

PSYCHOANALYSIS BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

Edited by
Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo
and Slavoj Žižek

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LOOK Publications

of the Multimedia Cultural Centre Split
and the Press of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Split

2023



Publisher of LOOK Publications:

Multimedia Cultural Centre Split
and the Press of the Faculty of Humanities and
Social Sciences Split

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Additional Support

Centre for Cross Cultural and Korean Studies

(with funding by the KSPS), Studia Mediterranea,

and a grant from the Split-Dalmatia County

program Istraživanje, razvoj i inovacije (thanks

to Tonka Petričević, Head of the Unit for Project

Implementation Support, University of Split)

ISBN 978-953-7344-06-1 (MKC Split)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Revista Bajo Palabra, of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, and specifically Delia Manzanero, the journal's editor, for authorizing us to publish some of the articles that will be originally published in a special Dossier, focused on Philosophy and Politics (2023). Thanks to The Universidad de Caldas, specifically to the journal Discusiones Filosóficas, for allowing the incorporation of one of the articles to this book. And thanks go to The University of Cali, Colombia, specifically to the Journal Guillermo de Ockham, for allowing the incorporation of two articles to this book, to Research in Psychoanalysis for the permission to include Étienne Balibar's contribution, and to the editors of Le Monde and the European Journal of Psychoanalysis for permission to include the essay by Elisabeth Roudinesco. Specific citations to the original publications are provided at the beginning of the relevant articles.

We thank the authors who agreed to include their work in this book.

And special thanks to Brian Willems for his support, editing and allowing this book to be published.

Foreword

IGNACIO LÓPEZ-CALVO

Psychoanalysis Between Philosophy and Politics is a remarkable, interdisciplinary volume consisting of fifteen chapters dealing, as the title suggests, with the numerous and diverse connections between philosophical and political discourses. It is divided into three sections: The Philosophical Vision of Politics, The Political Crisis, and The Knot Between Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, and Politics. The essays included come from several academic fields (philosophy, political, sociology science, psychoanalysis, clinical psychology, social theory, postcolonial studies) and different European and Asian countries (such as the United Kingdom, Serbia, Poland, Belgium, Philippines, East Timor, Taiwan, Korea).

The opening chapter, titled “From Freedom to Liberation,” and written by one of the co-editors of this book, the renowned Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, elaborates on the notions of freedom and liberty, using G.W.F. Hegel’s notions of “abstract freedom” (to do what one wants independently from social rules and customs) and “concrete freedom” (within a set of social rules) as a point of departure. He asks the following question: “what if the gap that separates the universal notion of freedom from the multiple meanings freedom has for different groups is the gap that constitutes (actual) freedom?” Underscoring the ambiguous way in which freedom works, Žižek defines “the structure of inherent transgression” as a social

space of what is both permitted and repressed, excluded but also necessary for this public space to reproduce itself. In this context, he adds, it has become increasingly common to find social sectors (not only from the Leftist anti-establishment but also from Right-wing populist movements) who are convinced that they must act freely (i.e., violate the rules) in order to protect their liberty, as happened with the two thousand rioters during the January 6 United States Capitol attack. Žižek concludes that nowadays, ideology functions increasingly less like a symptom and more like a fetish: “ideology works in a cynical mode, it includes a distance towards itself . . . fetish is not the element to which I hold so that I can act ignoring what I know – fetish is *this knowledge itself*.” In this way, he explains, capitalism includes and neutralizes critical knowledge: “critical distance towards the social order is the very medium through which this order reproduces itself. Just think about today’s explosion of art biennales (Venice, Kassel...): although they usually present themselves as a form of resistance towards global capitalism and its commodification of everything, they are in their mode of organization, the ultimate form of art as a moment of capitalist self-reproduction.”

In the second chapter, titled “Philosophy and Politics – An Odd Couple,” Frank Ruda continues to explore this odd relationship between the two fields, using again Hegel’s thought—in this case his assertions about philosophy’s inoperability vis-à-vis politics—as a starting point. He then compares this coupling with the relationship between philosophy and art. Ruda concludes that it is impossible for philosophy to think politics, but “This impossibility is the very possibility to see there something impossible can happen if we prescribe a new (im)possibility. Only by raising philosophy’s incapacity to the point of impossibility, politics can be thought. Philosophy can think politics by starting from affirming the impossibility to think politics.”

