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RECONFIGURATIONS OF LIMITS
VARIETIES OF PERVERSION

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Reconfigurations of Limits

Reza Naderi*

The Place of the Subject in Badiou's Theory of Discipline

Badiou and the Theory of Discipline

The main motivation for the theory of discipline resides in Badiou's desire to answer the following question: if there are forms of human inquiry that we can call thinking, what are the conditions in which these forms can acquire maximality? What are the conditions in which the solutions to particular impasses might appear as a restriction on the space of what we can actually think and conceive? We think this is the motivation that has led Badiou throughout his career, as a logician, as a political thinker, as a militant, and as a philosopher. In other words, Badiou's encounter with various subject matters has always been from the point of view of examining whether the subject matter in question struggles with any internal or external commitments that suture them to avowed or unavowed presuppositions. Badiou's category of truth should be placed within such a context.

For Badiou, truth is that point where a subject matter, which we call a discipline, is pushed beyond its own point of impasse. This impasse, upon closer examination, is always caused by the subject matter being sutured to explicit or implicit presuppositions. Badiou's answer to this is very simple: de-suture from opinion. How do we know that thought is able to de-suture from opinion? Because mathematics exists! Mathematics is the singular form of thought that has been able to rupture with doxa. So, the effective, historical, and independent existence of mathematics provides a paradigm for the possibility of being able to de-suture from opinion. This constitutes Badiou's philosophical programme for our time: a return to classicism, and in particular to Plato, and the essence of this return is to re-establish mathematics as the paradigm of thinking for philosophy. In effect, in Badiou's assessment, we are still living in the Romantic era, in the era of poets, inaugurated by Hegel. The mark of this era is precisely the banishment of mathematics as the paradigm for thinking and its replacement with poetry. Under the reign of poets, we are no longer eternal, but mortals bound to fini-

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tude. The gravest consequence of the banishment of mathematics is the banishment of the category of infinite as the basis of our thinking.

For Badiou, thinking maximally is possible only if first and foremost we are committed to the infinite. In that sense, all forms of genuine thinking occur with this commitment in place, even if philosophy may operate differently and under the dominance of the finite, as it does today. A discipline is one way of formalizing rigorous thinking that distinguishes itself by such a commitment. A discipline is a space within which pure thinking becomes actual, within which the commitment to the infinite happens in three concomitant and compossible dimensions.

First is the dimension that determines the space of thinking with no reference to its exterior. There is the inside of the discipline, but there is no outside. Hence, the discipline is not defined by what is exterior to it, because the discipline does not recognize its exterior as something that exists. I call this dimension of the discipline its interiority. A discipline is defined by an interiority that does not have exteriority, or in Lacan's language, the Other of the discipline is *extimate*.

Second, a discipline does not begin according to a principle or ground. While disciplines do not recognize anything external to themselves, they are able to recognize each other. Hence, they carve out a space of operations for themselves. Such a space is not created at the expense of other disciplines, but is born anew by the discipline itself. We think this takes place when thought operates in an axiomatic register. Axioms are precisely presuppositions that are avowed. They are generalities, not generalizations. In that sense, while they are independent of each other, and one does not provide a ground for the other, together they create a space for thinking that is groundless and principle-free. I call this dimension of a discipline its beginning. According to this dimension, all disciplines are axiomatic forms of thinking. Axioms have emerged in order to make possible thinking in its interiority.

Third, disciplines progress. They advance when they are challenged by impasses that they can formulate in their internal language. Disciplines are historical sites, which means that they are eventual. As per Gödel, the "real" of any sufficiently complex axiomatic system is that it is possible to build statements (known as Gödel statements) that are undecidable within that system. Mathematics teaches us that it is around these points (the undecidable state-

ments) that a revolution in a discipline usually takes place. A great example of this is the famous Continuum Hypothesis. I call the tendency in disciplines to push beyond their points of undecidability and towards the maximality of thinking *the novelty of disciplines*.

These three dimensions of disciplines, their beginning, interiority, and novelty, are concomitant and compossible, and the condition of their possibility is commitment to the infinite.

Disciplinary thinking is akin to dialectical thinking in that both carve out a space for thinking as an interiority. Dialectical thinking is also only concerned with the interiority of the One, with unfolding discontinuities within a coherent logical space. But for the discipline, there is no One other than the closure of a space of operations that is circumscribed by its axioms – it is not dependent on some initial grounds or fundamental derivation of its logic. Disciplinary thinking is also akin to dialectics in the dimension of novelty. Dialectics is never the result of supplementation from outside. However, unlike dialectical thinking, novelty is not the result of the sublation of two to one. It always begins with the One of the discipline and splits this into what the discipline discerns and “in-discerns” about itself. It is precisely within the category of novelty and the orientation towards what is possible that the discipline manifests its character as a wholly subjective process without an object. Within the theory of discipline, the subjective is an index of the dimension of novelty.

The dimension of beginning is where discipline is most different from dialectics. Thinking the beginning presents an inherent discontinuity because this thinking must perform an irremediable break from the sovereignty of doxa, one that is more akin to producing creative hypotheses and critical interventions. Axiomatic thinking is the only mode of thinking proper to this violent discontinuity; it is the only mode of thought that makes its own presuppositions explicit – rather than the presuppositions of the doxa. Axiomatic set theory provides a way of thinking the dialectic of the universal and particular through generalities rather than generalization. The relation between the particular and the universal has usually been thought through generalization: the particular was thinkable by being categorized under the universal. In contrast, axiomatic thinking approaches a situation through a set of generalities (axioms) whose deductive power allows us to show what makes a situation thinkable. If the particular is

unthinkable according to the system of sentences drawn from given axioms, then we add a new axiom that is consistent with the others so that this particular becomes thinkable. Moreover, by relying on ideas rather than ideals, we can experiment with the formal system directly, even in advance of the demands of the real; the real of the formal system is its own consistency. This form of deductive reasoning is impossible under the regime of generalization, since generalizations are related to one another (and ultimately derived from a super-genre), whereas generalities are independent of one another. On the other hand, the dialectic is generally ambivalent to what it begins with, and is therefore susceptible to generalization and requires a fixed foundation. As a result, dialectical thinking appears as a region or restriction of disciplinary thinking.

A formal system is part of every discipline. But since a discipline is a homogeneous region of thought, every part of this region can think its other parts. The best example of this is mathematics. A region of mathematics, say geometry, can be the object of formalization for another part, such as algebra, according to which the latter part can think (i.e. formalize) the former part. But by no means does this permanently fixate one part as the object and the other part as the subject since geometry can equally formalize algebra. In model theoretical language, the parts of a discipline can act as both a formal system and the model for a formal system. Disciplinary practice gains huge insight into its parts, and ultimately the discipline as a whole, by being able to think a part through another part of the discipline. This means that through disciplinary theories “about” a discipline, the discipline produces more of its own. This becomes clearer when a discipline is compared to a discourse. Discourses, for example the philosophy of science, have disciplines, such as science, as their subject but do not produce, nor claim to produce, disciplinary theories themselves. In all their forms, discourses attempt to find from outside of a given discipline the unifying principle according to which the discipline can be defined and organized. Discourses, in that sense, transcend the disciplines they study. In contrast, the assertions that a discipline produces about itself are part of the discipline itself. Discipline is immanence. It embeds what it thinks.

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Disciplines are also highly experimental. What constitutes the so-called “objects” of a disciplinary practice are elements of the model that satisfy the propositions of a formal system. But recall that what is now a model for a formal system could later be a formal system in its own right. In this sense, a discipline

does not distinguish between subject and object. The experimentality of disciplines also stems from this character. The set of propositions that constitute a formal system always refers to a set. That is, the sentences within that system always seek interpretations within sets of objects of different kinds. The fact that the sentences of a formal system require interpretation implies that those sentences are not universally valid or invalid in the same way that logical sentences are. This means that in the last instance, those sentences are axiomatic in nature; they are produced according to decisions that are not based on some prior self-evident principles. However, the opposite of this is also true: every axiomatic system requires a structure for its interpretation. This points to an extraordinary experimental vocation of formalism, and in that sense the material structures, from machines to laboratories, are thoroughly formal. The experimental nature of disciplines is due to their axiomatic nature. Axioms are responsible for the rigorous experimental protocol of formal systems.

The axiomatic nature of disciplines makes them eventual. There are conditions under which the formal systems contained in a discipline clash with each other and with the discipline's founding axioms. This is a mathematical certainty. It is under those circumstances that a discipline is subjectivized. It thinks its own foundation and through this, under certain conditions, it expands those foundations to open up new territories for its thinking. For this subjectivation, a substantial part of the body of a discipline (from theories to models and practitioners, to pens and paper, to signs and syntagma) must be activated towards the new possibilities that lie around the discipline's eventual site – which points towards a new existence that was not there. If enough of the discipline's body is activated in this way, then the discipline can redefine itself to expand its territory and to absorb the new possibilities into its domain. The discipline thus expands. But prior to this, from a logical standpoint, the condition for this subjectivation is precisely the practice within a discipline by which parts of the discipline appear and are interpreted by other parts of the discipline. That is, prior to any subjectivation, and as its logical condition, there is an objective phenomenology that is in effect and which constitutes “the life” of the discipline.

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The Place of the Subject

Before we elaborate on the ways in which the idea of the infinite reconstructs the category of the subject, it is useful to understand why this category has such a

central place in Badiou's thought. Indeed, why do we need a new thinking of the subject in the first place? Badiou's answer is that the subject is that operator of philosophy from which, in our time, the *compossibility* of Badiou's four generic procedures is drawn.

We recall from *Manifesto for Philosophy*¹ that, for Badiou, philosophy is the *space* for the compossibility of all four generic procedures: it is where these generic procedures together form a philosophical *vision* compatible with each particular condition. This means the following three things:

1. That there is an operation in philosophy that brings together the four conditions and helps us comprehend a certain *philosophical period*.
2. Such comprehension enables us to examine the philosophical period we are in, whose name, according to Badiou, is *modern philosophy*.
3. The period we call *modernity* has not ended, and thereby modern philosophy continues.

Philosophy has *conceptual operators* by which it *configures* its conditions. This configuration is what orients thought in each epoch, and it is the way philosophy thinks about a given epoch, as associated with a particular configuration. To understand these *operators of philosophy*, the first thing to note is that one of these conditions, or generic procedures, is always closest to an evental site and serves as the main referent for the deployment of the compossibility of the conditions.²

Such was the case for Plato, Badiou proclaims. There were two events within the situation relevant to Plato: the emergence of the city-state and the shift in the theory of sizes from the Pythagoreans, based on arithmetic, to the geometrical and continuous method of Eudoxus. Plato invented this configuration capability of philosophy and thereby created, for the first time, a space for both conditions: the operator of this configuration was the theory of Forms – operable across both politics and mathematics. At the same time, this operator bestowed a suspicious status on poetry and made love an indiscernible – that which is neither discourse (*logos*) nor knowledge (*epistémé*).

¹ Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. N. Madarasz, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999.

² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

A philosophical period is one in which “a certain configuration, specified by a dominant condition, persists. Throughout such a period, the operators of compossibility depend on this specification. A period creates a nexus out of the four generic procedures, in the singular post-evental state in which a generic procedure is inscribed into the space of thinking and circulation that philosophically serves as the determination of the time.”³ In the case of Plato, Forms are under the domination of the matheme (and thus mathematics acts as the dominating condition over politics). Plato asserts this in his *Republic* by having the governor educated in arithmetic and geometry. At the same time, imitative poetry is kept at bay, as that form of art that demonstrates the flexibility of language to sustain sophistry.

The question for us is now whether there is a *modern* period of philosophy. The *postmodern* declaration in some way corroborates this: the modern period did exist and is now over, according to the postmodern philosophers. If so, then the question is: What was (or still is) the operator of the configuration of the modern period? To understand that, Badiou first enumerates three distinct episodes that should fall in such a period:

1. Europe's classical age, of Descartes and Leibniz, in which the mathematical condition was dominant under the Galilean event, whose intervention introduced the infinite into the matheme.
2. Europe's romantic age, of Rousseau and Hegel, in which the historic-political condition was dominant under the event of the French Revolution.
3. Europe's post-romantic age, of Nietzsche and Heidegger, in which art, with poetry at its heart, was the dominant condition. Badiou does not name an event for this episode, but mentions that the return to art was “through an anti-Platonic retroaction, in the operators by which philosophy designated our time as that of a forgetful nihilism.”⁴

In this temporal sequence, we observe a movement of principle, from which the compossibility of the generic procedure is drawn, from the three conditions involved in these episodes: science dominant in the first, politics in the second, and art in the third. But within this displacement, there is still an invariant,

³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

from Descartes up to Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, and Lacan. This invariant is the theme of the subject. This theme endured devastating destruction by Heidegger and his followers, but was subsequently recast within Marxism (the subject of revolution) and psychoanalysis (the subject of the clinic).

This means, for Badiou, that the category of the subject stands for the operator of the configuration that designates the period that we call *modernity*.

According to Badiou, such is the question of the fate of philosophy: Is our time up to the task of upholding and reinserting the category of the subject back into philosophical discourse, now dominated by linguistic and analytical traditions? Our thesis points to the new orientation of thought constituted by the Cantorian invention and axiomatic thought as that which overhauls the thinking of the subject, which we sketch by closely tracking it through the theory of discipline.

As much as the Cantorian revolution has caused a total reorientation of thought, in Badiou's eyes, another disorientation had already been at the essence of what he names the Age of Poets, whose central figures, from Hölderlin to Celan, began to think outside the categories of the object and the subject. But, there is a difference: while the Age of Poets did disorient thought by playing down the role of knowledge in the thinking of truths, today we need a reorientation. Therein lies the difference between Heidegger and Badiou. While for Heidegger the destitution of metaphysics, and the opposition of knowledge and truth, on their own, inform an orientation of thought according to which the philosopher will only need to harken to the poet, for Badiou there still remains *one more step*; a step that our poets were unable – or perhaps lacked the conviction – to take. This step consists of an effort to rethink in the lineage of Cartesian meditation. So, while a disorientation of thought had already been accomplished in at least continental Europe, the reorientation is something that remains a task for philosophy. In summary, philosophy must affirm that “Disorientation can be *conceptualized*.”⁵ Badiou maintains that the category of the subject is the key to this conceptualization and reorientation.

That is why, throughout his career, Badiou's interventions have always taken place around the question of the subject: What can philosophy say (or not say)

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

about the subject? The category of the subject has been a (if not the) central category of Badiou's philosophy. Early in his career, and in reaction to the proposal that grounds science in general, and the foundation of mathematics in particular, on the repressed figure of the subject, in his seminal essay "Mark and Lack"⁶ Badiou affirms that science has no subject because science does not have a lack that it cannot fill itself. In other words, Miller is wrong to look for some place within the signifying chain in order to metaphysically or metaphorically establish the primitive of the Lacanian psychoanalytical subject. The discipline of science does not rely on something exterior to the discipline.

Having banished the subject from the discipline (of science), in *Theory of the Subject*⁷ Badiou ruminates on another *aporia*: How can we think novelty in a structure? This thinking took us from the analysis of Hegel's *Logic* and the relation of Something and Other to the notion of periodization. We saw that while Hegel's *Logic* contains resources to think novelty beyond mere circularity, and hence according to the schema of periodization, he does not have an explicit enough categorization of the two dialectics, which Badiou denoted as structural dialectic (SD) and historical dialectic (HD). Badiou finds a more advanced theorization in Lacan. In this regard, he thinks that the great dialectician after Hegel was not Marx, Lenin, Sartre, or Althusser, but Lacan. According to late Lacan, an understanding of *jouissance* and the signifier requires a logic similar to what Badiou calls HD, in that the relation of these two is no longer that of a situation (language) and the situated (speech), which is captured through the structural logic of whole-part. Instead, language itself is situated and a source of exception. Singularity and regularity are both generated through the practice of language. Therefore, the relation between *jouissance* and signifier is better captured through the relation of forces, which is the central grammar of the historical dialectic.

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While Lacan's thought can make irregularity thinkable, its model is based on the clinic. Badiou takes this theory and transposes it to the model that supports politics: the State, masses, and classes. While this theory justifies irregularity as a force with the same legitimacy and potency as the force of structure, in the

⁶ Alain Badiou, "Mark and Lack: On Zero", in P. Hallward and K. Peden (eds.), *Concept and Form Volume One*, London, New York, Verso, 2012, pp. 159–185.

⁷ Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. B. Bosteels, London, Continuum, 2009.

life of an individual subject in the clinic, the analysis must finally find a cure in the structure of one's symbolic constitution. By changing the model from a correlate of analysis to a correlate of politics, Badiou expands the scope in which the concept of consistency emanates and operates. In the Lacanian model, consistency belongs to the imaginary register: while the knot is in the real, its effect is registered in the imaginary as consistency. When the knot is cut, this effect of consistency is also destroyed, as the knot is the cause (in the real) and the consistency is the effect (in the imaginary). There is an inconsistency here: from the way the singularity of the *jouissance* comes to cohabit the very constitution of the regularity of the language – this regularity being in fact the retroactive effect of singularity – we come back to the primacy of regularity again, which is protected by the knot. But why such a compromise? The answer, in my view, is that the model operative in analysis is insufficient to sustain the radicalism of which the theory is capable. Using the model for politics, Badiou shows that the real of the masses is not only thinkable, it is the source of consistency, the source of a newfound regularity. What Lacan's thought was capable of – the relation of singularity and regularity – had to eventually recoil in the face of the weak model to which he had to apply it – a model that was too limited to sustain the consequences of what was possible to think. And here was precisely where the subject as the black sheep of materialism came into the picture: the real of the (political) subject (i.e. the masses) is the provider and guarantor of consistency.

What does the move from interiority to novelty tell us about the category of the subject? The logic of the signifier borrowed its conception of the subject from outside of the logic of structure. In other words, it performed an ideological construction of this category. Badiou dismissed this conception of the subject by maintaining that the structure is an absolute interiority whose consistency is not dependent on anything from outside. The logic of force, however, reinstates the subject, but this time within the constitution of the structure itself. This way, while maintaining the absolute interiority of structure, a gap is opened up within the structure itself which harbors the subject – the subject is anchored in the very gap between the surface of the law and the real of the forces that the law “in-discerns”, but in whose qualitative distinctions it depends. Subjectivization constitutes the moment when this qualitative indiscernible erupts to the surface, and the subjective process is that which keeps this eruption at the level of the ongoing operations of the structure. Novelty is the consistency brought forth by the subjective process, and thereby belongs to the category of the subject.

From this, we now understand why Badiou's salient philosophical undertaking during this phase of his career is captured within a book entitled *Theory of the Subject*: novelty is a category that requires a theory about the embedded subject. The subject is that which fastens the interiority and novelty within the boundary of a discipline.

Hence, for Badiou, the Age of Poets establishes that access to truth presupposes the destitution of the category of object as what presents the being: object, in this view, is a correlate of knowledge and not of being or truth. For Badiou, the task of philosophy is to sharpen the achievement of poets from Hölderlin to Celan, whose insights take philosophy in an opposite direction from what the philosophical avatar of that age, Heidegger, had pronounced. In fact, contrary to what Heidegger had surmised from the poets, the destitution of the object does not mean the destitution of the subject. Rather, it enjoins us to think the subject independently, without a *vis-a-vis*. For Badiou, the ability to think the subject without object consists of a possible renaissance for philosophy.⁸ While Heidegger and the post-structural milieu were pronouncing the end of the subject, Marxism and psychoanalysis proposed its restoration. But both schools, ironically similar to Heidegger, missed the great insight of the poets and restored the subject at the expense of also restoring a form of object and objectivity (the proletariat and the object of desire). So, while their return to the category of the subject was warranted, their construction still owes too much to objectivity. For Badiou then, the task of philosophy involves a complete commitment to the withdrawal of the object, while traversing those theories that either abandon the subject along with the object, or buttress the subject while still being unable to forgo the object.

Below, we will examine one of these traversals, and it should come as no surprise that the philosopher whose thoughts are material to his task is none other than Lacan. Nor should it come as a surprise that, in our view, the main coordinates of this traversal are two pivotal thoughts: Badiou's commitment to the maximality of thinking and the idea of infinity.

Accordingly, we picked two encounters with Lacan involving the category of the subject, both definitive of what Badiou intends for this category. The first

⁸ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, p. 93.

encounter is the very last meditation of *Being and Event*⁹, and the second is “Subject and Infinity”.¹⁰ Our reading of these texts will take place through our main theoretical apparatus: the discipline at whose center is the idea of infinity. Through this, it will become evident, during the first encounter, that Lacan’s formulation of the subject of the unconscious owes too much to the wrong side of Descartes: it owes too much to the *I* in *I think*. The proposal of this chapter begins by showing that Lacan’s theory of the subject relies too heavily on the count-as-one of an individual, and thereby it is not capable of overcoming the Sartrean reflexive subject. Disciplinary thinking shifts the emphasis from *I to think*, or more precisely, “being thinks”. The real, which is the *it*, is still a derivative of Descartes’, rather than a recomposition of thought from the ground up. In this sense, we will investigate the thesis that the true motivation of Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* is disciplinary thinking, in which the new category of the subject will arise.

The second encounter takes place around Lacan’s treatment of infinity. Lacan actually had engaged with Cantor in *Seminar XIX*, but makes it very clear that, for him, actual infinities are imaginary. However, Cantor is still useful to Lacan: the concept of actual multiplicity, understood as a set, authorizes psychoanalysis to speak of what the latter calls a *unary trait*. The theory of sets thinks multiples without totalization; it only thinks the *unicity* of each multiple. Lacan points out how psychoanalysis is still stuck with Freudian doctrine, because it needs a representation of otherness. However, this requires a unifying otherness. So, we can never operate in the model of the psychic apparatus with the idea that something of otherness is captured by the structure. In Badiou’s terminology, nothing of the outplace is preserved as an outplace by the place. We are authorized to move further and no longer think identification and representation only in these terms, because Cantorian mathematics has shown us that multiplicity without unity, and only with unicity, is perfectly thinkable. We can distinguish between multiplicities, without unintentionally unifying them. So, the extensive treatment of multiplicities authorizes us to think otherness without subsuming it as a finite multiple under a common property. Therefore, for Lacan,

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⁹ Alain Badiou, “Meditation Thirty-Seven: Descartes/Lacan”, in *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham, London, Continuum, pp. 431–435.

¹⁰ Alain Badiou, “Subject and Infinity”, in *Conditions*, London, Continuum, trans. S. Corcoran, pp. 211–227.

the gift of Cantor is the power to think unicity, which preserves otherness. This is what Lacan means by the unary trait, which states that something of the otherness is preserved by a trait. But, in *Seminar XX*, as we shall see shortly while reading Badiou's intervention, Lacan still maintains that the infinite must be thought of as inaccessible, something fictitious. The fact that we can think consistently about actual infinities and derive positive results from such thinking is totally out of Lacan's reach, not because it is unthinkable, but because Lacan has no name for that which is both inaccessible and consistent. This includes the fact that infinity is totally mis-measured by finitude, and is totally indiscernible from the standpoint of countable situations, but is still thinkable. These two positions, in successive seminars of Lacan, are, of course, inconsistent. Lacan accepts that it is possible to think the unicity of the multiplicity in extension (that is, in their existence), while claiming that we cannot accept actual infinity.

For this study, the Cartesian and Cantorian frameworks are combined: there is a way to think of the *cogito* and infinity within the same framework, which we call discipline. We claim that a rejuvenated understanding of the subject, in line with Badiou's work, involves a reconstruction of the subject using the idea of the infinite, and through this reconstruction we find that it is not the *I* or *it* that thinks, but the discipline itself. Let us now elaborate on these points.

The Subject and Cogito

For Lacan, the imperative to return to Freud was doubled by the directive to also return to Descartes. How can these two imperatives work together, Badiou asks. He provides the answer as follows:

The key to the matter resides in the statement that the subject of psychoanalysis is none other than the subject of science. This identity, however, can only be grasped by attempting to think the subject in its place. What localizes the subject is the point at which Freud can only be understood within the heritage of the Cartesian gesture, and at which he subverts, via dislocation, the latter's pure coincidence with self, its reflexive transparency.¹¹

¹¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 431.

Understanding the subject in its place is the key to understanding how the subject of the unconscious can only be understood as the *cogito*. How does Lacan link the Cartesian subject and the subject of psychoanalysis? What does the term *subject* mean for Lacan? He provides a thesis: the subject is the Cartesian subject, i.e. the subject of the *cogito* or the statement “I think.” Lacan makes this point explicit in his *Seminar XI*:¹²

I dare to state as a truth that the Freudian field was possible only a certain time after the emergence of the Cartesian subject, in so far as modern science began only after Descartes made his inaugural step.

It is on this step that depends the fact that one can call upon the subject to re-enter himself in the unconscious – for, after all, it is important to know *who* one is calling. It is not the soul, either mortal or immortal, which has been with us for so long, nor some shade, some double, some phantom, nor even some supposed psycho-spherical shell, the locus of the defenses and other such simplified notions. It is the subject who is called – there is only he, therefore, who can be chosen.

In order to understand the Freudian concepts, one must set out on the basis that it is the subject who is called – the subject of Cartesian origin.¹³

Let us first make four quick remarks about the *cogito* that we think are salient to the present discussion.

Firstly, *cogito* is the subject of thought. It is only because the subject thinks that it is certain about itself. In addition, *cogito* is a subject of certainty. It is certain about its own existence, not about its essential being, but its existence as it presents itself in thinking: the mere fact of thinking is what the subject as *cogito* is certain about.

Secondly, the subject of *cogito*, which is the subject of thought and certainty, is not a subject of truth. The *cogito* suspends any considerations of truth: the

¹² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, London, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

subject's thoughts can be true or false, they can be hallucinations, dreams or mistakes. Regardless, the truth status of these thoughts do not change the operation "I think".

Thirdly, the statement "I think therefore I am" rips away any particularity of what a subject is. A subject *is*, insofar as it *thinks*, and that eliminates all qualities and marks of empirical or substantial individuality, whether corporeal or non-corporeal. This emptiness at the core of the subject, marked by "I think therefore I am," is what makes it possible for it to engage with/in the world through a process that is devoid of any presuppositions – the process that we call the modern scientific process. In this sense, *cogito* is the true subject of science.

Fourthly, the statement "I think therefore I am" enunciates the fact that, insofar as I cannot doubt that the process of thinking is occurring, I am certain that I am. But the existence that is being affirmed is not the existence of a substance, but a process, since at this point, Descartes has not yet deduced a substance form in "I am". The Cartesian subject is thus the subject of the process of thought (the subject of enunciation) rather than the subject in the Aristotelian sense (the subject *I* in the statement "I am", or the subject of a statement) that is backed by a substance. The subject is *in* the enunciation, not *in* the statement.

What then are the grounds for Lacan claiming that the subject of psychoanalysis is the same as the subject of science, which is the Cartesian subject? In what sense is Freud Cartesian?

At the outset, we observe that the subject of psychoanalysis, what the practice refers to as the analysand – the person who asks for therapy – seems to be very different from the subject of the *cogito*. An analysand is firstly the one who suffers: if there is a *cogito* for the analysand, it seems to be more like: "I suffer therefore I am"! It appears that the subject of psychoanalysis is the subject of affects, not thoughts. In addition, the analysand is not the subject of certainty. On the contrary, an analysand is someone who mostly doubts: she does not know what is happening to her. She suffers but does not know why. An analysand, one who says "I suffer therefore I am", is therefore also a subject of doubt. The analysand who suffers and doubts about the cause of her suffering, also wants to know about the true reasons behind this suffering. An analysand is therefore not ambivalent to the truth.

What does the Freudian process do for such an analysand? It transforms the subject of suffering into a subject of thought. This process is called *free association*, through which the analysand is to speak her thoughts; to say what she is otherwise silently thinking. Free association transforms the subject of suffering into a subject of thinking, which is a step closer to the subject of *cogito*.

But an asymmetry exists herein: as the therapy brings more of the subject's affects into spoken words, and transforms the subject of affect into the subject of thoughts, it does not necessarily bring about certainty. In fact, just the opposite! To the analysand, the thoughts that she speaks about during free association may remain incoherent, inconsistent, insignificant, and meaningless. The analysand doubts the truth of her thoughts, and here lies the asymmetry between Descartes and Freud: for psychoanalysis, the moment of doubt is the moment that the subject of the unconscious *comes to be*. This was the case with Freud's discovery of the unconscious itself: it was his doubts about his dream thoughts that first suggested to him the existence and efficacy of the unconscious. Lacan mentions this point, and the parallel between Descartes' and Freud's experience, in the following way:

In a precisely similar way, Freud, when he doubts – for they are his dreams, and it is he who, at the outset, doubts – is assured that a thought is there, which is unconscious, which means that it reveals itself as absent. As soon as he comes to deal with others, it is to this place that he summons the I think through which the subject will reveal himself. In short, he is sure that this thought is there alone with all his I am, if I may put it like this, provided, and this is someone thinks in his place.

It is here that the dissymmetry between Freud and Descartes is revealed. It is not in the initial method of certainty grounded on the subject. It stems from the fact that the subject is 'at home' in this field of the unconscious. It is because Freud declares the certainty of the unconscious that the progress by which he changed the world for us was made.¹⁴

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The dissymmetry pointed out by Lacan pertains to certainty: in psychoanalysis, the certainty is not found in the subject of thought, i.e. in the analysand, but is situated in the Other, or the analyst. It is the analyst who is responsible for the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

presence of the unconscious.¹⁵ Therefore, the difference between Descartes and Freud, according to Lacan, can be summarized as follows:

We know, thanks to Freud, that the subject of the unconscious manifests itself, that it thinks before it attains certainty.¹⁶

In the end, the Cartesian subject is a conscious subject defined by its mastery over the process of thought. On the contrary, the psychoanalytic subject is subjected to language and the signifier. Both subjects exist insofar as they think, or more precisely, speak; both of their existences depend on speech and are in relation to the signifier, but these relations to the signifier are inverted with respect to each other. The relation of *cogito* is that of the mastery of the signifier, and the relation of the subject as unconscious is that of slavery to the signifier. In that sense, one may say that Freud is Cartesian insofar as he adopts the notion of the Cartesian subject, but it is a subverted subject.

There is another way in which the subject of the unconscious is a subversion of the subject of *cogito*: the existence of a substantial being becomes the existence of a process – the subversion of the *home* of the subject from the statement to the enunciation. This introduces a measure of ex-centricity, a divide, which Freud sought to exhibit in the relation of the subject to itself and to the whole experience of therapy. In *Écrits*,¹⁷ Lacan highlights the difference between where I am presented by my thought (the subject of statement) versus where my thought is (the subject of enunciation), which is captured in his re-transcription of “*cogito ergo sum*”: *ubi cogito, ibi sum*.¹⁸

The subject of psychoanalysis, therefore, looks like a generalization of the Cartesian subject: first, the two moments of thinking/doubting and being/certainty are not at the same *place* in therapy (as we shall shortly see in Lacan's us-

¹⁵ The role of the Other in acquiring the certainty is also emphasized by Lacan in the case of the Cartesian *cogito*: Descartes, although he affirms the presence of the thinking subject, has to assume that the truth of even this affirmation is dependent on an Other who is not deceptive.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, the First Complete Edition in English, trans. B. Fink, London, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

age of topological surfaces). Second, the analysand is not the only constituent: the object (or the analyst), the couch, and free association are also constituents of the subject. Third, the relation of the analysand to analyst changes as the process evolves. So, although psychoanalysis still works within the overall framework of the Cartesian subject, it makes this architecture more complex.

So, when Badiou says that Freud can only be understood (according to Lacan) “within the heritage of the Cartesian gesture, and at which he subverts, via dislocation, the latter’s pure coincidence with self,” we understand this sense of *within* according to the above structure that not only *subverts* but at the same time *generalizes* what is meant by the category of the subject.

What renders the cogito irrefutable is the form, that one may give it, in which the ‘where’ insists: ‘Cogito ergo sum’ ubi cogito, ibi sum. The point of the subject is that there where it is thought that thinking it must be, it is. The connection between being and place founds the radical existence of [the] enunciation of [the] subject.¹⁹

Badiou continues:

The subject thus finds itself ex-centered from the place of transparency in which it pronounces itself to be: yet one is not obliged to read into this a complete rupture with Descartes. Lacan signals that he “does not misrecognize” that the conscious certitude of existence, at the center of the cogito, is not immanent, but rather transcendent. “Transcendent” because the subject cannot coincide with the line of identification proposed to it by this certitude. The subject is rather that latter’s *empty waste*.²⁰

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The moment, or place, of certitude is where thought coincides with being. But that is not an immanent operation, Badiou claims. How does this stand with Lacan?

Lacan, throughout his early career after discovering Freud, was in search of a framework for articulating Freud’s discoveries on a solid basis that would be sci-

¹⁹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 431.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 431–432.

entific, while also non-humanist and non-essentialist. This leads Lacan to the concept of the *split subject*. As Badiou remarks, Lacan's "Science and Truth"²¹ is the primary source of this theoretical innovation and serves to highlight the important topological characteristics of the split subject. It is in this text that Lacan examines the status of the split subject as the true conceptual heir to the Freudian discovery of the unconscious, and how the rigor of the Freudian legacy might be maintained through this particular advancement. This, of course, amounts to a different reading of Freud's corpus, in particular from ego psychology, popular at the time and recognized by many of Freud's followers as where his legacy should reside.

Lacan proposes that Freud's work should be read in anachronological order (from later to earlier): from *Ichsplattung*, to the articles on fetishism (1927) and the loss of reality (1924). This allows the reader to grasp how the theory of the divided subject is the groundwork for the topography introduced through the terms (which Lacan opposes): *Ich*, *Über-Ich*, and *Es*. Lacan introduces the concept/term of *subject* to assist with the navigation of concepts introduced by Freud that, due to their lack of clarity, contributed to the *aporia* of depth psychology. Lacan professes that he borrowed the term *subject* from structuralism so that he could avoid the tendency to substantialize, or to confuse it with brain, mind, ego, or similar substance-like constructs. He asserts that Freud's second topography (ego, superego, and id) is best understood by thinking it through the concept of *subject*.

Freud's scienticism, although not completely adopted by Lacan, has very important consequences for the fate of psychoanalysis, one that should be preserved and continued. Lacan says that it is impossible to imagine psychoanalysis as a practice and the Freudian unconscious as a discovery without the birth of science in the 17th century, the century of geniuses. Lacan seems to allude to a science which could be applied to psychoanalysis, but one with a notion of subject (as a split between knowledge and truth and as the "two sides" of the Möbius strip). This notion will render irrelevant all humanist references in psychoanalysis.

As a practice whose main focus is human suffering, psychoanalysis should be fraught with humanist references, distinguishing it from the *hard* sciences. But

²¹ See "Science and Truth", in Lacan, *Écrits*, pp. 726–745.

Lacan does not like this proximal notion, and thereby stresses that “humanist references become superfluous in science, the subject cutting them short.”²² This portrays the tightrope that Lacan walks between humanist and scientific domains, and, at least in this particular text, in relation to the Freudian legacy as well as reasons that are his own, he approximates psychoanalysis more toward science than humanism. As evidence, his references to two historical anecdotes show how a scientific posture for psychoanalysis (which Freud was also in favor of) helped psychoanalysis gain popular acceptance, and furthermore, inspired Freud to look for a scientific formulation of human behavior, which led him to the discovery of the unconscious. Lacan sees the root of the latter inspiration in the scientific tendency to formulate all physiology, both mental and physical, by the laws of thermodynamics. Lacan persists on a certain path that, in his view, helped Freud investigate the unconscious with scientific rigor. This is the same path that set Freud apart from Jung, and from ego psychology, which was popular among American Freudians at his time. Lacan finds it important to draw a line with these tendencies, and suggests an alternative formulation from another field of study: linguistics. Borrowing from the structuralist approach, Lacan introduces the subject, around which the unconscious can be elaborated and further developed, with a rigor analogous to scientific method, and without recourse to an *object*, which is the way in which both scientific (physics, chemistry, etc.) and non-scientific (Jung, ego psychology, etc.) approaches tended to conduct their studies.

Lacan specifically distinguishes the subject of enunciation from the subject of science, something only discernible from within the context of linguistics, and this is why he promotes this as a model for psychoanalysis. How can this similarity be mapped? Here is a short suggestion by Lacan:

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It is in the realm of logic that the theory’s various refractive indices appear in relation to the subject of science. They differ as regards the lexicon, syntactic morphemes, and sentential syntax.²³

In other words, in linguistics, there is recognition at the level of the basic operators of discourse (lexicon, syntax, etc.) with relation to the subject of enun-

²² *Ibid.*, p. 728.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 731.

ciation and the subject of science (which we take to be the subject within the statement).

It is also important to point out that a science can be understood finally as a text about a particular subject. The subject appears in this text, the same way that *I* appears in "I think therefore I am." The *I* in this text is "the subject of science" partly because it is what a text is about – i.e. when a physics text discusses objects in motion, for example. Science is ambivalent to enunciation; what is important is the text itself. Compared to the sciences, the position of psychoanalysis is peculiar, as it primarily engages with the textual material of speech while its proper subject is the analysand. As such, while the speech (or text) is where the subject of other sciences will solely reside, the subject of psychoanalysis is where the speech is enunciated from.

Lacan's ingenious proposal is that there is nothing but speech, so if there is a *where* for the subject of enunciation, it is speech itself (so there is no depth psychology, no mind, soul, etc.). The subject of enunciation can only be found in what has been enunciated. This sounds enigmatic: How can that which enunciates be in the enunciated? Here is where Lacan's genius strikes again, by suggesting that the structure of speech should be viewed as a Möbius strip: speech is structured such that the two subjects (the subject of the statement and the subject of speech) constitute the two sides of this strip, and the split subject is the very split of the two surfaces. Psychoanalysis is the practice that is capable of analysing the two-sidedness of speech, so that the subject of enunciation can be traced there.

How does psychoanalysis do this? This is where another of Lacan's famous formulations enters. Lacan declares that the unconscious is structured like language: that is, the unconscious is subject to linguistic operations. Therefore, the *analysis* in psychoanalysis is the practice of decoding those linguistic operations that allow us to recognize the specific discourse produced by the analysand's unconscious, which is incidentally intermixed with the analysand's conscious speech. That is why, as we pointed out in the foregoing, psychoanalysis employs the method of free association. In this method, the analysand speaks freely of thoughts as they come to her mind, and through the course of analysis, the analyst begins to recognize those patterns that express unconscious thoughts.

We finally come back to this: both conscious and unconscious thoughts, both subjects, are found in speech, in the same text that is the vocation of the sciences, as the *I* appears in “I think therefore I am.” This is perhaps yet another way to understand why the subject of psychoanalysis is finally the same subject of the sciences. And this is how, for psychoanalysis, truth and knowledge are finally sutured within the same medium. Science can never suture knowledge and truth: this much is certain following Gödel’s proof. In Lacan’s model, truth and knowledge are seen as two sides of the same strip, traversable through speech, and no longer localized within the same *domain* and thus subject to Gödel’s incompleteness theorem: topology sutures what arithmetic could not. This is what Badiou alludes to in the quote above: certitude, knowledge about a subject can never be immanent to *where* the truth of the subject is – this truth cannot be obtained through or culminate in the former certitude – they belong to two sides of the strip only sutured through speech: certainty is never the vocation of the subject of unconscious.

The Lacanian subject is, therefore, a topological structure, where the truth of the subject is a void subtracted of all knowledge, yet maintained in a structure that is intertwined with the same conscious subject. This is what a split subject is, the split between (the subject of) truth and (the subject of) knowledge (if you cannot unite them, as per Gödel, keep them separate, but within one structure, aka a Möbius strip).

Lacan, in his *Seminar XIV* and *Seminar XV*, developed a schema to describe the relation of thinking and existing, as in the statement “I think therefore I am.”²⁴ In this schema, the two sides of the statement, i.e. *I think* and *I am*, have no intersection: no part of one belongs to the other; in other words, the thinking being is without existence and the existent being does not think.²⁵ It is impossible to have both thinking and existing at the same time. This schema is a way, in a logical form, to account for the torsion within the structure of the split subject, which became thinkable through the topology of the Möbius strip. It is easy to see how the split subject supports the modalities of *I am*, underwriting con-

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²⁴ Here we use Bruce Fink’s representation of Lacan’s schema. See Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject, Between Language and Jouissance*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 44–48.

²⁵ Fink, and perhaps Lacan too, contrasts thinking with being, but we chose to contrast thinking with existing instead, for reasons that should be obvious.

scious knowledge and the certitude about who the subject (of the statement) is, and *I think*, underwriting the signifier, the unconscious thought, and the truth of the subject (of enunciation) at the same time. In fact, the only issue that remains concerns *therefore*, there is no relation between the two, other than both belonging to the same structural torsion that Lacan calls the split subject. This sense of *therefore* will not find any place in this logical interpretation of the Cartesian subject. Below, we will discover that the elimination of *therefore* proves to be an important step in positioning the torsion of thinking and being, not inside the subject, but inside the discipline.

Now, when Badiou emphasizes the localization of the void, he absolutely targets the center of this debate, because Lacan's project is precisely an attempt to suture the truth of the Cartesian subject (i.e. the void of knowledge, as we said before, not merely in "I think", but the mere process of thinking, that is, the pure act of enunciation) with the knowledge of *I am*, which is the conscious subject. In this sense, Lacan's project of split-subject could be understood as the coming to maturity of the Cartesian project in a pure formal structure. Why is it important for Lacan to suture the void and knowledge into a subjective structure? The answer seems obvious: because of the alternative results in various kinds of depth psychology; the void is placed either in a chemical/biological brain, or in transcendental substances such as the mind, the soul, pure practical reason, common consciousness, etc.

At this point then, we are faced with a decision as to the location of thinking. Descartes originally attributed this to the Cartesian ego as the human subject, which is entirely transparent and transcendental. With Freud, we find that the thinking *thing* is not precisely in the same place as that to which the statement of certainty refers. So, we at least have two places: a place of thinking (enunciation, doubt) and a place of being (statement, certainty). Lacan provided an architecture for this *spaltung* based on the structuralist theory of language. Speech is where both certainty and doubt, being and thinking, are woven together, whose topological paradigm could be thought in terms of a Möbius strip. In this architecture, the subject is the very split between thinking and being as the two surfaces of the strip. The two sides share nothing with each other: there is an empty lacuna that acts as the mere differentiation between being and thinking, which Lacan dubs the subject. How does this model measure up to our disciplinary requirements?

What Lacan accomplishes is extraordinary as he avoided the metaphysical and humanist presumptions looming behind the subject from Descartes to Sartre, and at the same time he was able to extend structural causality by distinguishing the law from the cause. This opened up a gap within the structure between the automatic unfolding of the signifier (*automaton*) and the agency that evades formalization (*Tuchè*) – which we could name subjective causality, to distinguish it from structural causality. Despite this, however, Lacan’s notion of the subject, similar to his forerunners, still remained sutured to the *I* of *I think*. Speech, which is ultimately the place of the subject, is ineluctably *one’s* speech: for Descartes, as well as for Freud, Sartre, Husserl, and Lacan, thinking is ultimately sutured to the human individual. Miller, as seen at the very beginning of this study, had realized this and attempted to generalize the category of the subject such that it becomes the latent and repressed core of the logic of structure. According to the latter thematization, and inspired by Lacan’s innovations, Miller argued that not just one’s speech but any discourse, such as science or politics, is structured around a repressed kernel. Structure itself is not-all. Every structure forecloses or bars an element that paradoxically makes the structure consistent. Badiou uses this important discovery by Lacan: structure is not the place of consistency and stability, it is precisely the place of instability. This instability is the main reason for the metonymy of signifiers – inaugurated by a traumatic loss of *jouissance*. Accordingly, the subject is not constitutive of just an un-symbolizable excrement of the structure, but as Žižek puts it, “‘subject’ designates the contingency of an Act that sustains the very ontological order of being. ‘Subject’ does not open up a hole in the full order of Being: ‘subject’ is the contingent-excessive gesture that constitutes the very universal order of Being.”²⁶

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We call Lacan’s position *modest* because we think Lacan was justified in putting a *disciplinary* constraint on the reconstruction of the concept of *cogito* as a mere differentiation with a claim to universality. That is, ultimately, Lacan chooses to stick to *I think*, with the emphasis on the *I*, for the same reason that psychoanalysis is the only rigorous theoretical field where the statement “I love you” is relevant. The *I* in “I love you” connects to individuals. This move is justified precisely for the same reason that, in the procedure of love, the reference to the individual body still counts in a way that does not in any other procedure.

²⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject, The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London, Verso, 2000, p. 160.

So, Lacan is correct in asserting that if we care how people come to be desiring subjects, how they come to inhabit their bodies, and how they come to desire other bodies, as psychoanalysis does, we must remain faithful to the idea of the Cartesian subject. Because of this, the I is a relevant concept, and a more general construction of the concept should not erase it, as psychoanalysis in the end is concerned with how thinking and the body encounter each other in an individual. We call this a disciplinary constraint because it makes the practice of psychoanalysis possible. In other words, seen through the lens of the disciplinary theory in which we are engaged, psychoanalysis as a practice is that which subjectifies. It is not the case, however, that the subject in the clinic involves only the analysand. Rather, it involves the whole experience of the analysis, including the sessions, the free association, the analyst, the transference, the theory, as well as the analysand. In other words, thinking and being reside in a situation that we call analysis, or in our parlance, within the concrete discipline we call the psychoanalytical situation. The *psychoanalytic* cure is therefore not the end of the discipline *per se*, but rather it only eliminates the dependency of the disciplinary subject on the *external* facets of the analysis: the sessions and the analyst. This is where the analysand is now capable of participating in the subjective experience, which is the discipline itself. That is where the constraint put on the individual human body becomes material to the practice of psychoanalysis – it becomes the boundary of what will have been the elusive cure.

The issue that arises is thereby not the constraints set in order to circumscribe the disciplinary practice, but rather concerns the generalization of the constraints as a rule of thinking as such. In Badiou's parlance, it is the suturing of thought to a particular condition of truth. This suturing, although heavily suggested by Lacan himself throughout his work, was never transformed by him into a *programme*, but, by his exceptional reader, his son-in-law-to-be, and the future heir to his theoretical legacy, Jacques-Alain Miller.

The other, and more important issue, regarding this generalization, which makes the conception of the subject in psychoanalysis unsuitable for us, is that the suturing of the subject to the chain of signifiers has the inaugural assumption of a lost or impossible object. Why is this important? Because the conception of the subject for both Lacan and Miller, as the case was for the philosophers before them, is effectively mediated through the object, and this does not bode well from either the perspective of axiomatic thought, or Badiou's perspec-

tive, which holds philosophy responsible for thinking our era through the category of an objectless subject.²⁷

In fact, the conception of an objectless subject is precisely what the theory of discipline posits: the discipline *is* the *cogito*; it is the discipline that thinks, not the *I*. It is only within the movement of thought, whose coordinates traverse actors, artifacts, assumptions, theories, discourses, and experimentations spread across a disciplinary landscape, that subjective thinking can take place. The discipline thinks its own being through axioms, which means disciplines can think their beginnings. As we have discussed in detail in the previous section, the main difference between dialectical and disciplinary thinking is that a discipline can think its own beginning, but a dialectic cannot – as axioms are the only viable means of thinking the beginning, through a *violent* rupture from presumptions based on opinions. And it is precisely through the thinking of beginning that the thinking of truths finds legitimacy, as the latter goes beyond what the discipline could think through its beginning: thinking truths is precisely thinking beyond the point of the impasse of the beginning. But that is the other aspect of axiomatic thinking: that it can summon itself to carry out the task yet again. An example of this convocation under the event of infinity in Zermelo–Fraenkel set theory (ZF). ZF (which includes the Axiom of Infinity) as a set of axioms could in fact recoil, as it did, in the face of the infinity event toward the foreclosure of infinity under the assumption of constructivism. This is the event operating as the cause. But, at the same time, the fidelity to the infinity event can orient thought toward the assumption of the generic, where event now operates as consistency. Ontology cannot decide between the two, itself falling short in the face of being’s excess. This manifests the movement of axiomatic thought in two modalities: conveyance and composition. When the discipline conveys a concept, such as the generic, it does so by positing a new generality that supplements the set of previously posited generalities that had carved the being of the discipline. In the compositional mode, however, the discipline experiments with the avowed generality using the material available to it in the situation of

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²⁷ This assertion is certainly true for the subject of castration, as the universal operator of subjectivation for Lacan. But, in his theory of sexuation, Lacan does develop a conception of the subject that is not wholly determined by castration alone. Properly speaking, that subject could be considered to be an objectless subject. We will examine that sense of subjectivity in Lacan in the next section.

which it is a discipline. This we have dubbed the discussion of the *token*, or the material condition of a truth multiple.

For example, when the concept of the party in power, as a consequence of the Lenin event, recoiled to an organized State, as an abstraction of the socialist society after the October Revolution (event as cause), Mao offered a different conception of the socialist state and the relation of the Party to the masses in which the Party, as an abstraction of the State, was supplemented by the Cultural Revolution (event as consistency). At this level, the Cultural Revolution is a generality that merely supplemented the original set of axioms that defined the discipline of socialist revolutionary politics conveyed by Lenin. The Cultural Revolution is the conveyor of a new set of axioms (Lenin's party + the Cultural Revolution, akin to ZF + infinity). However, this generality was put to work in the real situation of Chinese society. This experimentation amounted to having every cadre tend to crops for six months. The implementation of the generality or idea is the compositional modality through which an instance of the truth is approximated within the discipline. The debate in the politburo, the organization of brigades, the new regiments for the cadres, were all part of the *implementation* of the supplemented generality towards the truth of the Leninist doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the creation of soviets, and the dismantling of the State.

On this basis, we propose to think of the objectless subject as the discipline in its compositional modality. In that sense, the *cogito*, the "I think", is the discipline when perceived compositionally. In contrast, the being of discipline is always its modality in conveyance; it is what the discipline conveys of itself. As a result, "I am" is the marker of the thinking of the discipline over its beginning, its thinking over its being. Using this grammar, the phrase "I think therefore I am" conjoins the two modalities of the discipline. This is, in my view, what Lazarus meant for the discipline of politics: politics thinks its own thought. This is also what Badiou said about the discipline of science when he proclaimed that there is no subject of science: there is no subject of science because primarily there is no *object* of science. Science is that thinking which aims for its own interiority – at least science in the Bachelardian sense. Badiou further claims that art and love are regions of thinking that manifest the same characteristics as politics and science.

Thought in this way, we construe Badiou's exposition of the subject in *Being and Event* within the above general disciplinary landscape. The relation of the

subject to an event from one end, and to truth from the other, is best understood when we place that relation in the context of the dual modalities of the discipline. In that sense, Badiou has provided a more elaborate framework for how the compositional logic operates. In “Meditation 23”, Badiou introduced the problem of *double origins* concerning procedures of fidelity. This problem referred to the naming of the event, which is the first step in an intervention. And the second is the operator of connection, the procedure of truth itself. The operator of fidelity emerges consecutively to an interventional nomination. Badiou calls this emergence of the operator of fidelity *subjectivization*. Thereby, subjectivization is an emergence of the Two: it is connected to the evental site through the intervention and it is connected to the situation through the operator of fidelity. Every intervention performs a naming, which puts into circulation a supernumerary name. But every such naming leads to a consecutive counting – a count that is different than the count-as-one of the presentation, and the count-as-one of the State.

This counting is the second aspect of the subjectivization – the operator of fidelity. Subjectivization, designated by a proper name: St. Paul, Lenin, Cantor, is the coming together of a name, which names the event, and an operator of fidelity, which is the generic procedure of a simple encounter. However, subjectivization is neither only one or the other, but something in excess. From the perspective of the situation and its state, the name has no significance. The insignificance of the proper name of the subject is an attestation to the fact that subjectivization is connected to the occurrence of the void. The Two, in our view, should be understood as a commitment to the maximality of thinking, which is *occasioned* by events and as that which invokes this maximality. This maximality is then *exercised* by experimentation in thinking. By being able to issue statements whose truth will go beyond the established system, thought demands and occasions its extension. Therefore, we see a very clear resemblance between Lautman’s views with respect to the way that generalities are identified or named, and how new theories are developed based on the inauguration of those generalities. Here we see the clear role of subjectivization, from one end caused by an event (the cause) and from the other oriented toward a truth (consistency). Ontology does not speak of this relation. As we have repeated time and again, ontology deals with the being of the generic as an impasse of the knowledge of the situation: the being of truth in general, whereas subjectivization is where a singular truth comes to exist in a situation, in relation to the occurrence of an event. The being

of truth is compatible with ontology: ontology does not speak of truth but does speak of the generic and its being.

But this much we knew from Lacan too: we already knew that the real has a being. If the generic is the name of the real as truth, what does the association of the generic and the real give us that we did not have before? How do we think more of the real by utilizing the name *generic* or *indiscernible*? In two ways: because the real is not just an impasse to the knowledge of a situation, it is the source of its novelty too – the situation could change and the real of the situation is the guarantor of the possibility of this change. Accordingly, the relation of the real and the interiority of the situation is not only of the category of cause, but also of the category of consistency. This attests to the connection of truth and consistency – whose inner relation belongs to the disciplinary relation of novelty and interiority. But, the generic, although providing a guarantee of the being of truth, does not speak of the existence of a truth in a given situation. Badiou's philosophical edifice, starting from the possibility of an event and the existence of its evental site, to the act of intervention and the procedures of fidelity, speaks to the existence of a truth associated with a particular evental site. We can also refer to the latter as the local possibility of a truth. So, when Badiou says the “local status of a generic procedure” has dependence on “a simple encounter,” we understand the above sense of the locality of a truth, vs. the ontological globality of the being of the truth that pertains to every historical situation in which an event decrees its void.²⁸

What constitutes a *simple* encounter? A finite set of enquiries, + or -, subsequent to the fixation of the name of an event, starting from its evental site. This procedure is so simple that it is non-prescriptive of the trajectory it should take: the encounter is completely aleatory. Although its effect is prescriptive (+/- results), its trajectory is not. That is how it is simple: it is an aleatory and unplanned encounter. The only thing that we can say about this encounter is that its trajectory starts from an evental site. Therefore, in its locality, we have a procedure whose genesis and progression are constituted by aleatory, non-prescriptive, and lawless encounters. Each encounter enriches the one or the other set of enquiries with the names of the elements according to whether or not they are affected by the name of the event.

²⁸ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 324.

From the perspective of this simple encounter, the truth (of that encounter) appears as an ideal: “a truth is the ideal assemblage of *all* the evaluations, it is a complete part of the situation.”²⁹ We can perhaps say that the ontological being of truth as a *complete* generic subset of the situation appears to the locality of the above simple operations as an unachievable ideal.

This leads to a thought: If the subject is the discipline in its compositional mode, and if discipline is infinite, then what does the association of the discipline and the subject tell us about the subject? Is the subject finite or infinite? Here is where the conception of the locality is important. The subject is related to the locality of an event and the locality of a procedure. As everything local is finite, the locality of what determines the subject would mean that it is also a finite multiple. Using this conception of locality, Badiou provides a definition of the subject in which the subjection is *qualifiable* and *unqualifiable* at the same time:

Thought in its operation, the subject is qualifiable, despite being singular: it can be resolved into a name (e_x) and an operator (\square). Thought in its multiple-being, that is, as the terms which appear with their indexes in effective enquiries, the subject is unqualifiable, insofar as these terms are arbitrary with regard to the double qualification which is its own.³⁰

What does being qualifiable mean? To me, the term qualifiable shall mean that the term subject is defined by a formula or predicate. The name guarantees the singularity of the subject: the singular name of the event is the source from which the subject inherits its singularity in the situation. The qualification (and thereby the predicative aspect) of the subject comes from the operation of fidelity. Furthermore, the matter of the subject is comprised of the terms submitted to enquiry at a given moment. Due to the aforementioned locality of the enquiry, the matter of the subject is unqualifiable. That is, the matter of the subject has no definable relation to the operation that indexes the terms of the enquiry (as + or -). This means that the multiple terms that constitute the matter of the subject is arbitrary and lawless. But the locality and thereby arbitrary nature of the enquiries that constitute the the matter of the subject make the subject necessarily finite: locality means finitude, and every finite multiple is discernible and there-

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²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

by belongs to the realm of knowledge. This means that the matter of the subject is not co-extensive with truth, despite the fact that “a truth proceeds solely via the assemblage of those enquiries,” it always surpasses the finite support of the subjectivization that makes the truth proceed.³¹

The finitude of the subject is not in contention with the infinitude of the truth. The local configuration of an instance of the truth is always finite, because of its locality. But the truth, as an idea that supplements the thought of the discipline, is infinite in its extension and in how the discipline is conveyed.

What is the importance of all this? We believe that the category of the subject whose vicissitudes are discussed in *Being and Event* gives us the framework of how the discipline operates in its compositional modality, whereas ontology, and in general axiomatic thinking, constitutes the working of the discipline in its modality of conveyance. The discipline is a region of thinking that has no object. Its ground refers to no objectivization. The important claim is thus this: understanding the subject as what belongs to a modality of the discipline as a whole should give us a concept of the subject with no object. A non-referential and non-objective category.

The journey is quite amazing here: as the Cartesian subject is the original template according to which the psychoanalytical subject is constituted, the roots of the latter is evidently in philosophy, matured and ripened in psychoanalytical theory. Now we have a philosophy that takes the concept of the subject from psychoanalysis back into philosophy, by keeping the same commitment to formalism in defining its constitution.

This periodization is none other than the great philosophical exchange through the history of modern thought, and more specifically in our era between philosophy and psychoanalysis. For both, there is a truth, but whereas for philosophy the being of truth is trans-individual and eternal, for psychoanalysis, truth is singularly placed in the subject's unconscious. In addition, we now have a new possibility for conceptualizing the subject that emerges from the concept of discipline, from which we can also ingest Badiou's theorization of this concept from *Being and Event*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

But what does this theory, based on the concept of discipline, give us that the theory of the subject in *Being and Event* did not? Why do we need a different formalization aside from, or in addition to, the formalization that Badiou provides? The concept of discipline speaks to three crucial conceptual apparatuses in Badiou's enterprise: firstly, it speaks to his Platonism through the commitment to the maximality of thinking; secondly, it speaks to his fidelity to the Cantor event through the commitment to the idea of infinity; and thirdly, to his revolutionary politics through the commitment to the category of the subject. The discipline comes together in these three apparatuses, which gives a new logic that is more general than the dialectic. This generality allows us to finally see that what the category of the subject names at the historical level (the operator of compossibility in modernity), discipline names at the ontological level, that is, the trans-historical level (the conditions of thinking that make the thought of immanence, novelty, and the beginning compossible in general). In a way, we could even think of the Platonic form as a local name whose global instance is discipline. Therefore, "discipline thinks" is a trans-historical statement, whose name in modernity is "subject thinks" (and "form thinks" in antiquity).

Therefore, we are quickly arriving at a point where, with the concept of discipline, we are able to merge the Cartesian and Cantorian frameworks towards a revived understanding of the *cogito*, in the tradition of Parmenides as discipline in composition. And this, we believe, is the proper reconceptualization of the Cartesian meditation after the Age of Poets.

The Subject and Infinity

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Lacan, in his theory of sexualization, develops two subjective logics: man and woman, each with its own determinations. This grounds a singular truth in psychoanalysis: there is no sexual relationship. This theory is of utmost importance to us for two reasons: first, in the position of woman, we can effectively recognize a *partially* objectless determination of the subject. Furthermore, Lacan proceeds to introduce infinity as the proper determination of this objectless subject. The focus of this section is precisely the encounter between Badiou and Lacan regarding the sense of infinity employed here. This encounter takes

place in a surprisingly obscure text called “Subject and Infinity”³², in which Badiou mostly comments on a single passage from Lacan’s *Seminar XX* (Chapter VIII, entitled “Knowledge and Truth”).³³ The text Badiou quotes is as follows:

In that logic, on the basis of the fact that one can write ‘not-every [*pas-tout*] x is inscribed in Φx ’, one deduces by way of implication that there is an x that contradicts it. But that is true on one sole condition, which is that, in the whole or the not-whole in question, we are dealing with the finite. Regarding that which is finite, there is not simply an implication but a strict equivalence. It is enough for there to be one that contradicts the universalizing formula for us to have to abolish that formula and transform it into a particular. The not-whole becomes the equivalent of that which, in Aristotelian logic, is enunciated on the basis of the particular. There is an exception. But we could, on the contrary, be dealing with the infinite. Then it is no longer from the perspective of extension that we must take up the not-whole [*pas-toute*]. When I say that woman is not-whole and that that is why I cannot say Woman, it is precisely because I raise the question [*je mets en question*] of a jouissance that, with respect to everything that can be used in the function Φx , is in the realm of the infinite.³⁴

Now, as soon as you are dealing with an infinite set, you cannot posit that the not-whole implies the existence of something that is produced on the basis of a negation or contradiction. You can, at a pinch, posit it as an indeterminate existence. But, as we know from the extension of mathematical logic, from that mathematical logic which is qualified as intuitionist, to posit a ‘there exists’, one must also be able to construct it, that is, know how to find where that existence is.³⁵

Lacan affirms the Aristotelian conclusion that the negation of a universal statement is equivalent to a particular negative statement. If I say “not all apples are red,” I imply that there is *at least one* apple that is not red. In logical notation:

³² The original French title of this essay is *The Position of the Infinite in the Split of the Subject*, which is a far more crucial and interesting title than the one chosen for its English publication. This title almost summarizes the topic of this study.

³³ Jacques Lacan, *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, 1972–1973*, trans. B. Fink, London, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999.

³⁴ The marginal page number of the quote is 94 (which is the page number Badiou cites).

³⁵ Lacan, *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, pp. 211–212.

$$\neg (\forall x): f(x) = \exists x: \neg f(x)$$

But Lacan puts a proviso on this. He says that this equivalency only works when x belongs to a finite set. In a finite set, when I posit $\neg (\forall x): f(x)$, I must be able to find an x such that I could say $\exists x: \neg f(x)$. But Lacan thinks that this cannot be the case if x belongs to an infinite set. In an infinite set, there is no guarantee that I could find such an x . At most, I can say that such an x is probable but not determinate. But why does that make this equivalency less true in the case of the infinite? This is where Lacan appeals to intuitionist logic. In intuitionist logic, the existence of something is only guaranteed if that something can be constructed or demonstrated in a mathematical proof. This points to an explicit disparity in Lacan's text when dealing with two different logics, Aristotelian and intuitionist, which we will return to later in this section.

But why does Lacan use this logical jargon? The issue is that the function Φ , which stands for castration, is a universal function in psychoanalysis. Castration is a process through which a speaking (i.e. human) subject is made. As such, if x is a subject, in psychoanalysis, then (analytically) $\Phi(x)$ holds. The issue is that if $\Phi(x)$ is true, then how can we at the same time assert $\neg (\forall x), \Phi(x)$?

When Lacan says woman is not-all, and on that basis he concludes that there is no *Woman*, it suggests that, while there is a universal genus of *Man* that all particular men fall under, *Woman* is not such a genus, there is no generalization under which particular women fall, and thus there is no *Woman*.³⁶

The passage we cited above is from the 8th session of Lacan's *Seminar XX*. The passage was produced after the main lecture was over (apparently there was a quarter of an hour still remaining and Lacan continued talking). Lacan, who was excited about a lecture delivered by François Recanati four months prior to that date (during the first session, entitled *On Jouissance*), provides some re-

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³⁶ One can only be a man if one assumes that there is an exception to castration in the set called Other. *Woman* is (one of the names of) that exception, and so is actually part of the masculine logic. It is important to highlight the dependence men have on *Woman*, and how this dependence does not go both ways.

marks regarding “the schema Recanati had to erase earlier,” which apparently had to do with Aristotelian logic and the topic of *not-all* (*pas-toute*)³⁷:

Masculine	Feminine
$\exists x: \sim \Phi x$ $\forall x: \Phi x$	$\sim \exists x: \sim \Phi x$ $\sim \forall x: \Phi x$
S Φ	$S(A)$ <i>Woman</i>

Lacan's Formulae of Sexuation

This not-whole (*pas-toute*), in classical logic, seems to imply the existence of the One that constitutes (*fait*) an exception. Henceforth, it would be there that we would see the emergence in an abyss – and you will see why I qualify it thusly – of that existence, that at-least-one existence that, with regard to the function Φx , is inscribed in order to speak it (*s'inscrit pour la dire*). For the property of what is said is being, as I said earlier. But the property of the act of saying is to ex-sist in relation to any statement (*dit*) whatsoever.

The question then arises whether, given a not-whole, an objection to the universal, something can result that would be enunciated as a particular that contradicts the universal – you can see that I am remaining here at the level of Aristotelian logic.³⁸

It appears to us that Lacan's argument, comprised of both this and the previous quote, can be divided into three parts. First, he acknowledges that in Aristotelian logic, when one speaks of “not-all x satisfy $\Phi(x)$ ”, one also implies that there exists an x that contradicts $\Phi(x)$. If I assume Φ is “is red”, then the expression “not all apples are red” means that we can find an apple that is not red. Lacan then adds that this is only true if we are dealing with the finite. In the case of x be-

³⁷ We are using “not-all”, which is what is widely used in the literature, and “not-whole”, which is used in Badiou's “Subject and Infinity” and *Seminar XX* as the translation of *pas-toute*, interchangeably.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

longs to a finite set, the existence of a particular x such that $\neg\Phi(x)$ is not only an implication, but also an equivalence. Such a condition is not necessary in predicate logic. In fact, as far as predicate logic is concerned, the equivalence of “not-every” and “there exists” is universally true regardless of the scope of x .³⁹

In the next part of his argument, Lacan considers the possibility of x to select over an infinite domain, and he says the following: “*then it is no longer from the perspective of extension that we must take up the not-whole [pas-toute].* When I say that woman is not-whole and that that is why I cannot say *Woman*, it is precisely because I raise the question of a jouissance that, with respect to everything that can be used in the function Φx , is the realm of the infinite.”⁴⁰ Lacan makes a turn here. He says that, in dealing with an infinite, *not-whole* domain, the logic in question should no longer be approached from the perspective of *extension*. What does this mean? Here is a possible reading: When I say “not all apples are red,” I am referring to the sets of all apples. But when I say: “not all of an apple is red,” the not-all does not refer extensionally; it refers to a single apple and says that not-all of that single apple is subject to the function *is-red*. It appears, solely based on this passage from Lacan, that the sense in which he wants to use the quantifier *not-all* suddenly shifts from an external scope (not every x) to an internal scope (not every part of x).

In the third part of the argument, Lacan is completely submerged in the discourse of the infinite: a point that pertains to the dialectic of existence and ex-sistence.⁴¹ Lacan says this: if we say “not all of x is $\Phi(x)$ ” (based on an internal domain of x) and the domain is infinite (which is the case when Lacan speaks of woman’s jouissance), we do not thereby conclude that there exists an x such that Φ is not true for it. In the context of jouissance, Lacan asserts that, unlike man’s jouissance, not all of woman’s jouissance is determined by the

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³⁹ For example, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First-order_logic#Provable_identities, accessed 23 February 2022.

⁴⁰ Lacan, *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, pp. 211–212. Emphasis added.

⁴¹ For Lacan, existence is only possible in the symbolic register. We may refer to things that do not exist (i.e. they are not within the symbolic register), but this reference does not mean that they exist. Lacan’s term for the sense of being of things that we can speak of but do not exist (i.e. they are not in the symbolic register) is “ex-sist”. Lacan borrows this term from Heidegger.

phallus: this is made obvious by the double arrow to the crossed-out *Woman* (~~*Woman*~~) in the diagram, which illustrates that ~~*Woman*~~ has two partners, the phallus and $S(\clubsuit)$, the signifier of the inexistent/inconsistent Other. Therefore, the assertion that “not all x such that $\Phi(x)$ ”, in my view, should mean that part of x , woman's jouissance, is determined by its relation to the signifier of the Other, but by writing $S(\clubsuit)$, Lacan indicates that he does not affirm the existence of the Other. Intuitionist logic can afford that to Lacan: it allows us to keep $S(\clubsuit)$ at the level of ex-sistence instead of existence. This reading is confirmed by the second passage we quoted from *Seminar XX*, which is just before the original passage quoted herein. A little before the passage we cited, Lacan says:

Is there One or not? In other words, this not-whole (*pas-toute*), in classical logic, seems to imply the existence of the One that constitutes (*fait*) an exception.⁴²

Therefore, when we say “not all x is $\Phi(x)$ ”, the question is: are we confirming, as Aristotelian logic requires us to do, that “there exists an x such that $\neg\Phi(x)$ ”? We know that the Primal Father is the referent of the One in the above quote: there is a One who is not subject to the effect of castration. What is the existential status of the Primal Father? That is precisely what takes us to the next part of this quote:

Henceforth, it would be there that we would see the emergence in an abyss – and you will see why I qualify it thusly – of that existence, that at-least-one existence that, with regard to the function Φx , is inscribed *in order to speak it (s'inscrit pour la dire)*. For the property of what is said is being, as I said earlier. But the property of the act of saying is to ex-sist in relation to any statement (*dit*) whatsoever.⁴³

What is implied by the not-all is precisely what allows us to speak of something that is not under Φ , but at the same time, this not-all does not force us to commit to “there exists”, thanks to the intuitionist logic. In the end, we have a pure signifier for the Other, which has no existential commitment.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 102, my emphasis.

In his *Seminar XIX*,⁴⁴ Lacan had previously adopted a different strategy toward the same end, by elaborating on a proposition that has a similar construction: “*Il y a de l’Un*” (“There is something of the One,” or “Sometimes there is One”), which he contracts as *Yad’lun*. After affirming the “Aristotelian angle” for the contradiction between “the statement that *for all x*, *x* fulfils in Φx the function of an argument, and the fact that there *some x* that can fulfil the place of argument only in the enunciation that is the exact negation of the former,” he proceeds to say: “I’m daring to advance something that is plainly lacking in the aforementioned logic. I am able to do so to the extent that the term existence has quite certainly changed meaning since then.” How has the sense of “existence” changed? When we say “*There exists an x, at-least-one*, lends a value that can be qualified as true to what is posited as a function.” In this sense, we can say: “There is a distance between this and natural existence, which I will not name otherwise today, for want of a better word.” This sense of existence is what Lacan attributes to the One, and it is why Lacan finds Cantor’s invention of sets so useful: “the main-spring of set theory hinges entirely on how the One – that *there is* – of the set is distinct from the One of the element.”⁴⁵ In Lacan’s mind, set theory supplies a sense of one (or oneness) without having to ground it in the one of being, or the existential sense of oneness and sameness (as we have seen Plato had attributed to Parmenides). Instead, the commitment to the one is grounded in the being of multiples, and as in set theory, there are nothing but multiples:

It is in this respect that it is, let’s say, *inadequate* in the Platonic dialogue to make anything whatsoever of the *existent* participate in the realm of the *like-for-like*. Without the crossing-through whereby the One is initially constituted, the notion of *like-for-like* would not appear in any way whatsoever.⁴⁶

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So, when Lacan refers to “there exists”, this does not refer to the sense of existence from Aristotelian predicate logic. Instead, borrowing from set theory, he is “daring to advance” the existential sense of the standard quantifiers.

⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan, ... or Worse, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XIX, 1971–1972*, trans. A.R. Price, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2018.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 120–124.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

This new “logic”, proffering a sense of “existence” distinct from “natural existence”, is the same sense that Lacan wishes to leverage when he speaks of the “infinite” field of woman’s jouissance – the not-all. At the bottom part of the diagram, *Woman* is connected to Φ and $S(A)$. $S(A)$ is that not-all which, at the same time that it signifies the non-existing Other, plays a part in formulating feminine sexuality. Using the foregoing interpretation, the sexuality (jouissance) of every woman is subject to the effects of castration, but castration does not fully determine a woman’s sexuality (jouissance): it is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. This is obvious from the first formula on top of the right side of the above figure that says $\neg\exists x: \neg\Phi(x)$: there is no woman who is not affected by castration, which means all women are affected by castration, but that is not all that determines their sexuality (unlike men). The key to this interpretation is, as we have said, to posit an internally scoped sense of the quantifier. However, in the sense of not-all, “there exists” does not predicate the existence of a thing outside of the effect of castration. That is why Lacan takes recourse in intuitionist logic, since what he wants in the end is a logic where the affirmation of *not-all* does not result in a “there-exists”:

For an intuitionist, therefore, from the statement ‘not for every x $\Phi(x)$ ’ there is no reason to conclude that ‘there exists x such that $\neg\Phi(x)$ ’. On this point intuitionism coincides perfectly with Lacan’s aim.⁴⁷

In intuitionist logic, the traditional concept of truth is qualified by the concept of constructive provability: a method of proof that works by demonstrating the existence of an object by creating or providing a method for creating it. Therefore, while predicate logic finds the proposition “not all x such that $\Phi(x)$ ” to be equivalent to the proposition “there exists an x such that $\neg\Phi(x)$ ”, such that the truth of one will imply the truth of the other, intuitionist logic does not consider these equivalent. Therefore, the truth of the former proposition does not imply the same for the latter: the existential statement must be independently constructed. This is, as Badiou points out in his commentary on *Seminar XIX*, exactly the effect that Lacan is seeking: woman, the not-all, has a relation to the phallic function, and nothing more – somewhere means not everywhere; the somewhere – not everywhere – of the woman’s position is expressed as not-whole.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Badiou, *Conditions*, p. 215.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

But is this a temporary alignment with intuitionist logic, or is Lacan an intuitionist? Badiou emphatically asserts the former. Lacan neither fully subscribes to intuitionist logic (e.g. the renunciation of *reductio ad absurdum* as per his approach in the interpretation of symptoms) nor renounces the existence of actual infinities (as per his usage of alephs). He even, in the first passage we quoted from *Seminar XX*, makes use of the Aristotelian logic of finite sets, something that an intuitionist would not agree with. The key that Lacan mistakenly sought in intuitionist logic does in fact lie on the side of the infinite. This confusing relationship with intuitionism points to another important matter as well. While intuitionism is not a branch of logic to which Gödel, Cohen, and Badiou subscribe, it is nevertheless one that many mathematicians have worked fruitfully within. This makes the debate between intuitionists and realists in mathematics an interdisciplinary debate, one that Lacan is not party to. Recall Badiou's detailed analysis of the ideological dispositions that are developed in relation to the sciences. As early as "Mark and Lack", Badiou had recognized two different representative stances, one transcendental to the sciences, such as epistemological theories, and the other immanent to a given science.⁴⁹ The latter stance represents what a science thinks about itself, and despite being ideological, is part of that science – furthermore, science already contains the means of eradicating such internal ideological representations. Hilbert's programme is evoked as such an ideological representation generated within the practice of mathematics itself – subsequently addressed by Gödel's inconsistency theorems. In contrast, we have ideological instances that are produced outside of a given science, those that do not pertain to the practice of the science itself. Miller's representation of the logic of the signifier is an example of this transcendental-ideological stance. Likewise, we could say that intuitionism is a representative disposition inside the practice of mathematics, and Lacan's usage of intuitionism, like Miller's, is an ideological disposition that is transcendental to the discipline of mathematics.

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But there is more. While Miller's ideological usage of Frege's logic (itself ideological, but nevertheless intra-mathematical) amounts to a consistent programme, Lacan's usage here is not so. As per Lacan's articulation, we are dealing with an infinite field of woman's jouissance. Somewhere in that infinite field, there is also phallic jouissance. But does not the existence of this somewhere, by way

⁴⁹ Badiou, "Mark and Lack: On Zero", pp. 159–185.

of negation, also affirm the existence of the everywhere of the infinite, the not-whole? Lacan's answer is no: the not-whole, the everywhere that is infinite, is too indeterminate for the finite to be circumscribed by phallic jouissance. This thought of Lacan's is seemingly confirmed by mathematics: there is no dialectic between the finite and the infinite – the infinite is the absolute alterity and inaccessibility with respect to the finite. The paradigm of the absolute alterity of the infinite, as we have formerly seen, renders the Hegelian dialectic of the finite and the infinite impossible – the infinite is not the negation of the finite, nor its sublimation, but its inaccessible determination. According to the paradigm of the mathematical infinite, phallic jouissance functions similarly as the succession operator, such that, despite its unending insistence (an unending chain of desires), a circumscribed finite jouissance will never be commensurable to the infinite not-whole; the same way that no whole number is commensurable to ω :

This is a crucial adjective, both in set theory and in the logic of the formulas of sexualisation. This enjoyment of the feminine not-whole is properly the inaccessible infinity in which castrated enjoyment is determined.⁵⁰

But in axiomatic set theory, ω is an actual number, infinite in size, but actual nevertheless – i.e. this number exists in the same way that the number 2 exists. But actuality is not what Lacan is after. It is enough for him to say that the infinite is an inaccessible horizon for the finite. This gives us a good explanation as to why feminine enjoyment ultimately has the structure of a fiction: it is a fiction of the inaccessible. From here stems the organic relation between this enjoyment and God. This is precisely where Lacan drops his association with Cantor:

Thus, set theory is designed to restore the status of number. What proves that it does indeed restore it, within the perspective that I have been laying out, is that, setting out as it does the grounding of the One, and making number lean on this as a class of equivalence, set theory thereby manages to highlight what it calls the *non-denumerable*, which is very straightforward, as you are about to see. It's readily accessible, but to translate it into my vocabulary, I call it, no the *non-denumer-*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

able – an object I would unhesitatingly qualify as mythical – but the *impossible to denumerate*.⁵¹

Lacan takes from set theory what he deems appropriate so he can “advance a new logic” to explain the non-existence of the sexual relationship. But the passage above completely shows his non-axiomatic comprehension of the denumerable. The axioms (of Separation, Power Set, Union, Empty Set, etc.) allow for the construction of the whole numbers. But none of these foregoing axioms are responsible for the construction of the denumerable itself, because the denumerable is not constructible. It exists according to a separate axiom: the Axiom of Infinity – using Lacan’s parlance above, ω is readily accessible *axiomatically*. Asserting the status of the denumerable as mythical is what makes Lacan a pre-Cantorian (and in our parlance, pre-disciplinary) in the end: for him (and this is why intuitionism sounds appealing to Lacan), the infinite is ultimately the paradigm of inaccessibility.

The latter point is accentuated by the way Lacan mobilizes Cantor in his treatment of the theory of identification. As we mentioned earlier, Lacan made use of the concept of sets in his *Seminar IX*, on identification, where he wants to move beyond Freud’s general theory of how representations associate themselves through an economy based on the quantity of excitement. At this point, Lacan took advantage of a method different than his usual one. Freud was already able to show that what is significant are associations wired in one’s psychic apparatus. In contrast, Lacan wanted to show that, before this can happen, one needs to bring into the psychic economy something that has no signification, which can represent the lack of representation, that is, desire itself. Therefore, the question is: How can one have a representative with no representation? A difference with no signification? The problematic that this approach opens, according to usual philosophical arguments, is that of the representation of nothing. Lacan needed to show that a relation to some unity, which is also not a representation of unification, is thinkable. This was not strictly a psychoanalytical problem, but rather a necessary stepping stone in Lacan’s argument. At that moment, Lacan found his solution in Cantor’s theory of multiples – because a set provides exactly this minimal measure of unicity without having to unify what it contains. With this step, Lacan mobilized Cantor in the correct sense:

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⁵¹ Lacan, ... *or Worse*, p. 124.

mathematics authorized Lacan to continue thinking maximally. From this, he proceeded to develop the concept of a unary trait, as a potentially denumerable set, as an addendum and extension to Freud, and to the existing psychoanalytical theories of the time.

This anecdote shows the positive influence that Lacan received from mathematics, set theory, and axiomatic thought. Here, Lacan does not yet condemn Cantor for having mythical or imaginary commitments. It was not psychoanalysis that was interpreting mathematics (as per Miller), but mathematics that was interpreting psychoanalysis. But there resides another point in this anecdote. We now know that the paradigm that Lacan wanted to move beyond is constructivism, that is, he wanted to move to the paradigm according to which a representation of a set does not have to be necessarily constituted by a representative, or a formula. We also know now that this is only possible by a commitment to the Axiom of Infinity that is deeper than what constructivism could afford. In other words, what Lacan wanted to achieve is possible not just by a commitment to the Axiom of Infinity, but also by a commitment to the genericity of denumerable sets: the movement we have been pursuing from Gödel to Cohen.

This finally takes us to the question crucial to our inquiry: What would it mean for the subject (in the analytical sense a woman) to have a determination that is of the *order* of the infinite, when this *order* is not merely fictitious and inaccessible? Let us see how Badiou answers this question, which summarizes the crux of our endeavor:

Since feminine enjoyment is of the order of the infinite, does it not turn out that, rather than having the structure of a fiction, it has the structure of an axiom? A woman then would, as the condition of her enjoyment, have to decide the inaccessible as regards its existence. This axiomatic character of secondary enjoyment in no way contradicts its unutterable character. Granted, the axiom does state something, but the decision on this statement, the gesture by which it is inscribed are [sic!] not all stated in the axiom itself. The axiom does not express its axiomatic dimension, and so the decision that it is remains tacit. Silently, in the infinite element of her enjoyment, a woman would have decided that with respect to primary or phallic enjoyment there exists an inaccessible point that supplements its effect, and determines her as not-whole with regard to the function Φ . It is properly this silent decision that would forever block the sexual relationship

from existing. For, summoned to the place of enjoyment, the position ‘man’ and the position ‘woman’ would continue to be separated by that layer (*épaisseur*) without substance (*épaisseur*) not even of the axiom, but of the axiomatic, and thus instituting, dimension of this axiom.⁵²

What is important about the above *paradigm shift* (or a figure-ground change of perspective)? That the real of thinking – as what was thought of as impossible and impassable – becomes a positive category, from which new possibilities will arise: it is the pass of the real, the real as consistency and as generic.

We can interpret this change of perspective, a disciplinary operator which I call regionalization: this operator lays bare the presuppositions embedded in a certain theoretical edifice. This operator touches upon the themes of beginning, novelty, and interiority – and sits at the center of the theory of discipline. This operator has been utilized by Badiou, time and again: in his debate with Miller regarding the theory of discourse, with Lacan regarding the operation of subjectivation in *Logical Time*,⁵³ regarding the presuppositions of the doctrines of foundation and ground, and finally with regard to the *cogito*, those presuppositions that tie us to an objective determination of the subject. It is therefore fitting that we complete our last construction with yet another application of this operator by our master.

If the subject has a determination that is of the order of the infinite, and if we abandon the pre-Cantorian presupposition of the infinite as inaccessible – if we espouse the idea of the infinite as a (or the) positive category of thought (in our time), apropos the Cantorian revolution in mathematics – then this infinite determination does not merely touch upon the real as mythical or mystical, but as generic. The essence of the subject is no longer unreachable, but comprised of an infinite truth. Following our construction of the subject as a non-relational category – subject minus the object – we come to realize that the determination of this subject is infinite, and this determination under the idea of infinity and axiomatic thought is nothing but an infinite truth.

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⁵² Badiou, *Conditions*, p. 211.

⁵³ See “Subjectivizing anticipation, retroaction of the subjective process”, in Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, pp. 248–253.

If we agree with Badiou that the category of the subject in philosophy has acted as modernity's operator of compossibility – a constant theme that has been present from Descartes (science), to Hegel (politics), to Heidegger (art), and to Lacan (love) – and if the return of philosophy will depend on the reworking of this category after its destitution in the hands of the linguistic turn, then, in my view, this reworking after Badiou must occur through the thought of discipline, in whose center we find the commitment to the maximality of thinking, the idea of infinity and its capacity for regionalization.

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Mathematical Science of Being

Mathematics has an important place in the philosophy of Alain Badiou; it is a carrier of a radical, innovative, disciplined, universal, and ontological thinking; it is a scientific truth procedure and ontology. That mathematics can be ontology is not an entirely new idea; it was already addressed by Edmund Husserl in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, arising from the idea of an all-inclusive science that would be a formal mathematics in its entirety.¹ Husserl's philosophical position, however, is the transcendental phenomenology of consciousness, or *cogito*, which was objected to by the epistemologies of Jean Cavaillès and Albert Lautman, who argue for the primacy of concept, universality, and non-subjectivity. They perceived mathematics as a rational and experimental science: the former in the dynamic relationship of historical contingency and internal necessity,² the latter in a Platonistic version of understanding the dialectical structures embodied in mathematical theories.³ Under their influence, Badiou took a step further with the thesis that mathematics – in the ZFC version of axiomatic set theory – is ontology. This thesis is in a certain way paradoxical because Badiou's doctrine of truths is based on the concept of an event, which breaks the ontological laws of being. Thus, mathematics is supposed to be both a science of the ontological laws of being and at the same time a truth procedure that arises from the eventful interruption of these ontological laws.

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¹ Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. D. Cairns, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, p. 77: "Besides set and cardinal number (finite and infinite), combination (in the mathematical sense of the word), relation complex, series, connexion, and whole and part, are such derivatives. Accordingly, it is natural to view this whole mathematics as an *ontology* (an a priori theory of objects), though a *formal* one, relating to the pure modes of anything-whatever."

² Jean Cavaillès, *On Logic and the Theory of Science*, trans. R. Mackay, K. Peden, Falmouth and New York, Urbanomic and Sequence Press, 2021.

³ Albert Lautman, *Mathematics, Ideas, and the Physical Real*, trans. S. Duffy, London, Continuum, 2011.

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In the present article, we would like to address this double status of mathematics by following the intimate connection – which Badiou has placed under the wing of the Platonistic orientation – between *rational materialism* and *ontological realism*. Under the mark of rational materialism,⁴ we understand the materialist epistemology of true procedures, which Badiou already set up in his youthful writings, although at that time he had not yet developed his doctrine of truths. *Rational materialism* is a rational materialist epistemology that analyses autonomous, homogeneous, non-empiricist, innovative, and universal materialist truth productions. On the other hand, *ontological realism* refers to ontology and it is a position in mathematics that confronts mathematical formalism⁵ by pronouncing the firm, real existence of being as being. Taking into account the necessary connection between rational materialism and ontological realism, one can truly understand Badiou’s fundamental proposition that thinking and being are the same.

Badiou believes that there are only four realms of human practices that can generate truths, and they are love, art, science, and politics. Truths are subtracted from general encyclopaedic knowledge and they produce universal and radical truth-thoughts that Badiou names “generic thought.”⁶ Truth-thoughts are generic because they are related to the generic truth procedures that have the ontological status of generic multiples. The generic thought of a concrete truth procedure is a specific thought. It is entirely autonomous and cannot be approached from the outer instance. It means that it cannot be mistaken for either philosophical thought or for knowledge or thought of any other truth procedures. Mathematics as scientific thought is thus the *other* in relation to philo-

⁴ We borrowed the expression “rational materialism” from the French epistemologist Gaston Bachelard (*Le matérialisme rationnel*, 1953). As a synonym for rational materialism, Bachelard uses other terms, such as: applied materialism, scientific materialism, dialectical materialism, technical materialism, materialistic rationality, and materialistic rationalism. In the following, we will also use the term “materialistic rationalism”.

⁵ Badiou rejects the formalistic orientation that understands mathematics as a language game and as a codified formal language producing rigorous manipulation with mathematical concepts and objects, which are merely formal mathematical constructions. For Badiou, Kant’s understanding of mathematics is also a formalism (as a transcendental formalism). Cf. Alain Badiou, Gilles Haéri, *In Praise of Mathematics*, trans. S. Spitzer, Cambridge and Malden, Polity Press, 2016, p. 30.

⁶ Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. N. Madarasz, Albany, SUNY Press, 1999, p. 81.

sophical, political, artistic, and love thought. Nothing can think (in terms of its production) certain generic and truth-thought but that concrete generic thought itself, because generic thought is strictly bound by the material conditions of its autonomous production protocol. Such thought does not use material and content from external, independent, objective reality, and therefore the material or object of the truth procedure is exclusively produced by the internal process of its truth production.

Generic thought is strictly subjective, but subjectivity here does not relativise the universal and creative value of this thought. The emphasis on the subjectivity of thought means accepting the subjectivity *literally* as something that cannot possibly be a matter of a correlative object. To be a subject, as Badiou says in his *Manifesto for Philosophy*, means to be “without a vis-à-vis.”⁷ In *Anthropology of the Name*, Sylvain Lazarus, Badiou’s political comrade and a close theoretical colleague, addresses such thought as “thinking in interiority”, and proposes the thesis that *thought* is a relation of the real and not a relation to the real.⁸ Lazarus calls this “an approach ‘in subjectivity’” or thinking “in interiority”.⁹ The dialectic of the subject and the object is out of the question because *thought* is “the subjective without a dialectic.”¹⁰ Or, in the words of Badiou in his analysis of Lazarus: “The whole problem is to think thought as *thought* and not as object; or again, to think that which is thought in thought, and not ‘that which’ (the object) thought thinks.”¹¹

The notions subjective/objective do not have a special meaning here, because what matters is the rational-materialistic logic, according to which: 1) the exterior is disqualified and 2) the internal and homogeneous object, arising from autonomous, generic, truth production, is the only subject of that production. That is why such production is rational and not empiricist. Its subject is not found in the exterior but is rather invented, making this production materialistic, because it brings changes, and intervenes by creating something new, something that had not existed before. In the 1960s, Badiou recognised such production in

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁸ Sylvain Lazarus, *Anthropology of the Name*, trans. G. Walker, London, Seagull Books, 2015, p. xi.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹ Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. J. Barker, New York, Verso, 2005, p. 27.

science (particularly in mathematics)¹² and aesthetics (in Macherey's concept of literary criticism autonomy).¹³ In the early period of his philosophy, Badiou understood the categories of subject and truth as ideological notions as the opposite of the self-sufficient, autonomous, homogeneous, and *objective* procedures of scientific production that can cut through the tissue of ideology. Under Althusser's influence, Badiou rejected all humanised versions of the conscious subject as ideological forms of subjectivity, and understood science as a machine of objective mechanisms that break with ideology. Due to the non-intentionality of the mathematical mechanism, mathematics was a strictly non-subjective machine, functioning mechanically and following the pattern provided by the concept of a Turing machine. With the doctrine of truths developed by Badiou at the end of the 1980s, these notions changed. The innovative and universal, arising from the eventful breaking with the existent, became subjective and entered into the service of truth procedures, while the status quo and what is an immediate given gained the status of objective reality. Despite the rotating subjective/objective marks, the rational-materialistic logic remained the same. The swap was thus made without a significant problem, so it is not unusual that Badiou kept the concept of subject as the agent of truth in a paradoxical image of a non-subjective machine, as was lucidly noted by Zachary Luke Fraser, since the new concept of subject is a *matheme*, which defies religious, ethnic, ethical, psychological, conscious, or sociological characterisations.¹⁴

This is followed by a question: How does insight into the concept of autonomous rational and materialistic scientific production, posited in the 1960s, help us understand the step that Badiou made in his book *Being and Event* (1980s)? From the concept of mathematics as a scientific mechanical automaton, introduced at the end of the 1960s, in the late 1980s Badiou came to the concept of

¹² Cf. Alain Badiou, *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics*, trans. Z. L. Fraser and T. Tho, Melbourne, re.press, 2007; Alain Badiou, "Mark and Lack", trans. Z. L. Fraser and R. Brassier, in P. Hallward and K. Peden (eds.), *Concept and Form*, London and New York, Verso, 2012, pp. 159–185; A. Badiou, "Infinitesimal Subversion", in P. Hallward and K. Peden (eds.), *Concept and Form*, pp. 187–207.

¹³ Cf. Alain Badiou, "The Autonomy of the Aesthetic Process", trans. B. Bosteels, in A. Badiou, *The Age of the Poets: And Other Writings on Twentieth-Century Poetry and Prose*, London and New York, Verso, 2014, pp. 111–131.

¹⁴ Zachary Luke Fraser, "The Category of Formalization: From Epistemological Break to Truth Procedure", in A. Badiou, *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics*, pp. xiii–lxv, p. lii.

mathematics as a scientific truth procedure and ontology, which, historically looking, reached the stage of scientifically pronouncing being as being through the axiomatic set theory of the ZFC system. By taking into account the rational and materialistic character of mathematics as a truth procedure, we will read the equation mathematics = ontology as an abbreviated form of the following description: mathematics = an automated and mechanised machine that uses an axiomatic formalized language as its writing; it is also an experimental scientific practice that produces the object of its own production and operates with its own material that does not arise from the empiricist exterior; and it is also ontology = science that pronounces the form of the multiple of being as being. We must also take into account the paradigm of ontological realism that concerns the ontological status of mathematical concepts and according to which mathematics has an “essential relationship with all there is.”¹⁵ Rational materialism and ontological realism here address each other perfectly well, which is explicitly shown by Badiou’s version of Platonism, which rejects the primary distinction between “internal and external” and between “the known and the knowing mind,” because every assumption upon which a subject aims at an external object (even if the object is ideal) is empiricist.¹⁶ In the mathematical process, there is no subject-object difference, which means that all of the value of the immanent ontological identity, “the same is thinking and Being,” is in that: “In so far as mathematics touches upon Being, it is intrinsically a thought.”¹⁷ This means that Badiou’s thinking of ontology arises out of an implicit idea of mathematics as a materialistic automaton of rational thought requiring special ontological measures, which will be presented below.

Axiomatic Prescription and the Form of the Multiple

In the following, we will focus on the Ideas of the multiple and on the ontological form of multiplicity, giving special attention to the axiomatic prescription of ZFC set theory and its ability to construct compositions based on an empty set. The emphasis on the axiomatic prescription or axiomatic presentation of set theory will lead us to insight into the *rational materialistic* character of mathe-

¹⁵ Badiou, G. Haéri, *In Praise of Mathematics*, p. 50.

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*, trans. N. Madarasz, Albany, SUNY Press, 2006, p. 90.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

mathematical production, which corresponds to Badiou's assertion that an axiomatic set is an immanent form of being-qua-being.¹⁸ At the same time, a composition based on an empty set will indicate the moment of being occurring in an axiomatic presentation, which supports the position of *ontological realism*. In this way, we will be able to show the *presentation form of the pure multiple* that functions as *ontological raw material for the mathematical inscription* of being as being. In the materialistic identity of form and matter, we will confirm the intimate connection of mathematical materialistic rationalism and mathematical ontological realism, which eventually means that in mathematics, it is the same to think and to be.

The mathematical theory of the ZFC axiomatic system is a referential place (*topos*) of thinking being as being, where this "as being" is subtracted from the normative power of the One. The axiomatics and the powerlessness of the One at the level of being are mutually connected, since axioms can be understood as propositions about the multiple that "exclud[e] any explicit definition of the multiple – the sole means of avoiding the existence of the One."¹⁹ Using an operative form of axiom, mathematical set theory avoids the conceptualisation (a concept is only another way to reinforce the normative of the One) of its material (pure sets). Badiou marks the nine axioms of the ZFC axiomatic system in the Platonistic manner as "Ideas of the multiple," or, in the Aristotelian manner, as "the 'first principles of being'."²⁰

There is no object in ZFC set theory, says Badiou in *Being and Event*, that would be "addressed" by the theory. This non-existence of the object must be understood in a triple manner. The mathematical material is not an object taken from the empiricist experience, which is a directive that already exists in Badiou's early perception of mathematics as rational materialistic production. This idea is also present in the ontological universe: "It can be described and thought only on the basis of the axioms or principles with which it is consistent. [...] It is rad-

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¹⁸ Alain Badiou, "Na poti k novemu mišljenju Absoluta", trans. R. Benčin, *Filozofski vestnik*, 32 (3/2011), pp. 7–22. Available at <https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski-vestnik/article/view/4166/3862>, accessed 15 December 2022.

¹⁹ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham, London, Bloomsbury Revelations, 2013, p. 64.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

ically unempirical.”²¹ This is connected to another momentum arising from ontological realism. Mathematics is thought as far as “mathematics touches upon Being.” In this immanent identity of thought and being, however, there is no place for the difference between a knowing subject and a known object. The third momentum is that mathematics as the ontology of non-One does not affirm the form of an object. The ontological form is not a form of the object, which is the form of the One. It is important because of the difference that Badiou articulates between ontology and phenomenology. Within the latter, the form of the object is established as a form of appearance of being.

Given the three characteristics of the non-existence of an object in mathematics, we can further ask what is “it” that mathematics operates with, what is the material that is specific to the mathematical production? If there is no mathematical object (there is no One at the level of being), “what” then “is”?

If there is no object of mathematics, the latter does not present anything, but while it does not present anything (because there is nothing to present), it presents the presentation itself.²² Ontology is a *presentation of presentation*²³ and thereby a site where we can grasp the general momenta of the structuration of the structure. Ontology is a presentation that does not present an empiricist object; it does not present in the subject-object relation and it certainly does not present in the form of the One. The axiomatic and subtractive character of ontology dictates that we must axiomatise, that we must present the raw matter of ontology (whatever this raw material is) in the form of the non-One. This form of presentation that manages to subtract itself from the normative power of the One is a *presentation form of the multiple-without-One*.

If ZFC set theory operates with the presentation form of the multiple-without-One, can the conclusion be drawn that being itself is multiple?

We must be careful here. To say that being is multiple is not the same as to say that being is presented in the form of the multiple-without-One. In the latter case, we take into account the ZFC set theory axiomatics, which, *within* its own

²¹ Badiou, “Na poti k novemu mišljenju Absoluta”, p. 7.

²² Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

production, presents in the form of the multiple-without-One and thus through mathematical axioms pronounces being as being. Mathematics analyses the structurability of structures within its own mathematical situation, i.e. it analyses what the structures have in common, which is “the fact of being, quite simply.”²⁴ Non-mathematical (non-ontological) or, in the words of Badiou, an *undetermined situation* “is not such that the thesis ‘the one is not’ can be presented therein.”²⁵ “In an indeterminate situation there is no rebel or subtractive presentation of the pure multiple upon which the empire of the one is exercised.”²⁶ Ontology, as an artificial, highly formalised, experimental, and *mathematically defined* situation, is the only situation that is capable of the subtractive process. Ontology being mathematics literally means: it is a situation that is ontological, because it is established within the mathematical axiomatic production; ontology is absolutely not transferable, i.e. for a non-mathematical situation (philosophical, artistic, poetic, theological, etc.) it cannot be replaced; only a mathematician is capable of “ontologising” (of ontological activity);²⁷ access to being, contrary to negative theology, is rational and immanent; and finally the prescriptive characteristics of ZFC axiomatic set theory impose the form of presentation that is the presentation form of the multiple.

Ontology, with its subtractive power, prevents being from expressing itself as the being of the One, which, on the other hand, still does not mean that being is multiple: from the fact that there *is not* the One at the level of being, it does not follow that there *is* a multiple at the level of being. Being, says Badiou, is entirely heterogeneous to the opposition One-multiple.²⁸ *The One is not* is a decision-argument that only tells what *is not* there at the level of being, and accordingly develops the ontological consequence that ontology subtracts or presents, which means that *ontology presents by subtracting* and thereby produces precisely the presentation form of the multiple-without-One. Between the ontological decision (that there is no One) and being (that we have thus far said nothing positive about; we have only been speaking about it negatively – that there is no One at the level of being), there is an ontological consequence that ontology presents in the presentation form of the multiple-without-One. The multiple is not being,

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²⁴ Badiou, G. Haëri, *In Praise of Mathematics*, p. 35.

²⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 55.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

while at the same time, it has not totally disappeared, since it appears as the *form of presentation*: “[T]he one and the multiple do not form a ‘unity of contraries’, since the first is not whilst the second is the very form of any presentation of being.”²⁹ The multiple is thus “*solely* the regime of presentation,” “a figure of presentation,”³⁰ while the theory of the multiple is a “general form of the presentation of being.”³¹ The question we cannot ignore concerns the role of presentation in ontology, since it is not directly clear what purpose this duplication or mediation with the concept of presentation serves.

Badiou does not always pay attention to the concept of presentation he introduced in *Being and Event*, where being and multiple are quite often equated, while in *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology* the concept of presentation is almost entirely missing. The consequences of this inexactness of Badiou also emerge in the secondary literature, which tends to put a direct equal sign between being and multiple. We believe that this is a commonly missed point, which may be somewhat understandable, but we must nevertheless insist on the ontological presentation, which is exactly the axiomatic prescription articulated through the form of the multiple. Therefore, we would like to call to mind Badiou’s note to readers that sometimes he himself uses abbreviations which we should not understand literally:

I said that if being is presented as pure multiple (sometimes I shorten this perilously by saying being is multiple), being *qua being*, strictly speaking, is neither one nor multiple. Ontology, the supposed science of being *qua being* [...] *must* present; at best, it must present presentation, which is to say the pure multiple.³²

Ontology must therefore present presentation, and making an equation between being and multiple is a risky undertaking. However, to understand this point of Badiou’s, we must find out, how Badiou understands the concept of presentation at all.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

There is a remark of Badiou's in his notes at the end of *Being and Event* that he had borrowed the concept of presentation from Jean-François Lyotard.³³ In Lyotard's book *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, there is a chapter entitled "Presentation", which Badiou refers to in his essay "Custos, Quid Noctis?", which is his review of *The Differend*. In this text, published before the book *Being and Event*, Badiou also pays attention to the concept of presentation by summarising Lyotard's understanding of "Descartes' doubt". Doubt does not lead to evidence in the form of "I think", as with Descartes, but to the evidence that what primarily happened was the phrase "I doubt". Or in the words of Lyotard: "It does not result from the phrase, *I doubt*, that I am, merely that there has been a phrase."³⁴ This means that "I (speak, think)" is not the evidence with which everything begins, but rather that "I" is a result, the conclusion of the *phrase that occurs before it*.³⁵ Every phrase presupposes other phrases: "It presupposes language, which would be the totality of phrases possible in a language."³⁶ The multiplicity of phrases is thus something that is *before* the subject or world.³⁷ But this multiplicity cannot be presented: "One can, in fact, describe, *Language is this and that*, but not show. *And this is language*. The totality is not presentable."³⁸ In Lyotard's conception of presentation, every following phrase presents a presentation of the previous phrase: "The presentation entailed by a phrase is forgotten by it [...]. Another phrase pulls it back out and presents it, oblivious to the presentation that it itself entails."³⁹ At the same time, it is true that: "What is not presented is not. The presentation entailed by a phrase is not presented, it is not. Or: Being is not. One could say that when an entailed presentation is presented, it is not an entailed but a situated presentation. Or: Being grasped as an existent is non-Being."⁴⁰

In his notes at the end of *Being and Event*, Badiou says that the presentation, as a pure multiple, belongs to an important theme of the era, which is reflected not

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³³ *Ibid.*, p. 513.

³⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. G. Van Den Abbeele, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988, p. 59.

³⁵ Alain Badiou, "Custos, Quid Noctis", trans. B. Bosteels, in A. Badiou, *Alain Badiou, The Adventure of French Philosophy*, London and New York, Verso, 2012, pp. 223–239, 227.

³⁶ Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, p. 59.

³⁷ Alain Badiou, "Custos, Quid Noctis", p. 227.

³⁸ Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, p. 59.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

only by Lyotard, but also by Gilles Deleuze. Unlike Deleuze, who thinks this concept under the natural paradigm, and Lyotard, who thinks it in the name of the juridical paradigm, Badiou sets this concept under the wing of mathematics.⁴¹ Nevertheless, certain similarities between Lyotard's and Badiou's concepts of presentation still remain. That presentation is a kind of regime of the multiple, *which is prior to subject*, is also Badiou's starting point. Lyotard actually provides the idea, 1) that there *is* something not-subjective, which is "the ultimate existential guarantee,"⁴² as Badiou calls it, of the phrase that had happened; 2) what there *is*, is not presentable in its totality, but merely in its situation (we can also say in its localisation); 3) therefore, what is not presented, simply *is not*, it is a non-being; 4) and is simultaneously something that is *presented* with another phrase by being *included* in the previous phrase. We can find all of these elements later in Badiou. In this way, Badiou also uses a review of Lyotard to announce and promote his own project, which will be a theme of *Being and Event*. In the same text, Badiou wrote: "I will only say the following – which is close to Albert Lautman's theses – namely, that mathematics in its history is the science of being qua being, that is, being inasmuch as it is not, the science of unrepresentable presentation. One day I will prove it."⁴³

The mathematical paradigm, Badiou continues in "Custos, Quid Noctis?", allows us to think being in a consistent manner exactly like an "existential scission of the nothing and the name," such as, for example, "the empty (nothing) set (name) exists."⁴⁴ A null-name, which refers to an empty or null-set, will be marked in *Being and Event* as the proper name of being. Mathematics thinks being in a consistent manner in a form of an existential scission of null and name, which is actually "the logic of scission as [a] form of the occurrence itself."⁴⁵ If we connect these words of Badiou's with words from *Being and Event*, we find an interesting momentum. In *Being and Event*, Badiou says: "the multiple is the regime of presentation; [...] being is what presents (itself)."⁴⁶ Being *is not* a presentation and Badiou requests "the expulsion of any presentifying assumption

⁴¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 512.

⁴² Alain Badiou, "Custos, Quid Noctis", p. 226.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 26.

of being”;⁴⁷ what is not presented also *is not* (in the words of Lyotard), while ontology is a science about being, even if there is no presentation of being (in the words of Badiou). Mathematics is thus “a science of non-presentable presentation” and an empty set is exactly this non-presentable of presentation. Being is thus non-presented, but it also somehow happens to the presentation, it somehow occurs in the presentation; and this event (= occurrence) is reported by ontology, which has the ability to present the presentation itself or the ability to present what “occurs” in the presentation, that is, what *happened* to the presentation. It is also true that at exactly this point, where being occurs in the presentation, being itself is multiple, “because being is only multiple inasmuch as it occurs in presentation.”⁴⁸ The form in which being occurs/happens/appears in presentation is multiple, because the multiple itself is a regime, figure, and form of presentation.

At this point, we have reached the crucial momentum. The concept of presentation in the regime of the form of the multiple is important, because Badiou has used it to philosophically describe the *internal-mathematical activity*, which is exactly that the axioms of the ZFC system operate, present, or construct “through” the form of the pure multiple. At the same time, the concept of presentation allows being to occur [French: *advient*] to the ontological discourse. At the point where being “occurs” to the ontological presentation, the *independence* of the ontology “object” (being as being) and its “dependence” on the ontological presentation itself (= axiomatic production) are simultaneously confirmed. In this minimal difference between the non-presentable (being) and the *occurrence* of the non-presentable (being in presentation), being is quilted with an ontological theory of the multiple. This is a point where the simultaneousness of ontologically-materialistic rationalism and ontologically-materialistic realism is actually confirmed. The mathematical axiomatic production of the ZFC system articulates or writes out what has occurred in its axiomatic prescription. The ontological presentation thus does not cause, but still enables, the real of being to occur, without requesting that we understand ontology as a reflection of the being’s objectivity (like some of the vulgar Marxist versions of the mirror theory would suggest). The presentation paradoxically allows being to be present without being presented and thereby lost. Being is included in pres-

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⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 72.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 26.

entation without being presented; it is present as the non-presentable or as the “‘multiple’ of *nothing*.”⁴⁹ Being is therefore with a *negation*, i.e. it is subtracted from its own presentation. Being is with a negation, because it has its own presentation subtracted. *The One is not* is a decision-argument that only says what is *not* at the level of being, and accordingly develops consequences that have nothing to do with *what being as being is*. This is important because exactly by saying *nothing* about being, the decision says something important about being: being is bound to nothing, which is the nothing of the subtracted presentation. Being *as being* “strictly speaking, is neither one nor multiple.”⁵⁰ When we do not confirm anything positive about being, we confirm being itself, which is the *null-presentation*.

At this point, we need to be careful not to attribute to the negation more than what the ontology’s intrinsicity allows. We must not understand the primary negation as an example of primality of logical laws over ontological laws, since it is a *consequence*, not a *principle*.⁵¹ In the mathematical ontology of the ZFC system, we can recognise the rules of classical logic, but it is not because ontology would adhere to these rules *a priori*, but because being itself in mathematics is articulated and expressed classically. Mathematics sets the axiom of the empty set, which literally *decides* the existence or the primitive name of being. The absolute initial point of being is articulated with the empty set axiom, which states that there is a set without elements. Being and ontological prescription (through mathematical axioms) are thus in a mutual grip. The ontological prescription is inevitably immanent to the mathematical procedure, thereby making axiomatics “the mathematical realization of the proper formalization of this decision.”⁵² If we can talk about the *a priori* conditions of ontology at all, then such a condition would be that the intrinsic discourse about being as being must be developed in the frame of *a situation that is necessarily ontological* (= *mathematical*), which is only another way of saying that mathematical access to being requires that one understand ontology as an autonomous rational materialistic production.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61–62.