Continuing with the exegesis of Hegel’s writings, in “Politics of the Absolute: Hegel and Object-Oriented Ontology,” Charles William Johns highlights the common denominators between Graham Harman’s Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) and Hegel’s theory of the (dialectical) object in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Johns argues that the characterization of the *object* by Harman (one of the contributors to this volume) suggests a turn from Hegel’s absolute, autonomous “whole” to the absolute autonomous independence of the individual object. This shift in contemporary philosophical readings of the absolute, he argues, has political implications. Johns associates this renaissance of the absolute with Hegel’s dialectical thinking. In his view, Harman’s characterization of the absolute as independent, non-relational unit and Hegel’s characterization of the absolute as an encompassing “whole” have political consequences: these polarizing descriptions of the absolute may be *dialectically* formulated and less prone to the absolutization of either side of the political spectrum (while the Left is fundamentally open and relational, the Right as fundamentally closed and consolidational).

In the following essay, titled “Anti-Antigone: From a Politics of Desire to a Politics of Love – Rethinking the Politics of the One-All-Alone,” Wanyoung Kim and Mark Murphy argue that whereas in the past, we had to face the prohibition of the father demanding us to relinquish the pleasure principle, we now seem to be convinced that there is nothing outside the pleasure principle, which causes a collective psychological trauma. The advent of neoliberalism, Kim and Murphy argue, has prevented us from returning to a politics of desire. In fact, this digital era is characterized by psychosis, self-naming, the desire to be seen, echo chambers, and isolation. The solution, they claim, is to separate the imposed therapeutic optimism from the need for hope, which begins with love. Fortunately, in their view, from the ashes of the isolation enforced by the

COVID pandemic, we are now seeing general strikes, people finally meeting face to face: “the circular enjoyment offered by the lathouse toward creating a new radical social link by a love beyond the law.”

Closing the first section, we find the collective essay “The Slovenian School, Contributions and Current Debates: An Exploration from a Latin American Perspective,” written by Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, Hernán Scholten, David Pavón-Cuellar, Jairo Gallo Acosta, Jesús Ayala-Colqui, and Antonio Letelier Soto. After providing an overview of the historiography of psychoanalysis, it focuses on the campaign organized by Nina Krajnik in favor of the psychoanalytic clinic and against the theoretical psychoanalysis of Slavoj Žižek, Alenka Zupančič and Mladen Dolar. According to the authors, behind Krajnik’s claims is the goal of expanding the World Association of Psychoanalysis (WAP) directed by headed Jacques-Alain Miller and, thus, monopolizing psychoanalytic theory and its political effects. The essay then proceeds to reveal the influence of the radical and irreverent approaches of Slovenian school (Dolar, Zupancic, and Žižek) in Latin America, but always within the context of Miller’s current hegemony within psychoanalytic field, particularly in countries like Argentina, where it was imposed even more deeply than in France.

Moving on to the second section of the book, titled “The Political Crisis,” the essay “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” by Étienne Balibar, previously published in 2016, focuses on Freud’s 1921 text “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” to define what the French philosopher calls “the moment of the trans-individual”: whereas individuals are considered normal if they can maintain a distance between personality or individual conduct, social institutions are normal if they favor (or are pathological if they abolish) the distance between the individual and the collective. But the trans-individual structure suspends the distinction between

the individual and the collective in favor of a primary process that commands both as modes of existence that are relative and relational. Balibar looks at Freud’s theory of a correlation between the formation of the “ego” and the theory of “groups” or “masses” to overcome the opposition between an “individual psychology” and a “collective psychology. The French philosopher also focuses on the notion of regression as applied to the functioning of institutions and its relation to the death drive. On the other hand, the essay looks at what is political in psychoanalysis: “The political . . . turns the unconscious into the matrix or the interplay of representations and affects, which ‘fixates’ individuals in the modality of a collective *binding*, or of a collective conformism, or on the contrary, thrusts them into the uncontrollable dimension of a subversive or self-destructive ‘*un-binding*.’” It explores the antitheses individual/collective (or the social) and normal/pathological, providing the Freudian examples of the resistance against panic and disarray in the Army, and to sectarianism or intolerance in the Catholic Church. These two major ideological state apparatuses are characterized for the libidinal structure of their love for the real (in the case of the army) or imaginary (in the case of the church) “leader.” Yet Balibar points out how Freud fails to point out the constitutive homosexuality of these institutions and how they are also constituted through hate and the exclusion of the foreign body. Freud, Balibar adds, also depoliticizes his analysis of the political by eluding the reference to the state (the absent cause), even though his analysis presupposes it. Freud, we learn, “resorts more to the regressive hypothesis in order to explain how individuals abandon their autonomy by grounding themselves in institutions and in groups, whereas he resorts more to the repressive hypothesis to explain how they become autonomous in relation to the group in order to gain access to ‘solitude.’”