⁵¹ Alain Badiou, Tzuchien Tho, “New Horizons in Mathematics as a Philosophical Condition: An Interview with Alain Badiou”, *Parrhesia* (3/2007), pp. 1–11, 5–6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

This entails a new characteristic of ontology; namely, it is an absolute referential universe, which is “absolutely intelligible on the basis of nothing.”⁵³ Badiou says: “In Set Theory, the primitive name of Being is the void, the empty set. The whole hierarchy takes root in it. In a certain sense, it alone ‘is’.”⁵⁴ The absolute initial point of being is expressed by the axiom of the void-set, which states: “There exists a set which has no element.”⁵⁵ An empty set is a universal constructor of different structures that form rational orderliness and fascinating mathematical architecture, where “special rules” are involved and dictated by the axioms of the ZFC system. Ontology is a militant, rebellious situation exactly because it is axiomatically formalised, which enables it to operate with only one set type, namely with the *pure set* (= *the pure multiple*). *Pure sets* are pure exactly because they contain *nothing* else than *sets*, which contain *nothing* else than *sets*, and so on until the *empty set*, which is the first case of a pure set, which everything begins with. “In other words, a pure set is either the empty set or a set that contains other pure sets.”⁵⁶ What is repeating, here, is not only an empty set, but also the very *form* of the set, *the form of the multiple of multiples*, which is “the form of presentation itself,”⁵⁷ indicating that the structurability of these structures is presented in the form of the multiple. The axiomatical presentational regime of the ZFC system is a regime that dictates the form of the multiple. We must not forget that a pure set, the mathematical set that ZFC theory operates with, is not defined or conceptualised and it primarily denotes a certain *form* and not a *concept* of mathematical axiomatic operativity. A pure set is simply an axiomatic prescription, a presentation. Axioms are applied to the variables α , β , γ , etc., “in respect of which it is implicitly agreed that they denote pure multiples.”⁵⁸ Here, we are dealing with formal inscriptions, where α is of the same “scripture type” as β , which confirms that within the ontological situation, a uniformity of pure multiples exclusively prevails.⁵⁹ Ontology encounters nothing that would be external to it or that would be heterogeneous to the pure multiple. By the example of the axioms of the powerset and of union, Ba-

⁵³ Badiou, “Na poti k novemu mišljenju Absoluta”, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, p. 98.

⁵⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Burhanuddin Baki, *Badiou's Being and Event and the Mathematics of Set Theory*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 40.

⁵⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 71.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

diou stresses that whether we go to the composition or internal decomposition (dissemination) of a given multiple, “the theory does not encounter any ‘thing’ which is heterogeneous to the pure multiple.”⁶⁰ The axiom of replacement (or of substitution) is particularly interesting in these terms, since it expresses exactly that, even if the elements of a given set are replaced by other elements, the result of this replacement is still a set. The implementation of an axiom is indifferent to the “content” of the multiple, because “the attribute ‘to-be-a-multiple’ transcends the particular multiples which are elements of a given multiple.”⁶¹ The main point is that despite the replacement of the elements, *the form of the multiple* remains. Given that nothing can obscure the uniformity of presentation in the form of the multiple, we can confirm that the *homogeneity* principle is an essential presentation principle of being in the theory of the multiple.

When a concept fails, we do not enter chaos, but a form. The form is a rebellion against the concept and is essentially a form-without-concept (reminiscent of Kant’s concept of the two forms of intuition, space and time, which, strictly speaking, *are not concepts*). The presentation form of the multiple-without-concept (understood in the instance of the mathematical letter) is the *ontological form* of mathematical operativity as ontology. Ontology operates *with* the ontological form and it simultaneously also operates *on* it, because the set, “the Multiple, for mathematics, was not a (formal) concept, transparent and constructed, but a real whose internal gap, and impasse, were deployed by the theory.”⁶² Badiou also says the following: “I began to think that if mathematics achieves the secrets of thought it was because of the type of thinking that it is. My conception of ontology began to follow this line of thought as well as the idea that the most sedimental thing will be pure multiplicity.”⁶³

The pure multiple is not merely a form of presentation, but also a moment of the real, which is “the most sedimental thing” without a concept. This thing-without-concept that ZFC set theory operates on is the most primitive *ontological raw material* of mathematical production. The pure multiple is the matter that is at

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶³ Alain Badiou, Zachary Luck Fraser, and Tzuchien Tho, “The Concept of Model, Forty Years Later: An Interview with Alain Badiou”, in A. Badiou, *The Concept of Model*, pp. 79–106, 103.

the same time the ontological form of the multiple. This equation of matter and form is possible in mathematics because ZFC set theory is an inscription of being in the instance of a letter. The formal inscriptions α , β , γ , etc., are not only formal, abstract marks of the multiple. They are much more. The mathematical letter tells us that the multiple *is* and it lacks a definition of what this multiple is, it is the “inscription without concept of that-which-is.”⁶⁴ Mathematics “is the *literal inscription* of being,” and not a description of being.⁶⁵ It is a discourse that “refers to nothing other than itself” and its marks or letters are “the sole reality of mathematical discourse.”⁶⁶ Being as being is thus not articulated through the abundance of some ontological Presence, but rather in a formalised letter;⁶⁷ ontology “marks the absence of being qua being in through the agency of the letter.”⁶⁸

This of course does not mean that Badiou advocates mathematical structuralism,⁶⁹ because even if every mathematical proof is “bound to a letter, it cannot be reduced to it.”⁷⁰ The form of the multiple-without-One or a pure set reveals the inexhaustive richness and “the banality of manifold-being.”⁷¹ The empty set allows us to think consistently very inconsistent and paradoxical “entities”, like asserting there is a set of all triangles with four sides, thereby confirming the existence of inconsistency as such. Being as being is inexhaustive, because the inconsistency is inexhaustive. What is presented of being as being is, on the other hand, consistent and structured in the form of the presented multiple. So, there is *being as being, the inexhaustive structurability of the structure* or the *non-presented presentation of the presented*, which is the *inconsistency* of consistency, occurring as an *empty set*, which is included in every pure set; it is not a *structure (the presented multiple, or consistency)*, even though the *structurability*

⁶⁴ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 48.

⁶⁵ Jon Roffe, “Alain Badiou’s Being and Event”, *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 2 (1&2/2006), pp. 327–338, 330.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ For the concept of letter as a primary condition, cf. Justin Clemens, “Letters as the Condition of Conditions for Alain Badiou”, *Communication & Cognition*, 36 (1&2/2003), pp. 73–102.

⁶⁸ Roffe, “Alain Badiou’s Being and Event”, p. 331.

⁶⁹ Cf. Baki, *Badiou’s Being and Event and the Mathematics of Set Theory*, p. 88.

⁷⁰ Alain Badiou, ‘Préface de la nouvelle édition’, in *Le Concept de modèle*, Paris, Fayard, 2007, pp. 27–28; taken from Fraser, “The Category of Formalization: From Epistemological Break to Truth Procedure”, p. xxxvi.

⁷¹ Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, p. 30.

(*presentation, inconsistency, or an empty set*) is what we operate on, what is the *matter itself* of any *structure* of a *presented, consistent multiple*.

The ZFC set theory thus provides an ontological aspect of any given structure, but it does not mean that an empirical or non-mathematical situation *arises* from the mathematical situation or is based thereon. Badiou is not a philosopher of “the ontological levels of reality” (like Nicolai Hartmann’s ontology), neither does he advocate a discursive hierarchy (like Rudolf Carnap does). For Badiou, a mathematical set is simply a “modus of thinking”, which thinks ontologically⁷² and is capable of thinking the firm point of the real. This real is not a matter of concept, but a matter of form, which is the *matter itself*. At the level of being and its presentation within ZFC axiomatic theory, it is the same to be, to think, and to formalise or form-realise.⁷³ We can conclude that ontological rationalism and ontological realism in Badiou’s version of the intrinsic and Platonistic ontology are not mutually opposing, but rather complementary.

The Ontological Decision and Metaontology

Let us conclude with the elementary question: With what kind of concept of ontology does Badiou operate? In an Aristotelian manner, Badiou defines ontology as discourse on being as being, which is an intrinsic understanding of ontology. Jean-Toussaint Desanti stresses that intrinsic ontology can be defined according to the minimum or maximum domain of interpretation based on how one thinks being *as* being (*on é on*).⁷⁴ The maximum interpretation will exhaustively develop all the conceptual richness of being as such, while the minimum interpretation will be limited to only the essential, asking: “[W]hat is *the least* that must be thought in order to define the status of the proposition ‘*there are beings*’?”⁷⁵ Badiou opts for the minimum interpretation of intrinsic ontology, which ena-

⁷² Fraser, “The Category of Formalization: From Epistemological Break to Truth Procedure”, p. xli.

⁷³ About Badiou’s concept of formalisation, cf. Magdalena Germek, “The Dialectic of Formalization”, *Filozofski vestnik*, 42 (1/2021), pp. 25–47.

⁷⁴ Jean-Toussaint Desanti, “Some Remarks on the Intrinsic Ontology of Alain Badiou”, trans. R. Brassier, in P. Hallward (ed.), *Think Again. Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, London and New York, Continuum, 2004, pp. 59–66, p. 59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

bles him to divide the history of ontology in relation to the minimum question: Should we think being-*as*-being as being-of-One or as being-of-multiple?

To this minimum question, however, philosophy does not offer a minimum answer. Arguments come from both sides: the Parmenides-Zeno line paved the way for ontology under the sign of the One, while the Democritus-Lucretius line did so for the ontology of the multiple. Both lines, however, started a history of a dramatic ontological struggle that has left us with only a portico of the ontology of its “ruined temple.”⁷⁶ The ruined temple of ontology is nothing but a metaphor for constructing something that is destroyed in the process of construction. In *Being and Event*, Badiou compares philosophy with the phoenix, the mystical bird dying and rising renewed from its ashes. Caught in a vicious circle of self-destruction and self-awakening, philosophy is a “phoenix of its own sophistic consummation.”⁷⁷ The destructive cycle can be interrupted by admitting that the rational knowledge of philosophical argumentation is clearly not the one that leads to a final solution, since the philosophical argument itself destroys the possibility of a final ontological proof. These problems came to philosophers’ mind quite early. In *Parmenides*, Plato tried to systematically derive argumentations from both sides and thoroughly examined, in the form of a logical exercise, all of the possibilities implied by the assumption that the One exists, as well as the assumption that the One does not exist. And in the last line of *Parmenides*, he captures the very essence of the *impossibility* of the *philosophical derivation* (argumentation): “if ‘one is’ or if ‘[one] is not’, [then] it and the others both are and are not, and both appear and do not appear to be all things in all ways, both in relation to themselves and in relation to each other.”⁷⁸

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Badiou intervenes exactly at this point. If we dismiss Plato’s conclusion as nonsense that has brought us to the end of argumentation, we admit the weakness and collapse of thought. The other option is to see only the beginning in this impossibility, meaning that we recognise “the first example, though a purely philosophical one, of an absolutely undecidable argument.”⁷⁹ The latter option defends the rational argumentation that does not lead to the final ontological

⁷⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Arnold Hermann, *Plato’s Parmenides. Text, Translation & Introductory Essay*, trans. S. Chrysakopoulou, Las Vegas, Zurich, and Athens, Parmenides Publishing, 2010, p. 217.

⁷⁹ Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, p. 92.

proof, but to the final ontological *decision* in favour of the existence of the One or multiple at the level of being. Badiou's point is that at the level of being we cannot make a rational deduction of the ontological proof, because that leads to the absurd; instead, we can *decide* that the One does not exist at the level of being. This decision allows Badiou to claim that ontology is mathematics, because it is precisely the mathematical set theory of the ZFC axiomatic system that separates being from the One and consistently pronounces the consequences of the decision that there is no One at the level of being.

We could ask: Why is it so?, Why is there not One at the level of being, i.e., what were the arguments that initially convinced Badiou to put his philosophy under the condition of the ontology of the not-One?

However, we must warn that Badiou is not obliged to answer our question. At the beginning of *Being and Event*, Badiou accepts the thesis that “the one is not,”⁸⁰ without offering an explanation of this thesis, either ontological or philosophical. It is true that Badiou presents the consequences of the *ontology of the One* in several places, but this presentation is *only an address* on behalf of the opposite position. In the ontology of the One, he sees the weight of the religious, metaphysical, and poetic discourses that maintain the teleological and theological approach to being, and are the ontological backside of phenomenology, which insists on the humanistic motive of finitude. His intention is to avoid this motive, which led him to condition his philosophy with mathematics; however, the *purpose thereof* is not a *rational justification* of the initial decision that mathematics is ontology, which confirms that there is no One. The rational justification of the ontological decision operates as a rational argumentation that must be confirmed based on itself and thus cannot be bound to ethics or politics, regardless of the emancipatory motives that may be there. Confirmation that refers to itself is not a definition of its contents. A decision is exercised without defined elements, meaning that it is “proven” without an explicit proof. So, what is this proving-without-proving?

As Burhanuddin Baki says, Badiou implicitly refers to both theses – that mathematics is ontology and there is no One – to a *consistency proof*, which differs

⁸⁰ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 26.

from a *direct proof*.⁸¹ A *consistency proof* is used in relation to undecidability, while a *direct proof* is “the mathematical condition for what we usually understand as logical argument.”⁸²

Badiou’s genius – which must be acknowledged – was to recognize the notion of consistency proof as another reasonable mathematical figure from which an alternative form of argumentation can be conditioned. We do not need to argue the conclusion from our basic assumptions; we can just demonstrate that it is not illogical for us to decide the conclusion to be true. Between the axioms and the end result lies a decision, a militant commitment. This gives us a great flexibility for pursuing any line of reasoning. Whenever a detailed and straightforward argument cannot be given, one can decide for the proposition to be true, with this deciding not being a simple recourse to subjective prejudices, but to the event of decision itself, which Badiou will later link to an event of subjectivity itself, the emergence of a new subject.⁸³

In *Being and Event*, Burhanuddin Baki stresses, we will not find direct argumentation of the theses that there is no One and that mathematics is ontology. “Badiou only claims that there is nothing wrong with taking Being to be multiple and mathematics to be equivalent to ontology. The validation of the propositions *does not precede* but *comes after* the decision.”⁸⁴ Exactly in this militant commitment lies the “fidelity [*fidélité*] to the decision,” whereby the consistency proof is “a license for decidability.”⁸⁵ Badiou finds this license for decidability in the revolutionary technique of “forcing”, which was introduced in mathematics by Paul Cohen. It is Cohen’s method of proving or forcing the consistency, which is strictly different than the causality procedure.⁸⁶ Badiou recognises its value particularly when it comes to the truth procedures that, as productions of something new, cannot be simply deduced from an existing situation. Even though truths break with a given situation in such a way so as to expose the inconsisten-

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⁸¹ Baki, *Badiou’s Being and Event and the Mathematics of Set Theory*, p. 84.

⁸² *Ibid.* “In the case of direct proof, there is a linear and necessary deductive thread from the premise to the propositional end result. But in the case of consistency proofs, the proposition is only decided to be true, and that is already enough.” *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, italics added.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 86.

cy of the situation, they are not inconsistent themselves, but rather subjectively decided towards productions (forcing) a new consistency. Thus *consistency and decision are related*.⁸⁷ Or, to express that by using the logic of consequences that Badiou introduces in his book *Logics of Worlds*: “A truth affirms the infinite right of its consequences, with no regard for what opposes them.”⁸⁸ This means that Badiou recognised the events (the Cantor-event, the Gödel-event, and the Cohen-event) in the historical development of mathematics that led him to the recognition that mathematics is actually a truth procedure (it produces the new and universal from the eventful interruption), which can – exactly because it is a truth procedure – produce rational consequences (from the Cohen-event) that justify the ontological decision that mathematics is ontology, which articulates being without the One (from the Cantor-event).

Truth procedures are concerned with the production and construction of such a world where the *decided* theses are *true*. With his book *Being and Event*, Badiou thus hopes to bring attention to the possibility of the existence of a world (model) where both theses (mathematics as ontology and the non-being of the One) are true. Badiou *cannot prove* this by *forcing* out this truth in the scope of philosophy, because philosophy is not a truth procedure. Therefore, *Being and Event* is not a direct spot to look for *forced proofs* that ontology is mathematics and that there is no One; these proofs are in a way a matter of the historical development of mathematics itself. Even if we spontaneously take both theses – *mathematics is ontology* and *there is no One* – as consequences of the philosophical decision (as a decision of the philosopher Badiou),⁸⁹ it still needs to be stressed that the *philosophical decision is not the subject of an ontological decision, but, on the contrary, its consequence*. Mathematics cannot adhere to philosophical principles, conditions, or decisions because they are external to it. At the same time, there is no personalised or transcendent decision-maker to decide upon being as being in mathematics as a not-intentional, yet subjective, autonomous, rational materialistic production. All we can say is that there are different operative mechanisms in mathematics that decide like mathematical axioms because

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. A. Toscano, London and New York, Continuum, 2009, p. 7.

⁸⁹ On the concept of a decision, cf. Jelica Šumič-Riha, “Tri pripombe k Badioujevemu pojmu odločitve”, *Filozofski vestnik*, 19 (1/1998), pp. 33–46. Available at <https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski-vestnik/article/view/4019/3728>, accessed 10 November 2022.

“the axiom is a regime of decision.”⁹⁰ The task of philosophy is then to position itself under the condition of what was decided in mathematics.

That philosophy is conditioned by mathematics, however, enables philosophy a vast range of philosophical approaches, since despite ontology being mathematics, *mathematics does not know anything about its ontological status*. Philosophy is the one to declare the thesis that ontology is mathematics. That mathematics is ontology, Badiou says, is a meta-ontological or philosophical thesis,⁹¹ which is not a philosophical directive for mathematics, but an insight that philosophy gains by its conditioning with the mathematical truth procedure. In this conditioning, philosophy is closest to mathematical thought, because the “conditioned concept of philosophy [...] is a way of philosophy trying to articulate the real from which it accepts its condition.”⁹² When philosophy thinks mathematics as a thought, it simultaneously thinks mathematical thought as a thought that touches being: “In so far as mathematics touches upon Being, it is intrinsically a thought. Reciprocally, if mathematics is a thought, it touches upon Being itself.”⁹³ In the spirit of Badiou’s early epistemology, we can say this as follows: mathematics is a thought that works like a machine, without self-reflection about its thought and its object, but precisely as “machine thinking”, mathematics is a thought that thinks being. Philosophy is not ontology, but when it thinks mathematics as a thought that as a thought thinks being, philosophy is meta-ontology. This means that by recognising that mathematics is a thought, philosophy accepts that being can be thought (in this respect, philosophy differs from sophism).

Despite philosophy being external to mathematics, mathematics is not external to philosophy, but is the philosophical condition that philosophy opens in its meta-ontological momentum. We, therefore, do not agree with Bruno Bosteels, who marked Badiou’s philosophical undertaking in *Being and Event* also as an intermediation between intuitive approximation and strict mathematical for-

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⁹⁰ Alain Badiou, Zachary Luck Fraser, and Tzuchien Tho, “The Concept of Model, Forty Years Later: An Interview with Alain Badiou”, p. 101.

⁹¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 14.

⁹² Rado Riha, “Filozofija in politika realnega”, *Filozofski vestnik*, 21 (3/2000), pp. 41–53, 41. Available at <https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski-vestnik/article/view/3753/3455>, accessed 5 November 2022.

⁹³ Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, p. 90.

malisation.⁹⁴ Philosophy does not have the role of a mediator; it is autonomous. The conditionality of philosophy is not its subordination. Philosophy does not translate mathematical formulae for non-mathematical readers (there are much more efficient manuals for this purpose than philosophical books), but it positions itself under a condition that provides philosophy with the insight that mathematics is ontology. Philosophy takes care of its own conditionality, because otherwise there is no instance that would tell philosophy that mathematics is ontology (mathematics is the last one to know anything about it). Mathematics is in a privileged position *vis-à-vis* being, which nevertheless has its limits. Although being as being is articulated in mathematics, it is articulated at the point of mathematical ignorance and oblivion. In “Appendix 2” of *Being and Event*, Badiou says that: “It is necessary to mathematics to forget being in order to pursue its pronunciation,”⁹⁵ because being as being itself “*does not want to be written.*”⁹⁶ The highly demanding technical needs of mathematical science force mathematics to forget the ontological destiny of its discipline. Similar applies to the being of truth. Badiou differentiates between the *de facto* and *de jure* existence of truths and uses this difference to open a space to position philosophy between the structural ignorance of mathematics and its truth production. For Badiou, a generic set is mathematical *de jure* “proof” that the being of truths exists. However, mathematicians do not know that and consequently do not know “how to name what was happening there.”⁹⁷ Mathematics is a truth procedure that does not recognise its *de facto* truth status; it is philosophy that can proclaim the *de facto* existence of truths, due to its status of being conditioned by truths. The limitation that prevents ontology from speaking for itself puts philosophy in a special position: philosophy as the meta-ontology that can *speak in the name* of ontology, but again, not as a meta-language, but by “adopting” the voice of ontology. Only in one instance of *Being and Event* does Badiou “allow” ontology to speak for itself, namely in meditations 33 and 34. These are the meditations summarising Cohen’s theory. Badiou says: “I have deliberately weakened the explicit links between the present conceptual development and the mathematical doctrine of generic multiplicities in order to let ontology ‘speak’,

⁹⁴ Cf. Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2011, p. 36.

⁹⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 468.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

eloquently, for itself.”⁹⁸ Other than this exception, everything in *Being and Event* is a philosophical prosopopoeia: mathematics as ontology has lent its voice to philosophy, i.e., philosophy has borrowed its voice from ontology. With its specialised formalisation, mathematics articulates being as being, without knowing it, which opens the room for philosophy that is conditioned by mathematics at the point of this ignorance.

The science of being as being has already existed since Greek times and “the sense and status of mathematics” is to pronounce it through its historical becoming.⁹⁹ The story of being existed, even if we never had the means to unriddle it until now, which means that being is independent of the instance of the comprehending (transcendental or any other) subject. The question is thus not “How is pure mathematics possible?” and the answer to this question is not “thanks to a transcendental subject.”¹⁰⁰ In these terms, we must “water down” the Kantian concepts and develop *a critique of every critique*.¹⁰¹ A critique of every critique is articulated by Badiou with reference to Mao Tse-tung: “We will come to know everything that we did not know before.”¹⁰² Before mathematical set theory emerged, we had not had the means to determine that it is mathematics with its production that “lets being speak”. But now, after all the pioneering and militant “mathematico-logical revolution of Frege-Cantor,”¹⁰³ we have realised what we had not known before. Now, it is the task of the *philosopher to decide whether to accept the truth of mathematics that mathematics is ontology*, which is nothing more than *accepting the scientific truth of being that it is not the being of the One and it is the same to think and be*.

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⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3 and 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 8.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 2.

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Rado Riha*

Transfinitisierung der Erkenntnis: Beispiel Kant¹

Die Selbstkritik der Vernunft ist, so wenigstens kann aufgrund der Kant'schen Erzählung vom geschichtlichen Schicksal der Metaphysik in der Vorrede zur ersten Auflage der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* gefolgert werden, die letzte Etappe in der geschichtlichen Entwicklung der Philosophie als Wissenschaft. An diesem Punkt ihrer Entwicklung gelang es der Vernunft nach allen ihren Irrnissen und Holzwegen endlich, das richtige Vorgehen zu finden, um die systematische Einheit der philosophischen Erkenntnis denken und vorstellen und damit der Philosophie die Form der Wissenschaft verleihen zu können. Kants gesamte Erkenntniskritik kann so als ein „Gegenstand in der Idee“ verstanden werden, das heißt, als der Umriss jener *architektonischen Einheit* aller Erkenntnis auf der Grundlage der reinen Vernunft beziehungsweise jener regulativen „idealen Wesenheit“, in Bezug auf welche alle empirischen philosophischen Erkenntnisse als Glieder eines Ganzen vorgestellt werden können und in der sie systematisch miteinander in Hinsicht auf die höchsten Zwecke der Vernunft verbunden sind.²

Natürlich ist jedes systematische Denken schon im Vorhinein zum Misslingen verurteilt, der Abstand zwischen der in der Vernunft enthaltenen Idee des Ganzen und ihrer empirischen Darstellung im architektonischen Schema ist unüberschreitbar. Ungeachtet dessen kommt aber gerade der Transzendentalphilosophie Kants die Rolle jenes philosophischen Ansatzes zu, der berechtigt ist, als die „so viel als möglich“ entsprechende Darstellung der Idee der Philosophie als Wissenschaft

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¹ Der vorliegende Beitrag wurde in Rahmen des von der slowenischen Forschungsagentur finanzierten Forschungsprojektes J6-3139 „Reconfiguring Borders in Philosophy, Politics, and Psychoanalysis“ verfasst. Die Problematik der Transfinitisierung wird in detaillierter Weise im Buch Rado Riha, *Kant, in Lacan'scher Absicht, Wien, Turia + Kant, 2018, abgehandelt.*

² Vgl. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Werkausgabe in 12 Bänden, herausgeben von Wilhelm Weischedel, Bd. IV, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1999, (im Folgenden *KrV*), B 27/A 14 und B 860 ff/A 832 ff.

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aufzutreten. Kant versucht keineswegs, seine Überzeugung zu verbergen, dass sich mit seiner Philosophie die philosophische Erkenntnis dem Punkt der vollständigen systematischen Einheit der Erkenntnisse maximal, das heißt, so weit wie möglich angenähert hat. Auch wenn nicht behauptet werden kann, dass in der Transzendentalphilosophie Kants, als einer unter zahlreichen anderen empirisch existierenden Philosophien, wirklich alle notwendigen und wesentlichen Zwecke der Vernunft verwirklicht worden sind, gilt es dennoch, dass sich gerade Kants Philosophie diesen Zwecken „so weit als möglich“ angenähert hat. Sie ist ihnen so nahegekommen, dass eigentlich festgestellt werden muss: weiter geht es nicht, ein Absolutes ist, fast, erreicht. Genauer gesagt ist Kants Philosophie zwar nicht das Absolute selbst, sie ist aber *ein Fall des Absoluten*.

An diesem Punkt unserer Darstellung der Kant'schen Idee der systematischen Einheit angelangt, können wir zur Problematik der zweiten „kopernikanischen Wende“ der Philosophie Kants zurückkehren. Wir werden zu unserer These zurückkehren, dass die Bedeutung der zweiten Wende im Rahmen des systematischen Ansatzes der Transzendentalphilosophie gesucht werden muss. Wir verstehen die zweite „kopernikanische Wende“ Kants also als eine begriffliche Operation, vermitteltst deren die Transzendentalphilosophie jene formellen und inhaltlichen Konsequenzen entwickelt und vorstellt, die aus der Tatsache folgen, dass das kritische System mit der dritten *Kritik* seine Vollständigkeit und damit auch seine Vollkommenheit erreicht hat.³ Als wesentliche inhaltliche Neuerungen der zweiten „kopernikanischen Wende“ werden von uns dabei, um es noch einmal zu wiederholen, die Figuren des dritten Subjekts und des dritten Objekts angesehen. Im Weiteren wird uns nur die *formelle* Konsequenz der zweiten Wende beschäftigen. Wir wollen sie auf folgende Weise bestimmen: durch die zweite Wende wird das kritische System, wenn wir uns einen Begriff aus der Mathematik ausleihen, als Transfinitisierung der Erkenntnis begründet.

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Unseren Ausgangspunkt bildet ein kurzer Artikel von Jacques Alain-Miller, der die transfinite Zahl *Aleph 0* behandelt und gleichzeitig versucht, die Erfindung Cantors auf das Gebiet der Psychoanalyse zu übertragen.⁴ Millers Anwendung der Erfindung Cantors interessiert uns auch deshalb, weil sie als Kommentar des

³ Vgl.: „Vollständige zweckmäßige Einheit ist Vollkommenheit (schlechthin betrachtet.)“, *KrV*, B 722/A 694.

⁴ Jacques-Alain Miller, „Vers un signifiant nouveau“, *Revue de l'ECF* (20/1994), S. 47–54.

Satzes von Jacques Lacan aus der *Proposition sur la psychoanalyse de l'école* gedacht ist,⁵ dass sich in der strengen Reihe der Buchstaben, unter der Bedingung, dass wir keinen Einzigen verfehlen, das Un-Gewusste sich als Rahmen des Gewussten herausausbildet. An die Stelle der „strengen Reihe der Buchstaben“, von der Lacan spricht, setzen wir das System Kants, und an die Stelle des Un-Gewussten die kritisch begründete Idee der systematischen Einheit.⁶ Inwiefern kann von einer Homologie zwischen Cantors Konstruktion des Unendlichen, der Entdeckung der transfiniten Zahl *Alef 0*, und Kants Konstruktion der Idee der systematischen Einheit gesprochen werden?

Solange wir das Unendliche als eine veränderbare Größe betrachten, die grenzenlos anwachsen oder sich vermindern kann, bleiben wir immer – so wie auch Jacques-Alain Miller in seinem Artikel den Ausgangspunkt von Cantors Entdeckung vorstellt – auf der Ebene der endlichen Größe der Kardinalzahlen. Cantor hat deshalb eine andere logische Operation konstruiert. In der Reihe der Kardinalzahlen bleibt die Frage der größten Reihe, also die Größe des Unendlichen, immer offen. Gerade als das Un-Gewusste der Reihe wirkt sie als eine Art Triebfeder für ihre Fortsetzung. Cantor ging nun hier wie folgt vor, dass er die unendliche Reihe der ganzen Zahlen als etwas Abgeschlossenes behandelte, und dann für eine solche gezählte, totalisierte Menge eine neue Zahl, die transfiniten Zahl *Alef null* erfand. Der Ausschluss der transfiniten Zahl *Alef null* aus der Reihe der Kardinalzahlen ist korrelativ mit der Konstruktion dieser Reihe als einem in sich abgeschlossenen, endlichen Nacheinander, das unendlich fortgesetzt werden kann. Die endliche Reihe kann insofern unendlich lange fortgesetzt werden, als die größte Zahl aus ihr ausgeschlossen ist und als Ausgeschlossene den Rahmen der abgeschlossenen Menge der Kardinalzahlen bildet: innerhalb dieses Rahmens können jetzt Kardinalzahlen ins Unendliche addiert oder subtrahiert werden, der Rahmen, die transfiniten Zahl selbst, bleibt etwas Fixes, immun gegen jede Operation der Addition oder Subtraktion.

⁵ Vgl. Jacques Lacan, „Proposition du 9 octobre 1967 sur la psychoanalyse de l'école“, in: *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, S. 249.

⁶ Die These, dass sowohl Kants Ding an sich als auch sein Postulat der Unsterblichkeit der Seele als eine Operation der Transfinitisierung zweier Gemütsvermögen, in einem Fall des Erkenntnisvermögens, im anderen des Begehungsvermögens, verstanden werden können, wurde von Jelica Šumič Riha im Rahmen des Seminars „Le pour tous face au réel“, Collège international de philosophie, Paris 2001, aufgestellt. Unsere Darstellung ist ein Versuch, diese These auf Kants Systemidee anzuwenden.

Das Wesentliche dieser Operation liegt darin, dass von ihr der unüberschreitbare Abstand zwischen der unendlichen Fortsetzung der Reihe der Kardinalzahlen und der transfiniten Zahl *Alef null* als eine irreduzibel innere Bedingung der in sich geschlossenen Menge der Kardinalzahlen gesetzt und aufrechterhalten wird.⁷ In Cantors Konstruktion fungiert das Unendliche nicht als Ideal, dem man sich nur unendlich annähern kann, und der Rahmen des Unendlichen stellt nicht die Schließung der unendlichen Reihe dar, vielmehr wird von ihm diese Reihe als eine unendliche Reihe überhaupt erst gesetzt. Insofern die Aufrechterhaltung des Abstandes zwischen der transfiniten Zahl und der unendlichen Reihe für die Operation der Transfinitisierung konstitutiv ist, könnte man die transfiniten Zahl auch als eine Regel für die Nichtentsprechung des jeweiligen Falls der Regel, in unserem Fall der Reihe der Kardinalzahlen, mit der Regel, das heißt, mit der transfiniten Zahl selbst bezeichnen.

Kommen wir jetzt zu unserer Behauptung zurück, dass die zweite „kopernikanische Wende“ als Operation der Vollendung des kritischen Systems formal gesehen eine der Transfinitisierungsoperation Cantors homologe Struktur hat. Dass die Realisierung der Forderung, vor die sich die Transzendentalphilosophie Kants durch ihren systematischen Ansatz gestellt sieht, der Forderung, dass das System der Transzendentalphilosophie „so weit als möglich“ als eine ideengerechte Erscheinung der empirisch nichtdarstellbaren Idee der systematischen Einheit aufgebaut werden muss, eine Operation der Transfinitisierung der Erkenntnis darstellt.

Wir werden zunächst die zwei „kopernikanischen Wendungen“ der Kant'schen Philosophie als ein Anzeichen dafür verstehen, dass die Transfinitisierung der Erkenntnis im kritischen System in zwei Schritten erfolgt. Der *erste*, von der ersten *Kritik* gemachte Schritt besteht in einem Verfahren, das für die Vernunftideen im Allgemeinen gilt und von der Transzendentalen Dialektik der ersten *Kritik* als *immanenter Gebrauch* der Vernunftideen benannt wird. Wir können diesen Schritt als ein Vorgehen bestimmen, bei dem die Idee, die für die Transzendentalphilosophie ein konstitutiv Un-Gewusstes ist, aus der Erfahrung ausgeschlossen wird. Um unsere Bestimmung der Idee als eines für die Erfahrung konstitutiv Un-Gewusstes etwas näher zu erklären, können wir auf eine Argumentation Kants in der ersten *Kritik* zurückgreifen.

⁷ Wir übernehmen hier das Argument von Jelica Šumič Riha, siehe Fn. 7.

Am Beispiel des Ideals des höchstens Wesens die Notwendigkeit des dialektischen Scheins der transzendentalen Idee erklärend, bestimmt Kant auch zwei sich gegenseitig ausschließende Grundsätze des Vernunftgebrauchs. Der erste lautet: wir können nichts von dem, was existiert, denken, ohne gleichzeitig auch schon vorauszusetzen, dass es *notwendig* existiert. Ohne also die Idee seiner vollständigen Bestimmung, damit aber auch die Vorstellung von einem absolut notwendigen ersten Grund vorauszusetzen. Aber, zweitens, so wie es nicht möglich ist, in der Erfahrung nicht immer schon die Anwesenheit eines Ganzen, die Totalität der Bedingungen für ein gegebenes Bedingtes, zu denken, so ist es auch nicht möglich, diese Anwesenheit des unbedingten Ganzen in der Erfahrung wirklich zu denken und vorzustellen. Obwohl alles, was existiert, für uns immer notwendig existiert, können wir das Dasein der Dinge niemals als etwas absolut Notwendiges denken und vorstellen. Nichts hindert mich daran, wie Kant sagt, für alles, was existiert, nicht auch sein Nichtsein denken zu können. Kurz, „[...] ich kann das Zurückgehen zu den Bedingungen der Existenz niemals *vollenden*, ohne ein notwendiges Wesen anzunehmen, ich kann aber von demselben niemals *anfangen*“.⁸ Die Totalität der Bedingungen bleibt ein für die Erfahrung konstitutiv Un-Gewusstes.

Von Kant wird das Problem der zwei sich untereinander ausschließenden Erfahrungsrollen der Vernunftidee gelöst, indem er die Idee des Ganzen aus der Erfahrungswirklichkeit ausschließt: „Es folgt aber hieraus, daß ihr das Absolutnotwendige *außerhalb der Welt* annehmen müßt“⁹ Das Wesentliche dieser Ausschließung bestimmt Kants präzise Formulierung: sobald die Vernunftseinheit, die an sich selbst unbestimmt und unbestimmbar, kurz, jenes ist, was in der Erfahrung ihr Un-Gewußtes ist, sobald diese Vernunftseinheit aus der Erfahrungswirklichkeit einmal ausgeschlossen ist, fallen auch alle *an die Erfahrung* gebundenen, restriktiven Bestimmungsbedingungen weg, und „das Größte und Absolutvollständige läßt sich bestimmt gedenken“.¹⁰ Die aus der Erfahrung ausgeschlossene Idee wird von Kant als etwas Bestimmtes so gedacht, dass er ihr eine *eingebildete* objektive Wirklichkeit zuschreibt, und dann diese eingebildete Objektivität als „Gegenstand in der Idee“ benennt. Dieser

⁸ Kant, *KrV*, B 644/A 616.

⁹ *Ibid.*, B 645/ 617,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, B 694/A 666.

„als-ob-Gegenstand“ fungiert nun genau als die *Einrahmung* des Feldes der Erfahrungserkenntnis.

Das, was Kant den größtmöglichen empirischen, auf der Idee einer systematisch-vollständigen Einheit gründenden Vernunftgebrauch nennt,¹¹ ist keineswegs etwas, was sich der Verstandeskonstitution der Erfahrung von Außen anschließen würde. Vielmehr handelt es sich um eine Operation, vermittelt deren sich die Erfahrung als ein in sich geschlossenes Feld von allen möglichen Verstandesverfahren und Verstandesgegenständen überhaupt erst konstituiert. Mit einem solchen Feld haben wir es, strenggenommen, erst dann zu tun, wenn der stets bestimmte, empirische Gebrauch des Verstandes vermittelt seiner Beziehung mit der in Form des „Gegenstandes in der Idee“ ausgeschlossenen Idee, bis zu jenem Grad der durchgängigen Einheit erweitert wird, in dem er sich „so viel als möglich“, also niemals vollständig, der Idee der systematischen Einheit annähert.

Der Punkt des „so viel als möglich“ ist das, was in der Erfahrung von der aus dem Erfahrungsbereich ausgeschlossenen Idee übrigbleibt. Einerseits ist der Punkt dieses „so viel als möglich“, wie schon bemerkt, ein Äußerstes, die Grenze eines „weiter geht es nicht“, der Punkt der empirischen Vollständigkeit. Aber diese Vollständigkeit hat kein festes Kriterium, das „so viel als möglich“ ist andererseits der Punkt einer äußersten Unbestimmtheit und Unabgeschlossenheit: kein empirisches System, wie vollkommen es auch scheinen mag, kann die Vernunftidee des Systems je erreichen. Im Punkt des „so viel als möglich“ kommt ein Zweifaches zum Ausdruck. Erstens, dass der Abstand zwischen dem empirischen System und der Idee der durchgängigen Einheit irreduzibel und unüberschreitbar ist. Und zweitens, dass gerade durch den Abstand ein empirisches System dennoch die Idee erreichen kann. Der Abstand gewährleistet die empirische Anwesenheit der aus dem Erfahrungsbereich ausgeschlossenen Systemidee, er gewährleistet also nicht eine vollständige, sondern eine sowohl subjektiv als auch objektiv bloß äußerst vollständige – und das heißt auch: immer wieder noch *zu vervollständigende* – systematische Einheit des empirischen Systems. Die Einrahmung der Erfahrung mit dem „Gegenstand in der Idee“ bedeutet keine Schließung des systematisch geordneten Feldes der

¹¹ Einer Idee, die unbedingt notwendig ist, um die „empirische Einheit dem höchstmöglichen Grade zu nähern“, *Ibid.*, B 705/A 677.

Erfahrungserkenntnis. Ganz im Gegenteil, durch die Einrahmung wird dieses Feld geöffnet – aber es wird von Innen her geöffnet, und zwar so, dass es als ein in sich abgeschlossenes Feld der fortwährend fortschreitenden Erkenntnis, als aktuelle Unendlichkeit gesetzt wird.

Diese innere Öffnung der Erfahrungserkenntnis steht aber unter der absoluten Bedingung, dass in ihrem Inneren auch eine materielle Spur der ausgeschlossenen Idee anwesend ist, in unserem Fall also eine materielle Spur des „so viel als möglich“. Genauer gesagt, der unüberbrückbare Abstand zwischen der empirischen systematischen Einheit und der Idee des Systems muss, erstens, in seiner doppelten Rolle eines Elements erscheinen, das einerseits dem empirischen System angehört und es andererseits auch schon transzendiert; und zweitens, innerhalb des empirischen Systems muss es als ein solches Element auch reflektiert werden. Das Problem, das von einer „so viel als möglich“ vollständigen empirischen Einheit der philosophischen Erkenntnisse, also auch von Kants Philosophie selbst, gelöst werden muss, liegt nicht, wenigstens nicht unmittelbar, in der prinzipiell unmöglichen empirischen Darstellung der Idee der systematischen Einheit.

Das Problem eines erfolgreich konstruierten empirischen philosophischen Systems liegt vielmehr darin, um es noch einmal zu wiederholen, dass die Unmöglichkeit der empirischen Darstellung der Vernunftidee gerade die Bedingung seiner Möglichkeit ist. Und das sie als diese Möglichkeitsbedingung innerhalb des empirischen Systems unbedingt auch dargestellt und reflektiert werden muss. Das Ausbleiben einer solchen Darstellung und Reflexion kann dazu führen, dass sich das empirische System in einer spontanen transzendentalen Illusion auch schon für eine adäquate Objektivierung der Vernunftidee nimmt. Die Bedingung der Vollendung des empirischen Systems ist jenes seiner Elemente, vermittelt dessen das empirische System sich selbst reflektiert, ein Element, das sowohl die Vollständigkeit und Abgeschlossenheit des empirischen Systems darstellt, gleichzeitig aber seine Offenheit, das heißt, seine fortwährende Umänderung und Umbildung ermöglicht.¹²

¹² Das empirische System, das erfolgreich abgeschlossen wurde, das sich also „so weit als möglich“ der regulativen Idee der Vernunfteinheit angenähert hat, bleibt immer gleich und dennoch fortwährend etwas ganz Anderes: es ist ein System als aktuelle Unendlichkeit.

Diese Bedingung wird vom *zweiten Schritt* der Kant'schen Transfinitisierung der Erkenntnis erfüllt, einem Schritt, zu dem es in der zweiten „kopernikanischen Wende“ in der dritten *Kritik* kommt. In diesem Schritt wird die *logische Operation* der Transfinitisierung der Erkenntnis, also die Aufstellung der in sich abgeschlossenen Unendlichkeit der Erfahrungserkenntnis, zur *ontologischen Aufstellung eines Seinsmoments*, das nicht von dieser, das heißt *empirischen Welt* ist. Innerhalb des empirischen philosophischen Systems kommt ein Element zum Vorschein, das sich radikal von allen anderen empirischen Elementen unterscheidet, und zwar dadurch, dass durch ihn das System in einen *Fall der Systemidee* umgewandelt wird.

Ein solcher Fall ist innerhalb des Kant'schen System die dritte *Kritik*. Die dritte *Kritik* ist einerseits, formell gesehen, in keinerlei Hinsicht etwas mehr und auch anderes als die ersten beiden *Kritiken*: sie ist ein Teil des kritischen Systems. Zugleich ist sie aber doch etwas mehr und auch anderes. Sie ist nämlich jenes empirische Element des Systems, mit dem das System vollendet ist und damit als System eigentlich überhaupt erst wirklich existiert. Sie ist jenes Element, in dem sich das System der Transzendentalphilosophie „so viel als möglich“, also äußerst, bis zum Punkt eines unbestimmten „weiter geht es nicht“, der Vernunftidee der systematischen Einheit der Transzendentalphilosophie annähert.

Eine der Implikationen der systematischen Orientierung der Transzendentalphilosophie liegt auch darin, dass am Abschluss des Systems die Aussage möglich sein muss, dass in Wahrheit alles schon am Anfang gegeben war. Dass also schon die erste *Kritik*, obwohl sie sich nur mit der theoretischen Erkenntnis befasst, *in nuce* das ganze System der reinen Erkenntnis der spekulativen Vernunft umfasst, das sowohl deren theoretischen wie deren praktischen Gebrauch umfasst. Die zwei der ersten *Kritik* folgenden *Kritiken* sind – nicht *trotz* der Thematisierung, sondern gerade *wegen* der Thematisierung neuer Begriffe und Problembereiche – nichts anderes als die Bestätigung, dass die Grundsätze für den anfänglichen Entwurf einer architektonischen Einheit der Vernunfterkennntnis richtig ausgewählt und bestimmt waren. Und ungeachtet dessen, wie sehr die Aufgabe mit „großen Schwierigkeiten“, um Kants Worte zu gebrauchen,¹³ verbunden war, auch für die Urteilskraft einen Grundsatz *a*

¹³ „Man kann aus der Natur der Urteilskraft (deren richtiger Gebrauch so notwendig und allgemein erforderlich ist, dass daher unter den Namen des gesunden Menschenverstandes

priori aufzufinden, um damit das System der oberen drei Erkenntnisvermögen, des Verstandes, der Vernunft und der Urteilskraft, abzuschließen – die erfolgreich ausgeführte Kritik der letzten unter den drei Erkenntnisvermögen ist nur ein Beweis dafür, dass schon die anfänglichen Grundsätze der Kritik keine „noch so kleine Gebrechlichkeit“¹⁴, keine Fehler oder Mängel enthalten haben. Mit anderen Worten, Kants Entdeckung eines apriorischen Grundsatzes für die Urteilskraft ist zwar wirklich etwas Neues – neu insofern, als dieser Grundsatz nicht von den schon bestehenden Elementen des bis zur dritten *Kritik* ausgearbeiteten philosophischen Systems Kant einfach abgeleitet werden konnte, darin nicht schon eingeschrieben war. Vielmehr ist er eine an sich kontingente Entdeckung Kants. Gleichzeitig zeugt aber die problemlose Aufnahme dieser Neuheit ins System davon, dass es zu dieser kontingenten Entdeckung eigentlich *kommen musste*. Alles, einschließlich der Möglichkeit von etwas *irreduzibel Neuem*, war schon von Anfang an da. Mit anderen Worten, die *einzigste Notwendigkeit* des Systems ist seine darin eingeschriebene Kontingenz, sind seine darin eingeschriebenen kontingenten Neuanfänge.

Aber, und mit der Antwort auf diese Frage können wir unsere Betrachtung der Systemidee in Kants Philosophie abschließen: wo im kritischem System kann jenes Element gefunden werden, von dem das System vollendet, zu einem „so viel als möglich“ vollständigen Ganzen abgeschlossen wird? Ein Element, von dem diese Vollendung gleichzeitig auch reflektiert wird? Wo kann dieses Element der Selbstreflexivität des Systems festgemacht werden? Die Antwort auf diese Frage zu finden ist leichter, als dies dem ersten Blick nach scheinen mag. In Wirklichkeit sind wir diesem Moment in unserer bisherigen Abhandlung der zweiten „kopernikanischen Wende“ der Philosophie Kants schon begeg-

kein anderes, als ebene dieses Vermögen gemeinet wird) leicht abnehmen, daß es mit größten Schwierigkeiten begleitet sein müsse, ein eigentümliches Prinzip derselben auszufinden (denn irgend eins muß es a priori in sich enthalten, weil es sonst nicht, als ein besonderes Erkenntnisvermögen, selbst der gemeinsten Kritik ausgesetzt sein würde), welches gleichwohl nicht aus Begriffen a priori abgeleitet sein muß, denn die gehören dem Verstande an, und die Urteilskraft geht nur auf die Anwendung derselben.“, Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Vorrede B VII. Die Schwierigkeit, von der Kant hier redet, liegt darin, dass die Urteilskraft das Vermögen ist, unter Regeln zu subsumieren, für die Untersuchung der Richtigkeit der jeweiligen Regelanwendung aber (immer wieder) eine Meta-Regel vonnöten ist – deshalb gilt es, dass Urteilskraft „[...] ein besonderes Talent sei, welches gar nicht belehrt, sondern nur geübt sein will.“ Kant, *KrV*, B 172/A 133.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, B XXXVIII.

net. Und zwar an der Stelle, an der wir Kants Worte aus der Vorrede zur *Kritik der Urteilkraft* angeführt haben. Wenn wir uns erinnern: Kant erklärt hier sein kritisches Unternehmen zunächst für beendet, und fügt dann hinzu, dass die Kritik in der Abhandlung über die Urteilkraft auch schon als Theorie diene. Die Aussage von der Kritik, die keine bloß propädeutische Rolle hat, sondern selbst auch schon Theorie ist, ist m. E. die Weise, wie die Transzendentalphilosophie ihre Einheit in der Form eines Systems konstruieren kann, das vollständig und vollendet, also in sich geschlossen ist, und sich gleichzeitig fortwährend verändert und neue Erkenntniselemente einbeschließt, die in der Kontingenz ihrer Entdeckung das Gegebene unterbrechen und das Alte umwandeln. Kants Aussage ist der Augenblick der Transfinitisierung der systematischen Einheit der Transzendentalphilosophie in ihrer immer endlichen Erkenntnis. Sie ist die Erfindung der Regel für die unendliche Reihe von immer neuen Anfängen einer in sich abgeschlossenen systematischen Einheit der Erkenntniskritik. Mit dieser Aussage erreicht das kritische System den Punkt, an dem behauptet werden kann, dass hier die Vernunfteinheit und die empirisch mögliche Einheit einander „so weit als möglich“, also äußerst, nahegekommen sind – und dass gerade wegen dieser ihrer äußersten Nähe und durch diese äußerste Nähe gleichzeitig der irreduzible Abstand zwischen ihnen aufrechterhalten wird.

Warum kann das behauptet werden? Wir dürfen hier einen wesentlichen Zug der Aussage Kants nicht aus den Augen verlieren: die Aussage von der Kritik, die in der dritten *Kritik* auch schon als Theorie diene, ist eine *bloße Feststellung*, eine *bloße Versicherung*. Von einer bloßen Versicherung kann deshalb gesprochen werden, weil wir in Wirklichkeit in keiner der drei *Kritiken* die Kritik auch schon in Form der Theorie finden. Das heißt, in keiner von ihnen ist ein allgemeiner Begriff der Kritik zu finden, unter dem wir dann spezifische, besondere Beispiele der kritischen Analyse subsumieren könnten. Die Kritik spielt in allen drei *Kritiken* jene Rolle, die sie schon in der ersten *Kritik* innehat: sie ist „eine Wissenschaft der bloßen Beurteilung der reinen Vernunft, ihrer Quellen und Grenzen“.¹⁵ Die drei *Kritiken* unterscheiden sich voneinander nur hinsichtlich des jeweiligen oberen Erkenntnisvermögens, das in ihnen kritisch abgehandelt wird. Die Entdeckung einer Kritik, die auch schon die Rolle der Theorie spielt, mit der das kritische System abgeschlossen wird, findet ihre Begründung nirgendwo anders als bloß in der Aussage der *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, von der

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, B 25/A 11.

festgestellt wird, dass hier die Kritik auch als Theorie dient. Diese Aussage ist eine bloße faktische Versicherung, ihr Inhalt ist ein „es ist halt so“. Die Vollendung des kritischen Systems, der Punkt seiner äußersten Annäherung an die Vernunftidee der systematischen Einheit tritt in Form einer bloßen, begründungslosen Faktums, eines Sinns ohne Bedeutung auf.

Das kritische System wird mit einer *Kritik* vollendet, die sozusagen alles ist, sowohl eine kritische Untersuchung der Bedingungen der reinen Vernunftkenntnis auf dem ihr jeweils eigenen Gebiet, als auch Theorie dieser Vernunftkenntnis. Mit einer solchen Vollendung ändert sich die Bedeutung der kritischen Reflexion selbst. Die Operation der Kritik der reinen Vernunftkenntnis begann damit, dass sie in der ersten und zweiten *Kritik* zwei gesetzgebende Erkenntnismodi begründete, von denen jeder sein apriorisches Handlungsprinzip und sein Gebiet hatte: die erste *Kritik* begründete das Gebiet des Naturbegriffs, die zweite das des Freiheitsbegriffs. Die Kritik selbst als Beurteilung der Quellen, des Umfangs und der Grenzen der reinen Vernunftkenntnis hatte dabei kein eigenes Gebiet.¹⁶ Zum Schluss entdeckte die dritte *Kritik* ein apriorisches Prinzip noch für die Urteilskraft, und mit dieser Entdeckung wurde das kritische System vollendet. Auch die Urteilskraft ist gesetzgebend, hat aber im Gegensatz zum Verstand und zur Vernunft nicht ein ihr eigenes Gebiet. Ihr apriorisches Prinzip schreibt sie weder der Natur noch der Freiheit vor, vielmehr gibt sie es sich selber als Gesetz.¹⁷ Die Kritik der Philosophie endigte somit mit der Entdeckung und Kritik eines Erkenntnisvermögens ohne eigenes Gebiet, dessen einzig entsprechendes „Handlungsgebiet“ eigentlich die als Erkenntnis ohne Gebiet wirkende Kritik selbst ist. Mit der *Kritik der Urteilskraft* hat sich die Bedeutung der kritischen Reflexion insofern verändert, als die Kritik jetzt sich selbst als eine Art *gebietsloses Gebiet* der Urteilskraft entdeckt, eines Erkenntnisvermögens, dessen Leitungsbegriff die Abwesenheit des Leitungsbegriffs und dessen Leitungsregel die Abwesenheit jeder festen Leitungsregel ist.¹⁸ Dieser Entdeckung entspricht

¹⁶ „Die Kritik der Erkenntnisvermögen in Ansehung dessen, was sie a priori leisten können, hat eigentlich kein Gebiet in Ansehung der Objekte; weil sie keine Doktrin ist, sondern nur, ob und wie, nach der Bewandnis, die es mit unserem Vermögen hat, eine Doktrin durch sie möglich sei, zu untersuchen hat.“ Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Einleitung, B XXI.

¹⁷ Vgl. *KdU*, Einleitung, B XXVII; vgl. auch *KdU*, Einleitung, erste Fassung, Kant *Werkausgabe*, Bd. X, S. 39.

¹⁸ Oben wurde bemerkt, dass die Vernunftidee in der Erfahrung unmittelbar in Form ihrer Abwesenheit anwesend ist. Jetzt können wir dazusetzen, dass die Urteilskraft, jenes

wiederum eine Art vorgreifender Identifikation, in der die Kritik sich selbst als Theorie anerkennt. Als ein gebietsloses Gebiet kann sie nur so bestehen, dass sie sich selbst auch schon als Theorie erklärt, und so zu einem eigenen Erkenntnisgebiet kommt. Ihr Erkenntnisgebiet konstruiert sie so, dass sie es selbst sich gibt, sich dabei einzig auf ihre bloße Feststellung gründend, sie sei auch schon Theorie.

Ohne diesen Akt ist die Kritik nicht möglich, und durch ihn wird die Kritik vollendet: nicht nur die Kritik in Form der kritischen Analyse der Urteilskraft. Vielmehr kommt mit dem bloßen Aussageakt die ganze komplexe Operation der Erkenntniskritik als solcher zu ihrer Vollendung, von der die verschiedenen Anwendungsgebiete der Kritik zum System der Kritik des Vernunftvermögens zusammengeschlossen werden. Das kritische System wird so mit einem Element vollendet, in dem die Kritik, sozusagen sich selbst überholend, sich als Theorie setzt, und im Nachhinein sich selbst als ein Gebiet konstruiert, das seinem ontologischen Status nach eine Art nichtempirischen Faktums ist. In der dritten *Kritik* existiert die Kritik faktisch als ein Gebiet, und zwar als das Gebiet eines abgründigen Faktums. Das kritische System, das mit einer Kritik, die auch schon Theorie ist, abgeschlossen wird, ist ein System, das auf einem Element aufgebaut ist, das im System selbst nicht bestimmbar ist, da es sich in seiner bloßen Faktizität jeder Erkenntnisbestimmung entzieht. Mit der Erfindung der Kritik in Form der Theorie, einer Kritik, die in Form eines begründungslosen, abgründigen Faktums auftritt, löst Kant die Aufgabe, auf die wir oben verwiesen haben. Es handelt sich um die Aufgabe, dass innerhalb jeder empirisch systematischen Einheit auch noch die Bedingung ihrer Möglichkeit, das heißt, die Unmöglichkeit einer empirischen Darstellung der Vernunftidee der systematischen Einheit, mitreflektiert und dargestellt werden muss.

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Mit der Kritik als einem theoretischen Faktum ist auch die Bedeutung der dritten *Kritik* als Kants letzter *Kritik* verbunden. Die dritte *Kritik* ist nicht deshalb die letzte *Kritik*, weil mit ihr das kritische System tatsächlich abgeschlossen ist. Die Faktizität der dritten *Kritik* liegt nicht darin, dass die dritte *Kritik* faktisch die letzte *Kritik* Kants ist. Vielmehr ist die *Kritik der Urteilskraft* deshalb die letz-

Erkenntnisvermögen ist, das, erstens, auf der Abwesenheit des Vernunftbegriffs in der Erfahrung gründet, und das, zweitens mit dieser Abwesenheit gerade operiert: durch die Handlungen der Urteilskraft ist diese Abwesenheit als Abwesenheit gerade anwesend.

te *Kritik* Kants, weil sie den Status eines Faktums hat, genauer gesagt, weil von ihr die Kritik als philosophische Methode auf einem *nicht-empirischen Faktum* begründet wurde. Der faktische Status der dritten *Kritik* erscheint auf eine fast empirisch greifbare Weise darin, dass im Rahmen der Begriffsentwicklung der dritten *Kritik* nie der Augenblick auftritt, in dem sich sagen ließe, „hier wirkt die Kritik auch schon als Theorie“. Die Bedeutung der Kritik als Theorie kann innerhalb des kritischen Systems nicht bestimmt werden. Etwas anders ausgedrückt: obwohl in der dritten *Kritik* die Kritik auch schon Theorie ist, sind ihre Begriffsentwicklungen, so wie die Begriffsentwicklungen der beide ersten *Kritiken*, in Wahrheit nie etwas anderes als die Kritik eines der drei oberen Erkenntnisvermögen.

Die drei *Kritiken* werden nie etwas Anderes als *Kritiken* sein, nie werden sie anders möglich sein als in Form der kritischen Beurteilung, durch die Anwendung der Urteilskraft auf sich selbst. Die Bedingung dafür, dass die drei *Kritiken* in allen ihren gegenwärtigen oder künftigen interpretativen Aneignungen immer wieder so wirken können, wie dies durch ihren Titel bestimmt wird, als *Kritiken* also, besteht aber darin, dass die dritte *Kritik*, mit der das gesamte kritische System abgeschlossen wird, im Augenblick dieser Abschließung die Form eines Faktums hat. Die bloße faktische Versicherung, dass hier die Kritik auch schon Theorie sei, ist etwas, was sich nicht nur der Kritik der Urteilskraft, sondern auch dem gesamten kritischen System entzieht. Durch die Subtraktion wirkt diese faktische Versicherung aber genau als Rahmen für die unendliche Fortsetzung des kritischen Systems, kurz, als Moment seiner Transfinitisierung. Kants kritisches System besteht nur in Form einer potentiell unendlichen Konstruktionsreihe der Folgen der bloßen Versicherung, durch die es seine Vollendung findet, der Versicherung, die es zum Gebiet eines abgründigen und mit dem Anspruch auf universelle Gültigkeit auftretenden Faktums macht.

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Kants Feststellung, dass die Kritik in der dritten *Kritik* auch schon als Theorie fungiert, bedeutet nicht, dass die dritte *Kritik* wirklich schon diese Theorie sei. Die dritte *Kritik* ist vielmehr jene empirische Form der philosophischen Kritik, die auf sich selbst als *Fall* der Theorie hinweist – einer Theorie, deren Existenz auf einem bloßen Faktum begründet ist. Und erst die Tatsache, dass die dritte *Kritik* sich selbst als Fall eines abgründigen Faktums darstellt, mit dem das kritische System vollendet wird, gibt ihren Themen, Begriffen und methodologischen Einsichten ihre spezifische Bedeutung.

Die Wirkungsgeschichte der dritten *Kritik* wurde auch vom Dilemma begleitet, wie ihre neuen inhaltlich-methodologischen Elemente des Schönen und Erhabenen, die Ausarbeitung der Zweckidee, die Problematik des Überganges vom Gebiet der Natur zum Gebiet der Freiheit, die Struktur des reflektierenden Urteils, um nur einige aufzuzählen, eigentlich verstanden werden sollten. Sind diese Erkenntniselemente theoretisch genauso bedeutend wie die Erkenntnisse der ersten und zweiten *Kritik*? Oder werden mit ihnen nur Lücken im anfänglichen Entwurf der gesamten Kritik der reinen Vernunft ausgefüllt – sind sie also nichts mehr als Spuren der abschließenden Feinarbeiten am kritischem System? Das Dilemma ist, um es noch einmal zu wiederholen, u. E. falsch. Das Neue der dritten *Kritik* besteht gerade darin, dass in ihr ein neuer Begriff des partikulären Erkenntniselements erarbeitet wird. Die Erkenntniselemente der dritten *Kritik* sind für das Ganze der Transzendentalphilosophie gewiss ihres je besonderen Inhaltes wegen bedeutend. Ihre Besonderheit verleiht aber diesen Elementen erst die Tatsache, dass sie Elemente einer Kritik sind, die auch schon Theorie ist. Sie sind Elemente eines kritischen Systems, dessen höchster Punkt, der Punkt seiner Vollendung, ein Faktum ist, das sich dem kritischen System selbst entzieht und bestimmungslos bleibt. Das Besondere der besonderen Inhalte der dritten *Kritik* liegt darin, dass sie den Erkenntniselementen des ganzen kritischen Systems im Nachhinein die Rolle von singulären Punkten verleihen, deren Geltungsanspruch erst durch die jeweilige Rekonstruktion ihres Anspruchs auf Universalität verwirklicht werden kann: Sie zählen als Punkte der Faktizität und Kontingenz, die es Kants empirischen System der philosophischen Kritik erlauben, sich „so viel als möglich“ der universellen Idee des Systems anzunähern.

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Rok Benčin*

World at the Border: The Cosmopolitan Ideal between Loss and Multiplication¹

Introduction

Throughout the history of political thought, cosmopolitanism has been inseparable from the problem of the border. In principle, the subjectivity cosmopolitanism gives rise to is based on an indifference towards – if not the effacement of – borders. A closer look, however, reveals some complications. The border returns both as a condition of possibility and a condition of impossibility of the cosmopolitan ideal. In his writings on cosmopolitanism, Immanuel Kant warned against the establishment of a global political power and claimed that a peaceful cosmopolitan condition can only be attained by an agreement between separated independent states.² Due to the dangerous concentration of power within a potential universal monarchy, he considered the existence of borders between states (despite being the cause of endless wars) to be a condition of possibility for any kind of peaceful coexistence between peoples in the future (when reason finally prevails). For Kant, the persistence of borders is compensated for by universal hospitality, i.e. the right to not be treated with hostility upon arrival across a border. A century and a half later, Hannah Arendt declared that the unification of the world, which for Kant was still an ideal, had become an “inescapable fact.”³ But as humanity comes together in the “One World”, the figure of the stateless migrant or refugee puts the cosmopolitan ideal to a test that it does not pass.⁴ Outside of state protection, people are denied their rights and face the

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² Immanuel Kant, “Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch”, trans. D. L. Colclasure, in P. Kleingeld (ed.), *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006, pp. 91–92.

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, San Diego, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1979, p. 298.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

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ultimate exclusion of being “deprived of expression within and action upon a common world.”⁵ The world as a political ideal is held up at the border.

Another reversal followed in the last couple of decades when cosmopolitanism re-emerged in political theory not as an ideal of peaceful unification, but as an actual condition of marginal subjectivities. After the universal values of the Enlightenment, which constituted the core of modern cosmopolitanism, were subjected to postcolonial critique, new kinds of “cosmopolitics” emerged, based precisely on the struggles of the peoples that modern universalisms have excluded. In the introduction to their volume *Cosmopolitanism*, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty write that the “cosmopolitanism of our times does not spring from the capitalized ‘virtues’ of Rationality, Universality, and Progress,” but resides in the experience of refugees, migrants, and peoples of diasporas, who now “represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community.”⁶ In a similar vein, Michel Agier has developed an anthropology of “ordinary cosmopolitanism”, which sees the world no longer as a political ideal but as a problematic non-place inhabited by displaced people:

Persons in displacement may well be in the process of living an experience more universal than it might appear, beyond the categories, classes and nationalities that are involved today. Even if they find themselves “on the margin”, they enable us to anticipate a way of being-in-the-world that globalization is tending to generalize. In this conception, cosmopolitanism is not the monopoly of a globalized elite. On the contrary, it is the experience of the roughness of the world by all those who, by taste, necessity or compulsion, by desire or by habit, are led to live in several places almost simultaneously and, in the absence of ubiquity, to live increasingly in mobility, even in an in-between.⁷

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁶ Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Cosmopolitanisms”, in C. A. Breckenridge, S. Pollock, H. K. Bhabha, and D. Chakrabarty (eds.), *Cosmopolitanism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2002, p. 6.

⁷ Michel Agier, *Borderland: Towards an Anthropology of the Cosmopolitan Condition*, trans. D. Fernbach, Cambridge, Polity, 2016, pp. xiii–ix.

In this article, I propose an examination of the concept of world at stake in these transformations of cosmopolitanism.⁸ What happens to the concept of world at the core of cosmopolitanism when it collides with the phenomenon of the border as its immanent limit? How to think of the world as a political ideal when it is no longer defined by totality but by marginality? In what sense can the displaced experience at the margins still constitute a being-in-the-world, i.e. a Heideggerian concept describing the authentic horizon of existence used by Agier and (more implicitly but no less crucially, as we will see) by Arendt? I argue that in order to think the cosmopolitics of borders, a different concept of world is needed. I conclude by suggesting that Jacques Rancière's understanding of politics as a conflict of worlds can take us beyond the traps of both cosmopolitan universalism and the phenomenological singularity of being-in-the-world.

The World Between Loss and Multiplication

In the famous discussion of human rights in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt addresses the unwelcome effects of the realisation of Kant's regulative idea, describing how stateless people are deprived of participation, expression, and action within a common world. Arendt claims that the realised unification of the world of humanity pushes stateless people into a position of radical worldlessness. As Roland Végső recently put it, Arendt presents a historical account of how “two opposing tendencies coincide: the absolute unification of the world and the absolute loss of the world.”⁹ The formation of the world as a global socio-economic totality is equated with the loss of what turns human coexistence into a world. Arendt sees the modern process of globalisation not as a condition of possibility of cosmopolitanism, but as a direct threat to any worldly experience.

Arendt's concern over the loss of the world stems from the fact that genuine politics is only possible within the framework of a common world. The problematic totalisation of the world does not result in the need to abandon the notion of

⁸ The concept of world in contemporary (political and general) philosophy was a topic of a recent special issue of *Filozofski vestnik*. See Rok Benčin (ed.), “The Concept of World in Contemporary Philosophy”, *Filozofski vestnik*, 42 (2/2021), special issue, <https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski-vestnik/issue/view/849>.

⁹ Roland Végső, *Worldlessness After Heidegger*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 89.

world in political thought, but necessitates its reconceptualisation. Arendt thus rehabilitates the ideal of worldliness beyond global unification. Turning away from cosmopolitan totalisation due to the disastrous consequences of actual globalisation, the world as a political ideal is transformed into a framework of common existential experience that conditions political action. If the world is to remain a political ideal, it must be divorced from any notion of a global totality. This does not, however, necessarily imply a regression to the closed worlds of national communities. It is neither the totality nor the particularity of human co-existence that makes a world, but its singularity: the common world exists as a singular common world, based on specific common experience and joint action.

What in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* might still be understood as a condition of the radically deprived turns out to be a disturbing form of a much more general state of affairs in *The Human Condition*, where Arendt positions the concept of world at the centre of her political thought, which identifies modernity with world alienation. The interconnectedness of humanity across the globe in terms of economy, travel, and communication unites humanity on a global scale but deprives it of a world.¹⁰

Before returning to the reasons for this loss, we should understand better what makes world a political concept for Arendt, for it is not at first introduced as such. Arendt presents the world as a product of human work, the artificial environment of things humanity surrounds itself with: “The man-made world of things, the human artifice erected by *homo faber*, becomes a home for mortal men, whose stability will endure and outlast the ever-changing movement of their lives and actions.”¹¹ To the natural cycles of mortal life and its needs, as well as to the perishable character of words and deeds, the world opposes a realm of durability, objectivity, and stability. As the correlate of work, the world is thus opposed to the two other forms of *vita activa* Arendt explores in *The Human Condition*: labour, whose correlate is (the preservation and reproduction of) life, and action, whose correlate is the plurality of human beings as political animals capable of deeds and speech. Even though the fabrication of the world

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¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp. 248–257.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

of things as such is not political *per se* (only action can be political),¹² it soon becomes clear that it is not only the material environment of action, as it also has a much more intimate relation to the political realm. It turns out that work and action condition each other: “Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object; without the human artifice to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes.”¹³

The meaning of the common world for human affairs only becomes fully apparent with its loss. But how can it be lost, considering that humanity obviously still (and increasingly so) lives in an artificial world of things? For Arendt, modern world alienation results from the fact that the principles of both labour and action invade the world-making principles of *homo faber*. On the one hand, things are no longer produced to be durable but become themselves objects of consumption, just like the goods necessary for the daily reproduction of life.¹⁴ This erodes the durability of the world and pulls the public sphere of political action down into the field of social issues and reproduction. No longer a free activity of equal men, politics becomes subordinated to the necessities dictated by the mass society of labouring animals and those who exploit them. On the other hand, modern science and advanced technology infect work with characteristics of action, namely unpredictability and irreversibility. Some of the things that *homo faber* now produces no longer offer worldly stability but threaten the very existence of the world. What started with the Scientific Revolution in the 17th century, Arendt claims, came to a conclusion with the atom bomb.¹⁵ Without the stabilising force of worldliness provided by work, the natural cycles of life and the unpredictability of action reveal their worldless character.

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In Arendt, world thus appears as a political concept not in the sense of a political project or a regulative idea, but in the phenomenological sense as a horizon of authentic existential experience, which is transformed into the existential horizon of political action. Without entering into Arendt’s complicated position

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

towards Martin Heidegger, it is clear – as Végső argues – that “she shares Heidegger’s phenomenological investment in the idea (and the experience) of the world.”¹⁶ The Kantian notion of the world as a totality is replaced by a Heideggerian phenomenological concept of world.

In his study on the notion of worldlessness, Végső claims that the phenomenological concept of world is haunted by worldlessness, not only historically, through the onset of a supposedly worldless modernity, but also structurally, as a precondition for the very emergence of worldliness as the fundamental horizon of existence.¹⁷ In a similar manner, Étienne Tassin notes that for Arendt, even though the existence of a common world is a condition of politics, political action proper “can rise against being-in-the-world.”¹⁸ Even though the world is both the condition (the stability of the man-made world of things) and the object (the public realm of coexistence) of politics, every free political act detaches itself from its conditions and therefore the world, redefining the field of possibilities with unpredictable consequences. Due to its power to separate from the world in which it takes place, action should be understood as existentially (Tassin) or structurally (Végső) worldless – it is a worldless power that precedes any historical epoch of world alienation.¹⁹

It should not be forgotten, however, that Arendtian action disturbs the world not only with its inherent worldlessness, but also with its power to bifurcate and multiply worlds. Action, for Arendt, is not only the bearer of worldlessness, but also what turns the heap of things humans produce into a world in the first place. Political action “not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it.”²⁰ While it is true that the constitutive capacity for action is also what has the power to dismantle the stability of the world, this is not because of its structural worldlessness, but because every act constitutes the world anew. Rather than being committed within the world, an act has the character of opening up a new world, a new field of possibilities. The multiplicity of acts and therefore

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¹⁶ Végső, *Worldlessness After Heidegger*, p. 81.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 81–82.

¹⁸ Étienne Tassin, *Un monde commun: Pour une cosmo-politique des conflits*, Paris, Seuil, 2003, p. 147.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 146; Végső, *Worldlessness after Heidegger*, p. 86.

²⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198.

worlds coincides with human plurality, which is a condition of political life.²¹ With every proper act, a bifurcation of worlds takes place. While it is true that an excess of new beginnings threatens the stability of the common world of political action, it is not worldlessness that is at the gates, but a proliferation of a multitude of worlds. Action, therefore, is not a principle of structural worldlessness, but a principle of the radical singularisation of worlds.

Arendt's focus on the loss of the world in modernity, however, prevents her from following this thread and developing the implications of an excess of worlds. In a seemingly paradoxical manner, Arendt claims that the loss of the world coincides with the process of its global unification. The unification of the globe in terms of travel and communication succeeded in "alienating man from his immediate earthly surroundings," uprooting the experience of having one's defined place within a particular and limited world.²² Expropriation in the context of accelerating capital accumulation is another central factor contributing to modern world alienation for Arendt, which brings her close to Marx (although she claims Marx wrongly emphasised self-alienation over world-alienation).²³ Yet, even economic globalisation is "of minor significance" compared to the "alienation underlying the whole development of natural science in the modern age."²⁴ Arendt thus comes close to Heidegger and his reflections on the darkening of the world due to the domination of modern science and technology.²⁵ Science does not connect us to the world, Arendt believes, but alienates us from it, since it introduces an ontological split. With modern science, "being and appearance part ways,"²⁶ which undermines the very foundations of the phenomenological experience of worldliness. In a true phenomenological fashion, Arendt claims that the reality that science explores has nothing to do with the world as the framework of meaningful experience, in which being (in its plurality) and appearance are one.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 251.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 253–256.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. G. Fried and R. Polt, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014, p. 29.

²⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 275.

From this perspective, the narrative of modernity is no longer the narrative of progress towards the realisation of a globally shared world, as it was for Kant and the cosmopolitan tradition. This realisation itself coincides with the process of world alienation, which seems irredeemable. Regaining the possibility of a shared world – as a singular world, constituted by singular beings – in the midst of global worldlessness nevertheless remains the stake of politics, but how this task can be achieved is a difficult question. From an Arendtian perspective, this would entail not only countering the worldless effects of global capitalism – the end of which, as the saying goes, is harder to imagine than the end of the world itself – but also dismantling modern subjectivity, along with its forms of rationality and their ontological implications.

Many political thinkers have since pursued a similar line of thought, with Jean-Luc Nancy perhaps delivering the most philosophically sophisticated version of opposing worldless globalisation with a renewed sense of non-totalisable worldliness. The multiplication of worlds already suggested by Arendt receives in Nancy a more direct conceptualisation. For Nancy, the world is always a multiplicity of worlds: “The unity of a world is nothing other than its diversity, and its diversity is, in turn, a diversity of worlds. A world is a multiplicity of worlds, the world is a multiplicity of worlds, and its unity is the sharing out [*partage*] and the mutual exposure in this world of all its worlds.”²⁷

Unity and multiplicity come together through the connection between sharing and mutual exposure. This is essential to Nancy’s conception of being and world, which moves beyond Heidegger’s emphasis on *Dasein* (being-there) as the centre of the phenomenon of worldliness to rather emphasise the dimension of the *mitsein* (being-together).²⁸ In Nancy, existence is defined by mutual exposure, which constitutes world(s) as plural. Each singular being offers a different access to the world, its own singularisation of the common world. Yet, for Nancy as well as for Arendt and Heidegger, the world-making capacity of human beings is put under threat by the process of globalisation, and global capitalism in particular, which alienates the plurality of world(s) within the uniformity of

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²⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. F. Rajfoul and D. Pettigrew, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007, p. 109.

²⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. R. D. Richardson and A. E. O’Byrne, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 93.

general equivalence and commodification.²⁹ In the face of such alienation, it is necessary to redeem the capacity of creation, “to create a world tirelessly.”³⁰ Nancy thus seems to further integrate the two paths already opened by Arendt – the loss of the world, on the one hand, and the proliferation of worlds, on the other, but emphasises more directly the pluralisation of world(s) as the means of a potential reversal of the creeping worldlessness of modernity.

The problem that emerges with such political appropriations of the phenomenological concept of world is that the emphasis on the opposition between global worldlessness and a singular worldliness leaves out of sight the question of the relations between singular worlds and potential conflicts between them. When the plurality of worlds is considered as an ideal in itself, it misses potential conflicts cutting through the very field of plurality. Antonia Birnbaum thus claims that Nancy’s ontologisation of plurality equates conflict with “a catastrophic destruction of the frame of compossibility,” which excludes conflict from understanding plurality.³¹ While the task of politics is limited to keeping the field of the singular plural open, conflict closes the becoming of plurality. For Birnbaum, this indicates a powerless and inconsequential conception of politics. She claims instead that it is precisely through conflicts that the shared world is actualised. A similar critique, but of Arendt, was proposed by Tassin, according to whom Arendt has not paid sufficient attention to the social conflicts and political struggles that are constitutive of political action. Even though political action indeed presupposes the Arendtian “being-with” and “acting-together”, it also implies “being-in-conflict-with” and “acting-against”.³² The concept of world as a plural singularity or singular plurality ultimately reduces the question of multiple worlds to the question of ethical and political coexistence within a common world. This deposits any notion of conflict or antagonism on the outside, as an intrusion of worldlessness, to which the ideal of worldliness is opposed.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³⁰ Nancy, *The Creation of the World*, p. 112.

³¹ Antonia Birnbaum, *Trajectoires obliques*, Paris, Sens & Tonka, 2013, p. 86. Compossibility is a term derived from the philosophy of G. W. Leibniz and indicates the logical possibility of coexistence within a world. At the end of the present article, I use the negative term impossibility to indicate a conflictual coexistence of worlds as incompatible transcendental frameworks.

³² Tassin, *Un monde commun*, pp. 14, 143, 155.

The Border Between Cosmopolitanism and a Conflict of Worlds

The turn from Kant to Heidegger is also present in some postcolonial reflections on politics. As David Harvey notes regarding Jarava Lal Mehta's and Dipesh Chakrabarty's endorsement of Heidegger as a way of challenging the abstract universalism of liberal cosmopolitanism: "There is, these authors seem to propose, no other way to compensate for liberal or socialist universalism and by extension Kantian failings other than by leaping straight from the Kantian frying pan into the Heideggerian fire."³³ Be that as it may, many postcolonial thinkers remain attached to the idea of cosmopolitanism, although in a radically transformed way. Concepts such as "rooted" (Kwame Anthony Appiah), "vernacular" (Homi K. Bhabha), or "subaltern" (Bonaventura De Sousa Santos) cosmopolitanism, and "afropolitanism" (Taiye Selasi, Achille Mbembe), aim to preserve the world as a political ideal while discarding its normative basis of abstract universality often associated with colonial and imperial practices.³⁴ According to these approaches to cosmopolitics, which range from humanist and liberal to radically anticapitalist, the universality of the world can only be activated when articulated with some kind of a particularity, singularity, multiplicity, and/or marginality. In more radical versions of this line of thought, the subjectivities emerging in political struggles surrounding these conditions are seen as forming a radical cosmopolitics from below. Cosmopolitanism is thus preserved on account of its singularisation, meaning that its universalist perspective can only be opened up from specific perspectives within social antagonisms and local

³³ David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 44–45.

³⁴ See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005, Chapter 6; Homi K. Bhabha, "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism", in L. Garcia-Morena and P. C. Pfeifer (eds.), *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*, London, Camden House, 1996, pp. 191–207; Bonaventura De Sousa Santos, "Beyond Neoliberal Governance: The World Social Forum as Subaltern Cosmopolitan Politics and Legality", in B. De Sousa Santos and C. A. Rodríguez-Garavito (eds.), *Law and Globalization from Below: Towards a Cosmopolitan Legality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 29–63; Taiye Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar", *Callaloo*, 36, (3/2013), p. 529; Achille Mbembe, "Afropolitanism", in B. Robbins and P. Lemos Horta (eds.), *Cosmopolitanisms*, New York, New York University Press, 2017, pp. 102–107. On the distinction between universal and plural cosmopolitanisms, see also Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism*, p. 79.

political struggles involving the people living a cosmopolitan condition on the margins of society.

Can such a perspective still rely on a phenomenological concept of world? In his own reflections on the political charge of the concept of world, Tassin attempts to reconcile the Arendtian conceptual framework with an emphasis on the conflictual dimension emerging within emancipatory politics. For Tassin, a common world in the political sense is not an existential given but made of “the intangible materiality” of human actions and relations “born out of struggles and conflicts.”³⁵ It is within a common struggle in the midst of concrete social conflicts that a common world emerges. The concrete nature of political struggles gives such worlds a necessarily singular character, as opposed to both the particular nature of exclusive communities and the abstract universal community of cosmopolitanism, which constitutes the “‘transcendental illusion’ of political reason.”³⁶ According to Tassin, cosmopolitan political projects aiming for the world as a whole in fact serve to distract from actual conflicts and emancipatory struggles.³⁷ His own version of “cosmopolitics” goes beyond the cultural or communitarian conception of common worlds toward properly political common worlds, in which singularities, irrespective of their identities, are united in a common struggle.³⁸ The struggles forming in migrant camps at borders are one of Tassin’s primary examples of such emerging common worlds.³⁹ Tassin succeeds at dialecticising the opposition of political worldliness and worldlessness by understanding social conflicts – the very condensations of modern worldlessness – as the site of the emergence of common worlds.

Looking closely at the way Tassin develops his argument, it becomes clear that what ultimately allows him to reaffirm Arendtian worldliness in terms of emancipatory political struggles is his adoption of Jacques Rancière’s theorisation of political subjectivation.⁴⁰ Both Rancière and Tassin also feature as crucial refer-

³⁵ Tassin, *Un monde commun*, p. 295.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 297–298.

³⁹ Étienne Tassin, “Cosmopolitique et xénopolitique”, *Raison présente*, no. 201 (1/2017), pp. 99–107.

⁴⁰ Tassin, *Un monde commun*, pp. 241, 277–278, 287–290.

ences in Agier's anthropology of being-in-the-world in border situations.⁴¹ While the concept of world indeed plays an important part in Rancière, who identifies politics as a conflict of worlds, the concept of world he operates with is, I argue, incompatible with the phenomenological one, even in its Arendtian version.⁴² Tassin assumes the compatibility between the Arendtian and the Rancièrian frameworks of political thought without engaging with Rancière's own critique of Arendt. What thus remains unaddressed is the tension between two very different political concepts of world, namely world as a phenomenological ideal of meaningful experience and world as a transcendental structure that determines what can appear within it and how.⁴³

The problem with Arendt's approach to politics, as Rancière understands it, is that politics can only take place within a sphere constituted by a defined collection of individuals and clearly delimited from the social sphere and domestic life.⁴⁴ As Arendt herself admits, not everyone is in a position to lead a public life.⁴⁵ Only adult men, freed from the necessities of the private sphere, can be seen as capable of constituting a political world. From this perspective, the stateless are indeed seen as excluded from any such sphere and therefore banished into worldlessness. For Rancière, in contrast, politics is not a sphere but a process, one in which the very limits of what constitutes a world is questioned. From this perspective, rights are not assigned to fixed collections of individuals but verified in acts of political subjectivation, which also challenges the perceived distinction between the public and the private. Rancière gives the exam-

⁴¹ Agier, *Borderlands*, pp. 100, 155–156. The discussion on the politics of a decentred subject in Part II of the book is significantly inspired by Rancière.

⁴² Regarding distinctions between Arendt and Rancière, see Jean-Philippe Deranty and Emmanuel Renault, "Democratic Agon: Striving for Distinction or Struggle against Domination and Injustice?", in A. Schaap (ed.), *Law and Agonistic Politics*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 43–56, and Andrew Schaap, "Enacting the Right to Have Rights: Jacques Rancière's Critique of Hannah Arendt", *European Journal of Political Theory*, 10 (1/2011), pp. 22–45.

⁴³ For a more detailed discussion on the transcendental concept of world I have in mind here, see Rok Benčín, "Worlds as Transcendental and Political Fictions", *Filozofski vestnik*, 42 (2/2021), pp. 221–243. This is also the topic of my book with the working title *Rethinking the Concept of World: Toward Transcendental Multiplicity*, forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press.

⁴⁴ Jacques Rancière, "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?", in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. S. Corcoran, London, Continuum, 2010, pp. 62–75.

⁴⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 32–33.

ple of women in the French Revolution, who – in relation to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen – had the rights of men in principle, but were excluded from many of the rights belonging to citizens and therefore reduced to their private domestic existence. Their political subjectivation, which resulted in Olympe de Gouges’s Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen, consists of a double demonstration: “Women, as political subjects, set out to make a twofold statement. They demonstrated that they were deprived of the rights that they had thanks to the Declaration of Rights and that through their public action that they *had* the rights denied to them by the constitution, that they could *enact* those rights.”⁴⁶ For Rancière, politics takes place in such a verification of rights in which political subjects show that they do not have the rights that are supposed to belong to them, but also exercise the rights that are denied to them.

Rancière does indeed articulate politics with a concept of world, but of a very different kind. This can be clearly seen in his critique of Arendt’s notion the rights of man. For Rancière, as we have seen, politics is not defined as a sphere which emerges as a given among a stable collection of individuals and the environment they create for themselves. In fact, “it is a division inserted in ‘common sense’: a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we see something as given. [...] This is what I call a dissensus: the putting of two worlds in one and the same world.”⁴⁷ Political dissensus therefore puts two worlds in conflict: the world in which certain people have rights and the world in which they do not. This conflictual coexistence of worlds involves the same people and the same ontological reality, but transcendently given in two very different, incompatible ways. This also implies that the problem cannot be solved by opposing globalisation with a more meaningful experience of singular common worlds, as plural as they may be. The problem is that any sense of worldliness is predefined by the question of who can take part in such a world and in what sense. If Rancière does not share the ideal of worldliness as developed by Arendt or Nancy, it is because he views political action not only as world-building, but also as a bifurcation of worlds. When Rancière defines politics as a conflict of worlds, the concept of world at play is no longer the phenomenological horizon of authentic existential experience transformed into a political ideal. It is a pro-

⁴⁶ Rancière, “Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?”, p. 69.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

saic conflict between incompatible transcendental frameworks of how the given is supposed to be constituted as a common world.

What happens, then, to the political concept of world when it is faced with the problems imposed on it by contemporary border situations? A comprehensive answer to this question would demand a wider examination, but from what I have attempted to show here, it seems that neither the universality of cosmopolitanism nor the singularity of worlds as spheres of meaningful coexistence can address the being-in-the-world of a stateless refugee or a migrant deemed to be illegal. The border is not a site of the affirmation of the world as a political ideal, nor a site of worldlessness. It is the stage of a conflict of worlds – not the cultural worlds of those who come across the border and those who are already there, but political worlds as “impossible” framings of the common.

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Marina Gržinić*

Capitalism and Death¹

The article begins with the thesis that the relationship between capitalism and life is transforming into a connection between capitalism and death.

On Necropolitics¹

The term “necropolitics” was introduced by the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe and allows us to better define the transformation to the management of life under the extreme conditions created by regimes of death. Its specific place in Western epistemology therefore calls for holding up a mirror to the model of the Western epistemic matrix, which cannot be understood without something we call the colonial matrix of power, but at the same time, Mbembe’s use of theoretical techniques such as recalibration and racialisation, allows for the critical actualisation of the contemporary historical moment.

Necropolitics is a coinage uniting *necro-* (death) and politics.² Therefore, necropolitics involves “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death.”³ And, in order to put this forward, three key procedures are central to necropolitics: the right to kill, enmity, and impunity.⁴

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² Marina Gržinić, “The Emergence of the Political Subject”, *Emancipation of the Resistance*, March 2013, <https://emancipationofresistance.wordpress.com/grzinic/>, accessed 22 December 2022.

³ Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics”, trans. L. Meintjes, *Public Culture*, 15 (1/2003), pp. 39.

⁴ This is how Edward A. Avila summarises these three points in his dissertation “Conditions of (Im)possibility: Necropolitics, Neoliberalism, and the Cultural Politics of Death in Contemporary Chicana/o Film and Literature”, PhD dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2012.

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Necropolitics refers to a system of governmentality in neoliberal global capitalism that is by no means a glorification of death in the sense of the old relationship between Eros and Thanatos, but an intensification of governance measures that not only brings about death, but also capitalises on it. Necropolitics always has, as a consequence, death as a systematic extermination, not just accidental death. Necropolitics operates with new forms of disciplinary and control technologies and with an authoritarian politics that shows itself in the normalisation of racist attitudes and an economy that is seen as completely detached from any production efforts, but is used as a pure political instrument for more and more oppression.⁵

As Mbembe conceptualises it in his seminal text “Necropolitics” from 2003:

Having presented a [necropolitical] reading of politics as the work of death, I turn now to sovereignty, expressed predominantly as the right to kill. For the purpose of my argument, I relate Foucault’s notion of biopower to two other concepts: the state of exception and the state of siege. I examine those trajectories by which the state of exception and the relation of enmity have become the normative basis of the right to kill. In such instances, power (and not necessarily state power) continuously refers and appeals to exception, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy.⁶

Necropolitics regulates life from the perspective of death, thus transforming life into a mere existence below the minimum of any life. I have axiomatically defined necropolitics as “let live and make die.”⁷ To illustrate this point, I have drawn a parallel with a form of life conceived by Michel Foucault in the 1970s called “biopolitics”. I have axiomatically described Foucault’s biopolitics as “make live and let die.”⁸ I have also argued that biopolitics in the 1970s represented a situation of regulating life in the so-called capitalist first world and

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⁵ Marina Gržinić and Aneta Stojnić, “Reclaiming the Body: Fem Positions Repoliticized”, in M. Gržinić and A. Stojnić (eds.), *Shifting Corporealities in Contemporary Performance: Avant-Gardes in Performance*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 24–25.

⁶ Mbembe, “Necropolitics”, p. 16.

⁷ Marina Gržinić, “Capital, Repetition”, *Reartikulacija*, (8/2009), p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.* See also Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975–76*, M. Bertani and A. Fontana (eds.), trans. D. Macey, New York, Picador, 2003.

welfare states, but also a situation of abandoning or delegating death to the so-called other worlds, the second and third worlds.⁹

These two modes of life represent a brutal difference in the management of life and death. In biopolitics, life is controlled, but it is about providing a good life for the citizens of the sovereign capitalist countries of the first world. Today, on the other hand, it is about a pure abandonment of these structures (let live), while at the same time death is managed, used, and capitalised by the war machine.¹⁰

This was clearly demonstrated in the 2008 crisis. In such a situation, death becomes the focus of a field of power that, in global, neoliberal necrocapitalism, takes the form not of biopower but of necropower. In order to understand what necropower means exactly, we should relate it to “bare life”. The latter concept was introduced in 1995 by Giorgio Agamben in his book *Homo Sacer: Il potere sovrano e la vita nuda*, translated into English as *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* in 1998.¹¹ *Homo sacer* is the Latin term for a sacred, perishable life. Historically, it already existed in ancient Rome; Roman law refers to it. Today there are many people who fall into this category, the best known being refugees, although before them those detained at Guantanamo had the status of bare lives. In these two examples it is clear that the figures are situated between life and death, because what they possess is precisely what Agamben calls bare life. Bare life is a product in between sovereign power and something that is a surplus or a leftover of human life.

Moreover, bare life is always constructed through a system of invisible, secret, hidden procedures and is also endowed with the performativity (of power) that terminally affects the (in/human) body. This denotes a very clear procedure by which social, economic, legal, or political power must resort to the state of ex-

⁹ Gržinić, “The Emergence of the Political Subject”.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* I developed the core of my thinking back in 2007. I developed it while reading about the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, and in the same period I was dealing with necropolitics as part of my teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna with my students. At that time, a decade ago, and still today, although to a lesser extent, the refutation of necropolitics was very present. And why? The answer is that neoliberal global capitalism today exhibits stubborn life, also thanks to biotechnology, in order to hide the hyper-profit made from death.

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998.

ception in order to produce bare life as a leftover or surplus within a structure (e.g. a state, sovereign, or institutional structure). In order to kill with impunity or abandon people or whole nations of civilians, a system of politics, law, economics, and social relations must be developed that presents itself as extrajudicial, exceptional, or emergency. Furthermore, the sovereign, as Agamben describes it, is an exception unto itself that decides on its exception. As Agamben shows, the legal right of the sovereign is the effective prorogation of the right itself and of a “state of exception”, both of which are confused in the last instance: the one who decides on the exception, which is a confusion of law and fact, is the sovereign itself. The result is pure circularity, another feature of global capitalism, which presents power as increasingly subjectless – and yet it decides as a subject.¹²

The relationship between biopower and necropower. I spoke about this in an introduction to a book by Adla Isanović.¹³ Necropower and biopower are inseparable concepts, when thinking about the relationship between the state and the people who live or have lived there. Foucault states in “*Society Must Be Defended*” that the nineteenth century was a kind of possession of man as a living being by the State, a kind of nationalisation of the biological.¹⁴ He sees racism as whatever “justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger insofar as one is a member of a race or a population.”¹⁵

In this way, he presents the population as a biologically racialised entity that is kept in unity by the elimination of threats. At this point of what can be thought about the nationalisation of the biological by the state we see the central role of biopower. Biopower can unfold under the protection of massive security measures, which we see again and again, this time in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. For biopower to function, which is suddenly a precondition for the possibility of the biopolitical, it is important that it is accepted and embraced by the population.

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¹² Gržinić and Stojnić, “Reclaiming the Body”, pp. 25–26.

¹³ Marina Gržinić, “Foreword: Questioning Digital Technologies, Forensics, and Human Rights Law”, in A. Isanović, *The Regime of Digital Coloniality: Bosnian Forensic Contemporaneity*, Frankfurt am Main, CEEOL Press, 2021, pp. 7–12.

¹⁴ Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, pp. 239–240.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

Necropower thus focuses on the negative goal of control over death as opposed to the positive goal of biopower, control over life. Moreover, it appears that necropower controls large populations through the management of death (as opposed to the individual executions of a classical sovereign) rather than through the management of life. In David Theo Goldberg's view, "necropower can take multiple forms: the terror of actual death; or a more 'benevolent' form—the result of which is the destruction of a culture in order to 'save the people' from themselves."¹⁶ As in biopolitics in relation to biopower, necropower is a central aspect of necropolitics. Necropower is the power of the state over the production and management of death,¹⁷ which also includes power over collective memory and the historical reappraisal of the past. Mbembe says that necropower is the exercise of sovereignty in cases where "*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" is the central project of power, not autonomy.¹⁸ In the last instance, the shift from biopolitics to necropolitics must be reconsidered precisely in the zones of indistinguishability between the sovereign and life, between citizens and non-citizens, and between biopower and necropower. Mbembe specifically situates his analysis of necropolitics in the context of contemporary colonial occupations (e.g. apartheid in South Africa or the Israeli occupation of Palestine). The concept of necropolitics thus opens up a critical space for discussing a land of dead, violated, and ultimately disposed bodies in necrospace.

Agamben describes the appearance of the state of exception. The state of exception, Agamben says, "is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law's threshold or limit concept."¹⁹

It is important to note that the state of exception is not exceptional; it is not derivative but constitutive of the way neoliberal states function today. Moreover, as Santiago López Petit notes, what characterises neoliberal global capitalism is

¹⁶ David Theo Goldberg, cited in Mbembe, "Necropolitics", p. 22, n. 38.

¹⁷ Mbembe, "Necropolitics".

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14; emphasis in the original.

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. K. Attell, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 4.

the transformation from nation-state to war-state.²⁰ In fact, this transformation means that the former imperial, capitalist, colonial states that have turned into war-states exist simultaneously as the fragmentation of all social and public sectors of the state. Petit calls this fragmentation “postmodern fascism,” which functions by sterilising the Other, avoiding conflict in social space, and fragmentation.²¹ The war-state, especially in the capitalist First World (us) and former Western European context, exists to maintain the illusion of society and the biopolitical mode of life, while within the neoliberal capitalist biopolitical system the necropolitical imposes itself and metastasises onto it. The illusion of society maintained by the war-state presents itself as a biopolitical standpoint, a politics that cares about the lives of the population, even though the population is systematically controlled, fragmented, and ultimately abandoned (think of the complete annihilation of society by the Covid-19 pandemic). The contemporary state is in fact turning into a necropolitical regime, a political system that only participates in the war of transnational capital (see the current relations between the United States and China) and abandons citizens to find their own way to survive.

In this transition from nation-state to war-state there is also the so-called missing link: the racial-state. The path from the nation-state to the war-state leads via the racial-state, at the centre of which is racism.²² It is also important to note that this triad of state forms only became possible with the rise of neoliberalism.²³

“Necropolitical power proceeds by a sort of inversion between life and death,” Mbembe explains, “as if life was merely death’s medium.”²⁴

²⁰ Santiago López Petit, *La movilización global. Breve tratado para atacar la realidad* [Global Mobilisation. A Brief Treatise on Attacking Reality], Madrid, Traficantes de Sueños, 2009.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²² Gržinić, “The Emergence of the Political Subject”.

²³ I have developed this trajectory in the political genealogy of films that have a relation to these three formats of states, with the racial state at the centre in a contribution entitled “Politics of Death in Europe”. See Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek, “Race and Its Far-Reaching Contemporary Ontological and Epistemological Implications”, in M. Rosen (ed.), *Diseases of the Head: Essays on the Horrors of Speculative Philosophy*, New York, punctum books, 2020, pp. 197–235.

²⁴ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. S. Corcoran, Durham, Duke University Press, 2019, p. 38.

Is There an Escape from the Necropolitical Topography of Injustice? On Migration, Necrocapitalism, and Civil Bodies

After the mass deaths of refugees off Lampedusa in 2013, Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta said: “The hundreds who lost their lives at Lampedusa yesterday [on 3 October 2013] are Italian citizens as of today.”²⁵ The state funeral that the victims received was less costly than returning the bodies to their place of origin. But what about the survivors? According to the law in force at the time, they not only did not receive citizenship, but also faced fines and imprisonment for attempting to illegally cross the state border of a foreign country.

The Lampedusa case made me think about what was not reflected upon in public, namely that these dead people got what they wanted, but in a deadly way, they got EU citizenship, which finally gave them a chance to have their own life in the EU, but only if they died. We see in global capitalism the emergence of a new form of citizenship, divided in two from within (similar to what Agamben did with life): on one side a necropolitical citizenship and on the other a biopolitical citizenship.

Necropolitical citizenship is given to those left to die (refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants). Whereas our EU citizenship is no longer an “old” form of “natural” citizenship (it never was!), but only biopolitical citizenship. So, in global capitalism we have at least two different forms of citizenship, necropolitical and biopolitical citizenship, which could easily be exchanged by neoliberal governments in the near future.

I would also like to point out a way out, through my own political experience that emerged on the other side of the Berlin Wall in the former Yugoslavia, where I come from. This border, which became imprinted in my philosophical thinking in the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, gives me a certain historical legitimacy to speak of a hegemonic process that the Western, first capitalist world carried out vis-à-vis the rest of Europe.

²⁵ Valentina Pop, “Italy Grants Citizenship to Lampedusa Dead”, EUobserver, 7 October 2013, <https://euobserver.com/rule-of-law/121681>, accessed 27 December 2022.

Basically, the last decades have shown that neoliberal global capitalism, historically, in order to move forward, has not only removed the Berlin Wall, but has also reinforced a rupture in the manner of ensuring proper governmentality. I can say that necropolitical and biopolitical citizenship require that these two distinctive forms of governmentality make their mode of operation explicit. In the 1970s, Foucault made it clear that there is a way of managing the life of the Western world, which he called biopolitics, because bio means life and politics is a takeover of the life of the population. The formula of biopolitics is “live and let die” (let die all other worlds outside the first Western world). In 2003, Mbembe wrote a text entitled “Necropolitics” (necro is death now administered by politics, but with the implementation of a military corpus, and this is what we have seen all over the great globe after 2001). Obviously, the sweet slogan of the 1970s welfare state has morphed into “let live” (for the first capitalist world) and “kill” (everyone else).

Biopolitics refers to the relationship between life and politics and operates through a variety of regulatory techniques in people’s everyday lives. According to Michel Foucault, biopolitics refers to “the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques.”²⁶ The biopolitical, as Gilles Deleuze understood it in the 1990s, thus came out of the disciplinary society, the vast enclosures that lead from one closed space to another, and each space with a law.²⁷ The disciplinary society came after the society of sovereignty, of taxation instead of the organisation of production, of the rule over death instead of the administration of life, the Napoleonic period as set out by Deleuze, as opposed to the French Revolution; after World War II we were no longer a disciplinary society but a society of control. Paul Virilio’s free-floating control.²⁸ The apparent acquittal of the disciplinary society, between two incarcerations and the limitless deferrals of the society of control. Or what Balibar exposed in the 2000s: the passport of a “rich person from a rich country” increasingly means “not just mere national belonging, protection and a right of citizenship, but a *surplus* of rights.”²⁹

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²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978, pp. 141–142.

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control”, *October*, 59 (1992), pp. 3–7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁹ Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, London, Verso, 2002, p. 83; emphasis in original.

My thesis is that everything we theorise today about the status of refugees and asylum seekers, and also about citizenship, including the living conditions, must be seen through a necropolitical lens; biopolitics is not enough, although there are many attempts to think of the borderspace as a European biopolitical space that is undergoing major changes.

I argue that these biopolitical borders, borderspaces, are subject to strict necropolitical procedures. They are becoming more and more militarised, and therefore all we see around Fortress EU are landscapes of death, which is a necropolitical category. It is also important that necropolitics works through measures of increased racialisation. This is not just the old racism, but new forms of the exploitation, dispossession, and expropriation of people or even states through the constructed category of race, which has become the norm today.

Aggregate A qq

In the first part of this sub-section, I will focus on the question posed in the section title “Is There an Escape from the Necropolitical Topography of Injustice?” Topography is understood here as the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area. To do this, we need to recall the state of affairs regarding refugees in the EU.

Thousands of refugees are scattered on the Greek islands, others live in seclusion in poor refugee camps, thousands wait to enter the European Union via Hungary and remain in Serbia. In all these situations, there is oppression in the name of security, although according to Mbembe’s definition we clearly see that necropolitics creates spaces of death that are no longer the biopolitical spaces of the regulation of life and protection to save lives; on the contrary, life becomes part of a process that extinguishes life. This process, which was pointed out by James Stanescu,³⁰ can help us grasp what is going on in the landscape of death at the border. Agamben said that since the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall,

³⁰ James Stanescu, “Beyond Biopolitics: Animal Studies, Factory Farms, and the Advent of Deading Life”, *PhaenEx*, 8 (2/2013), pp. 135–160. See also Marina Gržinić, “Afterword: ‘Afterwards’. Struggling with Bodies in the Dump of History”, in N. Jiménez del Val (ed.), *Body between Materiality and Power: Essays in Visual Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, pp. 159–178.

we have had two forms of life, bare life and life with forms.³¹ Bare life is a life with nothing, it is naked life, but I can say that we see that the life of refugees is a form of “deading life.”³² Mortal life is not bare life, but a thoroughly designed and constructed life under the pressure of death.

If we assume that biopolitics and necropolitics are two forms of governmentality that apply modes, procedures, tactics, logics, laws, and institutional regulations in a neoliberal global capitalism, then all these fenced and closed spaces in Europe and hyper-ghettoisation are linked to a very perverse situation. As Eric Fassin and Marie Adam have noted,³³ it is primarily a process of ghettoisation, which is nothing more than a form of security governmentality, but the aim is to contain, deter, and expel asylum seekers, but not yet to expel them completely, because as we can see in the Western European context, complete expulsion would violate their rights.³⁴ So all these procedures are closely linked to the taking of life – it is a path towards death, but not yet death.

The question of perversity in relation to law becomes even clearer when we refer to Seyla Benhabib’s remark from 2008,³⁵ a remark on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which we found exposed in a timely manner in a 2015 text by Kirstine Nordentoft Mose and Vera Wriedt entitled “*Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception*”:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was negotiated and adopted in 1948, when almost half the world was under colonial subjugation and consequently did not form part of the United Nations General Assembly. States and subjects under colonial rule did not participate in the negotiations, nor were they considered to fall under the allegedly universal scope of human rights. Today, the UDHR grounds a universal right to emigration in Art. 13, stipulating that ‘Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his coun-

³¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

³² Stanescu, “Beyond Biopolitics”.

³³ Eric Fassin and Marie Adam, “Calais, jungle d’Etat”, *Libération*, 23 April 2015, https://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/04/23/calais-jungle-d-etat_1261872/, accessed 28 December 2022.

³⁴ Fassin and Adam cited in Debarati Sanyal, “Calais’s ‘Jungle’: Refugees, Biopolitics, and the Arts of Resistance”, *Representations*, 139 (1/2017), p. 2.

³⁵ Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 30.

try’, and anchors everyone’s right ‘to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution’ in Art. 14. However, there is no provision for a right to entry.³⁶

Therefore, ghettoisation, which is nothing but a form of security governmentality, works hand in hand with another form of governmentality, namely humanitarian governmentality. Both support and enhance necropolitical management.

Debarati Sanyal, in her text “Calais’s ‘Jungle’: Refugees, Biopolitics, and the Arts of Resistance”, showed how these two forms of governmentality, we will say within necropolitical neoliberal global capitalism, operate. Sanyal referred to the words of Bernard Cazeneuve, then French Minister of the Interior, when he and the French government decided to “cleanse” the Calais Jungle of from 2,000 to 6,000 bodies. In 2016, the Calais Jungle, which was a “fortified space of deterrence and detention, with routine administrative procedures of harassment, incarceration, deportation, and destruction,” and where a “large police presence, composed of the *gendarmerie mobile* and riot police (the CRS, or *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*) [...] deployed to contain the ‘undesirables’,” was “cleansed.”³⁷ As Sanyal notes, this last attack was, in the cynical words of the French authorities, an evacuation, “a humanitarian stage of intervention,” carried out with “respect for the dignity of persons” in order to protect them from the indignities of their situation.³⁸

We see the ultimate perverse description, a boundless cynicism that Sanyal comments on as follows: the evacuation undertaken in the name of dignity “showed bulldozers razing the makeshift shelters under heavy police protection, while tear gas and water guns were fired at protesting refugees.”³⁹ Such doublespeak is not only symptomatic of the hypocrisy in which humanitarian language masks security violence, but, as Sanyal aptly puts it, represents the “aporia of border security practices, which positions ‘the “irregular” migrant as *both* a security threat *and* threatened life in need of saving.”⁴⁰ The double aim of security vi-

³⁶ Benhabib cited in Kirstine Nordentoft Mose and Vera Wriedt, “Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception”, *Birkbeck Law Review*, 3 (2/2015), p. 297, n. 76.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1; emphasis in original.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Nick Vaughan-Williams cited in Sanyal, “Calais’s ‘Jungle’”, p. 2; emphasis in original.

olence, which here is to generate even more violence, enables state repressive apparatuses and legal procedures to control this violence. So, it is not about justice, because justice is a lost cause in necropolitical capitalism.

Sanyal notes that borders not only materialise as walls or fences that separate territories, but also function as pre-emptive membranes that selectively filter and regulate the movement of bodies through new technologies.⁴¹ In such a context, the law and the justice system are used for this whole preventive system.

However, we also see that although Sanyal has accurately captured the escalation of necropolitics, she still dwells on the biopolitical. For example, she refers to the escalation of visual surveillance technologies in the nation-state's management of life and death in 2006 as "photobiopolitics."⁴² Returning now to my thesis, and as argued by Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt, visual technologies participate in the landscapes of death as photonecropolitics. The difference is crucial.

If we insist on the necropolitical, we can note another fact (following Sanyal's reading of Didier Fassin), namely that the "political right to protection enshrined by asylum has been replaced by an appeal to moral sentiments such as compassion and empathy."⁴³ Humanitarian governmentality, she argues, thus relies on the asymmetries of compassion rather than the reciprocity of justice and equal rights. When not dismissed as economic migrants or labelled as potential threats, "asylum seekers are frequently positioned as 'speechless emissaries' whose wounds speak louder than the words they say."⁴⁴ Liisa H. Malkki's text entitled "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization", to which Sanyal refers, shows that this process already began in the mid-1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is important to point out that this process was recognised a decade ago, but it did not ring a bell because at the time it was not seen that refugees represented an attack on what was called "our way of life."

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⁴¹ Sanyal, "Calais's 'Jungle'", p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 32., n. 40. Sanyal refers to Irving Goh's "Prolegomenon to a Right to Disappear", *Cultural Politics*, 2 (1/2016), pp. 97–114.

⁴³ Sanyal, "Calais's 'Jungle'", p. 4.

⁴⁴ Liisa H. Malkki cited in Sanyal, "Calais's 'Jungle'", pp. 4–5. See Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization", *Cultural Anthropology*, 11 (3/1996), pp. 377–404.

As Sanyal says:

In the words of a Bangladeshi refugee I interviewed in Paris, “We have to show that we are victims, pure victims.” Humanitarian reason capitalizes on trauma, suffering, and victimhood, reducing refugees to supplicant bodies in need of intervention and protection. It yields an impoverished view of asylum seekers’ subjectivity, narratives, and political energies, in a pre-emptive gesture of exclusion from equal citizenship.⁴⁵

In such a situation, which first shows that neoliberal global necropolitical capitalism tends to be pure or total, that is, to acquire the element of its ultimate goal capital, and this self-valorisation of capital as a subject and the complete privatisation of everything and especially the making of profit with the military machine, the question remains: Is there way out of the topography of necropolitical injustice?

Justice cannot be upheld by normative law and Western legal systems. Therefore, it is an attempt at self-rearticulation as destruction, which is the erasure of fingerprints. For migrants in the Eurozone, mutilating fingerprints with razor blades, fire, or acid is an attempt to escape access by Eurodac, the database that collects and manages the biometric data of asylum seekers and illegal entrants in the European Union.

Alexander G. Weheliye’s 2014 book *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, also develops the concept of racialising assemblages along these lines, which are important in capturing the racialising forms of violence that take place in borderspaces, deathscapes.⁴⁶ *Habeas Viscus* analyses the flesh or viscus to preserve the gendered and racialised particularity of biopolitical regimes. Weheliye not only brings Black feminism into the conversation with continental philosophy, but also articulates Black Studies as an intellectual endeavour that “pursues a politics of global liberation beyond the genocidal shackles of Man.”⁴⁷ Weheliye’s analysis of the

⁴⁵ Sanyal, “Calais’s ‘Jungle’”, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2014.