The following essay, titled “A Philosophical Approach to the Political Crises of Our Time” and co-authored by Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, Slavoj Žižek, Angélica Montes Montoya and Gonzalo Salas, questions an anthropocentric, neoliberal, global capitalist order that has caused the capitalocene, thus bringing us closer to the end of the world. It then proposes to de-globalize the COVID 19 pandemic in order to find solutions according to the material and non-material needs of each geographical space. Philosophy, the authors argue, should be employed to change society's worldview and achieve political and economic change that safeguards the environment and, therefore, the survival of the human species. Moreover, according to the authors, “inequality should not only be measured in terms of wealth distribution but also in terms of the “ecological and historical debt” of Western industrial countries (North America, Western Europe) towards developing countries.”

The aforementioned Graham Harman, in his essay “Displacing the State of Nature: A Disagreement with Graeber and Wengrow,” criticizes the latter's book *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. As Harman explains, *The Dawn of Everything* tries to find an alternative to the standards of modern political theory, which assume that humans in the state of nature are either good (Rousseau) or evil (Hobbes), thus producing very different types of government: in Graeber and Wengrow's view, humans are natural, playful, and imaginative experimenters who play with different types of culture and governance. According to Harman, however, their main mistake is to continue to place humans on center stage: “The only way to escape the modern deadlock is to give non-human entities a far greater role in political theory.” Following theories such as New Materialism and Object-Oriented Ontology, Harman questions their inclination to avoid the use of the environment to explain agriculture or cultural and political theory. Whereas in Graeber and Wengrow's opinion, the advent of

agriculture was nothing but a consciously playful process, in reality, Harman explains, things have a major role in history, as can be seen in the lifestyle changes provoked by the adoption of a fish-based or an acorn-based culture. For Harman, their obsession with avoiding determinism caused by non-human entities reflects a naïve, unreflective, and anthropocentric commitment to modernist ontology that divides the world into unlimited, playful human beings. According to Harman, “Human life, by contrast, is heavily mediated by inanimate objects that stabilize identity, rather than identity emerging through the purely social form of schismogenesis.”

In the following article, “A Dupuyan wager towards Comic Melancholy,” Gregg Smits discusses Left-wing melancholia and formal nostalgia vis-à-vis lost futures in a world that is becoming “corporate techno-feudalism”: the Left is either unable to imagine the end of capitalism, or can only imagine it as something worse. Smits defines the comic melancholic as “the one who foresees an inevitably catastrophic future without the desire for it, yet nonetheless persists to struggle for another fate in virtue of the absurd.” He proposes instead to exaggerate melancholy to distinguish a tragic from a comic melancholic stance. These types of melancholics are comic, according to Smits, because they go to the end and nonetheless continue even after everything seems to be lost.

Ruben O. Balotol Jr., in “Žižek and Violence in the Philippine Context,” resorts to Žižek's concept of violence to explore how Philippine governmental policies fail to provide inclusive growth and generate outbursts of objective violence, which includes anonymous and systemic capitalist violence. To contextualize the situation, Balotol finds in Philippine history what he considers a colonial mentality. He also connects these ideologies to the Filipino concepts of property, interpersonal and intergroup relations, *asal/pamatasan* (proper behavior), *sakop* (family/group-orientation), *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude),

and *hiya* (shame). Balotol then explains how capitalist modernity has given way to crony capitalism, monopoly, booty capitalism, and the country's inability to convert its assets into developmental progress. In his view, capitalism has also robbed many marginalized Filipinos of their elementary political freedoms and rights, which is causing unrest and objective violence.