⁴⁷ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 4.

flesh is a critical one. This means, as Amber Jamilla Musser points out in her review,⁴⁸ that flesh, as used by Black feminism as a signifier of the gendered but not quite human and not quite animal body, is a space of possibility because it offers a way of thinking about “alternative modes of life alongside the violence, subjection, exploitation, and racialisation that define the modern human.”⁴⁹

Building on the important work of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Winter in Black Feminist Studies, Weheliye criticises bare life and biopolitical discourse for failing to understand and counter the racialised hierarchies that sustain unjust global power structures and the corresponding forms of political violence. Therefore, we can see that the processes that oppose unjust systems are a form of razor blades and acid to liberate the body from a form of hyper-technological data archives and challenge the empty centre of biopower through necropower racialisations. It is also scary that we are losing our bodies. But it is really the only thing we have in neoliberal global capitalism. We have no politics. We do not have anything. We only have our body, and everyone wants to keep that identity. The way to get rid of it is to undermine necrocapitalist surveillance at some level.

In this article, we would like to conceptualise, deepen, and not just disentangle biopower and necropower, as they are interwoven through neoliberal capitalism. In this context, it is important to question the “myth” that in Western liberal capitalism there is an empty center of power (usually found in the so-called public spaces, etc.) that is not managed by the state power structure. This was the case in the 1970s and was systematically overturned as early as the 1980s, but it was still not understood that it was ultimately a myth. Today through the necropolitical wars, the necropolitical abandonment of refugees, and racialisation, this is no longer as valuable, and there are no longer spaces detached from the repressive and ideological structures of the state in which civil society could assert its demands in the public sphere.

Weheliye proposes the concept of racialising assemblages to illuminate and deconstruct the “sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full hu-

⁴⁸ Amber Jamilla Musser, “Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human”, *philoSOPHIA*, 6 (1/2016), pp. 156–160.

⁴⁹ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 2.

mans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans.”⁵⁰ I would insist on looking at the other side of this division as well. Thus, if on one side we see not-quite-humans and non-humans, I will argue that on the other side there is nothing like humans, but only post-humans. On both sides, a profound process of racialisation is already underway, and in the desert of global capitalism, there is no human on the horizon. The human being is not desired as a category! So instead of eliminating the division of people by race, nationality, or gender, these dividing lines turn out to be even more racialising processes.

This will intensify as we know that in October 2020, as commented by Daniel Thym, “a new start” was proposed by the EU Commission regarding the Dublin regulations on migration,

the Commission proposes to abolish the Dublin III Regulation and withdraws the Dublin IV Proposal. But [...] ‘the Migration Management Proposal’⁵¹ reproduces word-for-word the Dublin III Regulation, subject to amendments drawn [...] from the Dublin IV Proposal! As for the ‘governance framework’ outlined in Articles 3-7 of the Migration Management Proposal, it is a hodgepodge of purely declamatory provisions (e.g. Art. 3-4), of restatements of pre-existing obligations (Art. 5), of legal bases authorising procedures that require none (Art. 7). The one new item is a yearly monitoring exercise centered on an ‘European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy’ (Art. 6), which seems as likely to make a difference as the ‘Mechanism for Early Warning, Preparedness and Crisis Management’, introduced with much fanfare with the Dublin III Regulation and then left in the drawer before, during and after the 2015/16 crisis.⁵²

What changes will the proposal bring? It reflects the prevailing trends in the European Union regarding the regulation of migration: regaining control over the situation, ending large-scale “irregular movements”, and “protecting” the EU’s

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 3.

⁵¹ Communication from the Commission on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM(2020) 609 final of 23 September 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2020:609:FIN>.

⁵² Francesco Maiani, “A ‘Fresh Start’ or One More Clunker? Dublin and Solidarity in the New Pact”, *EU Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy*, 20 October 2020, <https://eumigration-lawblog.eu/a-fresh-start-or-one-more-clunker-dublin-and-solidarity-in-the-new-pact/>, accessed 30 January 2023.

external borders are the primary goals. As Conne Island, a self-managed youth cultural centre in Leipzig, stated on 25 January 2017, in reference to Dublin IV (apparently off the grid): “We have joined forces to fight against this abominable system under the name EUmanity, especially against Dublin IV, the latest instrument of foreclosure.”⁵³

We cannot say it otherwise than that the apparent abolition of Dublin IV is by no means an abolition of the “Orbanisation” of EU asylum law. A book by Keith Breckenridge entitled *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, published in 2014, shows how the twentieth-century South African obsession with Francis Galton’s universal fingerprint identity registry served as an incubator for today’s systems of biometric citizenship being developed across the South.⁵⁴

Sanyal explains that the production of illegibility using razor blades, fire, sandpaper, or battery acid is a political tactic developed in resistance to the biopolitical apparatus that manages bodies and controls borders.⁵⁵ I would say that all this goes hand in hand with an intensification of the system of necropolitics that develops new forms of governmentality, such as humanitarian, security governmentality.

Sanyal also points out a dilemma that I will leave open from the perspective of the autonomy of migration:

the migrant is the harbinger of a politics beyond the exclusions of representation, visibility, citizenship, and (human) rights.

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In its focus on agency and resistance, the autonomy of migration perspective poses an important challenge to the humanitarian and securitarian reduction of refugees to bodies that must be managed. Yet the celebration of anonymity and dis-

⁵³ “Wir haben uns zusammengefunden, um - unter dem Namen inEUmanity - gemeinsam gegen dieses abscheuliche System zu kämpfen, konkret gegen Dublin IV, das neueste Instrument der Abschottung.” Conne Island, “Was ist Dublin IV?” [What is Dublin IV?], <https://conne-island.de/terminlang/2017.html>, accessed 29 December 2022.

⁵⁴ Keith Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

⁵⁵ Sanyal, “Calais’s ‘Jungle’”, p. 17.

appearance remains a perilous gesture, given the tragically embodied reality of these terms in the mass grave that is the Mediterranean Sea.⁵⁶

Even if we acknowledge the cunning and creativity of refugees in crossing borders, as Sanyal continues, we cannot assume that mobility takes precedence over control when so many migrate in response to intolerable forms of control and their flight is halted by the camps springing up on European shores. Moreover, it is difficult to assign a temporal priority to the movement of migrants as the border pre-emptively filters out “risky” bodies through the increasingly sophisticated technology of biometrics.⁵⁷ Even as “techniques of resistance such as fingerprint mutilation continue to be practised by the exiled in sites like Calais, Europe’s unparalleled anxiety about potential routes of terrorist infiltration, materialized in France’s ongoing state of exception, is compromising such room for manoeuvre.”⁵⁸ We must constantly watch for balance, because necropolitical capitalism is without balance.

Aggregate B

I now come to the second part of my sub-section title: “On Migration, Necrocapitalism, Civil Bodies”. I would like to return to borderspaces and reflect in detail on their political-legal construction by the European Union. In this part, too, I mainly refer to the analysis by Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt entitled “*Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception*”.

We can see a vocabulary of violence emerging to deal with systems of surveillance and screening that uses shortcuts:

FRONTEX – European Border and Coast Guard Agency

EUROSUR – European Border Surveillance System

NCCs – National Coordination Centres (in EU Member States)

ENP – European Neighbourhood Policy, which mainly consists of bilateral political agreements between the EU and the respective partner countries outside the EU

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Since the summer and fall of 2015, the European Union's borders have been a militarised borderspace that is emerging under neoliberal necrotechnologies such as drones, etc.

Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt see the militarisation of borderspaces through (1) a horizontal expansion of border control through agreements with countries of origin and transit countries, and (2) a vertical intensification of surveillance by drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).⁵⁹ Of course, each of these levels has its own history. For example, on the US-Mexico border drone surveillance was introduced in 2006. Today, drones patrol more than half of the border, with the long-term goal of 24/7 drone operations.⁶⁰

At the heart of this restructuring or hyper-reconstruction of surveillance under the label of protection is the increasing militarisation of the border under the shield of surveillance. Why does this matter? Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt argue that the militarised border surrounding the European Union is termed an “area of justice, freedom and security.”⁶¹ Or, if we recall the specific surveillance and policy techniques underlying *Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the establishment of a European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems*, they all focus on the area of freedom, security and justice.

Political agreements with countries of origin and transit, mainly consisting of bilateral political agreements between the European Union and the respective partner countries, extend the borderspace horizontally. The ENP covers sixteen countries, divided into two regional groups:

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1) ENP-East countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, and 2) ENP-South countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia.⁶²

⁵⁹ Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt, “*Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception*”, pp. 279.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 281, n. 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁶² Eurostat, “*Background – European Neighbourhood Policy countries (ENP)*”, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/european-neighbourhood-policy/background>, accessed 29 December 2022.

Former German Chancellor Merkel met with Tunisian Prime Minister Chahed on the second day of her North Africa trip in March 2017, when Merkel called Tunisia a “hopeful project”, reflecting the importance the chancellor attaches to Germany’s relations with this relatively stable country to manage migration to Europe and speed up deportation procedures.⁶³ The basis is the EU-Morocco Action Plan, negotiated in 2006 and signed under the ENP, which aims to “prevent and combat illegal migration to and via Morocco,” “improve cooperation with regard to the readmission of Moroccan nationals, stateless persons and nationals of third countries,” and “strengthen border management” through equipment and assistance for staff training, increased control and surveillance of border areas, enhanced regional cooperation, and funding for governments outside the EU.⁶⁴ Moreover, “A revised draft action plan [from 18 February 2022] drawn up by the European Commission on a ‘comprehensive migration partnership’ with Morocco now suggests that the North African country should be informed of ‘the potential benefits of a status agreement with the European Union’ that would allow the deployment of Frontex officials on its territory.”⁶⁵

So, what do we have here? The three-dimensional space of control that has been widely implemented since 2013 must be seen in the context of the border, which is always a colonial border when it comes to establishing a relationship between the European Union and its neighbouring states. As Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt have pointed out in relation to the architecture of the borderspace, the border is a permanent “zone of exception” where violence is exercised against certain people in the position of migrant or refugee and exceptional measures are part of the political-legal order.⁶⁶ It is therefore not a space without or outside the law, but a space that is in a permanent relationship with the law. In Agamben’s understanding, our current state of exception is an empty space located at the

⁶³ Deutsche Welle, “Migrants, Security Top Merkel’s Agenda in Tunisia”, 3 March 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/migration-security-top-agenda-on-merkels-visit-to-tunisia/a-37793509>, accessed 29 December 2022.

⁶⁴ Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt, “*Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception*”, p. 284.

⁶⁵ Statewatch, “Tracking the Pact: EU Eyes Future Frontex Deployments in Morocco”, <https://www.statewatch.org/news/2022/march/tracking-the-pact-eu-eyes-future-frontex-deployments-in-morocco/>, accessed 29 December 2022.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

centre of power, and in this empty space, “a human action with no relation to law stands before a norm with no relation to life.”⁶⁷

The empty centre of power is a problem that clearly misses the processes of racialisation found in forced “repatriation” and a hypermilitarisation of border control, now also supported by the technology of control such as drones.

Again, we are not dealing with an empty space, but with an obliterated space; this is an essential difference, for it is transformed into a landscape of death. Secondly, we do not see here the reduction of life to mere life, to nothingness as life, but we can say, with reference to Stanescu, that we get a vanishing life, a life that is not yet dead but is in the process of vanishing, which is one of the main characteristics of the life of refugees. It is not yet just a zombie life, a living dead, but it is a life that is under the systematic, procedural pressure of death. Indeed, the life of us, the neoliberal first world citizens who are socially, politically, and economically depoliticised, is a zombie life; we are the living dead without a political agenda. The vanishing life of refugees is a political life under violent destruction where the erasure of fingerprints turns their own flesh into political flesh.

Aggregate C

We could thus create a genealogy that moves from the necroscape to a volumenscape of (necro) death as represented by the changes in the borderspace and by the surveillance technology developed in this context.

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So, the genealogy of these spaces, their changing topography and their changing dimensional relations, is also an imposition of the procedures of necrocapitalism and their digital technologies on space. Therefore, we speak of a regime in which all of these necrospaces and the volumenscape of death are intermingled with sunken spaces, and all these spaces/scapes are not only adjacent to each other but embedded in death.

The changes can be seen in the difference to a conception of space in modernity that moved away from a utopia and turned out to be a dystopia in the neoliberal

⁶⁷ Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 86.

biopolitical outcome, with a multiplicity of heterotopias, of which there were a greater number in the Occident and only a few in the Orient, which includes the former Eastern Europe.

Topography of the Necrospace

Let us look at the topography of the necrospace and record the temporal changes as well as the transformations in order to grasp and conceptualise them.

An example of this conceptualization is the sunken space. It reappears in Jordan Peele's film *Get Out*.⁶⁸ I will explain it in detail, but I want to emphasise that the sunken space was already elaborated in electronically produced video works in the 1970s and 1980s.

The plot of the film *Get Out* revolves around African American photographer Chris Washington, who, along with his Caucasian girlfriend Rose Armitage, visits her parents at their home in rural upstate New York. Their visit turns into a terrifying battle for his sanity and survival as the entire Armitage family, as well as the townspeople, turn out to be White vampires who kidnap and literally possess Black bodies in order to preserve their White dream of immortality, their White "social and biological futurity."⁶⁹

This sunken space was excellently explored in Bogdan Popa and Kerry Mackereth's 2019 text "Vampiric Necropolitics: A Map of Black Studies Critique from Karl Marx' Vampire to *Get Out*'s Politics of the Undead":

In *Get Out*, Missy Armitage psychoanalyzes Chris Washington to throw him into a space of doubt, anxiety and fear, which is identified as "the sunken place". As the film shows, this place is a tactic aimed at replacing Chris' black subjectivity with a dying white man's consciousness. In the therapy meeting, "the sunken place" exposes a central technology of racialization which asserts that black and non-white bodies can become as evolved and highly sensitive as white bodies. As part of the forced therapy session, Chris is paralyzed and cannot feel as deeply as the

⁶⁸ Jordan Peele, director, *Get Out*, Universal City, California, Universal Pictures, 2017.

⁶⁹ J. T. Roane, "Social Death and Insurgent Discourses in Jordan Peele's 'Get Out'", *Black Perspectives*, 27 March 2017, <https://www.aaihs.org/social-death-and-insurgent-discourses-in-jordan-peeles-get-out/>, accessed 29 December 2022.

white therapist. As Kyla Schuller shows, since the nineteenth century black bodies have been imagined as impermanent to change, and the capacity to feel impressions from external objects became a standard of racial superiority [...]. Chris is put in a state of heightened sensitivity because he does not have the resources to talk about his trauma.⁷⁰

To show this, a visualisation of sunken space is used. In a conversation with Popa conducted for the experimental-documentary video film *Insurgent Flows. Trans*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures* by Marina Gržinić and Tjaša Kancler (forthcoming 2023), which will also appear in the book *Political Choreographies, Decolonial Theories, Trans Bodies*, edited by Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek (forthcoming 2023), I have elaborated that the sunken space shows a mode of total alienation in the time of necrocapitalism. It is like a triple gaze that takes place here, and this reification of the alienated position gives another direction to the sunken space. It is not just about the experience of the film's main character, Chris Washington, who says, "I am losing my body", but we already see this process of being sucked dry by capitalism, not just by labour. What the regime of Whiteness wants from Black people is their minds. It wants their discourse, because the regime of Whiteness does not even have that anymore. We no longer have our vocabulary. But when that happens, it is not just a modernist alienation. It is an alienation as a volume, as a space, because we see it like a block in front of our eyes. This is a fantastic Marxist trope, because this kind of reification means that you do not stop talking about your practice.

We understand that things are already going on, that Black positions actually have to build a block if they are going to resist it, because they do not just have a feeling, they actually see their feelings in front of them, like a TV canvas.⁷¹ This sunken space (which is also referred to in relation to Peele's film as a sunken place) is much more than space itself, it is actually a necro three-dimensional

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⁷⁰ Bogdan Popa and Kerry Mackereth, "Vampiric Necropolitics: A Map of Black Studies Critique from Karl Marx' Vampire to *Get Out's* Politics of the Undead", *National Political Science Review*, 20 (3/2019), p. 171.

⁷¹ I elaborated on this in a conversation with Bogdan Popa; see Marina Gržinić and Tjaša Kancler, "Insurgent Flows. Trans*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures: A Conversation with Bogdan Popa", in M. Gržinić and J. Pristovšek (eds.), *Political Choreographies, Decolonial Theories, Trans Bodies*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming 2023.

space, a volume. This will also be my final thesis for a research direction on the changes in the topographies of spaces in necrocapitalism. Last but not least, this is now just the beginning, a necroliberal global “zero point” that calls for immediate further research.

Coda

I conclude that today we are dealing with a necropolitical procedure of a violent security logic that produces images of death that first require a different analysis of spaces and temporalities, of necrospace and necrotemporalities. It also requires a rethinking of the possibilities of resistance to these necropolitical procedures by those who are by no means mute, by no means mere victims, but subjects who have undergone a process of (de)subjectivation that, as Mbembe would argue, amounts to the process of the destruction of their own subjectivity.

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Disorientation in a Time of the Absence of Limits¹

Topological Subversion of the Inside/Outside Divide

In one of his most recent seminars, “Comment vivre et penser en un temps d’absolu désorientation?”, Badiou describes the major predicament of our time in terms of what he calls “the implacable disorientation of humanity”². This disorientation, according to Badiou, is due primarily to “the disappearance of any politics aiming at its disalienation with respect to the laws of the market that reduce existence to the dialectic of work and the commodity.”³ But if capitalism, even in its current disastrous variety, which has been called “authoritarian liberalism”, is far from collapsing, we should ask ourselves, “what are we being asked to be, for the sake of the planetary commercial order, so that we are willing to tolerate it without making too much of a fuss”?⁴ Capitalism has little to fear, claims Badiou, so long as it can rely on the individualistic obsession with being myself, which allows us to “imagine that we are free individuals”⁵. On the contrary, it is precisely this narcissistic cult that stands in the way of any attempt to think and practice that which is and must be common to all. Thus, in order to be able to come to grips with the current subjective disorientation, the first step towards a new orientation in thought and existence, as Badiou outlines it, is to

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² Alain Badiou, “Comment vivre et penser en un temps d’absolue désorientation”, lesson of 4 October 2021. Transcription available at http://www.entrettemps.asso.fr/Badiou/21-22.html?fbclid=IwAR1oOVauXtOuGfACRHIjSXRDLmBzDgRf87rpEQxokTe_gzC-5PakoiHack, accessed 4 November 2021.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

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break with the tyranny of liberal individualism, “the cult of the individual as the major prescription of the capitalist order”⁶.

Curiously enough, it is to poetry, which, for Badiou, is always at the service of any project of orienting oneself in thought and existence, that we have to turn, if we are to forge an idea of what a true politics can and must be, in view of its present disappearance. It may come as a surprise that Badiou might find one of the keys to the reconceptualization of such a politics in one of Emily Dickinson’s most famous poems from her earlier works:

I’m Nobody! Who are you?
 Are you—Nobody—too?
 Then there’s a pair of us!
 Don’t tell! They’d advertise—you know!
 How dreary—to be—Somebody!
 How public—like a Frog—
 To tell one’s name—the livelong June—
 To an admiring Bog!

In this poem, to follow Badiou’s reading, Dickinson exploits the possibilities of anonymity, impersonality and insignificance as a means to go beyond the “fetishism of the self” in order to build “a generic and egalitarian humanity”⁷ in which the nominally identified singularity of its members is of no account. In light of this, Badiou can boldly claim that the Ulysses-like proclaiming of “I’m Nobody!” is used by Dickinson, “this very first communist, without knowing it,” as a means to break with “the narcissistic imperative” with a view to building “a community of the anonymous”.⁸ While removing the burden of being myself, an individual taken in his/her singularity and thus incomparable to any other individual, may well constitute a necessary precondition for the possibility of the politics of emancipation today, it does not, by itself, provide a sufficient condition for what is thus atomized, disoriented humanity, in which each of its atoms is pinned to its proper place in the world by its proper name, to enter what Badiou calls “a community of the anonymous”.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

To clarify this murky point, it is in poetry, again, more precisely, in Pier Paolo Pasolini's poem "Victory", that Badiou looks for a guideline.⁹ It is revealing that Badiou reads it as "a manifesto for a true negation"¹⁰, which is not to be understood in terms of mere opposition, as the latter remains entangled with power and is, as a result, unable to propose the transformation of the structuring law of the world we live in, since such a transformation would require what Badiou calls "the creative dialectic of affirmation and negation"¹¹. In order to unpack the

⁹ Badiou quotes the following fragment from Pasolini's "Victory":

"All politics is Realpolitik," warring
soul, with your delicate anger!
You do not recognize a soul other than this one
which has all the prose of the clever man,
of the revolutionary devoted to the honest
common man (even the complicity
with the assassins of the Bitter Years grafted
onto protector classicism, which makes
the communist respectable): you do not recognize the heart
that becomes slave to its enemy, and goes
where the enemy goes, led by a history
that is the history of both, and makes them, deep down,
perversely, brothers; you do not recognize the fears
of a consciousness that, by struggling with the world,
shares the rules of the struggle over the centuries,
as through a pessimism into which hopes
drown to become more virile. Joyous
with a joy that knows no hidden agenda,
this army — blind in the blind
sunlight — of dead young men comes
and waits. If their father, their leader, absorbed
in a mysterious debate with Power and bound
by its dialectics, which history renews ceaselessly —
if he abandons them,
in the white mountains, on the serene plains,
little by little in the barbaric breasts
of the sons, hate becomes love of hate,
burning only in them, the few, the chosen.
Ah, Desperation that knows no laws!
Ah, Anarchy, free love
of Holiness, with your valiant songs!

In Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Poems*, selected and translated by Norman MacAfee with Luciano Martinengo, London, Random House, 1982.

¹⁰ Badiou, "Comment vivre et penser en un temps d'absolu désorientation".

¹¹ *Ibid.*

complexity of such a dialectic in a time in which politics seems to be impossible, it is necessary to examine the impotence of the two ways in which negation manifests itself today. There is, on the one hand, the fathers' negation, which can only lead to a status quo and a stalemate, a negation which is indistinguishable from acceptance of the existing situation, inasmuch as it admits that "the laws of history", as Pasolini points out, "are the same for us and for our enemies"¹². And on the other hand, there is the sons' negation. The latter is characterized by the rejection of their fathers' complicity with power. As a result, it is condemned to manifest itself in a series of destructive, yet entirely ineffective rebellions.

There is perhaps no better way to shed some light on the present unbinding of the (revolutionary, yet through their complicity with power, compromised) fathers and the (suicidal, rebellious) sons than to draw some lessons from an intriguing account of this impasse, which appears to be itself a direct consequence of the ruin of politics, that can be found in Jean-Claude Milner's book, *Constat*.¹³ In particular and crucially, Milner's account of this political deadlock corresponds to his larger account of a far-reaching mutation of the relationship between thought and the rebellion of the body. According to Milner, politics maintains its pre-eminence so long as it is grounded in the conjunction of thought and rebellion. What is meant by politics, is nothing less than the capacity of thought to produce material effects in the social field, the privileged figure of these effects being the insurrection of the social body. Seen from this perspective, the defeat or retreat of the emancipatory politics (in this reading, identified with politics *tout court*) that we have been witnessing since the 1970s reveals the powerlessness of contemporary thought to translate its effects into rebellion.

It should be noted, however, that this postulation of the thought-rebellion link suggests no 'natural' affinity between the two. On the contrary, if the emergence of the conjunction of thought and rebellion marks the break of modernity in the domain of politics, as Milner claims, this is only due to the fact that modern political thought, in opposition to classical thought which precludes the very idea of linking these two heterogeneous terms, is centred around their 'unnatural' union. Indeed, for classical political philosophy, grounded in the assumption of the unbridgeable gap between thought and the body, rebellion,

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Jean-Claude Milner, *Constat*, Paris, Verdier, 1992.

situated in the somatic moment rather than in thought, represents the impossible-real of politics and, thus, remains inconceivable. The linking of thought and rebellion, that is, of two ultimately incompatible entities, inasmuch as the latter is designated as the negation of the former, would, then, mark the invention of a new politics. Setting out from the assumption that there is no intrinsic bond between the body and thought, nor a common ground upon which they could initially meet, modernity is assigned the task of providing a basis for their conjunction. As Milner rightly observes, in the modern universe of science (this being a universe without beyond, a universe that knows of no limit and no measure), thought and rebellion cannot meet. Hence, a third instance must intervene to make their union possible. This task of grounding the binding of thought and rebellion is assigned, according to Milner, to ethics, or, to be even more precise, to the “ethics of the maximum”. This is because only an ‘extremist’ ethics, one that drives the subject beyond the possible into the impossible, that requires a finite, mortal speaking being to act as if s/he were immortal, can establish a link between thought and the body, thus providing a proper grounding for a politics that would constitute a proper way out in the infinite universe. Seen in this perspective, the way out, conceived as a politics of emancipation, appears to be less a matter of redemption, of repairing a wrong done to victims, than an experience of exploring the unheard-of, indeed ‘impossible’, possibilities of a given situation.

We can understand now why the emancipationist paradigm, so construed, is condemned to collapse once the alliance of thought and rebellion starts to falter and the process of their dissociation sets in. What is striking about Milner’s account is the judiciousness with which the negative implications of the process of disjunction, of the drifting apart of thought and rebellion that we are witnessing today, are brought to the fore: thought ceases to be politically subversive; worse, thought is worth its name only by being conservative, hostile to all forms of rebellion, while rebellion, on the other hand, is true to its nature only by expressing itself through a thoughtless, headless brutality. Put another way, thought marks the dissociation from rebellion by its growing powerlessness to produce material effects in the political and social field, whereas rebellion indicates its break with thought by turning into a resistance against thought, in short, by being the unthought. The present antinomic relationship between thought and rebellion can thus be accounted for in terms of a forced choice between ‘I am

(not)' and 'I am (not) thinking'.¹⁴ Confronted with the disjunction, according to which I am, the corporeal presence, there where I am not thinking and vice versa, rebellion assuredly opts for the 'I am' and therefore for the 'I am not thinking', suggesting that what is lost in this forced choice in any case is precisely a rebellious, emancipatory thought, a thought capable of inciting rebellion in the social body. This is evident in Badiou's comments on Pasolini's poem, insofar as that which in *Vitoria* is presented as a deadlock (namely the antinomy between thought and rebellion), is proposed as a first step towards a novel orientation in thought and existence.

For a politics of emancipation to be possible and adequate to the challenges of our time it is necessary to create the conditions for the possibility of an effective negation, one that would bring together fathers and sons, by mobilizing both, thought and rebellion. For this to be possible in the present situation in which politics is only conceivable in terms of *Realpolitik*, the seemingly unquestionable evidence, according to which "the laws of history are the same for us and for our enemies"¹⁵, must be put into question, otherwise, that is to say, under the present conditions, where all resistance turns inevitably into complicity with power, there is no hope for a politics that would truly challenge ingrained power structures. Thus, for a radical change to take place in our time, the rebellious nihilistic youth has to engage in a dialectic between the affirmation of a new world that would be liberated from the tyranny of the individual's tiny liberties, and the inevitable destructive negation, yet one that would be at the service of the affirmation of a new world.

Hence, what is required is an almost impossible topological operation. It is an operation by means of which, instead of with the relationship of pure exteriority between fathers – who, while being "responsible for the collective emancipatory orientation", that is, responsible for there being something like the thought of emancipation, by accepting the current *Realpolitik*, are guilty of being accomplices of power – and sons – who, let down by their fathers, are condemned to a thoughtless revolt, or, in Badiou's words, "a kind of collective nihilist suicide,"¹⁶ –

¹⁴ For further elaborations on the forced choice, see Jacques Lacan, *Logique du phantasme*, unpublished seminar (1966–67).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

we will be dealing with a relationship that will allow for a paradoxical continuity between the inside and the outside by bringing the outside into the very interiority of the political space and, vice versa, by pushing the inside towards an uncomfortable exteriority. But this is only possible if the figure of the father is split, divided between the “founding father”, so to speak, i.e., the law-instituting agency, and the father as the emancipatory agency striving for the transformation of the existing world. To be able to accomplish these two, at first sight incompatible tasks, the father, according to Badiou (and Pasolini), would have to adopt the stance of a paradoxical immanent negation, a kind of strategic posture of resistance. The figure of the son, by contrast, insofar as he is seen as the exteriority made flesh, since the son, according to Pasolini and Badiou, incarnates a thoughtless barbaric revolt, would, instead of being condemned to a pure exteriority which predestines him to suicide, be situated, precisely due to his exteriority, as an “extimate positionality” vis-à-vis the position of the subject required and modelled by the dominant discourse.

Before proceeding any further to a consideration of the implications of this diagnosis of the current impasse for contemporary thought and politics as well as for a possible way out of this predicament, we must examine what, if anything at all, psychoanalysis can offer in terms of a possible way out, insofar as psychoanalysis, like politics, confronts the problem of the subject’s disorientation. It is therefore necessary to see what psychoanalysis means by this notion. It is noteworthy that psychoanalysis tackles the problem of the current disorientation starting from the always traumatic encounter between the signifier and the body which orients psychoanalysis towards the singular, the “like no other”, the inassimilable, in short, the incomparable. The emphasis on the incomparable which, as the word itself makes obvious, is an objection to comparing, imposes on psychoanalysis the treatment of the singular as an experience of the absence of all criteria, of guarantees, in a word, as the experience of a kind of “destitution”, to borrow Lacan’s expression.¹⁷ It is worth noting that Lacan uses the expression “scattered” and “ill-assorted individuals” in order to characterize “those who are prepared to run the risk of attesting at best to the lying truth” in the pass that he refrains from imposing it “on one and all because, as it hap-

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¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *My Teaching*, trans. D. Macay, London/New York, Verso, 2009, p. 113.

pens, there is no all but only ill-assorted oddments.”¹⁸ We cannot but notice the distance that separates Lacan in his orientation towards the singular which targets the irreducible jouissance, the kernel, which is the most incomparable and the most real in each of us, and his quasi-scientific ambition in the “Proposition on the Psychoanalyst of the School” that refers to the “culmination of experience, its compilation and elaboration, an ordering of its varieties, a notation of its degrees.”¹⁹ If psychoanalysis targets the singular, there is no matheme for this, only the singular, incomparable ways of naming something that appears to be unsayable. Does the focus on the singular, incomparable, inassimilable inevitably point to relativism?

At first sight, it may seem that Badiou makes a similar point, but with a slightly different emphasis. The dominant ideology of our times that he calls “democratic materialism” is characterised by what Badiou terms its axiom rendered in a single, condensed statement: “*There are only bodies and languages.*”²⁰ As the globalisation of relativism, the epoch of democratic materialism can be described as the post-truth epoch. The very term “post-truth”, which inscribes truth in a temporal dimension, clearly indicates that the era of truth is somehow behind us, thereby marking a remarkable devaluation of truth. Hence, if the reference to truth seems to have lost all of its authoritative appeal and power of conviction for contemporary subjects, this is precisely to the extent that the relationship to truth is grounded in a relationship to the Other and knowledge, both called into question and splintered into fragments with the emergence of a new symbolic order. Indeed, what characterises this new symbolic order that produces subjects as its effects is the inconsistency of the Other.

The Crisis of Belief and the Lying Truth

The inconsistent Other signals a major shift in the organisation of our world: from the universalist paradigm – according to which the world is organised by the master-signifier marking a constitutive exception that assures the unity and

¹⁸ Lacan, Jacques, “Preface to the English Edition of *Seminar XI*”, trans. R. Grigg, *The Lacanian Review*, (6/2018), pp. 25–27.

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, “Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School,” trans. R. Grigg, *Analysis* (6/1995), p. 8.

²⁰ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event II*, trans. A. Toscano, London/New York, Continuum, 2009, p. 1.

totality of the world – to the paradigm of globalisation and non-totalisability, a paradigm according to which the world is organised by a host of master-signifiers whose very multiplicity prevents the world from constituting a whole, a unity. Elaborating on the structural shifts in the symbolic order and the production of a social not-all, Lacan proposes a striking image of what he calls a “buzzing swarm” of S_{1s} : “From the *one-among-others* – and the point is to know whether it is any old which one – arises an S_1 , a signifying swarm, a buzzing swarm [...] the swarm or master signifier, is that which assures the unity, the unity of the subject’s copulation with knowledge.”²¹ A swarm without an outside is a much better image of our globalised world, which was made possible through a peculiar alliance between the discourse of science and capitalism that has produced a new figure of the master, one that is seeking to impose what could be called a subjective rectification on a mass scale. The image of our globalised world is that of a world that is both open to all, all-inclusive, so to speak, and hostile to exceptions. Evidence of this ambiguity that characterises the present conjuncture can be seen in the injunction of today’s superego, forcing the subject to find his/her position in the social bond by passively “accepting” a place that is already provided for him/her. In the globalised world, with its imposition of mass communication, where contemporary subjects have found themselves trapped in the contradictory demands for transparency, mass narcissism and the quantification of being, the dominant social bond is the negation of all bonds as it manifests itself as an untotalisable, open series of homogeneous, identical Ones.

Seen from the perspective of the inconsistency of the Other, the post-truth era can be considered to be an era emerging from a crisis in belief in the existence of the Other, which is to be taken in a twofold sense: as a belief in the Other’s authority (the Other of the Other, that is, the Other of Law) and a belief in the Other designated as the subject that is supposed to know. The contemporary subject does not want to know anything about this “condition of belief” without which no knowledge, and therefore no truth, are possible. Hence, the crisis of belief not only affects the Other. It also affects the subject. This can be seen in the fact that the failing belief in the Other and knowledge, considered as a distinctive feature of our profoundly unbelieving times, is accompanied by an

²¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX. On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. B. Fink, London, W.W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 143.

unprecedented rise in anxiety at the social level, as contemporary subjects who do not believe in the (existence of the) Other are singularly defenceless before the irruption of the real. With truth losing its power to name the real, the subject itself as a singular response to the real is becoming ever more precarious. Which is why, when faced with the erratic irruption of the real, contemporary subjects are condemned to a desperate search for certainties.

To shed some light on the present quest for certainty – the only option that appears to be open to the subject in these uncertain times – we should turn to psychoanalysis. It is noteworthy that, for Freud and Lacan alike, certainty is to be distinguished from belief, indeed, it should rather be situated on the side of unbelief. Lacan's elucidation of the Freudian notion of *Unglauben*, usually translated as unbelief, can help us clarify what appears to be an almost counter-intuitive opposition between belief and certainty. To grasp what is at stake in belief, according to Lacan, we have to distinguish between “the divided subject”, who believes, and “the subject supposed to know”, to whom we grant credit. Unbelief, by contrast, is not simply the negation of belief; as Lacan clearly points out, it “is not the *not believing in it*, but the absence of the term in which is designated the division of the subject.”²² To the extent that unbelief refers to the absence of the first element constitutive of belief – the divided subject – what characterises unbelief, according to Lacan, is the solidity and the “mass seizure of the primitive signifying chain,” which “forbids the dialectical opening that is manifested in the phenomenon of belief.”²³ Hence, although paranoia seems to be stirred by belief, as Lacan notes, it should be situated on the side of unbelief since it is the latter which, due to the exclusion of dialectics between belief and knowledge, involves the search for certainty, which is one of the defining traits of paranoia. So, how are we to account for the present apparent decline of belief in the Other at the level of contemporary subjects, on the one hand, and the obsessive quest for certainty, on the other?

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While disbelief, suspicion, and a total absence of trust have been recognised by a number of contemporary thinkers as a telling sign of our profoundly unbelieving era, certain disquieting phenomena, such as the rise of conspiracy theories,

²² See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book IX, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, London, Penguin, 1979, p. 238.

²³ *Ibid.*

cannot simply be explained away by referring to the collapse of belief, but need to be related instead to unbelief – to be taken in the sense of *Un glauben*, a term used by Freud in relation to paranoia where blame is ascribed to the Other, who is considered to be responsible for the paranoiac's troubles. Distrust, one of the primary symptoms of paranoia, is now considered to constitute a common trait of contemporary subjects.

The phenomenon of conspiracism can certainly be seen as one of the most striking indicators of the frantic quest for certainties we are currently witnessing. In the current climate of incredulity, conspiracy theories arise from a drive for certainty whose true source is a paranoid defence against the real. This also explains why the contemporary subject prefers *automaton* to *tuché*, a term Lacan borrows from Aristotle to name the unpredictable, erratic encounter with the lawless real. The rise in contemporary conspiracism can be seen as a phenomenon resonating with the structure of paranoia in the Lacanian sense, where the delusional constructions of the paranoiac are precisely compensatory make-believes that try to fill the gap where the absent master signifier, whose role is to allow a socio-symbolic structure to constitute itself, should be. In this way, contemporary conspiracism both reveals the inconsistency of the Other and covers it up with the construction of a semblant of the master signifier. Because the master signifier is lacking, various scraps of the symbolic are used as temporary quilting points to restrain or contain the unbridled jouissance. In busying itself with the construction of the absent master signifier, conspiracism can be viewed as a delusional production of semblants of the exception in a paranoid attempt to hold onto the master's discourse. But contemporary conspiracy theories could also be seen as a response to the collapse of belief in the subject supposed to know. Designed to make sense of a chaotic, senseless world, conspiracy theories strive to fill the interpretative vacuum by promising to make clear what was once obscure and confusing. But in order to do so, conspiracy theories are obliged to postulate some evil Other whose scheming and machinations are responsible for otherwise inexplicable effects. This explains why distrust is the principal cause of conspiracism, and, indeed, it is precisely this trait that links it to paranoia.

Thus, in an era in which the Other is denounced as a semblant, we must understand what a semblant is, especially if we are to take our distance from the conspiracy theorists' approach where the semblant is nothing but a deceptive

appearance. In introducing the dimension of *jouissance*, Lacanian psychoanalysis allows us to consider the *semblant* as having three interrelated roles: firstly, it plugs the gap from which anxiety arises. Secondly, it is itself a form of *jouissance* or, more appropriately, a surplus-*jouissance* to the extent precisely that in a particular situation the subject prefers the *semblant* to the “real thing”, the absence of which it covers; characteristically, in allowing the subject to draw from it a certain amount of surplus *jouissance*, this experience outweighs the *semblant*’s deception, which is why the *semblant* is marked by a fetishistic disavowal: “I know, but all the same.” Thirdly, the *semblant* takes on the function of the quilting point. At the level of the symbolic, the phallus, the Name-of-the-Father, or the master signifier stands for the *semblant* of exception. Where conspiracy theories promise to finish with deceptive appearances in order to reach the real hiding behind them, the psychoanalytic approach does not claim to be able to access the truth of the real except by means of *semblants*.

But what status can be assigned to the real if truth is no longer the place where the real comes to be named and to be symbolised? Indeed, of which real does one speak today? Curiously, this question, i.e. What is the real?, while it might appear to be the inevitable departure point, is, in fact, a question that could not, or to be even more precise, should not be formulated, because, if we are to follow Miller, “the very form in which it is presented is not appropriate to the elaboration of the real as it imposes itself in the analytic experience.” This is because “the very procedure of definition” is one that “is appropriate to the search for a truth, whereas the real is not adjusted to this.”²⁴ Hence, properly understood, “the real is not adjusted to the truth,” nor therefore to an interrogation seeking the truth about the real by way of a definition. Its elaboration has to be pursued instead by an examination of the responses of the real.²⁵ This is precisely the path taken by Lacan, who gave various characterisations of the real in the course of his teaching, insisting on the very instability of the concepts by means of which he tried to localise the real proper to the analytic experience. Insisting on the variability itself of these solutions, Miller calls these variations “the amphibologies of the real.”²⁶ This is because the real does not always mean the

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²⁴ Jacques-Alain Miller, *L'expérience du réel dans la cure analytique*, 1998–1999, unpublished.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller, *L'Être et l'Un*, lesson of 2 February 2011, unpublished.

same thing in Lacan's use, which allows us to distinguish three principle conceptualisations that can be found in Lacan, as outlined below.

The first notion of the real forged by Lacan is one according to which the real is simply situated outside the analytic experience. The real here is a real prior to and exterior to the effects of the signifier, which is precisely what the analytic experience deals with. This preceding and exterior real is not to be confused with the psychoanalytic real, which, at the beginning of Lacan's teaching, is nothing but the signified itself. The real is considered to be meaning. The second notion of the real is one in which the real is situated from the perspective of the signifier. At this stage of Lacan's teaching, which addresses the alliance of psychoanalysis and science, the unconscious itself is deemed to be evidence that there is a knowledge in the real, hence the real presents itself under the guise of knowledge. And just as with the real in science, this real identified with a knowledge is a real regulated by a law. It is only with Lacan's final teaching that we are dealing with the "real" real since the real here is assimilated with the inassimilable traumatic encounter, to a *tuché* as essentially a failed encounter with the real.²⁷ In separating the real from the signifier and its laws, Lacan opens the perspective of "the real is without law."²⁸

This formulation of the real as something distinct from the signifier and from knowledge, that is, from the semblant, requires an interrogation of the psychoanalytic use of semblants. Because what is a practice of psychoanalysis that operates by no other means than speech, when the real is conceived as that which evades speech itself, as something that rebels against its powers and which, ultimately, excludes meaning? Lacan is bothered by the semblant as the inevitable access to the real in psychoanalysis to the point of questioning whether psychoanalysis, from the perspective of the semblant, could itself be nothing but a swindle:

Contrary to what is said, there is no truth about the real, given that the real is profled as excluding meaning. It would nonetheless be too much to say that there is such a thing as the real, because saying this is to suppose a meaning. The word real itself has a meaning, and I myself played with evoking the echo of the word

²⁷ Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 53–64.

²⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XXIII, Le sinthome*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, p. 137.

reus, which in Latin means culpable – one is more or less culpable of the real. This is why psychoanalysis is something serious, and it is not absurd to say that it could slide into becoming a swindle.”²⁹

It is precisely at this point that the relationship between truth and the real requires some additional clarification. If the Latin *veritas*, designating truth and reality, signals that these two notions, i.e. truth and the real, have been almost synonymous since the Middle Ages, today they have drifted apart. For psychoanalysis, the question of truth is therefore primarily the question of its articulation with the real. Hence, if the experience of an analysis still presents itself to the speaking being as a quest for the truth about his/her being, there is nevertheless a shift in emphasis: from a position that turns the truth of the unconscious into the *agalma* of the analytic experience, to a position that uncovers the incapacity of truth, indeed, its powerlessness to name the real, to name that which, for a speaking subject, irrupts as a meaningless, which is to say, impossible traumatic encounter with jouissance.

Thus, for the Lacan of the 1950s, “in psychoanalytic anamnesis, what is at stake is not reality, but truth,”³⁰ precisely to the extent that, in rediscovering the power of truth in our very flesh, an analysis allows true speech to restore the subject’s history where there had been a blank, an absence, and situates truth at the heart of psychoanalysis’s concerns since it aims to uncover the power of the truth in the speaking being’s body, because the truth of the symptom takes hold of the body, and inscribes itself in the flesh of the living body.

Yet, for late Lacan, the quest for truth would rather not only mark its inability to change anything in the existence of the subject, but would also make a hole into which the subject can fall, and from which it is up to the subject to try to pull him-/herself out, by undoing, through words, what was hollowed out for him/her in his/her existence. Thus, in discovering that truth is not the final word of the analytic experience, Lacan will be forced to explore the consequences of the untying of the truth and the real in his last teaching, yet this disentanglement of

²⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XXIV, L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile à mourre*, (1976–1977), lesson of 15 March 1977, published in *Ornicar?* (17–18/1979), p. 9.

³⁰ Jacques Lacan, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, in *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink, New York / London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2006, p. 213.

the true and the real will be accomplished not in the name of a post-truth, as one might assume, but rather in the name of a truth that holds onto the real.

This emphasis on the powerlessness of truth in grasping the real in psychoanalysis leads Lacan towards an examination of the effects of the signifier on the speaking body. Behind – or rather below – the effects of meaning that Freudian and early Lacanian psychoanalysis aims at deciphering and interpreting, there are effects that appear to be clearly meaningless and that psychoanalysis strives to circumscribe not via the signifier, but rather via writing. It is precisely the affinity between truth and the signifier, on the one hand, and the alliance between the real and the letter or writing, on the other, that leads Lacan to distinguish the domain of meaning as that of the signifier and the domain of the real as that of the letter: “Writing, the letter, is in the real, and the signifier is in the symbolic.”³¹

Lacan called this last version of truth – the truth with regard to the effects of an encounter with the real, i.e. a truth that aims at circumscribing what is written in the real – the “lying truth”.³² In this sense, truth is always, to some extent, of the order of fiction, but, paradoxically, it is only by means of this fiction that something of the real can be said. Truth therefore has a function in psychoanalysis on the condition that we start from its powerlessness rather than its omnipotence, as it is only by encountering what cannot be said that it evokes all that it cannot say; ultimately, on the condition that it recognises that about the real, it lies.

It is only on the condition of holding onto the impossible, only insofar as it aims at the real, that truth still has a role to play in psychoanalysis. As Lacan says in *Television*: “I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there’s no way to say it. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it’s through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real.”³³ For the truth that holds onto the real is the truth that does not seek to give meaning to a traumatic event, i.e. an encounter with *jouissance*, while starting out with the obscurity of its

³¹ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XVIII, D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, Paris, Seuil, 2006, p. 122.

³² Jacques Lacan, “Preface to the English Edition of *Seminar XI*”, trans. R. Grigg, *The Lacanian Review*, (6/2018), p. 22.

³³ Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. Joan Copjec, New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 1990, p. 209.

effects. It is that which sometimes leads the subject to invent a name in order to say the unsayable. A name that aims to say the impossible to symbolise it.

In Guise of Conclusion

If believing is to believe in the Other, then the loss of belief primarily concerns the domain of semblance, those phenomena, namely, that depend on belief, the phenomena that can be situated on the side of “make-believe”. In this respect, the role of the semblant is that of a defence against the disruptive real. The current climate of incredulity and the total loss of trust can be explained by another essential feature of our times: that of a generalised semblantification. The contemporary subject, enlightened by deconstruction and cultural relativism, already knows that there is no such thing as “objective reality”, that reality is a symbolic construction. For this subject, who, because he/she does not believe in the Other, demands certainty, i.e. proofs, everything is semblance, a make-believe.

If psychoanalysis is being profoundly reconfigured in its continuous effort to bring its theory and practice up to date, it is crucial that psychoanalysts, as interpreters of our time, a role Lacan ascribed to analysts in guiding the subject through the evolution of semblants of civilization since the mutation of the Other of civilization leads to a modification of the modality and usages of jouissance,³⁴ take account of the profound change in the matrix of civilisation captured in Lacan’s condensed formula: “There is no Other of the Other.” Indeed, for psychoanalysis, the crisis of belief, insofar as it affects the semblant, raises the question of how to operate in times of incredulity and a lack of belief in the Other with the means proper to psychoanalysis, that is to say, with semblants.

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Analytic discourse does not lend itself to any form of mass subjective rectification, because it draws its power precisely from what is demassifying. Rather, psychoanalysis accompanies the subject in his/her protest against the discontents of civilisation. The task of psychoanalysis is to accompany the subject in his/her solitude, in his/her own exile, there where only the One all alone exists.

³⁴ “Psychoanalysis has played a role in the direction of modern subjectivity, and it cannot sustain this role without aligning it with the movement in modern science that elucidates it.” Lacan, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” p. 235.

But this path is not without risks. Instead of interpreting the subject based on his/her sayings, slips of the tongue, contradictions, psychoanalysis today grounds its interpretation on what the body “says”, i.e., on *jouissance* that affects it. It is as if psychoanalysis sets out from the assumption that it is the body that tells the truth, rather than the subject whose speech always fails in saying it all.

This may explain Lacan’s move that concludes one of the chapters in *Seminar XX*: “The real ... is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious.”³⁵ Although it may seem that in his last teaching Lacan claims that the speaking body is the unconscious, this may appear to be misleading. Indeed, Lacan was extremely careful in making this distinction. Referring to this point, Lacan claimed: “It is to the extent that the unconscious is not without reference to the body that I think the function of the real can be distinguished from it.”³⁶ This distinction allows, in addition, a further distinction, namely a distinction between the effects of the signifier on the speaking body: there are, on the one hand, the traces of the signifier that affect the subject that have produced the effects of meaning and, on the other hand, the traces inscribed on the body that have produced *jouissance* effects. Consider the following remark by Lacan: “The drives are the echo in the body of the fact that something is said.”³⁷

It is in light of this partition that Lacan can separate truth, whose reference is language, and the real of *jouissance*, whose reference is *lalangue*, the embodiment of the meaninglessness of the real to the extent that the signifiers of which *lalangue* consists are to be taken in their materiality, i.e., in their pure senselessness. In this regard, the term “symptom” is best suited for the signifier insofar as it aims at meaning, whereas the term “sinthome”, which incarnates the invisible, yet ineffaceable mark that is the remainder of the impact of the signifier on the body of the drive, to borrow Miller’s formulation, “pushes-toward-oneism”. Disconnected from the unconscious that calls for interpretation and meaning and detached from the Other, the sinthome is an invention of the speaking being that provides him/her with an identity, or, to be more exact, singularity, incomparability at the level of the *jouissance* of the speaking body. The One that

³⁵ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX. Encore, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge (1972–1973)*, p. 131.

³⁶ Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre XXIII, Le sinthome*, p. 135.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

is in question here is the one that stems from the singularity of *jouissance* of the speaking-being, *parlêtre*, that is to say, from what separates him/her from other Ones.

In dealing with the one-all-alone that is centred on modes of immediate *jouissance* that necessarily excludes the social bond insofar as the latter supposes both exchange and its misunderstandings, psychoanalysis appears to provide to the speaking being an apology for irresponsibility. In a society that is organised around the real produced through the alliance of capitalism and science only the day to day counts: hedonism, where *jouissance* for all would immediately curb *jouissance* of the *parlêtre*. Paradoxically, psychoanalysis in taking seriously its mission, i.e., to be part of this world, would not provide a solution, a way out, by manufacturing made-to-measure *sinthomes*, according to each singularity. This is not a solution precisely to the extent that it succeeds in reducing the *sinthome* to a semblant. One of the challenges to psychoanalysis in the era of the inexistent Other and the lawless real is rather the question of knowing how knowledge and time are to be tied together in order to obtain “*donc*”, therefore, that will stop the endless metonymy that characterises the world of globalisation. If “the question of the contingent future is the very place where the tension between knowledge and time becomes extreme,”³⁸ than the paradox that psychoanalysis has to deal with today is that only the contingent can become the limit of the *jouissance* offered in the current scientico-capitalistic conjecture. And it is up to the *parlêtre* to counter it, bypass it, quash it or, on the contrary, to make use of the *sinthome* which, despite the fact that it pushes towards the one-all-alone of the speaking being, can also provide a solution that allows the speaking-being, *parlêtre*, to deal more or less efficiently with social relations with others.

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³⁸ Jacques-Alain Miller, “L’orientation lacanienne: Donc” (1993-1994), lesson of 1 December 1993 (unpublished).

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Cindy Zeiher*

Sensation(all) Ontology¹

I'd like to start with what we can call the problem of extimacy (*extimité*), which centres on the mixture of how 'inside' and 'outside' allows for the specificity of both knowledge and *know-how*. Here we are exploring how extimacy articulates the problem of traversing knowledge into *know-how*, that is, a praxis of truth of the symptom. Such a praxis harnesses knowledge of the unconscious as a specific knowledge which affords boundless, repetitive jouissance. However, the perception of ourselves as subjects in the world is never immediate – as Freud observed, “truth is complicated and not particularly obvious”². As divided subjects we must contend with the distinctive, disorienting Lacanian gaze in order to contend with his proposition that the “unconscious is outside”³.

What precisely are we dealing with here? On the one hand, the unconscious – the cause of the symptom – is inside and feels internal to the subject – dreams, slips of tongue and other parapraxes emanating from the symptomatic body. Such parapraxis is a replication of an articulation which stands out *verbatim*: the symptom literally speaks. On the other hand, these very symptoms are oriented outwards towards the Other. Thus as we crawl around the Möbius Strip being careful not to trip here or fall off the edge there, we know that there is no smooth pathway out of the symptom. We are both Kafka-esque like bugs crawling along the Möbius strip, weaving in and out of its coil unable to find our way and simultaneously traumatic witnesses to this stupid repetitive act of chasing our tails. Even when we can rise above ourselves, all we see is the symptom's

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² Isidor Sadger, *Recollecting Freud*, trans. A. Dundes, Madison, University of Wisconsin, 2005, p. 19.

³ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Porter, London, Routledge, 1992.

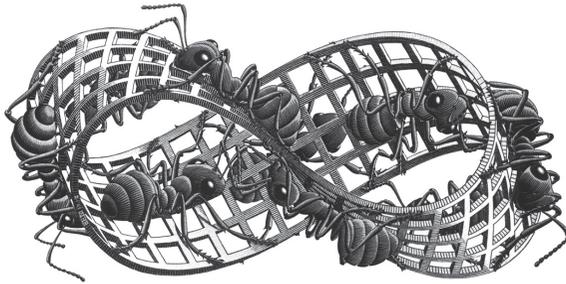
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insistence on repetition, a symptom we count on to perpetuate our search for something, anything which might pertain to knowledge which enables us to take up a subjectivity of knowing *how* to be in the world.⁴

At this point we can say that while the subject may not know about their symptom, they certainly suffer from it. This specific knowledge is justified by being a lexicon within everyday life, yet it is at the same time opaque. That is, the formation of the symptom is beyond the reach of the ego, but the ego is not altogether aware of this and pushes for the unconscious tendency to repeat. It cannot be easy for us in our search for knowledge, to admit to knowing nothing else but to repeat (our initial relationship to truth), because as we travel along the Möbius Strip only to return to where we started, knowledge remains the elusive object of the drive which all the while structures mastery of manoeuvring along the strip's continuous surface. It is important to remember that the purpose of the drive (*Triebziel*) is not so much to reach a final destination, but rather to follow its way, which is to circle round the object, this being the attainment of knowledge. And here we have the perfect entry into *know-how* (praxis) which encompasses the elements of the knowledge drive. The desire to know, to seek knowledge is a constant force which is taken up rhythmically, building momentum into desire which is at the same time unconscious yet physical. That is, one has to do something in order to find out about things which remain elusive and just out of reach. In this way for Lacan, the Möbius Strip is a metaphor for the subject's relationship to their desire to know something, to possess this object we name knowledge.⁵

⁴ Thank you to Jelica Šumič-Riha for here reminding me of the tradition of Walter Benjamin, which maintains that all discourses allow us to be opaque and enigmatic subjects in the world, willing dupes to our imaginary Other. As a further association, in Brecht's poem, *On Suicide* subjective enigma is discarded in favour of complete and utter realistic destitution, powerfully realised in Hanns Eisler blending of words with sound as specifically arts for the commons. We can even say that the Brecht-Eisler's fate-determining qualities of their characters assemble the subject as a repetition of the drive and towards a coherence of endurance. Brecht, Bertolt, "Über den Selbstmord", *The Brecht-Eisler Song Book*, Michigan, Oak Publications, 1967. To continue this thread, I am also reminded of Lacan's reference to Louis Aragon's poem, *Contre-chant* in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Here Lacan captures the symptom relationship between unconscious truth and its discontinuity: "Je suis ce malheureux comparable aux miroirs". Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1981, p. 17.

⁵ It is important to distinguish between drive and instinct – the latter we can think of as flight or fight whereas the former does not harbour such a preserving quality, being inter-



The Möbius Strip as Lacan's specific topology illustrates how opposites are intrinsically bound in a repetitive and conflicting dialectic. Such a conflict exists as the centre is always shifting and 'outside' of the subject. As David Pavón-Cuéllar says, "exteriority is intimacy, but intimacy, as exteriority, is rather an 'extimacy', that is no longer either intimacy or exteriority."⁶ The strip itself is narrower than we think, this path we tread is precise and to veer off it means certain death or at least, demise of subjectivity. Each time we repeat the journey we are guided by the traces we left when we walked the same path many times before. This path, much like our conception of what we think we know, is somehow comforting because it is already trodden and somewhat familiar. For the divided subject who is struggling to reconcile this journey of repetition which encompasses two gazes (the well-worn path ahead and the outer gaze which attempts to look for a horizon), the question arises of which gaze to trust amidst the somatic upheaval of *jouissance*. This is the ultimately unanswerable question, *che vuoi?*, unanswerable because the question itself captures us in an excessive anguish of *jouissance*. This immanence of *jouissance* brings together the divided subject's necessary relation with the extimacy which structures their division. *Jouissance* is described by Lacan in Seminar VII as "not purely and simply the satisfaction of a need but as the satisfaction of a drive"⁷.

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For Lacan desire implicates *jouissance* as a question addressed to the Other – *what can I be for the Other?* – and emerges from the split between need and

pellated into the Symbolic Order via its own repetition.

⁶ David Pavón-Cuéllar "Extimacy", in T. Teo (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, Springer, New York, NY, 2014. Available at <https://www.academia.edu/4374516/Extimacy>, accessed 10 October 2022.

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Porter, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 209.

demand for satisfaction. However, what does the subject do when, for one reason or another, negotiating the narrow well-trodden strip evokes not comfort of what is presumably known but only the pain of *jouissance*? Is the subject then catapulted into some sort of void, thereby putting at risk the symptom, which although not always reassuring is at least reliable? To be clear the symptom anchors the unconscious subject, it provides a fixed reference point from which the subject can handle and enjoy their singular symptom emanating from the unconscious. For the neurotic this transpires as the marking of the oedipal procedure: what kinds of template slide across their life, what choices mark their desires and frames their *jouissance* as a singular way of being in the world? Put simply, the symptom is the way in which the subject attempts to return to that which they have repressed whereas the unanalysed subject, normally unaware of their symptom, enjoys it but without knowing what to do with it. The subject is most present when they do not think but must at the same time struggle with the revelation of something unacceptable to the ego. It is here where the unconscious haunts and hunts the subject. The desire of psychoanalysis begins with this very ontological curiosity as the object of the drive.

But first, what exactly constitutes the symptom? It is a form and a force that without realising it we are bound to go on repeating, something not far removed from libidinal fixation in so far as we are repeating what has been repressed, and the act of repetition allows a somewhat clumsy, partial access to repressed memory, that is, the fundamental fantasy from which desire springs. At the same time the symptom does us a favour in at least allowing us go on living in a complex world – doing this and that, thinking, having relationships, falling in love, experiencing desires to take up particular subjectivities and so on. We could say that while the subject certainly identifies with the symptom this is not so much a given as a cultivation of identification supported by the Symbolic Order. At the same time, although ever present, the symptom doesn't function smoothly in that it can present as a companion who is alternately amiable and annoying. It is important also to understand that the symptom dates back to infancy when the subject as a child was confronted with the psychic trauma of individuation. From this arose the symptom which by ensuring subjectivity remains divided provides the psychic logic to cope with such alienating trauma. It is important to be clear about the origins of the trauma we are referring to arising from the realisation that one is allowed to express sexual energy to anyone else – except one's mother or father, the very source which marks original desire. Hence the impor-

tance of the symptom, which the analyst with great care both preserves and puts to work establishes the specificity, the exactness of *jouissance* being triggered in the analysand. This is the knowledge – of what makes the analysand tick – that through transference the analyst seeks. In addition, we might speculate that during transference it is not only the analysand's symptoms which are engaged but also those of the analyst's curiosity to find out what motivates the analysand. Such a transferential transmission can only take place and be sustained if the analyst wholly assumes the position of the *objet a*. It is up to the analyst to listen for the signifier, catch it, then throw it back to the analysand, time and time again until the analysand realises that what they are catching is something with little, if any substance. It is the psychic nature of this procedure which is what keeps the analyst curious and listening. Following the analysand's destitution a different psychic work begins, one which enables the subject to live (as much as possible) on their own terms. Thus if the subject repeats, they know what they are repeating and if they do not repeat, then they know what they are making a cut into. Either way the subject is handling knowledge of their *jouissance*. Here psychoanalysis has enabled the subject a *know-how*.

Prior to undergoing analysis, the analysand may presume that knowledge always has the upper hand, and not without reason since what we don't understand we are likely to repeat – we repeat without knowing but with full knowledge that we don't know what exactly we are repeating. We might either know something, think we do when in fact we don't, or just don't know at all. Socrates addressed this problematic when maintaining that we both know and don't know at the same time. Freud and, later, Lacan suggested that we act with the knowledge we *think* we have, an apparently conscious one which is nevertheless driven by unconscious forces in which repetition is retroactively constituted and reified by the fidelity to repeat. Freud is clear on this compulsion to repeat when he says,

What interest us most of all is naturally the relation of this compulsion to repeat to the transference and to resistance. We soon perceive that the transference is itself only a piece of repetition, and that the repetition is a transference of the forgotten past not only to the doctor [psychoanalyst] but also on to the other aspects of the current situation. We must be prepared to find, therefore, that the patient yields to the compulsion to repeat, which replaces the impulsion to remember, not only in his personal attitude to his doctor [psychoanalyst] but also in every oth-

er activity and relationship which occupy his life at the time – if, for instance, he falls in love or undertakes a task or starts an enterprise during the treatment. The part played by resistance, too, is easily recognised. The greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering.⁸

Here the symptom comes in very handy in giving repetition a trajectory but with a distinctive nuance which imparts to our otherwise familiar journey along the Möbius Strip an uncanny feeling of newness. This is what gives a certain pleasure to the journey's repetition of subverting linear space and oppositional forces. It is important not to forget that such a resistance to binary opposition is the project of psychoanalytic praxis. Inside/outside; signified/signifier and so on, are not so distinctive as categories from which the conscious/unconscious can be clearly articulated. Although we've been here before, there is now in our journey a hope of experiencing some new satisfaction. In this way the symptom promises an ever-better, new and improved jouissance, one in which pleasure eclipses pain or offers just enough pain to enhance pleasure. The symptom is here ticking along nicely, engaging with fantasies and declarations, acts and resistances, while jouissance is harbouring what can be called the visceral kernel of knowledge: *I know because I can't help but feel it*. This is a knowledge, a play of the symptoms which is immanent, manifesting in the material body as a condition of it. That such knowledge lies beyond language is precisely what characterises the feminine in Lacan's graph of desire – in Seminar XX⁹ Lacan talks at length about this, especially as it applies to feminine jouissance. Yet there are those, Freud and Lacan tell us, who know all about jouissance, where to find it, where to get it, and who to take it from. This pervert's position attempts but fails to make feminine jouissance into subjective *know-how*. However, if we stay with the hysteric's discourse in which jouissance should always remain a question, we can say that we thrive on jouissance, indeed that it constitutes our very subjectivity at least until the analysand reveals to the analyst the anguish of the symptom and the desire to be free from the painful part of their jouissance. Lacan illustrates this compulsion to jouissance – even when the stakes are high such as the realisation that one enjoys being in a bit of pain – in Seminar VII

⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through", in *Further Recommendations in the Technique of Psychoanalysis II*, trans. J. Riviere, New York, Basic Books, 1914, p. 6.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. B. Fink, New York, Norton, 1999.

Suppose, says Kant, that in order to control the excesses of a sensualist, one produces the following situation. There is in a bedroom the woman he currently lusts after. He is granted the freedom to enter that room to satisfy his desire or his need, but next to the door through which he will leave there stands the gallows on which he will be hanged... As far as Kant is concerned, it goes without saying that the gallows will be a sufficient deterrent; there's no question of an individual going to screw a woman when he knows he's to be hanged on the way out...¹⁰

So, we can deduce that one must make a decision in the above fantasy whether or not one is Kantian, especially should such a fantasy become an actuality. But more than this, the promise of *jouissance* not only eventually fails to please the subject (either way – guilt or death) but the subject feels duped by their compulsion towards this choice. Such an inside/outside dilemma captures Lacan's neologism of *extimacy* (*extimité*) as an uncanny internal feeling which is at the same time radically externalised to objects. Samo Tomšič's uptake of the problem of the *extimate* is notable for its succinct conceptualisation of the word 'extimacy':

The infrequent occurrence of this term in no way diminishes its critical value, which lies above all in its union of contraries. The prefix "ex-" marks a register that precedes the distinction between the intimate (subjective) and the public (intersubjective). Instead of describing the opposite of intimate—as the prefixes "in-" and "ex-" would normally suggest—the *extimate* pinpoints a specific modality of the intimate, the emergence of an element of foreignness at the intimate core of the subject. One could think here of the feeling of *Unheimlichkeit*, or uncanniness, which according to Freud has a sense of both the proximity of foreignness and familiarity.¹¹

What exactly is happening when we think of *jouissance* as uncanny, that is, inside and outside the subject? It is not simply that *jouissance* is not working when it unpleasant or disappointing; rather, on the contrary, it is working only too well, with direct access to the subject firmly in place, continuing to give enjoyment albeit within painful limits. Knowledge of the symptom remains elusive because the repetition of *jouissance* is too fascinating for it to be closely scru-

¹⁰ Lacan, *Seminar VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 108.

¹¹ Samo Tomšič, "The Ontological Limbo: Three Notes on Extimacy and Ex-sistence", in N. Bou Ali and S. Singh (eds.), *Extimacy: Encounters Between Psychoanalysis and Philosophy*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press (Forthcoming 2023) (unpaginated).

tinised. That is, until the pain inherent in the orgasmic pleasure of *jouissance* begins to obtrude in hurt and heartbreak. What now? This is where the original function of the symptom, in particular the effect of it on the divided subject *vis-à-vis* the original psychic trauma, provides a way forward. Until the advent of trauma the subject works with such knowledge as a speaking being in the world may have. The inheritance of language provides a tool which fixes the subject within the paradox of Lacan's gaze-drive. That is, the uncanny experience of being caught both within (ours) and outside (imaginary Other) the gaze also means that we are subjects of our singular *jouissance*.

At this strange conjuncture we can put words to those objects and subjects which circulate us and which we in turn circulate. When such a relation touches on the Real, as Lacanians are fond of saying, it is heartbreaking because what follows is the terrible realisation that perfect knowledge of language and what to do with it, is but a fantasy. Our traumatic breaking away from the inevitable disappointment of the limits of language – the very thing we are thrust into prior to our birth – brings with it a different kind of knowledge, one which for us as subjects of *jouissance* causes disorientation and confusion by throwing knowledge into chaos and what we think we know into destitution. Here we are dealing with two radically different kinds of knowledge: the first is dependent on the Symbolic Order, (in order to be in the world, we need to invest our symptoms relationally) whilst the second comprises a different language drawn from the subject's experience of *jouissance* resulting from their particular symptom. Although these kinds of knowledge are radically different both are necessary: one cannot reach full or true speech without at the same time full immersion in the repetition of empty speech.¹²

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Here the work for the analysand truly commences in putting the symptom to work in order to embrace a different knowledge. If we are to grapple with the Kantian choice Lacan puts to us, then we could say it is not the fantasy of choice which throws us into psychic chaos, but rather that the choice itself is not even

¹² For those of us on the couch and/or in psychoanalytic training, this moment of radical language transition becomes abundantly clear when we face our own symptomatic contradictions: the cut is most apparent not when we choose to stop believing in the bullshit of the Other, but rather when we stop believing in our own bullshit and thus not be complicit in the bullshit of the Other. The uptake of this radical knowledge position resulting from full/true speech has a permanent and sensational effect.

viable one in the first instance. This is what hurts the most: such a proposition can be thought of as more Pascalian in that the choice has already been made and accommodated as distinctly extimate. The extimate contours of the divided subject are here activated: the extimate being a space inhabiting the uncanny which is also new yet familiar. What is most important for the subject on their well-trodden path around the Möbius Strip is that the extimate *feels* uncanny. In this uncanny space one is free to feel bewildered and confused yet not so much that it is incapacitating. The spectre of the uncanny needs to appear to come from the ‘outside’, taking the subject by surprise but then disappearing, only to reappear later...

As mentioned, the intimate exterior is often referred to as the extimate space. Jacques-Alain Miller puts it succinctly when he says, that “(e)xtimacy is not the contrary of intimacy. Extimacy says that the intimate is Other-like a foreign body, a parasite”.¹³ Pavón-Cuéllar elaborates on this duality of extimacy:

Extimacy indicates the nondistinction and essential identity between the dual terms of the outside and the deepest inside, the exterior and the most interior of the psyche, the outer world and the inner world of the subject, culture and the core of personality, the social and the mental, surface and depth, behaviour and thoughts or feelings.¹⁴

It is a space somewhat akin to a vortex or riptide: once something is caught up it continues to circulate in a flurry of repetition. Although disorienting, the subject remains aware of being and feeling caught. Prior to all this, knowledge for the subject is situated externally and oriented to the subject’s desire for mastery whilst retaining a residual suspicion of it. This is the Hysteric’s discourse wherein the Master (who represents the extimate other as the one who is “something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me.”¹⁵ is closely examined and knowledge is configured through a dialectic between agency and causality. Such knowledge not only captures but also undermines the subject because its under-

¹³ Jacques-Alain Miller, “Extimacy”, *The Symptom*, 9, (2008). Available at <https://www.lacan.com/symptom/extimacy.html>, accessed 10 October 2022 (unpaginated).

¹⁴ David Pavón-Cuéllar, “Extimacy”, in T. Teo (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, Springer, New York, NY, 2014. Available at <https://www.academia.edu/4374516/Extimacy>, accessed 10 October 2022.

¹⁵ Lacan, *Seminar VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 71.

pinning dialectic has to be repeated countless times before the subject can make any sense of it. It is disconcerting for the subject, especially when on the couch and willingly rendered into *jouissance*, only then to be reminded that the symptom which has kept one nicely ticking over, won't work in the same way forever. This reminder that we are not mere divided subjects of knowledge but rather divided subjects of *jouissance* is unnerving and not really always enjoyable.¹⁶

In this context the Lacanian catchphrase 'enjoy your symptom!' appears overly vitalist, even somewhat stupid because there is nothing enjoyable about repeating the anguish of the symptom which is no longer working as it used to do. This is the moment wherein *know-how* gains traction: where identification with blind enjoyment of one's symptom is less about enjoyment and more about unconscious knowledge that one is wrestling and reconciling with one's mode of *jouissance*. It is here that one either knows what one enjoys or more poignantly, what one loathes enjoying when enjoyment begins to diminish. It gets even worse for the subject in that knowledge of one's symptom is not about mutual recognition but rather what Lacan refers to as a misrecognition which one is compelled to repeat in the quest for elusive recognition. It is at this point the subject must contend with the ethical kernel of psychoanalysis: the extimate and not entirely knowable space which captivates and nourishes us into a false sense of security about who we are and the knowledge we have or presume we have.

Generally speaking, and unsurprisingly, such destabilisation logically signals the end of analysis, especially since, as Jacques-Alain Miller insists that "in no way can one say that the analyst is an intimate friend of his analysand. The analyst, on the contrary, is precisely extimate to this intimacy".¹⁷ Only the most masochistic and pessimistic could bear continuation of such psychic misery, so for some this is where the analytic procedure ends. Yet not always as for both analysand and analyst there lingers a strange sense of unfinished business and curiosity as to what might constitute different subject positions: for the analysand who is desperate for a *jouissance* which works, any other subject position is viable, and for the analyst, finally, there is a gleam of insight into which

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¹⁶ I am situating the subject as Hysteric here – but of course, the subject can be positioned as an object for enjoyment such as in sadism where supposed *know-how* of short-sighted sensation is overdetermined.

¹⁷ Miller, "Extimacy", (unpaginated).

knowledge structure makes the analysand tick. Furthermore, the analysand is provoked by what might happen when they are curious as to the transition from one knowledge position to another. It is this specific desire which keeps transference in place; the analysand returning to the couch and the analyst listening. We can say that this is the praxis of the extimate, where the analysand has the intermittent ability to gaze upon themselves. This metonymic procedure, where two gazes slide into and across each other allows a double perspective: alongside the fantasy the subject has about themselves as a knowledge subject, the subject also slides into another discourse framed by the Other.

Bearing in mind that the *jouissance* which continues to torture us holds a kernel of truth whilst the knowledge which has been represented to us by the Master has a fictional quality, we are led to confront subjectivity as no more than a chain of signifiers, a schema which speaks, sometime politely but sometimes obscenely to the symptom. Here we can say that the inside/outside extimate space is structured like a sensation, which gives ground to the not-all of subjectivity. That is, we experience that which is at the limit or edge of thinking the symptom, of the symptom sliding across into another domain, as a sensation which cannot altogether be put into words.

What has been described so far is the subject's experience of anguish, something not exclusive to those undergoing psychoanalysis since everyone must contend with anguish, especially when it manifests from desire, error, folly, trauma and so on. It is traumatic simply being a subject in the world. Such anguish is usually met with an affective reaction of some sort, for instance that our anguish must have an underlying validation which restores a degree of dignity. Such a relation or search for meaning invokes the Hysteric's discourse which looks for the right inscription to mark our anguish and lay it to rest so that we can comfortably resume tantalising our *jouissance* as before or the memory of good *jouissance*. What we are here attempting through invoking discourse is to rein-'state' our mark (whose inscription has left us with) on to the designated subject-supposed-to-know. This keeps us not-all-knowing subjects who are driven by the desire to know something.

Let us take a close look at how knowledge is inscribed and how one takes up this inscription. For Lacan, language is inscribed in us before we are born. That is, because we are born into language, we have no choice but to take it up, oth-

erwise our very subjectivity is cancelled – we go to gallows. Upon birth we enter the field of signifiers and systems which uphold them – family, institutions, words, thinking, rituals and so on – already in place and through which we can take up knowledge as a discourse ‘to know’. We become attuned to them because they are embedded in social life so as to maintain the social bond. As life continues, we come to embody them, for instance by finding passions, falling in love, cultivating talents, experiencing desires, attending to our curiosities, all in the name of an inscribed knowledge which logically requires us to maintain that knowing is something we ‘do’. We trust not only this knowing but also its effects, that is, those traces which stick to us as subjects. Although we would like to think that we exercise discernment about what kinds of knowledge we want to accept, knowledge nevertheless operates as the great external generaliser which bonds us. Such an inscription of knowledge is for us profound in so far as we inscribe again and again whatever we think affords us the certainty of an external coherence to our subjectivity. The more we progress our knowledge, the more of it we think we continue to acquire. However, our experience as subjects of knowledge is – as Freud contended – overrated (no wonder Freud enjoyed the story of *Don Quixote*, the man who thought he knew everything about women only then to realise his total ignorance of feminine jouissance! One is here reminded of the amusing line indicative of Phallic jouissance as a force which somehow transcends desire in the name of brave deeds: “Those whom I have inspired with love by letting them see me...”). To presume one’s knowledge is complete or at least on its way to completion is an obvious stupidity: we are better off putting knowledge to the test by first admitting that although our curiosity is contingent on the acquisition of knowledge, we initially know nothing, not even about ourselves. Freud was himself especially curious and felt it his ethical duty to act on behalf of the less curious by keeping the traumatised analysand on the couch and their analyst listening. For the analysand, the question of how can I live the life I imagine the other to have, transforms into a more urgent question of knowing: with such knowledge as I have, how can life be bearable under its savagery of jouissance?

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My claim here is that we seek truth to short-circuit knowledge which is so incredibly savage. To be clear, the psychoanalytic thinker is on par with the philosopher in that they both seek truth. However, the mechanisms and locations for such truth are very different. The Freudian-Lacanian looks to the truth of the unconscious. Here in our quest for knowledge neither (sometimes) dizzying di-

alectic nor its antithesis, common sense is necessarily of much help. However, Lacan's metaphoric topology of the Möbius strip as one continuous surface can help us traverse this fantasy of knowledge, especially when it is too savage for the subject to bear. For Freud and Lacan, knowledge has more to do with sensation than with sense, sensations being the repetition of acts which don't make completely conscious sense but whose satisfaction comes from suffering the symptom. In *Three Essays in Sexuality*,¹⁸ Freud contends that we know little about what makes up any claim to either normality or abnormality. Notwithstanding Freudian psychoanalytic theory has biological – even positivistic – roots, Freud insists that there is nothing natural about sex in so far as our knowledge of it is a construction derived from the influence of significant others, authorities such as parents, morals, social taboos and so on. This construction enables knowledge of how one identifies as a sexed subject in the world, how sexuality functions – or ought to, how in the repetition of daily life we unconsciously resist such knowledge to take up a taboo position. For Freud whether we resign to the gallows or enjoy our desire with another is neither here nor there: we live knowing that what we desire may be the death of us. We unwittingly give ourselves to desire: everyone has made Freudian slips when saying one thing and meaning another; everyone has forgotten something which is important to remember; everyone has had a nightmare or an erotic dream. All such sensations belong to parapraxis, the emerging pathology of what is knowable in the unconscious. They are neither merely distractions nor are they counterpoints supporting so-called legitimate knowledge. Instead, for Freud and Lacan these sensations demonstrate a logic and knowledge of their own precisely through their opacity (that is, from symptom to *sinthome*). They are a repetition of what is repressed and are unable to be simplified or domesticated through the Master's discourse. Thus the problematics of uncertainty, unpredictability and indeterminacy become hallmarks of a knowledge of which the subject would do well to be curious, even and especially if this is destabilising and hurtful. Freud wanted to normalise psychoanalysis as science on the couch, a project then refined by Lacan into a praxis or method for knowing rather than a science. This method is concerned with thinking and putting the symptom to work which is potentially a hurtful, even savage project little appreciated by the academy because during psychoanalysis the unconscious can be brutal in enabling the uptake of a very

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. J. Strachey, London, Imago, 1949.

different position regarding knowledge and knowing. In this process subjective division becomes all too real, widening more and more until the subject surrenders to the sacrifice demanded by psychoanalysis namely recognition or acceptance that the subject-supposed-to-know is also a castrated divided subject. The savagery of this realisation – usually occurring when one gets a glimpse of the (unshared) desire of the other – is accompanied by the strangely life affirming framing of desire as a specific ontological form with which the subject must now engage. To elaborate, this is the true trauma (sensation) for the Hysteric who can go along with a fantasy, even in speech. The acting out or actuality of the fantasy is the traumatic tipping point. That is, obtained jouissance is hardly satisfactory.

In this Lacanian ontology the subject is one of lack, a gap which symptoms attempt to fill with a feeling of wholeness or at least a fantasy of wholeness.¹⁹ This is how the ontological structure of Lacan's symbolic order is founded. In replying to Jacques-Alain Miller's question, "what is your ontology?"²⁰ Lacan drew attention to the gap as itself the ontology. In, *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through* ²¹Freud points towards direct access whereby the analysand can return to earlier situations, where once unconscious forgotten traumas become a normalised conscious procession. Freud says, "When the patient talks about these 'forgotten' things he seldom fails to add: 'As a matter of fact I've always known it; only I've never thought of it.'"²² As a pointed example of unconscious repetitious acting out which stands in for the forgetting, Freud remarks, "...the patient does not say that he remembers that he used to be defiant and critical towards his parents' authority; instead, he behaves in that way to the doctor [psychoanalyst]".²³

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Part of what makes unconscious knowledge that is uncovered in the transferential relationship (which is arrived at and produced by the analysand at the end of analysis) so potentially savage are the very defences which it engenders in us. Why do we feel the need of defences? The answer is that desire, being a law

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XXVI. Topology and Time, 1978-1979*, trans. D. Collins, Unpublished manuscript, p. 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through", p. 2.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²³ *Ibid.*

unto itself entices us to live beyond our means, keeping us in a symptomatic repetition which is bound to fail either in fantasy or actuality. Hence the purpose – even duty – of psychoanalysis, is that of helping us transform desire and the management of *jouissance* into something akin to a tolerable life. As Verhaeghe and Declercq assert,

A psychoanalytic cure removes repressions and lays bare drive-fixations. These fixations can no longer be changed as such; the decisions of the body are irreversible.²⁴

They elaborate on this claim in a footnote,²⁵

This instance is the Real of the body, that is, the Real of the drive. This Real of the bodily drive is independent of the subject; it is an instance that judges and chooses independently: *Ce qui pense, calcule et juge, c'est la jouissance*. [Translated by original authors as: “What thinks, computes and judges, is the Enjoyment.”]²⁶

This is not easy and sometimes feels impossible, especially in the extimate as a psycho-ontological space of transition between knowledge discourses which reveal their circulation and conflicts. It is as much a bodily experience as it is psychological. Here the object (that which is thrust into the domain of desire and which was once thinkable, at least) is reconstituted on realising that no object will ever fill the gap, not even that of knowledge. We come to understand when transitioning discourses that life is still possible even when not filled with gap-filling objects. We might be curious to invest in the sensation of Lacan's extimate ontological space (a ubiquitous form for psychoanalysis) but at the same time try to remain impervious to it and its effects. The extimate nature of Lacan's ontology ensures that we are always somewhat lost in both it and the signifiers it produces. Furthermore, although it is a fantasy that we can be sovereign from, it, at least fantasy triggers the very anxiety needed in grappling with the savage abundance of *jouissance*, one which is so affective, it causes a momentary sen-

²⁴ Paul Verhaeghe & Frédéric Declercq, “Lacan's Analytical Goal: “Le Sinthome” or the Feminine Way”, in: L. Thurston (ed.), *Essays on the Final Lacan. Re-inventing the Symptom*. New York, The Other Press, 2002, p. 62.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XXVI. Topology and Time, 1978-1979*, p. 9.

sation of having it all, which is either confirmed or refused within the extimate space of which this ontology is constituted.

I'd like to riff on this notion of having it all, of feeling a sensation(all) drive towards chasing one's desire. For psychoanalysis, Lacanian ontology shifts the focus from the object to sensation manifesting from discontent, anxiety, and the desire for wish-fulfillment. All the objects and experiences which make social and intimate life possible prepare those fantasies which enable us to put our senses to work. Inevitable discontinuity between the pragmatics of life and fantasy are not bridged by objects but rather by understanding the conditions from which objects are made intelligible, notwithstanding that eventually objects become fragmented or even discarded the more one distances oneself from the knowledge previously invested in. What emerges is not synchronicity between one's external and internal world, but rather a better way of handling jouissance in the contradiction emanating from being situated in the psycho-ontological extimate. Jouissance – always a visceral sensation – can be understood not as an abridged version of the split subject but instead as emanating from difference in how one is taking up a new knowledge in which the lost object resurfaces bearing a different inscription. Thus even knowledge of one's deception is an ontological sensation apprehended within the extimate. In this way we can think of ontological sensation as an initial visceral experience of an extimate logic drive. By providing both jouissance and its limits, this is where psycho-ontology takes place and realised as being *in* service to the subject.

Lacanian theory proposes that jouissance, the enjoyment of the symptom, emanates from the subject's division, from the not-all. It is important to note that jouissance is a concept many Lacanians resist translating. Adrian Johnston²⁷ puts such resistance under scrutiny when he discusses the distinction between 'jouissance expected' (full mythical jouissance which is imagined) and 'jouissance obtained' (pleasure which falls short), claiming that given Lacan located jouissance as beyond the pleasure principle, it necessarily bypasses the mitigation of the ego. Simply put, the ego cannot enjoy or is incapable of enjoying jouissance. Jacques-Alain Miller offers a functional exposition of jouissance when he says

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²⁷ Adrian Johnston, "The Forced Choice of Enjoyment: Jouissance between Expectation and Actualization", *The Symptom*, 2 (2002). Available at <https://www.lacan.com/forcedf.htm>, accessed 10 October 2022.

that it is “precisely what grounds the alterity of the Other when there is no Other of the Other. It is in its relation to *jouissance* that the Other is really Other.”²⁸

We could say that for satisfaction and frustration to not only occur but also to be contained within the domain of *jouissance*, the extimate acts as a vector for such libidinal investment to be reiterated. This circulation is all in the name of knowledge as an object, also as an orientation towards it manifesting as a strange satisfaction in two kinds of knowledge. Firstly, that of the subject-suppose-to-know (the knowledge presumed to be already known) and secondly, that of the subject-supposed-to-soon-know (the knowledge yet to come). It is not only knowledge itself which is captivated, and which provides *jouissance* but rather these are two unmoving ever-present simultaneous symptoms. These are firstly, subjective desire to articulate something about what is supposedly known (that is, for the knowledge to speak for itself via the subject and in so doing to grapple with what needs to be explained). Secondly, it is the subject’s strange and unsettling curiosity which accompanies this differentiation and which manifests as a powerful drive in which pleasure and displeasure, intimacy and the social bond, appropriation and alienation are all simultaneously invested as a contradictory and traumatic necessity.

The function of curiosity especially about the symptom is the foundation to any psychoanalytic inquiry. Indeed, it constitutes the method and desire of psychoanalysis. The question concerning the location of truth is straightforward for psychoanalysis: the truth it is so curious about resides in the unconscious. Here, curiosity as a specific drive is an unyielding floating attention which navigates subjective frustration about what can be known and the trauma of what can’t. Samo Tomšič again offers that “[t]he drives, then, are fictions, which nevertheless explain the causality pertaining to language, the disturbances and the disequilibrium that the functioning of the symbolic order produces in the speaking body, in short, the production of enjoyment.”²⁹ Thus drive does not seek to address empirical questions (notwithstanding these are what often attract the analysand to the couch – how and what do I need to be for the other?) but rather it is simply an inscription in the name of *jouissance*, one which ill-fits either the production of knowledge or the social bond. For example, the social bond

²⁸ Miller, “Extimacy”.

²⁹ Tomšič, “The Ontological Limbo: Three Notes on Extimacy and Ex-sistence”.

doesn't deal with trauma particularly well when issuing judgement rather than seeking for a cure. The radical idea that knowledge is a fantasy provides the foundation of Lacan's 1967 proposition in Seminar XI. In this proposition Lacan contends that the analyst trusts not how well one can articulate a narrative of their supposed knowledge, but what constitutes the desire for this articulation. Both Freud and Lacan approach knowledge from a new and original perspective in which knowledge is a fantasy whose function is to keep the curiosity of one's *jouissance* alive. In political terms this might translate into: what is everyone getting off on, is everyone delusional? Although in the earlier Lacanian position the signifier of knowledge negates *jouissance*, contemporary Lacanian theory, following *Encore* frames the symptom as coexisting with *jouissance* through producing enjoyment via speech. Considered as a bodily event, we can think of *jouissance* as the vessel which contains the too-muchness of the confrontation with the not-all. What this means is that the subject suffers from not only the symptom but from over-attachment to its effects. This all-encompassing sensation is the motor of the drive allowing repetition of that which, in the search for knowledge of *jouissance*, seems impossible to master. It is here that *lalangue* – those elements of speech which on their own are non-sensical (radically outside meaning) but which are nevertheless components of speech, for example phonemes, sounds, stutters, prefixes and so on – is operationalised as a great non-sense mystery. This is what allows us to manage both *jouissance* and its effects differently. Put simply, trying to articulate one's *jouissance* can feel impossible, partially sensical only when it is half said, unreferenced, not fixed. This leaves the sensation of speech (and language) as forever unfinished yet always ready to be taken up again.³⁰ Lacan observes that

³⁰ It is worth marking the bodily foundation of the symptom as a specific linkage to *lalangue*: “We must start with Lacan’s contribution. There is language and it is structured. It acts as a brake on *jouissance*; it is used for speaking, communicating and constructing our fictions. Then there is *lalangue*, that is, the material consisting of sounds, phonemes and words in their raw state and not articulated into the structure of a discourse – material that collides with living bodies. *Lalangue* is something that is endured or suffered. It is a passion. Human beings are the patients of this encounter between *lalangue* and the body. It leaves marks on the body. What Lacan calls ‘the *sinthome*’ is the substance of such marks. These are events, bodily events. Man has a body, and events occur within this body” Bernard Porcheret, “The Bodily Roots of Symptoms”, *Psychoanalysis/Lacan*, Lacan Circle of Melbourne, 2022, unpaginated. Available at <https://lacancircle.com.au/psychoanalysislacan-journal/psychoanalysislacan-volume-1/the-bodily-root-of-symptoms/>, accessed 12 October 2022.

[t]he drives are our myths, said Freud. This must not be understood as a reference to the unreal. For it is the real that drives mythify, as myths usually do: here it is the real which creates [fait] desire by reproducing in it the relationship between the subject and the lost object.”³¹

The myth that the body is a site for knowledge can be traced back to fragments of language which present but a tenuous connection with what needs explicit linkage. Russell Grigg understands myth as “a fictional story woven around a point of impossibility.”³² Esther Faye further comments “that the drive is not only a fundamental concept, it is a fundamental fiction – it performs a fundamental and fictional function in relation to the real. This highlights the necessary artifice of the drives – the way in which what in itself is un-representable – the real from which desire is born – gets represented, or rather, acquires its representative through the drives.”³³ Such fragments are what constitute *lalangue* and are in themselves meaningless, satisfying nothing and producing suffering, confusion and disorientation. The subject’s fixation is on meaning and the possibility of identification with an intimate part of oneself, notwithstanding that suffering feels strangely detached and outside the body. Here we have the real of the symptom in action: *jouissance* without meaning. Psychoanalysis works not with the knowledge one purports to have but with the symptom, the strange sensation of too-muchness. Engaging the signifier as the site of some specific knowledge, as Lacan advocates, binds the body with the signifier. In psychoanalysis these are not unbound but separated allowing the signifier to speak to unconscious rather than to material forces. But from the perspective of subject-supposed-to-know, curiosity as the main instigator for knowledge is foreclosed because of the presumption that one already knows and therefore has no need to traverse anything. Here *jouissance* can be understood as an economic as well as a psychic problem in that it structures one’s curiosity about one’s symptom: Psychoanalysis is an ontological sensation which marks knowledge as a question of *jouissance*. Such a drive is certainly symbolically productive (providing one does not fall into cynicism) and validated by the very sensation of it. Jan

³¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. B. Fink, New York, London, W.W. Norton, 2006, pp. 723–724.

³² Russell Grigg, “Beyond the Oedipus Complex”, in J. Clemens and R. Grigg (eds.), *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 55.

³³ Esther Faye, Esther, “The Real of the Drive”, *Analysis*, (2014), p. 1.

Völker³⁴ purports a logic of curiosity in his ontology of speculation as two distinctive yet combined forms extending beyond the materiality of life. It is at this speculative fork in the road Völker marks the commencement of Freudian psychoanalysis about what later becomes Lacan's construction of the enjoyment of the symptom:

The most important passage for this can be found in the famous 1921 text, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Following a synopsis of various problems in the theoretical construction of psychoanalysis, Freud marks an interruption: 'What now follows is speculation, often far-reaching speculation, that each one will appreciate or neglect according to their particular attitude...'³⁵

Later in *Four Fundamental Concepts* Lacan offers that subject's orientation to the speculation of the symptom "is properly the other, appears in so far as the drive has been able to show its circular course."³⁶ Such speculation provides for our desire to be curious about our drive. The subject navigates the grammatical ontology of the Möbius strip with two oppositions in mind: firstly, another Lacanian neologism *non-sense* (which nevertheless harbours a sensical logic) and secondly the *non-sensical* as a rejoinder (a suturing point of knowledge based on presumption, ambivalence, or convenience) which together give meaning to the life of the neurotic – arguably also the perverse and psychotic. The psychoanalytic cure allows for *non-sense* to be a source of knowledge by allowing the subject to get lost in it for a while until its initial unthinkability becomes less fantasmatic as psychic defences start disintegrating, together with the compulsion to be sensical, to attribute coherent meaning to symptoms – to put the non-sensical to work. Nevertheless, what also happens when navigating the Möbius strip and thereby taking up another position in relation to knowledge, is that the subject gains intimate knowledge of their symptom and its function in the repetition of a composite of unconscious knowledge and conscious knowing. This constitutes a specific drive for the subject of psychoanalysis thrust into the throws of the 'impossible profession', to play along with un-

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³⁴ Jan Völker, *Geteiltes Denken: Marx, Freud, Kant, Hegel*. Habilitationsschrift. Eingereicht am Fachbereich Philosophie und Geschichtswissenschaften der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main im Fach Philosophie, 2022, p. 211.

³⁵ From unpublished manuscript in original German, *Geteiltes Denken: Marx, Freud, Kant, Hegel*. Translation by C. Zeiher.

³⁶ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 9.

certainty. In this situation the signifier acts as a supportive logic of a subjective sensation vital to the rationale of transference, which invites identification with a tantalising knowledge to be known. Here the Real is allowed to take over and only time can reveal the evolution of a new subjective knowledge and its sensation(all) effects, inevitably absolved as a *know-how* which is not-all.

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Varieties of Perversion

Peter D. Mathews*

The Pleasures of Unpleasure: Jacques Lacan and the Atheism Beyond the “Death of God”

During a discussion of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) in *Seminar XI*, Jacques Lacan pauses to observe that “the true formula of atheism is not *God is dead* [...] the true formula of atheism is *God is unconscious*.”¹ Characteristically, Lacan resumes his analysis without any further clarification, leaving it to commentators to fathom the significance of this statement. Oliver Harris, for example, argues in *Lacan’s Return to Antiquity* (2016) that Lacan is referring to the scientific reduction of the divine to a reality-producing machine, “passing no judgements, making no commands” yet silently “holding everything together, underwriting the coherence of the world.”² Harris’s reading makes sense in light of the discussion of the Cogito in *Seminar XI*, in which Lacan observes that “Descartes inaugurates the initial bases of a science in which God has nothing to do.”³ Christopher Watkin offers a different explanation in *Difficult Atheism* (2011), observing that Lacan is expressing the disparity between the atheist’s belief in freedom from divine mastery and the continuing effects of unconscious prohibitions.⁴ Rather than “God is unconscious,” however, Watkin is describing the enduring effects of a father/god whose authority is reinforced (rather than abolished) by death. Lacan regards this “God is dead” form of atheism as unviable because “the father’s murder” remains “the condition of *jouissance*,”⁵ a negation in which “the more you perceive yourself as an atheist, the more your

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¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. Sheridan, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 59.

² Oliver Harris, *Lacan’s Return to Antiquity: Between Nature and the Gods*, London and New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 138.

³ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 226.

⁴ Christopher Watkin, *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux*, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh Press, 2011, p. 93.

⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. R. Grigg, New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2007, p. 120.

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unconscious is dominated by prohibitions which sabotage your enjoyment.”⁶ The “death of God” fails because it spoils the freedom and enjoyment that the abolition of the paternal law was supposed to achieve.

The challenge, then, is to implement “the true formula of atheism,” to articulate an atheism that goes beyond the death of God.⁷ For Lacan, this process requires a new ethics of pleasure, which he formulates through a rereading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and by examining earlier modes of desire, from courtly love to Greek tragedy, to see what made those historical attempts to generate *jouissance* so successful. Alenka Zupančič notes, for instance, how the Greek gods are now read not as supernatural beings, but as symptoms of the real. Their role in the tragic drama is to create “a certain impasse of desire,” resulting in an “absolute antinomy between the signifying order and the realm of *jouissance*.”⁸ In contrast to the easy gratifications of the modern world, Lacan’s interpretation of tragedy shows how this divine frustration of human desire generates and intensifies *jouissance*. The Greek gods thus perpetuate the interplay between pleasure and unpleasure that underpins the possibility of enjoyment with a caprice that is unconscious rather than negative.

Pleasure and Unpleasure

In his critique of modern pleasure in *Seminar VII*, Lacan situates his work on the ethics of psychoanalysis as a response to a new emphasis on freedom in political and ethical philosophy during the eighteenth century. Lacan points, in particular, to the emergence of the “man of pleasure,” a subject of liberated desire who assumes pleasure can be explored and tasted without limits.⁹ The paradoxes produced by this “man of pleasure” distinguish this mode of human desire in all its modern peculiarity. The liberation of desire unexpectedly foregrounds the death drive, the beyond of the pleasure principle, a paradoxical longing for

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⁶ Slavoj Žižek, “God is Dead, but He Doesn’t Know It: Lacan plays with Bobok”, 4 April 2009, Lacan.com, accessed 23 February 2022.

⁷ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 59.

⁸ Alenka Zupančič, “Ethics and Tragedy in Lacan”, in ed. J.-M. Rabaté, *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 174.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. D. Porter, New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 1992, p. 3.

unpleasure and destruction that would have baffled the ancient world. “Would Plato have understood what psychoanalysis was about?” ponders Lacan. “No, he wouldn’t have understood it, despite appearances, because at this point there’s an abyss, a fault, and this is what we are in the process of looking for, with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.”¹⁰ This “fault” or “abyss” is not new to human desire, but the “man of pleasure” has made its existence conspicuous in the modern world.

The unfolding discovery of the “beyond” of the pleasure principle is traced by Lacan through the timeline of Freud’s intellectual development. In *Seminar II*, for instance, he talks about why Freud began, from 1920 on, to develop his metapsychological model, which “has been misread, interpreted in a crazy way by the first and second generations following Freud – those inept people.”¹¹ Freud’s new model, he contends, is a response to the decline of Freud’s therapeutic success during the second decade of the twentieth century. Unlike his initial success, when “subjects recovered more or less miraculously,” Freud finds the treatment of his patients increasingly difficult, leading to a “crisis of analytic technique.”¹² Lacan suggests that the “new notions” Freud develops arise not only as a response to this crisis, but also as a theoretical attempt “to maintain the principle of the decentering of the subject.”¹³ This gesture was widely misunderstood as a revival of the “*autonomous ego*”¹⁴ – Freud’s attempt to decenter the subject thus led to the opposite result, a *recentering* of the ego among many of his followers.

Lacan then makes the surprising claim that “Freudian metapsychology does not begin in 1920. It is there from the very start.”¹⁵ The decentering of the subject, the paradoxes of desire, the perverse pull of unpleasure, all of these elements are already in Freud’s earliest writings, from his letters to Wilhelm Fliess to the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Rather than following the conventional

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Techniques of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. J.-A. Miller and J. Forrester, trans. S. Tomaselli, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

idea that Freud's metapsychology dates from 1920, therefore, Lacan argues that we should instead see this stage as "what might be called the last metaphysical period" of Freud's thought.¹⁶ "For this period," contends Lacan, "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the primary text, the pivotal work. It is the most difficult."¹⁷ Lacan is reiterating a position described nearly twenty years before in "Beyond the 'Reality Principle'" (1936). Commenting on Freud's earliest outlines of his thought in *The Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), Lacan observes:

The first sign of a submission to reality in Freud's work was the recognition that, since the majority of psychical phenomena in man are apparently related to a social relations function, there is no reason to exclude the pathway which provides the most usual access to it: the subject's own account of these phenomena. [...] If we wish to recognize a reality that is proper to psychical reactions, we must not begin by choosing among them; we must begin by no longer choosing.¹⁸

According to Lacan's interpretation, the Freudian division between the pleasure and reality principles has been entirely misunderstood. The reality principle is not something external, but rather operates as part of the subject, working to diagnose what is unpleasurable and therefore, presumably, undesirable. "It is thus worth recalling that, from the outset, Freud did not attribute the slightest reality as a differentiated apparatus in the organism to any of the systems in either of his topographies," observes Lacan later in *Écrits*.¹⁹ The conclusion from Lacan's various remarks is that the reality principle has not only been misunderstood but also misnamed: it has nothing to do with external reality, and everything to do with what Dennis Porter pointedly translates with the neologism "unpleasure" (*déplaisir*).

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Lacan's commentary in *Seminar II* must therefore be reinterpreted in the context of Freud's early work, which dramatically reconfigures the relationship between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Understanding the reality principle as one of *unpleasure* helps to distinguish it from the narcissistic desires of the pleasure principle. Whereas the pleasure principle is what the ego wants,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. B. Fink, New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2006, p. 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

the reality principle is what the Other wants – or more accurately, what the ego *imagines* the Other wants. “[T]he reality, so to speak, of each human being is in the being of the other. In the end, there is a reciprocal alienation,” observes Lacan.²⁰ Even more surprising is that, far from the two principles being in opposition, Freud saw the pleasure and reality principles as aspects of each other. “It never occurred to him that there wasn’t a pleasure principle in the reality principle,” says Lacan. “For if you follow reality, it is only because the reality principle is a delayed-action pleasure principle. Conversely, if the pleasure principle exists, it is in conformity to some reality – this reality is psychic reality.”²¹ Lacan’s interpretation that the reality principle, by withholding or denying what the pleasure principle wants, is not trying to thwart desire but to prolong and intensify it, is a revolutionary rereading that nonetheless makes sense when applied to the practice of desire.

In the game “Odd or Even,” for instance, my opponent’s aim is to create unpleasure by denying me the satisfaction of winning the marbles. Yet it is precisely the opponent’s refusal that keeps the game interesting *for my own pleasure*: an opponent who too easily reveals their hand is an unsatisfying partner. My gratification is thus predicated on the infliction of unpleasure by the other, my partner in the game. The pleasure principle ceases to function once a level of satisfaction has been reached and, to this end, it needs the opposing principle of unpleasure:

The pleasure principle – the principle of pleasure – is that pleasure should cease. Within this perspective, what becomes of the reality principle? The reality principle is usually introduced with the simple remark that too much pleasure-seeking ends in all kinds of accidents – you get your fingers burnt, you get the clap, you get your face smashed in. That is how we have the genesis of what is called human learning described to us. And then we are told that the pleasure principle is opposed to the reality principle. In our perspective, that obviously acquires another meaning. The reality principle consists in making the game last, that is to say, in ensuring that pleasure is renewed, so that the fight doesn’t end for lack of combatants. The reality principle consists in husbanding our pleasures, these pleasures whose aim is precisely to end in cessation.²²

²⁰ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, p. 72.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

In other words, the reality principle, by bringing unpleasure to the subject, prolongs the game of pleasure to revive and preserve the flame of passion. Unpleasure, the failure to get what we want, is thus, paradoxically, what we need to feel that the fulfillment of our desire has been enjoyable.

Pleasure, it turns out, is not satisfying in and of itself. Only when pleasure is accompanied by unpleasure, by an outcome that we do not desire, can passion truly be inflamed. For desire, “it is the wrong form which prevails,” says Lacan. “In so far as a task is not completed the subject returns to it. The more abject the failure, the better the subject remembers it.”²³ This rotating cycle of desire and unpleasure also explains why Freud emphasizes the importance of repetition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, most famously in the *fort-da* game played by his grandson, Ernst. Ernst uses a cotton reel as a symbolic substitute for his absent mother, resulting in a repetitive game in which the boy imagines himself controlling her absence (*fort*) and presence (*da*). “The object is encountered and is structured along the path of a repetition – to find the object again, to repeat the object,” explains Lacan. “Except, it is never the same object which the subject encounters. In other words, he never ceases generating substitutive objects.”²⁴ A further dimension of the work of unpleasure is thus revealed: not only does it prolong the game of pleasure, but it also provides the subject with the sensation that the scenario of desire has been renewed, so that even when the same objects or players are involved, they nonetheless feel like a new iteration. For Lacan, this interplay of pleasure and unpleasure constitutes the central drama of the human psyche, a repetitive but infinitely variable game.

The Gods Belong to the Field of the Real

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Like the reality principle, Lacan’s theorization of the “real” must similarly be read as a function of the symbiosis of pleasure and unpleasure, rather than as a product of the opposition between reality and illusion, or truth and falsehood. As such, the real “in its dialectical effects” is felt as “originally unwelcome,” he states in *Seminar XI*.²⁵ The real can never be grasped directly, for its manifestations are only glimpsed through its effects on the imaginary and symbolic.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

²⁵ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 69.

The real is beyond the automaton, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is always that which lies behind the automaton, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of his concern.²⁶

The reality principle, by contrast, describes the subject's way of *handling* the contingencies of the real, this "obstacle to the pleasure principle" which ensures "that things do not turn out all right straight away."²⁷ The conditions of modernity have made humanity increasingly fascinated with the real, with the effects of unpleasure – not because of a wish to experience unpleasure for its own sake, but from a surfeit of easy pleasures.

Lacan explores this condition through the problem of nihilism in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), in which Fyodor Dostoevsky explores how the abolition of God leads humanity not to universal freedom, but to the contrary emotion of feeling imprisoned by life. In an essay in *Écrits* reflecting on criminality and psychoanalysis, Lacan links Dostoevsky's final novel to Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and Nietzsche's announcement of the "death of God" in *The Gay Science* (1882), arguing that all three authors exhibit the increasingly common symptoms of modern humanity's unexpected loss of pleasure in the face of unrestrained freedom.

We can understand why Freud [...] wanted to demonstrate the origin of universal law in the primal crime in *Totem and Taboo* in 1912. Whatever criticism his method in that book might be open to, what was essential was his recognition that man began with law and crime[...] [...] The modern face of man was thus revealed and it contrasted strangely with the prophecies of late nineteenth-century thinkers[...] [...] To the concupiscence gleaming in old man Karamazov's eyes when he questioned his son – "God is dead, thus all is permitted" – modern man, the very one who dreams of the nihilistic suicide of Dostoevsky's hero or forces himself to blow up Nietzsche's inflatable superman, replies with all his ills and all his deeds: "God is dead, nothing is permitted anymore."²⁸

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁸ Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 106.

The fundamental oversight of the “man of pleasure” was the erroneous belief that abolishing all rules and limits could lead humanity to a state of unrestricted freedom and pleasure. What the repressive aspect of the law obscured was its other crucial role in the regulation of desire in the form of unpleasure, without which the enjoyment of pleasure becomes impossible. “[W]e analysts know full well that if God doesn’t exist, then nothing at all is permitted any longer,” reiterates Lacan in *Seminar II*, again alluding to *The Brothers Karamazov*. “Neurotics prove that to us every day.”²⁹ What is neurosis, after all, but a longing for unpleasure when pleasure has been emptied of all meaning, the result of an ego that always, tediously, gets what it wants, but never on the terms that it can actually enjoy?

In the godless universe shown in Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Freud, the human being experiences a life of interminable, neurotic dissatisfaction, in which pleasure is constantly available but enjoyment is forever out of reach. In *Seminar XI*, however, Lacan utters another enigma when he says that the “*gods belong to the field of the real*,” a statement that is not connected in any way to the supernatural.³⁰ Instead, what Lacan is saying is that the divine, in its identification with the real (unpleasure), refers to a domain beyond the ego. The gods may have originally been born as human creations, as Feuerbach posits, but they have since gained an autonomy that makes them representatives of the forces of chaos and unpredictability, beyond the control of human existence. When Lacan is talking about the “gods” or “God,” therefore, he is not referring to “the good old God” of Christianity.³¹ These terms refer exclusively to the real, to the principle of unpleasure that curtails the ego in order to produce and regulate human desire.

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Lacan is fascinated by how this divine function of unpleasure is built into the ancient structures of myth and religion, regularly encouraging his audiences to learn the lessons of the past by returning to earlier discourses in the modern context of psychoanalysis. If religion was a symbolic system ultimately designed for the creation of *jouissance*, then the decline of religion and the advent of athe-

²⁹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, p. 128.

³⁰ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 45.

³¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 68.

ism in the modern world have ushered in an age of greater access to pleasure, but also a diminished enjoyment of it, according to Lacan's diagnosis. As such, it is the task of psychoanalysis to rediscover enjoyment without a regression to illusion and superstition. That is why in *Seminar VIII*, for example, Lacan locates Freud's discovery of the unconscious in a new relationship to the "divine":

If the discovery of the unconscious is essential, it is because it has allowed us to extend the field of messages we can authenticate, in the only proper meaning of the term, insofar as it is grounded in the domain of the symbolic. In other words, many of the messages that we believe to be opaque messages from reality (*réel*) are merely our own. This is what we have reclaimed from the world of the gods.³²

This approach demystifies the gods, showing that modern humanity now recognizes that what it mistakenly thought were the supernatural messages of the divine were merely the profane echoes of the Other. Lacan nonetheless locates this Other outside the control of the ego, and thus capable, regardless of its lack of true divinity, of functioning as a regulator of desire. Indeed, for Lacan, cultivating this function of unpleasure is often the primary role of the competent psychoanalyst. An analyst may allow themselves initially to be imagined as a divine, omniscient entity, a "subject who is supposed to know" in Lacanian terminology, but this preliminary idealization is the predicate to the "unwelcome" experience of disillusionment that ultimately, unhappily, opens the way to a possible cure. The unpleasure that the analyst provides to the neurotic by introducing them to the experience of the real is precisely what allows the analysand to rediscover the interplay of desire, and with it their lost feeling of enjoyment. Another version of Lacan's rereading of the divine function can be found in *Seminar XX* in the session titled "God and Woman's jouissance," in which Lacan cheekily suggests that the love relationship between a man and a woman is really a *ménage à trois* with an imaginary "God." Lacan precedes his commentary with two important caveats that are easily overlooked in his controversial analysis of the love relation. Firstly, Lacan talks directly about his use of the term "God" as the Other, suggesting that he has elsewhere shown the impossibility of understanding this term in its conventional, theological sense.

³² Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII: Transference*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, Cambridge UK and Malden MA, Polity, 2015, p. 122.

[P]eople [...] were surprised when they heard that I situated a certain Other between man and woman that certainly seemed like the good old God of time immemorial. They were, by God, [...] from the pure philosophical tradition, and among those who claim to be materialists[.] [...] Materialism believes that it is obliged, God only knows why [...] to be on its guard against this God who, as I said, dominated the whole debate regarding love in philosophy. [...] It seems clear to me that the Other [...] was a way, I can't say of laicizing, but of exorcising the good old God. After all, there are even people who complimented me for having been able to posit in one of my last seminars that God doesn't exist. Obviously, [...] they hear, but alas, they understand, and what they understand is a bit precipitous.³³

This passage is replete with irony, from Lacan's provocative interjections ("by God," "God only knows") to his closing lament that some of his listeners believe they have understood him, when in fact they have not. Having claimed to have effectively "exorcized" the traditional concept of God in *Écrits*, Lacan then tells his audience that "today, I am [...] going to show you in what sense the good old God exists."³⁴ Lacan is not merely being playful, for in approaching the topic of the divine in this oblique way, he strategically avoids the negation associated with the "death of God".