In "Planetary Memory and Trans-species Immunity," Chun-Mei Chuang shares the post-humanist approach seen in Harman's essay by displacing humans from the center of our lifeworld and proposing, instead, that the *spiritual* dimension of the noösphere is not restricted to the humanist-linguistic model of thought but should rather be opened to a "trans-species posthumanist space of diffractive politics." Chuang then examines the benefits of the trans-species coevolution of sub/molecular sensibilities leading to the trans-species diffraction politics of immunity. Chuang laments how capitalism and climate change have increased the chances of viral transmission across species barriers, and underscores the importance of viral surveillance and biodiversity surveys to prevent future zoonotic disease outbreaks. Chang adds that viruses "have a lot to teach us about sense and nonsense, between self and nonself, form the sensible and insensible, and the evolutionary urge for a molecular intuition mutation. The possibility of political life as a heterogeneous co-constitution lies in this ongoing lesson about sense and sensibility."

Philip Højme, in "On the Possibilities for Future Communisms: Rethinking Communism as Biocommunism," examines the influence of Marx's early concept of species-being or *Gattungswesen* (workers alienated from their bodies or nature by conceiving of their bodies as tools to be sold or rented out) on the Kyoto School. Also resorting to Agamben's (biopolitics, communal life) and Butler's (grievable life) life writings, Højme proposes the idea of biocommunism, "an orientation towards a life without direct state control," as a type of communism

that is more suited for today's reality. Højme argues that today, humans, alienated from their species-being, see work not as a life-affirming activity or an integral part of being human, as Marx understood it, but as a means to make a living. In this sense, biocommunism, unlike biopolitics, would be characterized by as sensitivity to humans' creative force and connectedness with nature and social life. It would also allow individuals to re-take control of their own development, which is still today in the hands of institutions.

"On the Knowledge and Love of the Unconscious," by Silvia Kargodorian, locates the appearance of the political in psychoanalytical discourse when it addresses the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave, as well as in the concept of the phallic signifier, and in the triad Symbolic, Real, and Imaginary. According to her, "The unconscious is politics because it is what binds and opposes men, in the form of acceptance and rejection. Politics supposes the exchange that concerns a relationship. The unconscious is politics, and we can infer; and politics is aesthetics." Kargodorian also points out how Lacan took from Freud the idea that individual psychology is simultaneously social psychology, thus placing at the same level the subject of the individual and the subject of the collective. She also defines the symptom as political, as it promotes the bond, love, and shared discourse among human beings. Closing the essay, Kargodorian reminds us about how Hannah Arendt doubts the utility of politics during her time, given that the horror of the Nazi demagogic and totalitarian policy leading the masses was not over. Yet the author finds a solution to this evil type of politics in unveiling the knowledge of the unconscious, which promotes a community of analyzers.

The third and closing section, titled "The Knot Between Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, and Politics," opens with Elisabeth Roudinesco, who argues that psychoanalysts have contributed to their own demise by adopting, since 1999, contro-

versial stances against gay marriage and about autism. Adding to this, they have abandoned public debate, and their training programs have become dogmatic and inflexible. Roudinesco bemoans how psychoanalysis today has become blended with psychology, psychiatry, as the term “psychotherapy” is shared by psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and clinical psychology. As a result, the unwellness previously covered by psychoanalysts is now treated with psychotropic drugs prescribed by psychiatrists and general practitioners. Along these lines, while psychoanalysis no longer influences literary and philosophical circles, practitioners use incomprehensible language, are no longer seen as intellectuals, and publish in very small editions. It is now difficult for younger analysts to find clients and set up their practices. Moreover, Roudinesco laments, psychology declares its alleged scientific superiority to drive away psychoanalysis from its territory. She closes her article criticizing the attempts to modernize psychoanalysis through queer and decolonial approaches.

The next essay, Daniel Bristow’s “Freud and Politics,” is an exploration of the Austrian’s psychoanalysis relation to the politics of his day. Bristow begins by addressing the assessments of the father of psychoanalysis on different political issues of his day and what kind of politics transpire on the background of his works. For instance, Freud rejected Roman Catholicism, blamed then-US President Woodrow Wilson for the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and, disappointed with the Treaty of Versailles, saw the Habsburg monarchy as a model that Europe should aspire to replicate. He also saw the Russian Revolution of 1917 as a message of a better future. As a diaspora Jew, he supported the implantation of Jewish colonies in Palestine but did not see the creation of a Jewish state as a solution to anti-Semitism. But, above all, Freud believed in the revolutionary potential of psychoanalysis and saw a parallelism between Lassalle’s aspirations of social revolution and

the one he aspired to achieve through the scientific revolution led by psychoanalysis. In all, contemporary politics influenced his writings from his first writings to his 1939 *Moses and Monotheism*, in which he addressed the capitalist world’s socio-economic ills.