The second caveat is that the love relationship Lacan describes in *Seminar XX* is not based on the paradigm of the "man of pleasure," but derives instead from the medieval ideal of courtly love. Lacan invokes this tradition to highlight the extent to which modern life has diminished pleasure to an imperative of the superego. The proponents of courtly love may have possessed shortcomings in their sexual politics, but Lacan shows they had a far superior grasp on the production of *jouissance*. The ethos of courtly love is the opposite of the free-for-all of the "man of pleasure," constituting "a highly refined way of making up for (*suppléer à*) the absence of the sexual relationship, by feigning that we are the ones who erect an obstacle thereto."³⁵ The principle of unpleasure, while suppressing the sexual relationship, at the same time increases the sensation of *jouissance* for the two lovers through the crucial addition of "the notion of the obstacle."³⁶ This "obstacle" turns out, of course, to be the role imagined for

³³ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, p. 68.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

“God.” Returning to his earlier playful address to his “materialist” critics, Lacan ponders: “[W]hy should materialists, as they are called, be indignant about the fact that I situate – and why shouldn’t I – God as the third party in this business of human love? Even materialists know a bit about the *ménage à trois*, don’t they?”³⁷ The forgotten virtue of the adherents to courtly love (and in a later example by Lacan from the same session, of medieval mystics like St. Theresa) is that, in contrast to the modern “man of pleasure,” they instinctively understood that religion’s authority rested on the ability to generate pleasure, a *jouissance* that exists in proportion to the unpleasure of its rules and obstacles. The mindset of the courtly lover mirrors that of the neurotic insofar as they both long for unpleasure. The problem for the modern neurotic, however, is that with the death of God (unpleasure), pleasure has far greater difficulty renewing or sustaining itself. “[I]t’s no accident that Kierkegaard discovered existence in a seducer’s little love affair,” reflects Lacan at the end of this session. “It’s by castrating himself, by giving up love, that he thinks he will accede to it.”³⁸ This self-defeating and unwholesome solution to the problem of desire, the unexpected but logical outcome of the great expectations of the “man of pleasure,” reiterates Lacan’s point that ultimately “we are duped (*joués*) by *jouissance*.”³⁹

Tragedy, or Atheism Without The “Death of God”

The unpleasure that lies at the heart of tragedy makes it a natural object of interest for psychoanalysis, as the enduring fascination with a play like *Antigone* testifies. Yet tragedy is rooted in theological and mythical structures that sit uneasily with psychoanalysis’s claims to being a system of modern, rational thought. This apparent paradox is extended by the fact that Freud, despite being an avowed atheist, often chose to express his ideas through quasi-mythical examples, from the murder of the father in *Totem and Taboo* to his imaginative rewriting of ancient Jewish history in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Lacan addresses this issue on many occasions, such as in *Seminar XVII*, where he outlines the relationship between psychoanalysis and myth. In the eighth session of that seminar, for instance, titled “From myth to structure,” Lacan begins by commenting on an article by Marie-Claire Boons about the death of the father in

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Freud's work. Boons argues that through this paternal death "in some way psychoanalysis frees us from the law," a vision of negative freedom that echoes the philosophy of the "man of pleasure" Lacan dealt with a decade earlier.⁴⁰

Whereas Boons claims that the death of the father – in other words, the abolition of the symbolic aspect of the law – is the first step toward liberation, Lacan argues that Freud shows the exact opposite to be the case: the death of the father (which is interchangeable with the death of God) is actually the *precondition* for the religious economy of divine *jouissance*.

The father's death, insofar as it echoes this statement with its Nietzschean gravity, this statement, this good news, that God is dead, does not seem to me of a kind to liberate us, far from it. [...] [R]eligion itself reposes on something that Freud quite astonishingly puts forward as primary, which is that it is the father who is recognized as deserving of love.⁴¹

Lacan concludes this paragraph with the startling conclusion that he will later repeat with even greater force in his lecture "The Triumph of Religion" (1974): "There is already the indication of a paradox here [...] a certain difficulty concerning the fact that, in sum, psychoanalysis would prefer to maintain, to preserve, the field of religion."⁴² Lacan's position appears paradoxical to the point of absurdity: how can a psychoanalytic discourse, rooted in atheism and rational skepticism, possibly support an enemy like religion?

When Lacan makes statements like these his words must always be read with caution. His commentary on the "good old God" in *Seminar XX* is a perfect example: what Lacan actually means by "God" in his analysis of courtly love and sexual *jouissance* bears only the most superficially comical resemblance to the god of Christianity, with its divinity stripped down and hollowed out to become nothing more than a god-function. Just like in Spinoza, there is nothing personal in this god, no arbiter of right and wrong, and certainly no aspect of the supernatural. The realm of Lacan's gods is the realm of the real – if we are going to conceive of a new atheism, then, it is necessary to stop repeating the error of

⁴⁰ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 119.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

equating the death of God with the end of religion. “The pinnacle of psychoanalysis is well and truly atheism,” says Lacan in *Seminar XVII*, “provided one gives this term another sense than that of ‘God is dead,’ where all the indications are that far from calling into question what is in play, namely the law, it is consolidated instead.”⁴³ This passage makes it clear that while Lacan considers himself to be an atheist, he also observes something important to the ethics of enjoyment in the religious mindset that must not be lost – namely, its role as an obstacle in the production of *jouissance*. Truth without pleasure, as Oedipus discovered, can be a very bitter thing indeed.

The notion of a “religion without religion” has been popularized in recent times by John D. Caputo’s *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (1997), which wrestles with the notion of the “impossible” in Jacques Derrida’s thought in a way that bears some resemblance to the complexities of the Lacanian “real.”⁴⁴ However, the foregrounding of myth in psychoanalysis, especially the tragic myths of the ancient Greeks, means that a model of “religion without religion” already exists. No modern reader, after all, actually believes in the Greek deities, and yet, through these stories, we gain an intimate understanding of the role of the “divine” in the production of *jouissance*. Lacan’s readings of Greek tragedy might crudely be divided between two poles, with the example of Oedipus occupying the negative, cautionary side. There is a long and complex discussion of Oedipus’s story in *Seminar XVII*, in which Lacan distills the drama to a reflection on the earlier theme of the death of the father.

[L]et’s start with the death of the father, allowing that Freud did declare it to be the key to *jouissance*, to *jouissance* of the supreme object identified with the mother, the mother as the object of incest. [...] It’s here, in the Oedipus myth as it is stated for us, that the key to *jouissance* is found. [...] The Oedipus myth, at the tragic level at which Freud appropriates it, clearly shows that the father’s murder

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Martin Häggglund performs a pertinent critique of Caputo in *Radical Atheism*, arguing that “Caputo reads the paradox of impossibility in the wrong direction” a misreading that produces a religious conclusion that is the very opposite of Derrida’s deconstructive atheism. See Martin Häggglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008, p. 122.

is the condition of *jouissance*. If Laius is not brushed aside [...] then there will not be any *jouissance*.⁴⁵

Lacan then relates this Oedipal notion of the dead father back to Freud's modern myth of the murdered father in *Totem and Taboo*, arguing that this motif designates "a sign of the impossible itself"⁴⁶:

And in this way we discover here the terms that are those I define as fixing the category of the real, insofar as, in what I articulate, it is radically distinguished from the symbolic and the imaginary – the real is the impossible. Not in the name of a simple obstacle we hit our heads up against, but in the name of the logical obstacle of what, in the symbolic, declares itself to be impossible. This is where the real emerges from.⁴⁷

Lacan's logic here can be difficult to follow, until we translate it back into the terms of pleasure and unpleasure. The real is not reality, let us not forget, but rather the principle of unpleasure, and the reason it is "impossible" is because it lies outside the purview of the ego's desire – that is to say, it belongs to the uncontrollable realm of the gods, whose unpleasurable meddling in human affairs is required to ensure the continuation of *jouissance*. Following in the footsteps of Freud, then, Lacan reads the drama of *Oedipus Rex* as a model for the religious production of an economy of pleasure/unpleasure.

At the same time, this analysis of Oedipus and the death of the father/God should also be read as Lacan's explicit (and poorly understood) wish to move *beyond* this well-worn model of desire. The mythical examples of Oedipus, of *Totem and Taboo*, of Christ on the cross, even of Nietzsche's Dionysus, are problematic because they are all predicated on a logic of divine/paternal death. If Lacan finds in Oedipus the negative pole of Greek tragedy, in which the tragic hero's abject ruin culminates with him being symbolically blinded/castrated by his own hand, then the positive pole of Greek tragedy is surely occupied by Oedipus's daughter, Antigone, the unexpected nobility of whose death, unlike that of her father, contradicts the disgrace of her circumstances. In her commentary on Sophocles's

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⁴⁵ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 120.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

play in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), Luce Irigaray argues that the stand-off between Creon and Antigone reveals how language and subjectivity are implicitly loaded with gendered forms of oppression, with Antigone's defiant refusal to conform making her an inconvenient "remainder" or "supplement" that Creon, in seeking to reestablish the law of the community, wishes to abolish. "In her case 'I' never equals 'I,'" she writes, "and she is only that individual will that the master takes possession of, that resisting remainder of a corporeality to which his passion for sameness is still sensitive."⁴⁸ For Irigaray, Antigone is a figure of defiance who stands up bravely to the oppressive patriarchal community that refuses to acknowledge her as a valid subject. In *Antigone's Claim* (2000), Judith Butler, by contrast, argues that Lacan's reading of the play ultimately sides with Creon as the representative of the symbolic order, a figure grounded in the law of the father. Like Irigaray, Butler also casts Antigone as a figure of defiance and unconventionality who resists all forms of collaboration with the repressive intertwining mechanisms of heteronormativity and the state.

While both of these readings make coherent political points, their vehement rejection of Lacan's reading of the play is puzzling. In his extended commentary on *Antigone* in *Seminar VII*, after all, Lacan first praises Antigone as "the real hero" of the drama before launching into an extended analysis that condemns Creon's "error of judgment."⁴⁹ A more convincing overview of Lacan's interpretation of *Antigone* appears in Joan Copjec's *Imagine There's No Woman* (2002), which juxtaposes Lacan's reading of Antigone's character to Hegel's analysis of the play:

Hegel [...] effectively argues that Antigone ("that consciousness which belongs to the divine law") and Creon ("that which holds to human law") are, in their very decisiveness and intransigence, both guilty, both in the wrong, insofar as they both abandon or alienate one principle through the very act of embracing its opposite. Acting on behalf of a particular individual, her brother, Antigone betrays the community and terrorizes the state, while Creon acts on behalf of the city-state and thus sacrifices Polynices and the values of the family. Lacan attacks the deep undecidability of this reading in order decisively to side with Antigone, praising hers as the only real, ethical act in the play and condemning the actions

⁴⁸ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. G. C. Gill, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 224.

⁴⁹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, pp. 258–259.

of Creon as crimes. In this reading it is only Creon who, through his actions, renders himself guilty.⁵⁰

Although his interpretation is not motivated by the critiques of gender and heteronormativity that underpin the arguments of Irigaray and Butler, Lacan nonetheless joins them in opposing the Hegelian reading to side with Antigone. What really interests Lacan about Antigone's example, though, is the glimpse that her character gives of a completely different economy of pleasure and unpleasure, one that is distinct from (and therefore inimical to) the contradictions of the patriarchal law in which Creon finds himself so tragically entangled. The importance of Antigone, in this context, is her ability to generate a *jouissance* that is beyond religion, thus demonstrating the possibility of an atheism beyond the "death of God".

The fatal error that Lacan attributes to Creon is that "he seeks the good," a charge that, at first glance, might not seem particularly damning.⁵¹ More surprising is Lacan's contention that "the ethic of tragedy" is "also that of psychoanalysis," thus making an important distinction between the psychoanalyst and Creon: the duty of the former is *not* to seek the good, reiterating that the true task of psychoanalysis is not therapeutic.⁵² The psychoanalyst would be wrong to seek the good of the analysand for the same reason that Creon is wrong: such a move assumes an "identity of law and reason" in a way that seeks to compel the other *in the name of their own desire*.⁵³ Doing so opens up the paradoxical territory of compulsory pleasure, of the contradictory mandate to enjoy. As such, Creon urges Antigone to conform to the law for the good of herself and her family, a petition that ultimately frames his appeal in the terms of the superego: what you *ought* to do equates with what, from a purely rational, utilitarian perspective, authority assumes that you *want* to do.

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The characteristic response of characters in modern literature to such a challenge, from Stendhal's Julien Sorel to Dostoevsky's Underground Man to Albert Camus's Meursault, has been to leap into the abyss of the irrational or absurd

⁵⁰ Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2002, p. 15.

⁵¹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 258.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

when the superego imposes itself in this way. In each of those instances, the law has been devoured by reason to the point where the protagonists of those novels have nowhere left to turn except against reason itself. In his reading of *Antigone*, Lacan reminds us that the religious context of the play provides a way out that is unavailable to the modern, secular world, a dimension of the law that, because it belongs to the realm of the divine, also stands outside the sphere of human reason.

[Creon's] language is in perfect conformity with that which Kant calls the *Begriff* or concept of the good. It is the language of practical reason. [...] His refusal to allow a sepulcher for Polynices [...] is founded on [...] a maxim that can be given as a rule of reason with a universal validity. Thus, before the ethical progression that from Aristotle to Kant leads us to make clear the identity of law and reason, doesn't the spectacle of tragedy reveal to us in anticipation the first objection? The good cannot reign over all without an excess emerging whose fatal consequences are revealed to us in tragedy. What then is this famous sphere that we must not cross into? We are told that it is the place where the unwritten laws, the will or, better yet, the $\Delta\iota\kappa\eta$ of the gods rules.⁵⁴

The centerpiece of Antigone's argument against Creon, contends Lacan, is that he has made the hubristic error of putting humanity – in the form of human law, in this instance – on the same footing as the divine. Making the law into a universal in this way excludes the (divine) Other, a tyranny of reason that regards any exception to it as “impossible.” Yet Antigone herself, her very existence, from this perspective, is already “impossible” – the prohibitions against incest should have prevented her birth, yet it was the gods themselves who made such an event possible. Without seeming to realize what he is doing, Creon crosses “that famous limit” that separates the human and the divine, so “that Antigone defends it [...] the unwritten laws of the $\Delta\iota\kappa\eta$.”⁵⁵ The crux of Creon's error, then, is that he is “impious” in the hubristic way he transforms human law into a divine universal.

In so doing, he does not claim merely to speak for the law of the community, but also to represent his human interests as equivalent to the will of the divine. Creon's move represents a tyranny of reason that Lacan also identifies in Kant's cat-

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

egorical imperative. “Antigone is the heroine,” reiterates Lacan. “She’s the one who shows the way of the gods.”⁵⁶ The admiration that Lacan expresses for Antigone derives precisely from her refusal to be assimilated, from her unyielding position as “ὠμός,” a word from the Greek text that Lacan translates as “inflexible” or “something uncivilized, something raw.”⁵⁷ In contrast to Irigaray, who sees this term as a diminution of Antigone, Lacan regards this heroic refusal to compromise from her position, highlighted by Antigone’s unvarnished remarks to her sister Ismene, as a mark of her authenticity. “This then is how the enigma of Antigone is presented to us,” says Lacan. “she is inhuman.”⁵⁸ Lacan is careful to distinguish this state of affairs from “the level of the monstrous” – Antigone’s remarkable inhumanity, her incarnation as an unbending principle of unpleasure, is what aligns her, at least in function, with the realm of the divine.⁵⁹

At the same time, Antigone finds herself abandoned by both gods and humans. Her accusation of Creon – “You made the laws” – charges him with impiety and tyranny, yet it does not arouse the gods to act in her favor.⁶⁰ Her insistence that her brother Polynices be given a proper burial even though he is regarded as a criminal is not received as a divine edict. “She pointedly distinguishes herself from Δίκη,” points out Lacan.⁶¹ Antigone instead derives her authority from a place where she feels herself to be unassailable, a place where it is impossible for a mortal being to υπερδραμεῖν, to go beyond νόμιμα, the laws. These are no longer laws, νόμος, but a certain legality which is a consequence of the laws of the gods that are said to be ἀγραπτα, which is translated as “unwritten,” because that is in effect what it means. Involved here is an invocation of something that is, in effect, of the order of law, but which is not developed in any signifying chain or in anything else.⁶²

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Antigone has placed herself entirely in the field of the Other, no longer herself, but a figure reduced to the unrelenting demand that Polynices be given a decent burial. “Antigone’s position represents the radical limit that affirms the unique

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

value of his being without reference to any content, to whatever good or evil Polynices may have done, or to whatever he may be subjected to.”⁶³ This radical alienation from her ego is why Antigone is impervious to Creon’s appeal to the utilitarian questions of pain and pleasure, honor and dishonor, right and wrong.

Antigone’s example is crucial to Lacan’s thought because she demonstrates that it is possible for human beings to enact for themselves, without reference to any gods, the divine principle of unpleasure. If we learn from her example, then access to the unpleasure that is the precondition of *jouissance* is available to all human beings without the burdens and prohibitions of religion. Antigone is the foreshadowing, in other words, of a true “religion without religion”, of an economy of pleasure and unpleasure beyond the “death of God” and its patriarchal implications. At the end of *Seminar VII*, Lacan famously says that “from an analytical point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire.”⁶⁴ Antigone’s startling transfiguration, the “violent illumination, the glow of beauty” that “coincides with the moment of transgression,” are outward markers of Antigone’s refusal to give ground on desire – not her own, but the desire of the Other.⁶⁵ “Antigone appears as *αυτόνομος*, as a pure and simple relationship of the human being to that of which he miraculously happens to be the bearer, namely, the signifying cut that confers on him the indomitable power of being what he is in the face of everything that may oppose him,” concludes Lacan.⁶⁶ Antigone never backs down on a desire that is not hers, that is beyond her ego, and it is this relentless ethical commitment to the Other that serves as the guarantee of her satisfaction, even though in the end it costs her everything.

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⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

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Bara Kolenc*

Voyeurism and Exhibitionism on the Internet: The Libidinal Economy of the Spectacle of Instanternity

Introduction

Today, in the situation that we call the *instanternity* of the digital age, the visual aspect of social (and power) relations is ever more important. The majority of human interactions on the Internet are happening in the field of vision. In this field, human desire follows the scopic drive, which is, according to Freud, expressed in the ambivalence of voyeurism and exhibitionism.

The notion of instanternity marks the constellation of reality in today's digitalized world, but can also be used as a broader name for the digital age itself. In this, say, historical sense, instanternity is the name of the period that comes after "postmodernity" and is currently on the rise. Conceptually, it denotes the restructuring of our perception of time induced by digitalization, concerning, in the first place, the relation between finitude and infinity, which deeply affects the constitution of subjectivity and socio-economic structures.¹

An analysis of voyeurism and exhibitionism on the Internet, that is, in the spectacle of instanternity as the reality irreversibly permitted and determined by the digital virtual, will therefore – this is what is at stake in of this article – help us understand a certain aspect of the mechanisms constituting the social tissue to-

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¹ We have coined the notion of "instanternity" as a conceptual crossbreed between the "instant" and "eternity". While in the traditional analogue perception of time the moments of the now represent the inexistent, always already lost reality, today, with the emergence of the virtual environment, the moment, *the instant*, becomes the merging point of reality as it is. The reality of the digital era builds upon a certain "preservation" and accumulation of present moments in a topological arrangement of time. In an enthralling way, the shift in our perception of time taking place with digitalization corresponds to the "timelessness" of the unconscious. This has enormous effects on the constitution of subjectivity and of the world today. It affects everything: psychic and socio-economic structures, the distribution of power, the relation between the particular and the universal, the mechanisms of grounding the political, and the human account of nature.

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day, especially their inner hindrances as well as their transformative potential. This analysis, of course, exceeds the spatial limitations of one article. Of the three steps of the analysis, we will, at this point, only focus on the first one: the relation of voyeurism and exhibitionism to the scopic aspect of the spectacle of instantaneity. What we want to trace here are the shifts, the minimal structural and phenomenal leaps triggered by the outspread of the digital virtual, which, even if they might not be immediately recognizable as the “break” with reality as it was (before digitalization), they nevertheless break with reality as it was.

In order to reach this goal, we will need to execute certain preliminary elaborations on: 1) the relation of voyeurism and exhibitionism to the scopic field, that is, to the field of vision determined by the gaze and the light, and to its functions (the eye, the gaze, the picture, the image, the lure); 2) the relation of the scopic field and its functions to what Debord called “the spectacle”, that is, “a social relation between people, which is mediated by images”;² 3) the relation between Debord’s old spectacle and the spectacle of instantaneity; 4) The relation between the screen and the mirror; 5) the unprecedented aspects of the function of the computer screen.

This topic, in a broader sense, tackles the inscription of the subject within the digital virtual spectacle, which deals with the relation between the individual’s imaginary and symbolic identification, that is, between the *ideal ego* and the *ego ideal* (the first step of the analysis executed in this article), with the enigmatic liaison between the subject’s genuine ability to “play with the screen” and the processes of interpellation (the second step), and, finally and most importantly, with the question of the activity and passivity (or interpassivity) of the political subject, focusing on the prospects of their social activation (the third step).

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Adhering to Lacan’s comment that “there are many ways of being wrong about the function of the subject in the domain of the spectacle,”³ we should make several preliminary remarks here:

² Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. K. Knabb, London, Rebel Press, 2005, p. 7.

³ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, London, W. W. Norton & Co., 1998, p. 97.

1. The inscription of the subject in the digital virtual field does not function exclusively in the digital virtual environment understood as some sort of a meta-world separated from (and imposed on) the “real” one. This is because a) these two worlds cannot be radically separated, and b) in a purely Deleuzian sense, both the actual and the virtual are real.⁴ What is reali-

⁴ The *virtual*, for Deleuze, possesses full objective reality, and cannot be confused with the *possible*, which lacks reality. Whereas “the possible is the mode of identity of concepts within representation, the virtual is the modality of the differential in the heart of Ideas,” as Deleuze states (Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, Continuum, London, New York, 2004, p. 350). Ideas are, thus, pure virtuality: “All the differential relations brought about by reciprocal determination, and all the repartitions of singularities brought about by complete determination, coexist according to their own particular order in the virtual multiplicities which form ideas.” (*Ibid.*, p. 349.) As Freud notes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, “everything that can be an object of our internal perception is *virtual*” (Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text*, trans. and ed. J. Strachey, Basic Books, New York, p. 606.). The relation between the virtual and the actual is, in Deleuze’s view, “as though everything has two odd, dissymmetrical and dissimilar ‘halves’,” each dividing itself in two: “an ideal half submerged in the virtual and constituted on the one hand by differential relations and on the other by corresponding singularities; an actual half constituted on the one hand by the qualities actualizing those relations and on the other by the parts actualizing those singularities.” (*Ibid.*, p. 350.) Lacan, speaking about the imaginary plane and the scopic field, differentiates between the “real image” as a representation in my mind of an object which I look at directly, and the “virtual image” as the mirror image of the object, that is, a representation in my mind of an object which I look at with the mediation of a mirror. In this article, the differentiation between the *actual* and the *virtual*, which refers specifically to the difference between the non-digitally intermediated reality and the digitally created reality, somewhere echoes both Deleuze’s and Lacan’s notions. As for Deleuze, also for us both the actual and the virtual possess full objective reality, and are perplexed in the spectacle of instantaneity as “two odd, dissymmetrical and dissimilar ‘halves’.” However, if we were faithful to Deleuze (and we will refrain from this here), we would need to say that 1) both the non-digital actual reality and the digital virtual reality have their “virtual and actual half”, and that 2) at the same time, neither the non-digital actual reality nor the digital virtual reality function beyond the plane of representation, identities, similarities, and contradictions, like Deleuze’s virtuality and actuality of differentiation and repetition do, but are both largely connected to this plane. On the other hand, we can fully adhere to Lacan’s notion of the virtual as that of an image in the mirror, for the computer screen is itself acquiring a certain “derailed” function of a mirror. At the same time, we are transforming Lacan’s differentiation between the real and the virtual image into the division between the actual and the virtual image, where both of them are real. Our notion of “reality” basically refers to Hegel’s definition of reality [*Realität*] as an existent quality [*seiende Qualität*], which contains negation as determination: “Quality, in the distinct value of *existent*, is *reality*” (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. G. di Giovanni,

ty today is the very merging of the digital and the non-digital, the merging which is but a (repetitive, continuously boosted) stream of traversing the unsurmountable gap between them.⁵

Ad a) From the moment of the emergence of the digital, the actual world cannot be separated from its determinate negation as the non-digital. In the age of instanternity, the pre-digital turns into a myth. At the same time, in its striving to take supremacy over the actual physical existence as something that needs to be sublated (say, with multi-sensory technologies), the digital virtual can only exist in relation to the non-digital. Only in this sense – and not in the sense of a nostalgic idealization of “real life” as some primordial harmonic relation between the individual and the world, which has allegedly become lost forever throughout the industrial and post-industrial processes of alienation – should we understand Debord’s statement that the spectacle is a “visible negation of life.”⁶

Ad b) Or, as Debord expresses himself: “objective reality is present on both sides.”⁷ He understands the connection between the spectacle and actual reality as a dialectical process of “reciprocal alienation”, where

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 85.), and “Reality itself contains negation; it is existence, not indeterminate or abstract being” (*Ibid.*, p. 88.).

⁵ One of the possible prospects of the future is that the gap between human self-awareness and external reality might well close, thus sublating the traditionally “transitional” character of man, and radically changing the status of the subject: “Once a direct connection of our brains to a digital network crosses a certain threshold (which is a quite realistic prospect), the gap separating our self-awareness from external reality will collapse (because our thoughts will be able to directly influence external reality and *vice versa*, and we will also be in direct contact with other minds).” (Slavoj Žižek, “Apokalipsa ožičenih možganov” [The Apocalypse of a Wired Brain], *Problemi*, Vol. 57, Nos. 7-8, Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 2019, p. 21.) From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: “*Ko bo neposredna povezava naših možganov z digitalno mrežo preseгла določen prag (kar je precej realističen obet), se bo vrzel, ki ločuje naše samozavedanje od zunanje realnosti, sesedla (ker bodo naše misli lahko neposredno vplivale na zunanjo realnost in obratno, poleg tega pa bomo tudi v neposrednem stiku z drugimi umi).*” The question is, however, whether closing the gap between the non-digital actual and the digital virtual is a direct consequence of closing the gap between human self-awareness and external reality or not. Or, put differently, is the gap between human self-awareness and external reality a condition of the possibility of the gap between the non-digital actual and the digital virtual or not?

⁶ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

the two beings-in-themselves (the reality of the spectacle and actual reality) mutually negate (and therefore determine) each other: “The spectacle cannot be abstractly contrasted to concrete social activity; each side of such a duality is itself divided. [...] The spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a real product of that reality. Conversely, real life is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it.”⁸ Reality, therefore, “emerges within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real.”⁹

2. Instanternity marks both the constellation of reality in today’s digitalized world and its spatio-temporal predispositions.¹⁰
3. The digital virtual cannot be reduced to its spectacular aspect, but the spectacular aspect represents a good part of it. As far as we consider or investigate the digital virtual from the perspective of the scopic field, the digital virtual reality, in a fundamental dialectical intertwinement with the non-digital actual reality, is the spectacle.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Due to the limitation on the length of this article, the spatio-temporal aspect underlying the reality of instanternity is left aside here. However, it is possible to argue that even before Heidegger’s project of the “temporalization of being (and its consequent ontologization of time)” (Bara Kolenc, “Is it too late?”, *Problemi International*, Vol. 58, Nos. 11-12, Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 2020, p. 115.) and Hegel’s “way towards a de-ontologization of time through the temporalization of the original cut as the co-determination of being and nothing/non-being” (*ibid.*), one of the most prominent philosophical fathers of the thus defined “instanternity” was Fichte and his philosophy of the I positing itself and the world right here, right now. While previous philosophies relied on some timeless frame of ontological categories, Fichte’s I is entirely thrown into the full urgency of the present moment in which it must emerge. See especially Jure Simoniti’s reading: “Fichte did not stumble upon a foundation, which metaphysics was still supposedly capable of finding, but he, quite to the contrary, revealed that very groundlessness of being that must be filled out only here and now.” (Jure Simoniti, “Ko je svet začel gledati skozi nas. Fichte in ekološki argument” [When the World Started to Look Right Through Us. Fichte and the Ecological Argument], *Problemi*, Vol. 60, Nos. 5-6, Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 2022, p. 190. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: “Fichte ni trčil na temelj, kot ga je doždevno znala najti metafizika, temveč je, nasprotno, razkril tisto breztemeljnost biti, ki jo je treba zapolniti šele tukaj in zdaj.”)

4. The scopic field, the field of vision within which the spectacle operates, is not related solely to, or limited to, the image.¹¹ Beyond the geometral parameters of the image, it is determined by the gaze and the light.
5. Debord's notion of the "fundamentally spectralist" society should therefore be extended beyond the concept of the image in order for some of his insights to be applicable to *instanternity* as the unprecedented assembling of reality invoked by digitalization.
6. As long as the digital virtual needs the gaze and the light as its conditions of possibility, it operates within the scopic field, even if it does not handle images. To this extent, the digital virtual, in a dialectical relation with the non-digital actual, forms *the spectacle of instanternity*. In this sense, the spectacle, in Debord's words, "represents the dominant model of life."¹²
7. In the scopic field, the spectacle takes place on two scales: on the level of the image and on the level beyond the geometral parameters of the image. The inscription of the subject in the spectacle of *instanternity* therefore refers to a) the image of the body, in a narrow sense (dealing with the individual's imaginary identification, the *ideal ego*), and to b) the subject's emergence in the field of the gaze and the light beyond the image, in a broader sense (that is, on the level of symbolic identification, the *ego ideal*). Both levels are interconnected. As Lacan demonstrated with the optical model of a phantom bouquet, the symbolic order structures the imaginary: "My position in the imaginary is only conceivable insofar as one finds a guide beyond the imaginary, on the level of the symbolic plane."¹³
8. In this respect, the inscription of the subject in the spectacle of *instanternity* a) cuts across the gap between the digital virtual and the non-digital actual, and b) traverses not only the geometral parameters of the image,

¹¹ Here, we are referring to Lacan's notion of the image, which leans on a definition of the image in optics: "to every point on the object there must correspond a point on the image, and all the rays issuing from a point must intersect again somewhere in a unique point." (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. J. Forrester, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 123.)

¹² Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, pp. 8-9.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, p. 141.

but also the field of the gaze and the light beyond the image, linking the scopic field with the field of language, as well as computer language.

9. As long as the scopic drive is expressed in the dialectic of voyeurism and exhibitionism, these two mechanisms represent the privileged entry for the analysis of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the spectacle of instantaneity.

You Never Look at Me from the Place from Which I See You and What I Look at Is Never What I Wish to See

Generally speaking, the apparition of the subject in the scopic field involves a *lure*: “The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see.”¹⁴ The lure unravels the relation between exhibitionism and voyeurism as non-complementary. It is not a simple symmetric inverse in the sense “I wish to see what you show, and what I show is what you wish to see.” Because desire, unlike need, is structurally insatiable (what I desire is always “not that”), what triggers desire in the voyeuristic, exhibitionistic interplay is the very discrepancy between *what one shows and what the other wishes to see*, on the one hand, and between *how one wishes to be seen and what the other sees*, on the other. It is the very failure, the very impossibility of the fulfillment of exhibitionistic and voyeuristic desire, which drives their mechanisms.

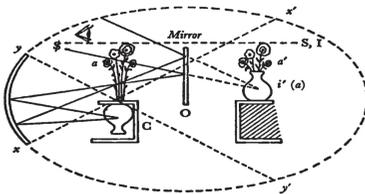
What, in love, is a reproach – *you never look at me from the place from which I see you* and *what I look at is never what I wish to see* – has a certain relation to the logic of desire in exhibitionism and voyeurism. Here we are dealing with the relation of the subject to another subject as the object of desire. The first sentence, *you never look at me from the place from which I see you*, refers to exhibitionism. In my desire, I show myself, I put myself into sight (*donner-à-voir*), thus putting myself under the gaze of the other. I make myself a picture, aspiring to trigger the other’s desire. I want the other to look at me from the place from which I see him or her. But I necessarily fail. Not because the other is unable to “look through my eyes,” but because it is structurally impossible for the other to enter the origin of my vision. The thing is that even if the other would somehow magically manage to crawl into my eye, he or she would still not be able to look at me

¹⁴ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 104.

from the place from which I see him or her. For the true origin of my vision is not in my eye – it is displaced in the symbolic.

The place from which I see you is the place of my symbolic identification, $I(A)$, of the *ego ideal*, *Ich-ideal*. When making myself a picture, I am reaching beyond the geometral parameters of my imaginary identification, $i(a)$, that is, beyond the identification of my self-reflective consciousness with my image in the mirror, which is represented in my mind as the “image of myself”, and in reference to which I recognize myself as a whole and a self-identical entity, forming thereby the instance of the *ideal ego*, *Ideal Ich*, instituted, from Lacan’s developmental perspective, with the notorious “*Aha-Erlebnis*” in the “mirror stage”. The subject emerges in the scopic field where the imaginary reveals itself to be structured by the symbolic:¹⁵ “Imaginary identification offers the support of recognition in the image, i.e. in an ‘objectified’ ego, through which the ego comes to itself, whereas identification through desire establishes the place of the subject as irreducible to any representation, as a void beyond all possible representa-

¹⁵ Lacan’s elaboration of the scheme of the phantom bouquet, an optical illusion described by George M. Hopkins in his *Experimental Science* from 1890, defines the relation between the imaginary and the symbolic, and, thereby, also the relation between one’s imaginary and one’s symbolic identification. The picture of the bouquet in a vase, which I see in the plane mirror with the help of a concave mirror, is only an illusion (for actually the bouquet is not in a vase, only the play of the mirrors represents it as if it were). With a shift in the direction of the gaze (if I step to the side), the bouquet “falls out of the vase” and what I considered to be “real” reveals itself to be merely an illusion. The shifted direction of the gaze is the true origin of one’s vision set on the symbolic plane. The imaginary perspective is, therefore, always illusory: “where the subject sees himself,” that is, where he recognizes “the inverted image of his own body” in the plane mirror as himself (the ideal ego), “it is not from there that he looks at himself.” (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 144.) The place from where he looks at him, namely, is not the gaze in his eye, but the offset place of the barred subject as a symbolic guide governing the angle of the plane mirror. It is from this place from which he forms his symbolic identification, the ego ideal.



tion, and thus also as the inner agent and principle of the articulation of representations.”¹⁶

The second sentence, *what I look at is never what I wish to see*, refers to voyeurism: *what one shows the subject is never what he or she wishes to see*. As a voyeur, I relate to the object of my desire – I want to see what is not shown to me, what is hidden, and what is forbidden to be seen. I want to see “that”. In trying to grasp what is beyond what one shows me – an indefinite something that I assume is hiding behind the curtain – I fail again. There is nothing behind what one shows. For the subject is itself but a picture, a lure, a play with a screen. But as the very impossibility of satisfaction is the lever of desire, what drives a voyeur is exactly the object as an absence: “What the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain.”¹⁷

Because exhibitionism and voyeurism are the two forms of the rudimentarily ambivalent scopic drive, every exhibitionist is unconsciously also a voyeur – and the other way round.

The Ambivalence of the Scopic Drive: Voyeurism and Exhibitionism

“Visual impressions,” remarks Freud in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, “remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused.”¹⁸ Scopic drive, which is represented in the pair of opposites – *Schau-lust*, the pleasure in looking, often translated into English as *scopophilia*, or *voyeurism*¹⁹, on the one hand, and *exhibitionism* – *Zeigelust*, the pleasure in show-

¹⁶ Mladen Dolar, *Samozavedanje: Heglova Fenomenologija duha II*. [Self-Consciousness: Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit II.], Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 1992, p. 23. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: “*Imaginarna identifikacija ponuja oporo prepoznanja v podobi, torej v nekem “objektnem” Jazu, preko katerega Jaz pride do samega sebe, nasprotno pa identifikacija skozi željo vzpostavlja mesto subjekta kot nezvedljivega na katerikoli reprezentacijo, kot praznino onkraj možne reprezentacije, s tem pa tudi kot notranje gonilo in princip členitve reprezentacij.*”

¹⁷ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 182.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905)*. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905)*, trans. J. Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press, 1949, p. 161.

¹⁹ Consistently, Freud couples exhibitionism with *Schaulust*, and not with *voyeurism*, which for him denotes specifically the aspect where *Schaulust* as a normal function of the hu-

ing, on the other hand – is not only one of the most important players in an individual’s psychic constitution, but has, for Freud, a specific conceptual importance. Not only does it serve, along with sadism and masochism, as a prominent example of the ambivalence of drives, but it also allows him to elaborate, specifically in *Instincts²⁰ and its Vicissitudes*, on the complex intertwinement of a) the two vicissitudes of the drives (out of four, sublimation and repression being left aside in this study), that is, the reversal into its opposite [*Verkehrung ins Gegenteil*]²¹, and turning round upon the subject’s own self [*Wendung gegen die*

man psyche turns into a perversion. For example, Freud uses the couple *voyeurism-exhibitionism* in claiming the ambivalence of drives: “Whenever we find in the unconscious an instinct of this sort which is capable of being paired off with an opposite one, this second instinct will regularly be found in operation as well. Every active perversion is thus accompanied by its passive counterpart: anyone who is an exhibitionist in his unconscious is at the same time a voyeur.” (Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII* (1901-1905), p. 167.) For Freud, *Schaulust* is itself a normal function of the human psyche, which turns into a perversion under specific conditions: “On the other hand, this pleasure in looking [scopophilia] becomes a perversion (a) if it is restricted exclusively to the genitals, or (b) if it is connected with the overriding of disgust (as in the case of voyeurs or people who look on at excretory functions), or (c) if, instead of being preparatory to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it. This last is markedly true of exhibitionists, who, if I may trust the findings of several analyses, exhibit their own genitals in order to obtain a reciprocal view of the genitals of the other person.” (*Ibid.*, p. 157.) A perversion, further on, turns into a pathological symptom, if “instead of appearing merely alongside the normal sexual aim and object, and only when circumstances are unfavourable to them and favourable to it—if, instead of this, it ousts them completely and takes their place in all circumstances—if, in short, a perversion has the characteristics of exclusiveness and fixation—then we shall usually be justified in regarding it as a pathological symptom.” (*Ibid.*, p. 161.) In this article, we use the terminological couple of *voyeurism-exhibitionism* as the two aspects of the scopic drive, which can be understood on a scale from the “normal” functions of a psychic apparatus, to perversions, and to pathological symptoms. *Schaulust*, on the other hand, is used as the *economic* term, expressing the “third great polarity” of human psyche, that of pleasure-unpleasure, and can be, in this sense, coupled not with the term *exhibitionism*, but *Zeigelust*, the pleasure in showing. The scopic drive is therefore understood in the ambivalence of *voyeurism-exhibitionism* from the perspective of the polarities activity-passivity and object (external world) and subject (ego), and in the ambivalence of *Schaulust-Zeigelust* from the perspective of the polarity of pleasure-unpleasure.

²⁰ James Strachey, the translator of *The Standard Edition of the Collected Works of Sigmund Freud*, consistently translated Freud’s term “*Trieb*” with “instinct”. As Freud distinguishes between “*Instinkt*” and “*Trieb*”, “drive” is a more accurate translation for the latter.

²¹ Regarding the reversal of a drive into its opposite, Freud traces two different processes here: a change from activity to passivity, and a reversal of its content. While the second

eigene Person], and b) two out of the “three great polarities that dominate mental life,”²² i.e. the polarity of subject (the ego) and object (the external world), and the polarity of activity and passivity.²³

It is through the elaboration of the two “best-known sexual instincts that appear in an ambivalent manner,”²⁴ voyeurism-exhibitionism and sadism-masochism, where Freud draws a clear line between the polarity of activity-passivity, on the one hand, and the polarity of subject (ego) and object (external world), on the other, while, at the same time he points to their fundamental interweaving. For Freud, the “antithesis active-passive must not be confused with the antithesis ego-subject – external world-object.”²⁵ An important observation here is that the reversal in the polarity of activity-passivity affects the *aims* of the drives, where “the *active aim* (to torture, to look at) is replaced by the *passive aim* (to be tortured, to be looked at),”²⁶ whilst the reversal in the polarity of subject-object accounts for the change of the *object*, the aim remaining unchanged: “The turning round of an instinct upon the subject’s own self [*die eigene Person*] is made plausible by the reflection that masochism is actually sadism turned round upon the subject’s own ego [*das eigene Ich*], and that exhibitionism includes looking at his own body.”²⁷ Nevertheless, we cannot fail to notice, states Freud, that both in

one, the transformation of a drive into its “material” opposite, is explained through the single example of love (which admits not only of one, but of three different opposites – loving-hating, loving-being loved, and the complex of loving-hating as the opposition to unconcern or indifference), the first one, a change from activity to passivity, is elaborated through an analysis of the two pairs of opposites: voyeurism-exhibitionism and sadism-masochism.

²² Sigmund Freud, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, trans. J. Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1957, p. 140.

²³ Although the third polarity, that of pleasure-unpleasure, is not specifically addressed in Freud’s elaborations on exhibitionism and voyeurism, it is, of course, the driving force of both exhibitionism as *Schaulust* and voyeurism as *Zeigelust*, running to a good extent on the masochistic enjoyment detected by Freud as the initially incomprehensible pleasure in unpleasure.

²⁴ Freud, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, p. 132.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

voyeurism-exhibitionism and in sadism-masochism “*the turning round upon the subject’s self and the transformation from activity to passivity coincide.*”²⁸

The change of the object coincides with the change of the aim: with the turning of a drive upon the subject’s own self, the active aim turns into a passive one, or, which is the same process, the shift from the active aim to the passive one results in the turning of the drive upon the subject’s own self. In the case of an exhibitionist, who shares in the enjoyment of his or her exposure, this means that, simultaneously, the external object (a mother or any other person, her genitals, or any other part of her body, or a fetish) has been replaced by the subject’s own self (his or her own genitals or any other part of his or her body), and the active aim (to look at) has been substituted by the passive aim (to be looked at). An exhibitionist is therefore showing off, exposing parts of his or her body (a change in the object, which now becomes the subject’s own self) in order to be looked at, to become an object of desire of the other (a change in the aim from active to passive).

What we can notice here is that for Freud – somewhat counter-intuitively – the voyeur is the active agent, while the exhibitionist is the passive one. Our intuition normally follows the well-known mantra of passive observers, spectators–consumers, who are unable to change the order of things, *versus* active performers, the actors in the spectacle, the players on the world’s stage holding the conductor’s stick. For Freud, an exhibitionist is indeed very much active in showing himself²⁹, but in following his aim, in his desire, he occupies a passive position: what he desires is not to look at (to see, to perceive, to notice), but to be looked at (to be seen, to be perceived, to be noticed). An exhibitionist invests much of his effort into putting on all the masks, the costumes, the make-up, the personas, running around, laughing and speaking loudly; he is super-active, but at the end of the day, all of these activities are subordinated to pursuing his passive aim. He makes all this circus only to make himself be looked at. He is all active to make himself passive. The true position of the exhibitionist is a passive one: this is the locus of his desire and enjoyment. The one who is truly active, in Freud’s view, the one following his active aim to look (to see, to perceive, to notice), although he might remain unnoticed himself, is the voyeur.

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²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ For ease of reading, from this point onwards in the text, male pronouns shall also be considered to include both sexes.

There is a certain close connection between narcissism and the scopic drive – the myth of Narcissus falling in love with his own image clearly points to this. The autoerotic pre-phase of the scopic drive, in which “the subject’s own body is the object of the scopophilia,” must be, states Freud, “classed under narcissism.”³⁰ The basic predisposition of narcissism is, namely, the turning round upon one’s own self, the choice of one’s own body as the libidinal object, which, subsequently, corresponds to the passive aim of “being looked at” rather than “looking”, of “being loved” rather than “loving”, and even of “being tortured” rather than “torturing”. This is why, according to Freud, in the later development of the active scopic drive into voyeurism, narcissism is left behind, while the passive scopic drive, that is, exhibitionism, still “holds fast to the narcissistic object.”³¹ Narcissism, therefore, defines the scopic drive, especially the exhibitionist’s part therein.

The autoerotic pre-phase of the scopic drive coincides with and, in this sense, importantly defines primary narcissism. Subsequently, the “mirror stage” establishes the scene not only for the development of the “normal” object-related psychic constitution with more or less expressed narcissistic traits, but also for the development of secondary narcissism, that is, of a predominantly narcissistic psychic constitution of a grown-up person. The narcissistic traits in a psychic constitution of a grown-up person are formed through a complex dialectics between the individual’s imaginary identification, that is, his relation to the *ideal ego*, and his symbolic identification, that is, his relation to the *ego ideal*.

In the immanent critique of the notion of the “pathological narcissist” put forth by American ego psychology (Kernberg, Kohut, Winnicott) and popularized by Christopher Lasch in his book *The Culture of Narcissism* from 1979³², Žižek, in an article from 1985³³, exposed one crucial feature of the so-called “pathological narcissist” as the predominant subjective constitution of the neoliberal age

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, W.W. Norton, New York, London, 1991.

³³ Slavoj Žižek, “Patološki narcis’ kot družbeno-nujna forma subjektivnosti” [The “Pathological Narcissist” as the Socially-Necessary Form of Subjectivity], *Družboslovne razprave = Social Science Forum*, II, Vol. 2, Slovensko sociološko društvo: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Ljubljana, 1985, pp. 105–141.

(along with the *borderline*³⁴). In reference to Lasch, who was the first to point to the replacement of the ego ideal with the “anal” superego as a fundamental feature of late capitalist bureaucratic society, the product of which – especially due to changes in micro and macro social structures (de-hierarchization, the dismantling of authority, the critique of identitarianism, and so on) and the associated permissive upbringing – is the “pathological narcissist”, Žižek points out that what basically defines the “pathological narcissist” is the *unsuccessful symbolic identification*.

With symbolic identification, the subject submits to symbolic authority, integrates the law, and, in a purely Kantian sense, takes it as his own, entering into a *symbolic covenant* as his own ethical position to which he is accountable, and in relation to which he is *responsible* (accountable to the other). By accepting the law as his own determinant, the subject frees himself from the irrational demand of the superego and enters the field of desire, which constitutes him in the symbolic. Here, it is crucial to maintain a strict distinction between the concepts of the superego, the ideal ego, and the ego ideal, which correspond to the trinity of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic: “The feature that separates the ego ideal and the ideal ego from the superego is, of course, *identification*.”³⁵ The superego excludes all identification; it appears as an “irreducibly alien, noninternalized, traumatic, unperceived, terrifying command, i.e. something *real* in the sense of the impossible-unsymbolized.”³⁶ For the narcissist, therefore, so-

³⁴ Žižek notes that the two disorders systematized by Otto. F. Kernberg are alike in showing both psychotic and hysteric characteristics and symptoms, which was inconceivable from the perspective of traditional psychoanalytical theory.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: “*Poteza, ki Ideal-Jaza in idealni jaz loči od nadjaza, je seveda identifikacija.*”

³⁶ “The feature that separates the ego ideal and the ideal ego from the super-ego is, of course, *identification*; the ego ideal and the ideal ego are two modes of identification, the symbolic and the imaginary, or, in Lacanian mathemes, I(A) and i(a), identification with the ‘unary trait’, S₁, the signifier in the Other representing the subject, and identification with the mirror-image, while – as J. A. Miller remarks – the super-ego excludes all identification, it appears as an irreducibly alien, noninternalized, traumatic, unperceived, terrifying command, i.e. something *real* in the sense of the impossible-unsymbolized.” Translated from Slovene by B. K.: “*Poteza, ki Ideal-Jaza in idealni jaz loči od nadjaza, je seveda identifikacija; Ideal-Jaza in idealni jaz sta dva modusa identifikacije, simbolni in imaginarni oziroma, v lacanovskih matemih, I(A) in i(a), identifikacija z ‘enotujočo potezo’, S₁, označevalcem v Drugem, ki zastopajo subject, in identifikacija z zrcalno podobo, medtem ko – kot opozarja J.-A. Miller – nadjaz izključuje sleherno identifikacijo, nastopa kot ireduktibilno tuji, nepono-*

cial laws are merely the “rules of the game”, which do not bind him internally. Since in the “pathological narcissist” the moment of symbolic identification is absent, the image of the Self, by itself, without the support of symbolic identification, performs the function of “integration”: “instead of an *i(a)* ‘mediated’ by an I(A),” we have to deal with “an *i(a)* that relies directly on a cruel, mad, ‘irrational’, ‘anal’ superego.”³⁷ All that the “pathological narcissist” can lean on, therefore, is his imaginary identification, which is the only thing that structures him and which responds to the impossible, capricious demand of his superego, expressed in the paradoxical imperative of enjoyment.

Following this consideration, we can state that *the aspect of the image as the geometrical part of the scopical field is pivotal for the constitution of “pathological narcissism”*. Because of the lack of symbolic identification, the elemental feeling that defines the “pathological narcissist” is anxiety, a sense of inner emptiness that the narcissist tries to fill with euphoria, eccentricity, excess, promiscuity, the abuse of substances, workaholism, and so on, and which he strives to soothe with the phantasmal entity of the “grandiose Self”, with the help of which he is supposed to receive the eagerly awaited validation from the superego. The “grandiose Self” is not only a fantasy, but a performed Persona, which the “pathological narcissist” creates as a hollowed image of himself. Subsequently, “pathological narcissism” is expressed as a more or less overt exhibitionism – in a secret ambivalence with covert voyeurism.

The Autoerotic Pre-phase of the Scopical Drive: The Original Split Between the Eye and the Gaze

As in sadism-masochism, Freud traces three developmental stages in voyeurism-exhibitionism: “a) Looking as an *activity* directed towards an extraneous object. b) Giving up of the object and turning of the scopophilic instinct towards a part of the subject’s own body; with this, transformation to passivity and set-

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tranjeni, traumatični, nedojeti, grozljivi ukaz, torej nekaj realnega v pomenu nemogočega-simboliziranega.” (Žižek, “Patološki narcis’ kot družbeno-nujna forma subjektivnosti” [“Pathological Narcissus” as the Socially-Necessary Form of Subjectivity], p. 118.)

³⁷ Žižek, “Patološki narcis’ kot družbeno-nujna forma subjektivnosti” [“Pathological Narcissus” as the Socially-Necessary Form of Subjectivity], p. 119. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: “Pri ‘patološkem Narcisu’ imamo torej namesto *i(a)*, ‘posredovanega’ z I(A), opraviti z *i(a)*, ki se neposredno opira na kruti, nori, ‘iracionalni’, ‘analni’ nadjaz.”

ting up of a new aim - that of being looked at. c) Introduction of a new subject to whom one displays oneself in order to be looked at by him.”³⁸ These stages, on the one hand, pertain to the development of a child, but are, in a grown-up person, co-existent – this is what Freud’s idea of the *ambivalence of drives* basically refers to.

However, what Freud notices at some point is that the parallel between sadism-masochism and voyeurism-exhibitionism – as the two examples of the reversal of a drive into its opposite regarding the (combination of) the polarities of activity-passivity, on the one hand, and that of subject-object, on the other – somewhere hits a limit. The thing is that unlike in sadism-masochism, a certain autoerotic pre-phase takes place in the scopophilic instinct, which precedes the three developmental stages evident in both phenomena.

The autoerotic pre-phase serves Freud to present the *diagrammatic picture of the scopophilic drive*:

(α) Oneself looking at a sexual organ	=	A sexual organ being looked at by oneself
(β) Oneself looking at an extraneous object (active scopophilia) [<i>aktive Schaulust</i>]		(γ) An object which is oneself or part of oneself being looked at by an extraneous person (exhibitionism) [<i>Zeigelust, Exhibition</i>]

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The autoerotic pre-phase is represented in the first row of the diagram (α). In the second row, the scopophilic (i.e. scopic) drive develops into (β) voyeurism and (γ) exhibitionism.

This autoerotic pre-phase, remarks Freud, is interesting, “because it is the source of *both* the situations represented in the resulting pair of opposites.”³⁹ Out of this stage, voyeurism (*aktive Schaulust*) and exhibitionism (*Zeigelust*,

³⁸ Freud, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, p. 127.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Exhibitionism) develop “according to which element in the original situation is changed.”⁴⁰ If the change concerns the *object* (a baby swaps one of his own organs as the object of his gaze for someone else’s, usually one of his mother’s) – the aim here remains unchanged – the pre-phase turns to voyeurism as the active aspect of the scopophilic drive. If the change concerns the *aim* (the baby swaps from actively looking at his own organ to the passive aspect of his organ being looked at by someone else, usually his mother) – here, the object remains unchanged – the pre-phase turns to exhibitionism as the passive aspect of the scopophilic drive.

What is pivotal here is that this pre-phase is not diachronic, rather, it reveals the bare structure of all the players and forces that will later be stretched into a temporal sequence of the three developmental stages. The autoerotic pre-phase of voyeurism-exhibitionism displays the situation where a baby is looking at his own sexual organ *at the same time* as his own sexual organ is being looked at by himself. He *is* at the same time the active and the passive agent of the scopic drive (looking and being looked at), and he *is* both a sexual organ (object) and his own self (subject). In a sort of a limbic state, he is entirely turned into his own body, because the instance of the ego and a relation to the external world have not yet been established. However – in contrast to other examples of sexual excitation in autoeroticism as the primary phase of a child’s sexual development, such as thumb sucking, where the polarities active-passive and subject-object have not yet been substantiated – the autoerotic pre-phase of the scopic drive establishes some sort of a “differentiation of the undifferentiated,” a minimal distance between looking and being looked at, between the object (the baby’s own sexual organ) and the subject’s own self.

In the autoerotic pre-phase of the scopic drive, I actively look at my own organ and I am at the same time passive towards my own gaze. We can see how a certain externalization takes place here, setting the ground of *extimacy* on the very fundamental level (that is, before the instance of the *ego* and the relation to the external world are established, and before the process of alienation through one’s imaginary and symbolic identification takes place), where, on the one hand, *my own sexual organ becomes the object of my desire*, and, on the other

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

hand, *my own gaze turns into the gaze of the other*.⁴¹ Followed by the three stages of voyeurism-exhibitionism in the later development of a child, that is, the turning of the subject to the external world, the formation of dialectics between the ideal ego and the ego ideal, and the development of voyeurism and exhibitionism proper, the constellation of the autoerotic pre-phase – and this is crucial – is not simply overcome, but persists in the psychic apparatus as a fundamental constellation, *as the elemental setting of the split between the eye and the gaze*.