Andrea Perunović’s “Political Jouissance and the Vicissitudes of Mistrust” deals with the main topic of another forthcoming volume of essays also co-edited by Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo and Slavoj Žižek: political jouissance. In particular, Perunović conceives of jouissance as “the core psychic mechanism that structures the libidinal economies of our contemporary political cultures.” In his view, jouissance replaced the pleasure principle as the main psychic mechanism structuring the libidinal economies in political culture. Perunović points at the recent anti-vax movement as an example of the auto-destructive feature of political jouissance. Thus, the anti-vaxxer “will experience surplus jouissance in the proliferation and/or creation of new meanings that will come to contradict the dominant knowledge: ‘the vaccines contain micro-chips that allow authorities to track us,’ ‘vaccines modify our DNA,’ ‘vaccines cause sterility,’ etc.” Other examples of political jouissance, in his view, can be observed in racism, sexism, nationalism, or other right-wing politics.

In “For Politics and Psychoanalysis: Imperialist Eroticism, Nation and Emancipatory Struggle,” Fernando A. T. Ximenes argues that fascism, the symptom of today’s decadence, has always been at the core of capitalism and that it needs to be overcome via “a mass collective praxis founded on particular-universal dialectical simultaneity and differentiality.” In light of the rising power of populism and fascism in the twenty-first century, Ximenes adds, we should return to the former radicalness of psychoanalysis and to Marxist revolutionary praxis to lead “the political struggle against Western global imperialism centered in Washington.” Only that way, he believes, a new

man and the revitalization of the struggles of early socialism will be possible. The keys for this process are multipolarity and internationalism.

Robert T. Tally, in “Hermeneutics and Politics: Rereading *The Political Unconscious*,” revisits Fredric Jameson’s seminal book *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, underscoring how it conceives of literary interpretation as a political act. To develop a Marxist critique of the world system, Jameson’s dialectical, Marxist hermeneutic analyzes sentences and forms as derived from sociopolitical and economic relations in a certain type of mode of production. This dialectical criticism resorts to allegorical interpretation to make sense of the world, to understand the individual and collective existential condition in capitalist societies. To understand texts in their cultural and historical contexts as well as in the critic’s own context, one must translate from one code or register into another according to a master code or school of criticism. In this sense, Marxist criticism, according to Jameson, can identify the “strategies of containment” by which texts, as “socially symbolic acts,” suppress sociohistorical and political content. This method will make the repressed, unseen narrative of history or historical dimension (class struggle) visible by considering three frames of reference: the text’s own time and political history, its society, and history itself, which is the “absent cause.” This may be understood as a critique of ideology or false consciousness that should ultimately lean toward a utopian alternative pointing at future struggles. In other words, we interpret the text and, therefore, the world in order to change it.

In the closing chapter of the volume, “Is There a Political Unconscious in Technology?” Jens Schröter asks if technology a form of the political unconscious. Early in Marx, Schröter adds, we can find analysis of an unconscious economic reality. Every artificial object and, therefore, every technological object, has political implications because it was given a certain

form in order to fulfill a certain purpose that is affected by historical factors. There is, then, a “tension between the change a technology makes by introducing a new option (otherwise it wouldn’t be invented and used) and is therefore political, without thereby determining concrete cases how to use the technology.” Yet while, in this context, it seems plausible that technology is not neutral, it is difficult to understand or predict its political implications or political unconscious. For this same reason, it is not easy to decide how technologies must be monitored or selected. In any case, reminiscent of the unexpected effects of the repressed Freudian unconscious, according to Schröter, technology can have unexpected, disruptive side effects that may not have been intended by design or use.

Altogether, these variegated, interdisciplinary essays comprise a daring exploration of the multiple, sometimes unexpected ways in which psychoanalysis has drawn from and influenced both philosophy and politics from its inception.

PART I

The Philosophical Vision of Politics

From Freedom to Liberation

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

The finale of Act I of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* begins with don Giovanni's powerful appeal to all present "Viva la liberta!," repeated forcefully by all, interrupting the melodic flow, as if the music got stuck at this point of excessive engagement – but the catch is, of course, that, although the entire group is enthusiastically unified around call to freedom, each subgroup projects into "liberta" its own dreams and hopes, or, to quote Etienne Balibar: "Sociability is therefore the unity of a real agreement and an imaginary ambivalence, both of which have real effects."¹ Imagine a situation of political unity where all sides unite under the same Master-Signifier ("freedom"), but every particular group projects a different meaning into this universality (freedom of property for some, anarchic freedom outside the state law for others, social conditions which allow individuals to actualize their potentials for yet another group...). It is crucial here that affect is invested already in the universal notion: we passionately participate in the struggle for "freedom" although our idea of freedom is not the same as that of others – passion is abstract-universal, not particular. What we have to avoid here is the pseudo-Marxist reduction of "freedom" to an illusion which conceals the conflict of multiple "real" meanings – the unity of agreement is real, it has performative efficiency.

We should even go a step further here: every figuration of freedom is in itself plural and full of inconsistencies, but what if the gap that separates the universal notion of freedom from the multiple meanings freedom has for different groups is the gap that constitutes (actual) freedom? Concretely, the fact that for me as a political agent freedom for which I fight is at a distance from its particular content makes it possible for me to freely change the content of freedom that is attached to my idea of freedom. In English, this tension that cuts across the notion

1 Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, New York: Verso, 1998, 88.

of freedom is indicated by two words, “freedom” and “liberty,” which seem to refer to the same content (in Slovene, my own language, we also have two terms: “svoboda” and “prostost”). Numerous attempts to draw a distinction between the two brought no clear result – let us then take a risk and fixate this opposition as the one between what Hegel called “abstract freedom” and what he called “concrete freedom.”

Freedom Versus Liberty

Abstract freedom is the ability to do what one wants independently social rules and customs, to violate these rules and customs, even to act against one’s own substantial nature in an explosion of “radical negativity,” exemplarily in a revolt or revolutionary situation. In contrast to such explosions, “concrete freedom” is the freedom located within and sustained by a set of social rules and customs. My freedom is only actual as freedom within a certain social space regulated by rules and prohibitions. I can walk freely along a busy street because I can be reasonably sure that others on the street will behave in a civilized way towards me, will be punished if they attack me, if they insult me, etc. Of course, we can strive to change the rules of common life – there are situations when these rules can be relaxed, but also strengthened (as in the conditions of a pandemic), but a domain of rules is needed as the very terrain of our freedoms.

Therein resides the Hegelian difference between abstract and concrete freedom: in a concrete life-world, abstract freedom changes into its opposite since it narrows our actual exercise of freedom. Let’s take the case of freedom to speak and communicate with others: I can only exert this freedom if I obey the commonly established rules of language (with all their ambiguities and inclusive of the unwritten rules of messages be-

tween the lines). What a society in its public discourse doesn’t find satisfying is its specific repressed – unwritten rules, obscene supplements which are socially not recognized but necessary. The space of ideology, of customs that regulate our daily interactions, is thus ambiguous and inconsistent. There are prohibitions we are expected to violate, but discreetly, not in public. And there are freedoms that are given to us *on condition that we don’t use them* – we are given a free choice if we make the right choice. (For example, in my country, if I have a diner with my friend who is poor, when the bill arrives, he is expected to insist that he will pay his share, but I am expected to insist that I will pay, so he quickly accepts that I will pay.) But we also have prohibitions which are themselves prohibited, i.e., which cannot be publicly announced. For example, in a hard Stalinist regime, it was of course prohibited to openly criticize the Leader, but it was also prohibited to publicly announce this prohibition. Nobody publicly said that it is prohibited to criticize Stalin, and the one saying this publicly would instantly disappear.

Every order of culture implies its obscene underground, what one is not allowed to talk about publicly. This space of the obscene operates at multiple levels, from rumors about dark side of the private life of political leaders and the use of dirty language and indecent insinuations, to cases which are much more “innocent” and as such even more crucial – here is an extreme case of the prohibition of publicly stating the obvious. In the last years of his life, Deng Hsiao-Ping officially retired, but everybody knew that he continued to pull the strings of power. When one of the high Chinese party apparatchiks referred to Deng as de facto leader of China in an interview with a foreign journalist, he was nonetheless accused of publicly disclosing a state secret and severely punished. So, a state secret is not necessarily what only a few are allowed to know – it can also be something that everybody knows –

everybody except what Lacan calls the big Other, the order of public appearance... In this way, we violate what Kant called the “transcendental formula of public law”: “All actions relating to the right of other men are unjust if their maxim is not consistent with publicity.” A secret law, a law unknown to its subjects, would legitimize the arbitrary despotism of those who exercise it – compare with this formula the title of a recent report on China: “Even what’s secret is a secret in China.”² Troublesome intellectuals who report on political oppression, ecological catastrophes, rural poverty, etc., got years of prison for betraying a state secret. The catch is that many of the laws and regulations that make up the state-secret regime are themselves classified, making it difficult for individuals to know how and when they are in violation.