The Representational and the Specular Screen

There is a basic relation defining the scopic field: the relation between the *screen* and the *mirror*.

In the classical idealist conception of introspection, that is, of a self-reflective consciousness observing the world with the gaze resting in one's eye, when viewing an external, physical object, I create an *image* of this object in my mind. Like some sort of a screen set between the eye (which possesses the gaze) and the object, an intermediate layer is thought to be formed onto which the object, lit by light, is “projected”, thereby creating a representation of the object in the mind of the observer. This screen – let us name it a *representational screen* – has always been understood as a kind of mirror: a reflection of the world in one's mind. The idea of a mirroring of the world in introspection supports the psychic construction of the “I”, the thinking self (ego) woven around the illusion of self-identity, which is largely caught in the imaginary parameters, that is, in the organization of the field of the gaze and the light (i.e. the scopic field) through geometrical points.

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Beyond the imaginary of introspection, however, there is a certain pre-existence of the gaze – as Lacan pointed out following Merleau-Ponty⁴² – which de-

⁴¹ That is, *my own sexual organ becomes the object of my desire as desire of the other*, and *my own gaze is in dissonance with, yet resonates in, the gaze of the other*. All Lacan's propositions regarding the scopic field seem to be inscribed in the pre-phase of the scopic drive. In the autoerotic cocoon of the scopic drive, the gaze extricates itself from the eye and starts lingering around as the gaze of the Other, the subject turns into a picture, while the object is detached from the subject as forever lost, but persistently present in its absence.

⁴² Lacan's introduction of the split between the eye and the gaze is inspired by Merleau-Ponty *Le Visible et l'invisible* and *La Phénoménologie de la perception*, which demasks the

finest the subject's inscription in the scopic field: "It is no doubt this *seeing*, to which I am subjected in an original way."⁴³ What is, according to Lacan, the original constellation of a subject in the scopic field is not a self-reflective consciousness observing the world through the gaze in their eye, but the split between the eye and the gaze: "The eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field."⁴⁴ The gaze is not an exclusive possession of the eye as an organ, but floats around, as an inconceivable point of light which cannot be pinned on a geometral map: "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides."⁴⁵ This sets the subject as a blurred and ephemeral apparition in the field of vision, as a *stain*, in relation to which the "I", the "self", and its representations turn out to be a mere illusion of a self-reflective consciousness and an effect of an individual's striving for self-identity. On the very fundamental level, I am not the one observing the world, but the one *being observed*: "We are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world."⁴⁶ In this sense, exhibitionism is an original constellation of the subject in the scopic field, underlying the forms of exhibitionism and voyeurism proper.⁴⁷

While a self-reflective consciousness believes that it sees the world as an *image*, in the original constellation of the scopic field, conversely, the subject makes itself a *picture* for the gaze of the Other. What is crucial here, however, is that in this shift from the idea of the image as something perceived and imagined in the illusion of introspection, forming, together with many other images, a representative base of the conscious "I", towards the subject *qua* picture, Lacan's differentiation between the image and the picture not only serves the purpose of

illusion of introspection: "That in which the consciousness may turn back upon itself – grasp itself; such as Valery's Young Parque, *as seeing oneself seeing oneself* – represents mere sleight of hand. An avoidance of the function of the gaze is at work there." (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 74.)

⁴³ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ "And, incidentally, in the same sense, exhibitionism – being exposed to the Other's gaze – is not simply a symmetrical reversal of voyeurism, but the original constellation that supports its two sub-species: exhibitionism proper and voyeurism." (Slavoj Žižek in the chapter "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please!" in the book Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, London, Verso, 2000, p. 117.)

turning around the perspective on the subject, but at the same time puts forth a certain conceptual distinction between the two: differently from an image, a picture exceeds and evades the geometrical parameters of representation. A picture operates in the field of the gaze and the light even beyond the imaginary scope.

Just as in the conception of introspection, also in the constellation of the split between the eye and the gaze the screen plays a central role as “the locus of mediation”⁴⁸. But differently from the representational screen, which is set between the eye (self-reflection) and the world (external objects), the screen – let us call it a *specular screen* – is now set between the subject *qua* picture, on the one side, and the gaze, which lingers around as a point of light, on the other. The subject makes itself a picture in such a way that it plays with a screen (for Lacan, a genuine ability of human beings⁴⁹), projecting itself on the screen as a splash of its transient emergence in the glow of the gaze and the light. In this scheme, again, the screen functions as a mirror. Here, however, the screen is not a mirror reflecting the world in one’s mind, but a mirror reflecting the world directly. The subject reflects the world not in representation, but directly, as a *speculum mundi*, a mirror of the world:⁵⁰ “That which makes us consciousness institutes us by the same token as *speculum mundi*.”⁵¹ The specular screen is a mirror-screen on which the picture projected on it, which is the subject, is at the same time the mirror-image of the world.

In the scopic field, the gaze occupies two functions at once: a) the function of the elusive *objet-petit a*, marking the relation of the subject to the object, which can only be defined negatively, as a lack,⁵² and b) the function of the Other, marking the relation of the subject (as barred, constituted upon a lack) to the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁹ “Desire that is the essence of man—is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? Insofar as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze.” (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 107.)

⁵⁰ In his book *Speculum mundi* from 1635, John Swan presents an original idea that the world is actually a mirror reflecting God. Since God created the world in six days, there should be six mirrors, each showing one perspective of God’s creation: hence, the world should take the shape of a hexadreon.

⁵¹ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 75.

⁵² “The objet a in the field of the visible is the gaze.” (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 105.)

phantasmal entity of control and also of protection (the Other not only watches me, but also watches over me) within the realm of intersubjectivity to which the subject ultimately responds and which is a referential point of his symbolic identification, i.e. his ego ideal. In this second function, the gaze turns into the Gaze. In the original split between the eye and the gaze, the subject is therefore set in the space of the Other: “But, certainly, it is in the space of the Other that he sees himself and the point from which he looks at himself is also in that space.”⁵³ Like in the realm of language, also in the realm of vision, the subject emerges in the field of the Other through alienation as the fundamental procedure of its institution, which is defined by its very disappearance, *aphanisis*. When the subject is playing with the specular screen, making himself a picture, he is playing with the reflection of light, trying to, simultaneously, distract the gaze – like annoying someone with a mirror by reflecting light into his eyes – and to show itself as a stain, a blurred spot of a bare reflection, a present absence, as something that is at the same time being lit by light and absorbing it.

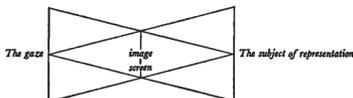
Both schemes, the representational and the specular, are at work in the scop-ic field. The representational illusion of a self-reflective consciousness is persistently fractured by the subject’s fragmented and transient apparition in the field of the gaze and the light, as a picture evading the geometral parameters of images. What is pivotal for our further analysis, however, is that in both schemes *the screen functions as a mirror* and that in their geometral representation drawn by Lacan as two non-equilateral triangles – which is, of course, only approximate, because it is itself limited to the imaginary scale – *these two screens, the representational and the specular, overlap*.⁵⁴

The Computer Screen as an Actual-Virtual Object

What the spectacle brings about is a certain *physical* (or *corporal*, to use Derrida’s term) *materialization of the screen*. In this sense, the screen functions as a *prosthesis*. However, even if we do not go into a detailed elaboration of the

⁵³ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 144.

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prosthetic theory as regards the digital virtual media – adhering here to Freud’s understanding of prosthetics as the mediator between mind and body, between internal and external, and between conscious and unconscious, and to his description of man as a “prosthetic God”⁵⁵, or to Marx’s basic formula of alienation stemming from the blurred line between man and the materialism of commodities, to which later theories of prosthetics refer (Marshall McLuhan, Henry Ford), and to the aspect of amputation as the flip side of the prosthetic extension of a human body stressed by Heidegger, an idea that was further developed in McLuhan’s theory of autoamputation accompanying any extension of media, we can immediately notice a certain fundamental structural difference between the prosthetic function of the screen of the old spectacle, that is, the TV or the cinema screen, on the one hand, and the prosthetic function of the screen of the digital virtual spectacle, that is, the computer screen, on the other hand.

While we can well read a desktop computer as the apotheosis of McLuhan’s idea of media convergence, that is, of a certain self-absorption of media and their ability to perform an incessant transformation of form into content (“the medium is the message”⁵⁶), and, in this sense, can see the digital virtual media as a continuation and intensification of the procedures of the old uni-directional media, we can, from another perspective, notice a certain shift, or a leap between the old spectacle and the digital virtual one. A desktop computer represents a certain turning point, where the prosthesis is not only an externalized extension of the human body, but the human body itself, as some sort of prosthesis of a prosthesis, becomes an externalized extension of the computer. This only makes it a real prosthesis, a real amputation – but at the same time, this prosthesis makes possible a new realization of reality, which is not only a negation of actual physical reality (so-called “artificial reality”), but is, exactly through negation, its very affirmation.

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Despite Debord’s visionary understanding of “everyday reality” and the reality of the spectacle as fundamentally intertwined and mutually determining each other in their “reciprocal alienation”, the two realities are, in the old spectacle,

⁵⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. J. Strachey, New York, London, W. W. Norton & Co., 2010, p. 19.

⁵⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York, London, MIT Press, 1994, p. 9.

still detachable from each other. Only the spectacle of instanternity fully realizes Debord's theoretical setup in blurring the difference between one reality as primordial (so-called "everyday reality") and the other as only secondary (so-called "artificial reality"). In the spectacle of instanternity, we are on both sides: we not only try, like in the old spectacle, to domesticate the new artificial universe, which is alienated from our physical existence, but we equally try to domesticate the old physical reality, which is alienated from our digital existence. From this perspective, both "everyday reality" and "artificial reality" appear as only mythical.

In the sense of a voyeuristic-exhibitionistic ambivalence, the computer screen not only shows something, like a TV screen, but it also watches (as a camera is integrated in it). At the same time, the user of a computer not only looks at the screen, like at a TV, but also shows himself on the screen.⁵⁷ What is pivotal for an understanding of the old spectacle, and what has not yet been clearly put forth, is that in the old spectacle, the fundamental split between "everyday reality" and the reality of the spectacle is *not* the divide between the spectator as the allegedly passive voyeur, on the one hand, and the spectacle as the active exhibitionist on the other. Such a division of roles, namely, is only a consequence of a more radical split between the two realities, and a symptom of a certain blockade brought about by the old spectacle. The crucial point here is that *the abruptness of the old spectacle is not that it divides the roles within the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay, but that it fully sabotages the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay itself*, which is at work in the original ambivalence of the scopic drive. The true difference between the old spectacle and the spectacle of instanternity, therefore, lies not in an individual's simple passage from a passive to an active position (say, from a spectator to a user), which is the usual argument of

⁵⁷ With the emergence of the digital virtual reality, which induced an unprecedented supposition of physical *isolation* and digital social *interaction*, man is entering a novel existential condition – *intersolation*. While the formula of the old spectacle is *isolation + passive reception*, the formula of the spectacle of instanternity is *isolation + active interaction*. Instead of passivizing, the virtual digital spectacle rather forces individuals into constant activity (it could be for leisure or work, or for political, romantic, sexual, etc., purposes), which demands physical isolation (remember the common image of teenagers sitting on a bench together and communicating with each other via their smartphones?). This leads to some sort of an (obsessive) neurotic situation, where one is caught in an endless loop: the more one is physically isolated, the more one engages in digital interaction – and the more one is physically isolated.

leftist cultural criticism:⁵⁸ but the fact that the old spectacle blocks the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay, while the spectacle of instanternity enables it. Only when the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay in the non-digital actual reality is extended and intertwined with the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay in the digital virtual reality, can the two realities, through their reciprocal alienation, become the two sides of one reality.

The subject's genuine ability to play with the specular screen as the basic mechanism of his scopic inscription in the field of the Other is, in the spectacle of instanternity, affected by the mediation, or rather, the intrusion of a new form of a physically materialized screen – the computer screen. When using a computer screen, an individual plays with this screen, making himself a picture on it. In this sense, the computer screen acquires the function of the materialized *specular screen*. At the same time, he uses the screen as a representational plane of how he sees the world. Here, the same computer screen acquires the function of the materialized *representational screen*. Thereby, the computer screen takes on the role of the two screens operating in our psychic apparatus: the *representational screen* of the illusion of introspection and the *specular screen* of our original exposure to the Gaze. While in the (mythical) non-digital actual reality these two screens well structure the psychic, but operate on different scales (their overlapping in Lacan's drawing is only schematic), in the physically materialized existence of the computer screen they *factually overlap*. The great estrangement of the digital virtual stems exactly from this (impossible) overlapping of the two screens operating in our psychic apparatus, which are now materialized in the same object.

This materialization, however, is only possible because the computer screen is an *object of a new kind*: it is not only physical, but also digital. As such, it en-

⁵⁸ The general leftist argument about the passivization of the political subject caused by the spectacle as the “visualized and materialized ideology” is in this sense too sloppy. Namely, it does not see that the position of a voyeur, that is, the spectator, is actually an active and not a passive one – so it is not the position as such, but certain other factors that passivize the spectator. Where the spectator of Debord's spectacle is truly passivized, or castrated, is in that *he cannot fully engage in the ambivalent interplay of voyeurism and exhibitionism*, because a) he is pushed into a (regulated) voyeuristic position – he can only watch what has been shown to him – so he cannot really follow his active voyeuristic aim, and b) he is prevented from exhibiting himself, so he cannot actively pursue the passive aim of being watched.

ables the computer to become a prosthesis of a human body (and mind), and also the human body (and mind) to turn into a prosthesis of the computer. As an *actual-virtual object*, a computer screen is at the same time the *bearer* of the intersection of the two realities, which are now inseparable, and of their mutual determination through negation, as well as the *locus* of the materialized overlapping of the two psychic screens. As such, it is simultaneously: 1.) as a materialized representational screen, the actual-virtual intermediate between the individual's eye as the illusory source of his vision and the objects of the world (and, among these objects, also his own mirror image), and 2.) as a materialized specular screen, the actual-virtual intermediate between the subject making himself a picture by his playing with the screen and the gaze of the Other. With this, the computer screen not only enables the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay within the digital virtual reality, but makes possible a complex dialectic between the digital virtual voyeuristic-exhibitionistic interplay and the non-digital actual one.

The computer screen as an actual-virtual object functions in the realm of vision: without the light and without the gaze the screen is a dead thing. As soon as it lights up, it becomes both a source of light and an illuminated object – it illuminates itself. More than any other object, the screen calls for the Gaze. At the same time, it itself establishes a field within which the Gaze circulates.

The Radical Consequences of the Selfie-Turn

What is a selfie? It is a photographed image in a mirror. Or, to be more precise, it is a photographed image of oneself in a mirror created by oneself. The first front-facing camera on a smartphone was introduced in 2010. “Selfie” was proclaimed a word in 2013. Today, each smartphone has two cameras: one to capture the outside world – the user's field of vision – and one to capture the user himself. What is pivotal here is that with a camera installed above the screen, the screen takes on the role of a mirror.

A computer screen is a mirror with the miraculous ability to freeze the image it reflects. With a click of the camera, I want to catch what I consider to be myself on an imaginary scale – what I want to grasp is the point of my imaginary identification, my ideal ego. This is, of course, an always failed attempt. No matter how much effort I put into the creation of an image that would finally capture

the ideal me (doing my makeup, my hair, dressing up, choosing the right angle, appropriate light, etc.), I necessarily fail. What I desire to see in the mirror never matches what the mirror shows me. So I am driven to give it another try, to take a better shot. Or to endlessly correct an existent one. Selfie-mania is, in this sense, nothing but *obsessive hunting for the ideal ego*.

In contrast to the old spectacle, where an anonymous spectator watched stars on a screen, on the Internet, everyone is turning into a star, that is, into a “spectacular representation of living human beings,” according to Debord, which is “the opposite of an individual.”⁵⁹ The star, says Debord, enters the spectacle “as a model to be identified with,” and thereby “renounces all autonomous qualities in order to identify himself with the general law of obedience to the succession of things.”⁶⁰ But because, in the spectacle of instantaneity, both the non-digital actual and the digital virtual reality are real, the gap defining the spectacle is no longer set between an anonymous observer as the *individual* and the star as a reified [*verdinglicht*] *model*, which has become part of the spectacle as the “materialized ideology”⁶¹. The individual is now on both sides – everyone is at the same time a *star* and a *no one*, a reified model, a digital virtual commodity, on the one hand, and a human being with his own physical determinations and his own mental constructions, on the other.

Today, with the development of technology, we can change our faces as if the face itself were a mask or make-up. The transformation of our faces can be both physical and digital, the latter being easier and cheaper. What is a novel aspect here, however, is not man’s tendency to beautify his face to match his ideal ego, but the fact that because, in the spectacle of instantaneity, both the non-digital actual and the digital virtual reality are real, the individual’s haunting of his ideal ego is now subjected to the reciprocal alienation of the two realities. This can be, so it appears, highly traumatic. In 2017, the American Academy of Facial

⁵⁹ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ “Ideological expressions have never been pure fictions; they represent a distorted consciousness of realities, and as such they have been real factors that have in turn produced real distorting effects. This interconnection is intensified with the advent of the spectacle – the materialization of ideology brought about by the concrete success of an autonomized system of economic production – which virtually identifies social reality with an ideology that has remolded all reality in its own image.” Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 116.

Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery found that 55% of facial plastic surgeons say patients have requested cosmetic procedures to look better on social media. Today, with the recent escalation of face morphing apps, the trend has arrived at the absurd: people are requesting plastic surgeries on the basis of their digitally corrected photos. The recently identified body-image disorder known as “Snapchat dysmorphia” is characterized by the need to heavily edit one’s own digital image, which, at its most severe, causes people to seek out cosmetic procedures in order to replicate the digitally morphed faces they present online. In such a, so to say, “hysterization of the gap,” in a literally “plastic” embodiment of its insurmountably, paradoxically as it may seem, the two realities have become truly indivisible.

Because the computer screen is also a means of communication, one’s image on the screen-mirror is shared with others. In the digital virtual reality, we are, in an unprecedented way, constantly looking at ourselves when interacting with other people (via video calls, video conferences, streams, and so on). This has become a new form (and a new norm) of digital virtual social interaction. Unlike in the (mythical) actual non-digital reality, where I, when interacting with other people, played with the specular screen in making myself a *picture* for the gaze of the Other, in the digital virtual interaction I at the same time look at my *image* in the mirror. I show myself to the Other, and I at the same time *look at myself showing myself*. The selfie is a prime example – but many mechanisms on the Internet work like this; much of how we make ourselves a picture in the scopic field is monitored by us looking in the mirror, where we are driven to see the ideal image of ourselves.

When watching my mirror image on my computer screen, I am using the computer screen as a materialized representational screen of my psychic apparatus. I am making a “projection” of my imaginary self-perception on the digital screen. When sharing a selfie with my collocutor, I believe he can see me just as I see myself. However, even if the other looks at me through the filter of my selfie image, which I consider to correspond to my ideal ego, the exhibitionistic demand (*I want you to look at me from the place from where I see you*) would still not be fulfilled. The place from where I see the objects, and, among them, also other people and my own image in the mirror, never coincides with the place from where the other, my collocutor, sees me. This is because the true origin of my vision is not in my eye, forming, in my mind (and now, in the digital virtual,

on the computer screen) a representation of the world, but is rather the place of my symbolic inscription, the place where I, as a subject, emerge in the symbolic. It is this symbolic place, wherefrom I structure my imaginary perspective. The illusion of a selfie as the fulfilment of the exhibitionistic demand is therefore nothing but a result of the “retroversion effect” as a paradoxical winding of subjectivity where the imaginary self-experiencing of the ‘I’ (*moi*) as the origin of its actions is the way the subject “blinds itself to its radical dependence on the big Other, on the symbolic, of which it is the effect.”⁶²

A computer screen as a means of communication taking up the role of a mirror is not at all an innocent technological improvement. Rather, what it brings along is a fundamental transformation of the traditional function of the mirror. Never before in the history of technological development has it happened that the closed intimate relationship between me and my reflection in the mirror, as a basic paradigm of the mirror image, has been penetrated by another relationship. Exactly this is now made possible by a digitally shared mirror image. In a videocall, another person (or more of them, even a global community) is entering the one-to-one relation between me and my mirror reflection. This interference has a severe impact on both one’s imaginary and symbolic identification. Through the eye of my selfie camera, the other sees my image in the mirror not as the outside observer from his own perspective, but from the same angle, with the same light, and so on, as I do. He sees *exactly* what I see: my image in the mirror. Like a vampire, he can observe my mirror image without being visible in the mirror himself. As an odd *inversion of the figure of the double*, the other literally “settles in my eye”, intruding into my intimate relationship with my reflection in the mirror, which I, in my introspection, perceive as “myself”. Here again, just from an inverted position, the double threatens to eliminate me as his rival, not by taking my place in the world, like in Golyadkin’s schizophrenic delusion in Dostoevsky’s *The Double*, but by stealing the origin of my vision.

⁶² Slavoj Žižek, “Graf želje” [The Graph of Desire], *Vestnik Inštituta za marksistične študije*, IX, Vol. 2, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, 1988, p. 49. Available at <https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski-vestnik/article/view/3631/3325>, accessed 23 November 2022. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: “Omenjeni ‘učinek retroverzije’ se opira prav na imaginarno raven, t. j. nosi ga iluzija jaza kot avtonomnega dejavnika, kot nosilca, ki je že od vsega začetka navzoč kot samodejni izvir svojih dejanj : to imaginarno samodoživljanje jaza kot izvira svojih dejanj je način, kako subjekt sprevidi, kako se zaslepi za svojo radikalno odvisnost od velikega Drugega, od simbolnega, čigar učinek v resnici je.”

The double sees *my* image as the image of *himself* – which is only possible if he, when invading my eye, occupies not only my imaginary perspective from which I form my ideal ego, but also the symbolic place from which I, for real, see myself: the place of my ego ideal.

By sharing my mirror image on the computer screen, however, I do not relate only to my collocutor, but also to the camera's eye. The relation between my mirror image and myself is mediated by a camera. The mirror does not have an eye – it is a reflective screen. The camera, conversely, possesses an eye, the phantasmal origin of vision. The computer screen turns into a mirror only with the mediation of a camera. Leaning on the fantasy of the omni-voyeur as an all-encompassing source of power,⁶³ I imagine the camera eye is looking at me. I fantasize the big Other is watching me, and that I am under the absolute control of this Gaze (remember the paranoid covering of webcams with adhesive tape so that some hacker-robbers will not be able to study one's apartment through it?). Unlike in the (mythical) non-digital actual reality, however, the Gaze of the selfie camera does not extend all around, but is, so I imagine, clearly directed through one tiny hole. The digital-virtual omni-voyeur seems to be peeping through a keyhole. So, to maintain the idea of the omni-voyeur in the age of digital technology, I need to presume cameras are everywhere. Albeit this perspective can be paranoid, it is a fact that cameras are everywhere today (there is some real cause of paranoia): not only fixed, like in Orwell's 1984, but mostly mobile. In the reality of instanternity, the controlled society is turning into a self-controlled and auto-controlled one.

From another point of view, because I am the operator of my device, I can, so I believe, manipulate the Gaze. I can control how the camera captures the world, and also how it captures my image in the mirror. In the digital virtual reality, the original exhibitionistic disposition of the subject is transfigured in such a way that when I show myself to the gaze of the Other (playing with a specular screen, which is now externalized, and making myself a picture), I at the same time try to control this gaze. When making a selfie, or observing my *image* on the computer screen during, say, a Zoom conference, I try to factor the Other's gaze into

⁶³ “The spectacle of the world, in this sense, appears to us as all-seeing. This is the phantasy to be found in the Platonic perspective of an absolute being to whom is transferred the quality of being all-seeing.” (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 75.)

this photo, that is, how I am being photographed, as a *picture*, in the field of the gaze and the light.

As we have seen before, in a computer screen as the virtual-actual object, the representational and the specular screen as the two functions of a psychic apparatus somewhat weirdly overlap. The computer screen plays the role of the representational screen insofar as I imagine seeing the world on it, that is, images and videos of people, of objects and events, and also of myself. But as soon as I *share* my image with my collocutor or post it on the Internet, the computer screen turns into a specular screen, on which I give myself into the gaze of the Other. However, as the two screens of my psychic apparatus are both materialized in the computer screen, I, in the case of selfies, try to “glue” the materialized representational screen onto the materialized specular screen. I try to “superimpose” my image over my picture. In doing so, I want my collocutor to see the computer screen not as my specular screen on which I reflect the world as a *speculum mundi*, but as my representational screen on which I – in an exhibitionistic demand – expose the illusion of my imaginary self-perception. Using a selfie camera, I interact with others through some sort of “imaginary filter”, which functions as a damper of social interaction beyond the geometrical parameters of the image. As Dolar points out somewhere, “the image began to serve as that in which desire cannot quite recognize itself as desire and which always betrays it.”⁶⁴

The Auto-modelling of Subjectivity and the Domination of the Image

The overlapping of the two psychic screens materialized in the computer screen results in the *auto-modelling of subjectivity* as the principle individual’s imaginary inscription in the spectacle of instantaneity. Auto-modelling, which has been showing its contours more and more clearly in recent decades, refers to two characteristics of the processes of modelling, that is, of reifying the individual in the digital virtual, i.e. to these processes being *autistic* insofar as they are radically reflexive and self-referential, and to them being *automated* inasmuch as they are not (solely) individually controlled or guided, but are produced

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⁶⁴ Mladen Dolar, *Samozavedanje: Heglova Fenomenologija duha II*. [Self-Consciousness: Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit II.], Ljubljana, DTP, Analecta, 1992, p. 23. From the original in Slovene, translated by B. K.: “*podoba je začela služiti kot tisto, v čemer se želja ravno ne more prepoznati kot želja in kar jo vselej izda.*”

through the fluidity of the technologically inter-mediated relations. Auto-modelling refers to Internet exhibitionism as the *narcissistic* part of the ambivalence of the scopical drive. When someone's mirror image (i.e. a selfie) as a representation of an individual is "glued" onto his playing with the specular screen, the individual's self-reflection acquires a self-referential, autistic form: what he engages with in the space of the Other as a *speculum mundi* are all the (imaginary) reflections of himself. This process is *automated* in a sort of an "infinite mirror": once you roll the digital-virtual machine, algorithms start to reproduce the schema by themselves.

The representational screen overriding the specular screen as the prevalent principle of the digital virtual social interaction begets the *domination of the image* in the spectacle of instantaneity. The ascendancy of the image promotes *narcissistic exhibitionism*, which again actuates the reign of the image. The prevailing imaginary environment of the Internet captures the subject in auto-modelling as a narcissistic-exhibitionistic trap, thereby reproducing "pathological narcissism", which (and this is its vicious circle), in the absence of the ego ideal, is easily caught in this trap and even reproduces it. With this self-supporting structural process, the apparition of the subject in the field of the gaze and the light beyond the geometrical parameters of the image, that is, on the level of the symbolic, which staples the realm of vision with the realm of language, is to a large extent blocked. The reduction of the field of vision to the reign of image has, of course, already taken place in the old spectacle – the point is that here, unlike in the old spectacle, this reduction is established through the intervention of an individual, the "user" – through his active engagement in following his passive, that is, his exhibitionistic aim. Thereby, it turns into *auto-reduction*.

The Internet voyeur, the stalker, is driven in his obsession with the "this is not it" relation to the object of his desire, which functions as its lever: *what I look at is never what I wish to see*.

The stalker's double thrill – and in the spectacle of instantaneity we are all stalkers – resembles the double thrill of the old-fashioned voyeur. On the one hand, he wants to catch the other at the point where he does not show, in order to finally see, in his fantasy, what he wishes to see. This part of the excitement is powered by his relation to the *objet a*. On the other hand, the stalker is driven by the frisson of shame that he feels in a state of suspicion that he himself might be caught

in his ignominious act of stalking. This part of the thrill is related to the big Other. The shame of the stalker, however, is not only about him being ensnared in his physical existence sitting on the bed in his room and stalking others through his computer screen, but also about his stalking being revealed within the digital traits. Passing invisibly between the two realities, the Gaze is all around.

Surfing through all the selfies, where the targeted individual (the object of the voyeur's desire) is trying to convince the Other that he is the image of himself, and through all the photos where this individual is posing for someone else's camera, the stalker is looking for photos from parties and other occasions where the other is captured when unaware of being watched and photographed (the more awkward or intimate the situation, the higher the excitement). But what the stalker gets in such a case is again an image, someone else's (that is, the photographer's) representation of the other: in this manner again there is someone, the paparazzi-photographer, who attempts to regulate the Gaze editing his representation of how he saw the other. The Internet stalker tries to penetrate through the narcissist self-referentiality of the Internet exhibitionist, who covers his screen with endless layers of images looped in an infinity-mirror effect. The image-shower makes the stalker apathetic: you have blinded me by showing me how you want to be seen, and in doing so you confront me only too bluntly with the fact that what I am looking at is not what I want to see – you do not stimulate my desire, you are killing it: I don't want to look at you anymore. Only by reaching beyond the auto-modelling of the Internet exhibitionist can the true drive of the Internet voyeur be triggered: only there can he fail to see what he wishes to see and only there can he be driven by the thrill of being caught in his secret act.

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Unlike the Internet exhibitionist, the stalker is, following his active aim, not caught in the imaginary mirror-cage of auto-modelling – or at least, even if he is addicted to this activity (for he is nothing but the exhibitionist's flipside), he tries to break through its inner cracks due to the structure of his desire – which makes him (that is, his position) the “transformative potential” of the spectacle of instantaneity.

Conclusion

This analysis of voyeurism and exhibitionism on the Internet, namely, in the spectacle of instanternity as the reality irreversibly permitted and determined by the digital virtual, has brought us to the following conclusions:

1. Although the digital virtual cannot be reduced to its specular aspect (the digital virtual reality does not function only in the field of vision), the field of vision, as long as we operate with computer screens, preconditions the digital virtual reality.
2. This means that voyeurism and exhibitionism as the two mechanisms of the scopic drive, that is, the two ways the subject is constituted in the field of vision – despite the fact that language, written and spoken, is present on the Internet to the same extent as visual content – are the fundamental principles operating in, and structuring, the digital virtual.
3. Subsequently, the changes in the operation of voyeurism and exhibitionism in the digital virtual compared to the (now only mythical) non-digital actual have a significant impact on the constitution of subjectivity in the reality of instanternity, and, with this, also on the prospects of sociality in the future.
4. These changes are related to a) the fact that the digital virtual and the non-digital actual are (or soon will be) inseparable, and to a certain extent also indistinguishable, so that the individual is on both sides, constantly and repetitively traversing the unsurmountable gap between them and riding on the waves of their reciprocal alienation, and b) to the technological improvements that are penetrating certain basic relations underlying the mechanisms of voyeurism and exhibitionism, namely the relation of the subject to the object, to another subject (as the object of desire), and to the Other (which, in the field of vision, operates as the Gaze), as well as the relation of the individual to himself *qua* the object (the narcissistic proposition of turning round upon one's own self), that is, to his own mirror image, and therefore affects the formation of the psychic constellations of the ego, the ideal ego, the ego ideal, and the superego.

5. The screen of a desktop computer or a mobile phone equipped with two cameras brings about the following changes, which fundamentally impact the constitution of subjectivity and intersubjectivity:

a) The computer screen as the actual-virtual object conjoins the two screens (the representational and the specular) operating in our psychic apparatus and defining our functioning in the scopic field. “Materialized” in one single object, which is, as no object before, both physical and digital, the two structurally diverse screens somehow forcibly overlap. This overlapping results in a number of psychic consequences (obsessive selfie-mania or attempted control of the Gaze, hallucinatory fixations to the Gaze as in “Snapchat dysmorphia”, or the paranoid fantasies of being under the control of the Gaze, and so on). Notwithstanding these effects on the psychic constellations, the most important consequence of the overlapping of the two screens materialized in the computer screen is *the representational screen overriding the specular screen*, which results in the *domination of the image* in the spectacle of instanternity.

b) With a selfie camera, or webcam, installed above the screen, a computer screen acquires the function of a mirror. Unprecedentedly, we now interact with others while looking at ourselves in the mirror. This has become the new norm of digital virtual communication.

c) With this new norm, and with the representational screen overriding the specular screen, communication as such has become (self-)representation.

d) In such a disposition, an individual – necessarily, structurally – gets caught in the *auto-modelling of subjectivity* as a narcissistic, exhibitionistic self-referential cycle, which again reproduces the reign of the image.

e) The computer screen brings about a historical transformation of the function of the mirror: the intrusion of the other – as the double – in an individual’s intimate relationship with his mirror image.

6. Although the exhibitionistic-voyeuristic interplay, unlike Debord’s old spectacle, is enabled in the spectacle of instanternity, it still results in

the euthanization of the political subject: the spectacle of instanternity, namely, *actively produces the passive position of the exhibitionist, while it puts to sleep the active position of the voyeur* (it makes him apathetic). Because of this, the spectacle of instanternity produces a paradoxical situation: the very interaction with others prevents intersubjective relations.⁶⁵

7. At various levels, the *abolition of the ego ideal* is at work in the digital virtual. The reduction of the scopic field to the realm of the image promotes narcissism, which, as a pathology, emerges exactly due to the unsuccessful symbolic identification. Caught in a trap of auto-modelling, “pathological narcissism” has overflowed into the digital virtual. Simultaneously, the transformation of the function of the mirror brought about by the computer screen also undermines symbolic identification, because the other, as an uncanny double, in an unprecedented way intrudes upon my origin of vision displaced in the symbolic.
8. Instead of the ego ideal, there comes the network. Power relations today are not predominantly hierarchical, but function for the most part as “points of coincidence and accumulation” in a system of multi-dimensional interconnections. This is where the network of the World Wide Web and the network of the established global free market economy are perfectly aligned – in this sense, the Internet truly functions as a “materialized ideology”.
9. The “pathological narcissist” is embedded in it. By his essential constitution – marked by a lack of symbolic identification – the “pathological narcissist” is the exact opposite of a political subject.

⁶⁵ This can be referenced to Samo Tomšič’s notion of the *antisociality of capitalism*: “By imposing relations of competition as the paradigm of social bond, capitalism in fact performs a foreclosure of the social, thus allowing only a politics of animosity or resentment. No surprise, then, that, together with the foreclosure of solidarity, equality was replaced by a quasi-naturalized vision of inequality while freedom became associated first and foremost with the market, thus becoming the unbound, absolute freedom of economic abstractions. Within this framework, the other’s freedom no longer functions as condition and constraint of my own freedom, but as a threat.” (Samo Tomšič, “No Such Thing as Society? On Competition, Solidarity, and Social Bond”, *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Critique*, Vol. 33., Nos. 2-3, Duke University Press, Durham, 2022, pp. 62–63.)

10. To exit the spectacle that materializes the ideology of neoliberal market economy, a change in the existent libidinal economy would be necessary – or vice versa – the question is what socio-technological constellation could establish a libidinal economy that could generate a new political subject. Assuming that a return to a pre-digital reality is not possible, the only way forward seems to be to posit a radically different relationship between the Internet, as the technological essence of the age of instantaneity, and the World Wide Web, as its “ideological materialization”. One that would break through the self-generating mechanism fostered by the inherent relationship between the reign of the image, narcissistic exhibitionism, “pathological narcissism”, autism, the injunction to enjoy, and slavish subordination to the network. The Internet, with hypertext as a symbolic structure of a different scale, indeed makes this theoretically possible (remember the utopian dreams of its pioneers?). The practical incentives in this direction are few, but on the rise.
11. At this point, however – before any further analysis – we can conclude with an approximate assumption that the transformative potential inscribed in the spectacle of instantaneity is implied in the voyeur, who is, unlike the exhibitionist, able to distance himself from the self-referentiality and self-generation of the spectacle due to the logic of his desire.

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Povzetki | Abstracts

Reza Naderi

The Place of the Subject in Badiou's Theory of Discipline

Keywords: discipline, axiomatic method, formal systems, subject, (mathematical) infinite, cogito, dialectic, anti-philosophy

Alain Badiou's theory of discipline condenses many important theoretical tools that he developed throughout his long encounter with various philosophical and political milieus from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s, when he wrote his magnum opus *Being and Event*. Through this vast terrain, Badiou expressed seemingly different commitments: from logic and the epistemology of science in the late 1960s and politics during the 1970s, to ontology and mathematics in the 1980s, which has continued to this time. However, a close reading of his major works during this period reveals an internal thread of thought that runs between them, which I have named discipline. In other words, discipline is the framework within which we can reconstruct Badiou's main ideas as part of a continuous work (during the stated period) that not only reveals the internal coherence of his overall thought over the course of time, within which he showed different and seemingly unrelated commitments, but also gives us a powerful tool to understand the key concepts of his philosophy, such as the procedures of truth, ontology, phenomenology, and his commitment to axiomatic thinking. In this essay we aim to examine the concept of the subject in relation to the theory of discipline. We will do so by examining Badiou's encounter with two crucial aspects of the theory of the subject discussed by Lacan: the Cartesian *cogito* and the relation of the subject to the mathematical infinite.

Reza Naderi

Mesto subjekta v Badioujevi teoriji discipline

Ključne besede: disciplina, aksiomska metoda, formalni sistemi, subjekt, (matematično) neskončno, cogito, dialektika, antifilozofija

Teorija discipline Alaina Badiouja združuje številna pomembna teoretska orodja, ki jih je razvil med svojimi večkratnimi srečevanji z različnimi filozofskimi in političnimi okolji od sredine šestdesetih do sredine osemdesetih let, ko je napisal svoj magnum opus *Biti in dogodek*. Na tem obsežnem terenu je Badiou izražal na videz različne zaveze: od logike in epistemologije znanosti v poznih šestdesetih in politike v sedemdesetih letih do ontologije in matematike v osemdesetih, kar se je nadaljevalo vse do danes. Vendar pozorno branje njegovih glavnih del v tem obdobju razkrije notranjo miselno

nit, ki poteka med njimi in ki sem jo poimenoval disciplina. Z drugimi besedami, disciplina je okvir, znotraj katerega lahko rekonstruiramo Badioujeve glavne ideje kot del kontinuiranega dela (v navedenem obdobju), ki ne razkriva le notranje koherentnosti njegove misli skozi čas, znotraj katere je pokazal različne in na videz nepovezane zaveze, temveč nam daje tudi orodje za razumevanje ključnih konceptov njegove filozofije, kot so postopki resnice, ontologija, fenomenologija in njegova zavezanost aksiomatskemu mišljenju. Namen tega članka je preučiti pojem subjekta v luči teorije discipline. To bomo storili tako, da bomo preučili Badioujevo srečanje z dvema ključnima vidikoma teorije subjekta, ki ju je obravnaval Lacan: kartezijski cogito in razmerje med subjektom in matematičnim neskončnim.

Magdalena Germek **Mathematical Science of Being**

Keywords: Badiou, mathematics, ontology, epistemology, rational materialism, ontological realism, presentation form of the multiple

In the present article, we have demonstrated that it is important to understand the equating of mathematics with ontology in Badiou's philosophy, taking into account the necessary connection between rational materialism and ontological realism. Only in this way can we truly understand Badiou's fundamental thesis that thinking and being are the same. Philosophy is not ontology and it is not a true procedure, but a thought that arises by being conditioned with the generic thoughts of all four truth procedures (art, politics, science, and love), which in turn does not mean that it cannot speak in the name of truth and ontology.

Magdalena Germek **Matematična znanost o biti**

Ključne besede: Badiou, matematika, ontologija, epistemologija, racionalni materializem, ontološki realizem, prezentacijska forma množstva

V pričujočem besedilu smo pokazali, da je v Badioujevi filozofiji pomembno razumeti enačbo matematike in ontologije ob upoštevanju nujne povezave med racionalnim materializmom in ontološkim realizmom. Samo tako lahko zares razumemo Badioujevo temeljno tezo, da je isto misliti in biti. Filozofija ni ontologija in ni procedura resnice, temveč je misel, ki nastaja v pogojevanju z generičnimi mišljenji vseh štirih postopkov resnice (umetnosti, politike, znanosti in ljubezni), kar pa ne pomeni, da ne more govoriti v imenu resnic in ontologije.

Rado Riha

Transfinitisation of Knowledge: Kant's Case

Keywords: Kant, Cantor, knowledge, the system of critiques, transfinitisation

Analysing the role of Kant's third and final Critique, the *Critique of Judgement*, in the system of Kant's three Critiques (*Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of Judgement*), the paper posits that with the conclusion of the system of critiques in the third *Critique*, Kant succeeds in presenting it as a point of a transfinitisation of knowledge within the critiques' system.

Rado Riha

Transfinitizacija spoznanja: primer Kant

Ključne besede: Kant, Cantor, spoznanje, sistem kritik, transfinitizacija

Članek analizira vlogo Kantove tretje, zadnje kritike, *Kritike razsodne moči*, v sistemu treh Kantovih kritik (*Kritika čistega uma*, *Kritika praktičnega uma* in *Kritika razsodne moči*), izhajajoč iz teze, da je Kantu v tretji *Kritiki* uspelo prikazati ta zaključek kot točko transfinitizacije vednosti znotraj kritičnega sistema.

Rok Benčin

World at the Border: The Cosmopolitan Ideal between Loss and Multiplication

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, migration, politics, philosophy, Arendt, Rancière

The article examines the transformations of the philosophical concept of world as it appears in the cosmopolitan tradition of political thought and its relation to the problem of the border. It focuses particularly on how world is understood as either lost or multiplied in the contexts of modernity, globalisation, and migration. The article discusses postcolonial conceptions of cosmopolitics and the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt to show how the universal ideal of the world is replaced by singular constructions of worlds in terms of the experience of migrants and refugees or the phenomenological horizon of political action. I conclude by suggesting that Jacques Rancière's understanding of politics as a conflict of worlds can take us beyond the traps of both cosmopolitan universalism and the phenomenological singularity of being-in-the-world.

Rok Benčin

Svet na meji: kozmopolitski ideal med izgubo in pomnožitvijo

Ključne besede: kozmopolitizem, migracije, politika, filozofija, Arendt, Rancière

Članek preučuje transformacije filozofskega koncepta sveta, kot ga predpostavlja tradicija kozmopolitske politične misli in njegovo razmerje do problematike meje. Osredotoča se na razumevanje sveta kot izgubljenega ali pomnoženega v kontekstih modernosti, globalizacije in migracij. Skozi obravnavo postkolonialnih razumevanj kozmopolitike in politične filozofije Hannah Arendt pokaže, kako univerzalni ideal »sveta« zamenjajo singularne konstrukcije svetov v smislu migrantske in begunske izkušnje ali fenomenološkega horizonta političnega delovanja. V zaključku nakaže, da bi nas onstran pasti kozmopolitskega univerzalizma in fenomenološke singularnosti biti-v-svetu lahko popeljalo razumevanje politike kot konflikta med svetovi pri Jacquesu Rancièru.

Marina Gržinić

Capitalism and Death

Keywords: biopolitics, necropolitics, citizenship, reconfiguration

In the article, the author addresses with two ways of dealing with life, biopolitics, and necropolitics, and connects them to the excess of power over life and death in the era of neoliberal global capitalism. Dealing with necropolitical processes requires a different analysis of spaces and temporalities, of necrospaces and necrotemporalities. It also requires consideration of the possibilities of resistance to necropolitical processes by those who are by no means silent witnesses, by no means mere victims, but subjects who have undergone a process of (de)subjectivation in a way that, as Achille Mbembe would argue, leads to a process of destruction of their own subjectivity.

Marina Gržinić

Kapitalizem in smrt

Ključne besede: biopolitika, nekropolitika, državljanstvo, rekonfiguracija

V članku se avtorica ukvarja z dvema načinoma soočanja z življenjem, biopolitiko in nekropolitiko, in ju povezuje s presežkom moči nad življenjem in smrtjo v dobi neoliberalnega globalnega kapitalizma. Ukvarjanje z nekropolitičnimi procesi zahteva drugačno analizo prostorov in časovnosti, nekroprostorov in nekrotemporalnosti. Zahteva tudi premislek o možnostih upora proti nekropolitičnim procesom s strani tistih, ki nikakor niso neme priče, nikakor zgolj žrtve, temveč subjekti, ki so bili podvrženi procesu (de)subjektivacije na način, ki, kot bi trdil Achille Mbembe, pripelje do procesa uničenja lastne subjektivnosti.

Jelica Šumič Riha

Disorientation in a Time of the Absence of Limits

Keywords: disorientation, belief, Unglauben, certainty, the post-truth, the real, jouissance

Seen from the perspective of the inconsistency of the Other, the post-truth era can be considered to be an era emerging from a crisis in belief in the existence of the Other, which is to be taken in a twofold sense: as a belief in the Other of the Other, that is, the Other of Law, and a belief in the Other considered as the subject supposed to know. Insofar as the contemporary subject does not want to know anything about this “condition of belief” without which no knowledge, and therefore no truth, are possible, the crisis of belief affect both, the Other and the subject. This can be seen in the fact that the failing belief in the Other and knowledge, considered as a distinctive feature of our profoundly unbelieving times, is accompanied by an unprecedented rise in anxiety at the social level, as contemporary subjects who do not believe in the (existence of the) Other are singularly defenceless before the irruption of the real. With truth losing its power to name the real, the subject itself as a singular response to the real is becoming ever more precarious. Which is why, when faced with the erratic irruption of the real, contemporary subjects are condemned to a desperate search for certainties.

Jelica Šumič Riha

Dezorientacija v času odsotnosti mej

Ključne besede dezorientacija, verovanje, Unglauben, gotovost, realno, užitek

Obdobje postresnice, če ga gledamo iz perspective nekonsistentnosti Drugega, je obdobje, ki je posledica krize verovanja v obstoj Drugega. Verovanje v obstoj Drugega je treba razumeti v dveh pomenih: kot verovanje v Drugega zakona in kot verovanje v Drugega kot subjekta, za katerega se predpostavlja, da ve. Če sodobni subject noče ničesar vedeti o tem pogoju verovanja, brez katerega ni mogoča vednost in, posledično, tudi resnica ne, kriza verovanja zadeva tako Drugega kot subjekta. To je razvidno iz dejstva, da zamajano verovanje v Drugega in vednost, kar je prepoznavna značilnost našega časa neverovanje, spremlja nezaslišani vzpon tesnobe na družbeni ravni, kolikor so namreč sodobni subjekti, ki ne verjamejo v (obstoj) Drugega, popolnoma brez obrambe pred vdorom realnega. Ko resnica izgublja zmožnost poimenovati realno, postane status subjekta, če ga obravnavamo kot singularen odgovor realnega, vedno bolj problematičen. To tudi pojasni, zakaj so sodobni subjekti, ko so soočeni z vdorom realnega, obsojeni na obupano iskanje gotovosti.

Cindy Zeiher

Sensation(all) Ontology

Keywords Lacanian know-how, extimité, ontology, repetition, curiosity, jouissance, sensation

It is the praxis of being a subject in the world which enables psychoanalysis to theorise subjectivity. Freud theorised subjectivity from the perspective of desires, those repressed unconscious forces which conflict with the subjects' need to live in the world. The upshot of this conflict for the subject is trauma and for psychoanalysis such trauma provides a way into a remedy, a cure, the presumption of psychoanalysis being that through its method of transference, it does indeed possess the knowledge to pursue a remedy. Lacan offers a new interpretation of Freud by considering the subject as an ongoing ontological enigma in so far as subjective unconscious desire is not only (potentially) traumatic but necessarily (always) linguistic. How is this an ontological enigma? For Lacan the subject is first and foremost a speaking being engaged in an ongoing struggle to articulate unconscious desire. This is because, claims Lacan, we are born into language which not only pre-exists us but continues after death. In this way subjectivity is inescapably oriented to language as simultaneously intrinsic external to it. The unconscious is therefore a mixture of inside and outside, an enigmatic (pre) ontological space which Lacan calls extimacy. This essay seeks to explore Lacan's orientation of the subject towards extimacy as the site of subjective conflict where, in its quest for the subject's desire to know and handle the symptom, transference engages a new ontological dimension in which we can say that the extimate is structured like a sensation.

Cindy Zeiher

Ontologija občutja

Ključne besede: Lacanov savoir y faire, ekstimnost, ontologija, ponavljanje, radovednost, užitek, občutje

Praksa bivanja v svetu kot subjekt psihoanalizi omogoča, da teorizira subjektivnost. Freud je subjektivnost teoriziral z vidika želja, tistih potlačenih nezavednih sil, ki so v sporu s subjektovo potrebo živeti v svetu. Izid tega konflikta za subjekta je travma, za psihoanalizo pa takšna travma predstavlja pot do zdravljenja, pri čemer psihoanaliza izhaja iz domneve, da s svojo metodo transferja dejansko poseduje vednost, ki vodi v zdravljenje. Lacan ponudi novo interpretacijo Freuda s tem, da subjekt obravnava kot nenehno ontološko uganko, kolikor subjektivna nezavedna želja ni le (potencialno) travmatična, temveč nujno (vedno) jezikovna. Kaj pomeni, da je ontološka uganka? Za Lacana je subjekt najprej in predvsem govoreče bitje v nenehnem prizadevanju za izražanje nezavedne želje. To pa zato, trdi Lacan, ker se rodimo v govorico, ki ne le da

obstaja pred nami, ampak se nadaljuje tudi po smrti. Na ta način je subjektivnost nezogibno naperjena na govorico, vendar ostaja v notranji zunanosti glede nanjo. Nezavedno je torej mešanica notranjosti in zunanosti, enigmatični (pred)ontološki prostor, ki ga Lacan imenuje ekstimmnost. Namen pričujočega besedila je raziskati Lacanovo naravnost subjekta k ekstimmnosti kot mestu subjektivnega konflikta, kjer transfer v svojem prizadevanju za subjektovo željo po vednosti in rokovanju s simptomom mobilizira novo ontološko razsežnost, v kateri lahko rečemo, da je ekstimmno strukturirano kot občutje.

Peter D. Mathews

The Pleasures of Unpleasure: Jacques Lacan and the Atheism Beyond the “Death of God”

Keywords: Lacan, atheism, reality principle, unpleasure, tragedy, Antigone

Although the desire to be free from God springs from humanity’s wish to enjoy pleasure without restraint, Lacan observes that humans remain neurotic and unhappy. That is because the prevailing “dead of God” form of atheism relies on the denial of a father/god, a negation that inadvertently replicates the logic of religion. Lacan, by contrast, grounds his atheism in a theory of pleasure that recognizes the role of “unpleasure” in breaking the tedium of easy, unlimited gratification. Turning to Greek tragedy, Lacan shows how the ancient world used the gods as creators of “unpleasure” to generate human *jouissance*. The figure of Antigone, in particular, shows how the divine function can fulfill “the true formula of atheism,” which is not “God is dead,” but rather, Lacan affirms, that “*God is unconscious.*”

Peter D. Mathews

Ugodja v neugodju: Jacques Lacan in ateizem onkraj »smrti Boga«

Ključne besede: Lacan, ateizem, načelo realnosti, neugodje, tragedija, Antigona

Čeprav želja po osvoboditvi od Boga izvira iz človekove želje po uživanju ugodja brez omejitev, Lacan opazuje, da ljudje ostajajo nevrotični in nesrečni. To pa zato, ker prevladujoča oblika ateizma »mrtvega Boga« temelji na zanikanju očeta/boga, negaciji, ki nehote posnema logiko religije. Nasprotno pa Lacan svoj ateizem utemeljuje s teorijo ugodja, ki prepozna vlogo »neugodja« pri razbijanju dolgočasnosti lahkega, neomejene potešitve. Lacan se obrne h grški tragediji in pokaže, kako je antični svet uporabljal bogove kot ustvarjalce »neugodja«, da bi ustvaril človeško *jouissance*. Zlasti lik Antigone pokaže, kako lahko božanska funkcija izpolni »pravo formulo ateizma«, ki se ne glasi »Bog je mrtev«, temveč, kot pravi Lacan, »Bog je nezaveden«.

Bara Kolenc

Voyeurism and Exhibitionism on the Internet: The Libidinal Economy of the Spectacle of Instanternity

Keywords: voyeurism, exhibitionism, internet, digital virtual, pathological narcissism, spectacle, vision

Today, in the situation that we call the *instantiernity* of the digital age, the visual aspect of the social (and power) relations is ever more important. A majority of human interaction on internet is happening in the field of vision. In this field, human desire follows the scopic drive, which is, according to Freud, expressed in the ambivalence of voyeurism and exhibitionism. This means that voyeurism and exhibitionism are the fundamental mechanisms operating in, and structuring, the digital virtual. This topic, in a broader sense, tackles the inscription of the subject within the digital virtual spectacle, which deals with the relation between individual's imaginary and symbolic identification, that is, between *ideal ego* and *ego ideal*. To a certain extent, this also relates to what has been marked as »pathological narcissism«. Even if the changes brought about by the digital virtual, as far as the subject is concerned, are not ontological, i.e. they do not concern its relation to being, they do concern its entry into the field of the Other, and can, because they are systemic changes, fundamentally restructure the social fabric. The bet of this article is therefore not only to try to understand the mechanisms driving the formation of subectivity within the digital virtual, but also to trace their transformative potential.

Bara Kolenc

Voajerizem in ekshibicionizem na internetu: libidinalna ekonomija spektakla instantnosti

Ključne besede: voajerizem, ekshibicionizem, internet, digitalno virtualno, patološki narcizem, spektakel, vizualno

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Danes, v razmerah, ki jih imenujemo instantnost digitalne dobe, je vizualni vidik družbenih (in oblastnih) odnosov vse pomembnejši. Večina človeških interakcij na internetu se odvija v vidnem polju. V tem polju človeška želja sledi skopičnemu nagonu, ki se po Freudu izraža v ambivalentnosti voajerizma in ekshibicionizma. To pomeni, da sta voajerizem in ekshibicionizem temeljna mehanizma, ki delujeta v digitalnem virtualnem in ga strukturirata. Ta tema se v širšem smislu nanaša na vpis subjekta v digitalni virtualni spektakel, ki obravnava razmerje med posameznikovo imaginarno in simbolno identifikacijo, torej med idealnim jazom in idealom jaza. Do določene mere se to nanaša tudi na tisto, kar so označili kot "patološki narcizem". Četudi spremembe, ki jih prinaša digitalni virtualno, vsaj kar zadeva subjekt, niso ontološke, tj. ne zadevajo njegovega odnosa do biti, pa zadevajo njegov vstop v polje Drugega in

lahko, ker gre za sistemske spremembe, temeljito prestrukturirajo družbeno tkivo. Stava tega članka torej ni le poskus razumevanja mehanizmov, ki poganjajo oblikovanje subjektivnosti v digitalnem virtualnem, temveč tudi sledenje njihovemu transformativnemu potencialu.

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Ibid., str. 49

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