This secrecy of the prohibition itself serves two different purposes which should not be confused. Its commonly admitted role is that of universalizing guilt and fear: if you do not know what is prohibited, you cannot even know when you are violating a prohibition, which makes you potentially guilty all the time. Of course, except at the climax of the Stalinist purges when, effectively, everyone could be found guilty, people *do* know when they are doing something that will annoy those in power. The function of prohibiting prohibitions is thus not to give raise to “irrational” fear, but to let the potential dissidents (who think they can get away with their critical activity, since they are not breaking any laws, but only doing what laws guarantee them – freedom of the press, etc.) know that, if they annoy those in power too much, they can be punished at the power’s will.

2 See “Even What’s Secret is a Secret in China,” *The Japan Times* (June 16, 2007), 17. Some of the arguments that follow are based on Slavoj Žižek, “Legal Luck,” *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 3, No. 1 (2009), Internet: <https://zizekstudios.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/155/155>.

But there is another function of prohibiting prohibitions which is no less crucial: that of *maintaining appearances* – and we all know how absolutely crucial appearances were in Stalinism: the Stalinist regime reacted with total panic whenever there was a threat that appearances will be disturbed: there were, in the Soviet media, no black chronicles, no reports on crimes and prostitution, not to mention workers or public protests. This prohibiting of prohibitions is far from being limited to Communist regimes: it is operative also in today’s “permissive” capitalism. A “postmodern” boss insists that he is not a master but just a coordinator of our joint creative efforts, the first among equals; there should be no formalities among us, we should address him by his nickname, he shares a dirty joke with us... but in all this, he *remains our master*. In such a social link, relations of domination function through their denial: we are not only obliged to obey our masters, we are also obliged to act as if we are free and equal, as if there is no domination – which, of course, makes the situation even more humiliating. Paradoxically, in such a situation, the first act of liberation is to demand from the master that he acts as one: one should reject false collegiality from the master and insist that he treats as with cold distance, as a master... No wonder all this sounds vaguely Kafkaesque – Kafka effectively wrote that “it is an extremely painful thing to be ruled by laws that one does not know,”³ thereby bringing out the implicit superego obscenity of the famous legal principle that “ignorance (of the law) is not an excuse.” Derrida is thus fully justified in emphasizing the self-reflexivity of the prohibition with regard to the Law – the Law not only prohibits, it is ITSELF prohibited:

3 Franz Kafka, “The Problem of Our Laws,” in *The Complete Stories*, New York: Schocken Books, 1995, 437.

The law is prohibition: this does not mean that it prohibits, but that it is itself prohibited, a prohibited place [...] one cannot reach the law, and in order to have a rapport of respect with it, one must not have a rapport with the law, one must interrupt the relation. One must enter into relation only with the law's representatives, its examples, its guardians. These are interrupters as much as messengers. One must not know who or what or where the law is.⁴

In one of his short fragments, Kafka himself pointed out how the ultimate secret of the Law is that *it does not exist* – another case of what Lacan called the inexistence of the big Other. This inexistence, of course, does not simply reduce the Law to an empty imaginary chimera; it rather makes it into an impossible Real, a void which nonetheless functions, exerts influence, causes effects, curves the symbolic space... In every social situation, freedom thus works in an ambiguous way. On the one hand, we have what Marxists like to dismiss as a mere formal freedom: equality in the terms of law can cover and legitimize brutal submission and exploitation. (Marx was nonetheless fully aware that form matters: only the declaration of formal freedom opens up the way to demand actual rights and freedoms.) On the other hand, a subject who is effectively free (in the sense of power to decide) can claim that he is just doing his duty and in this way avoid full responsibility for his acts. (One can also evoke one's own culture in this way: I act as a racist, but it's not my guilt, it is part of the culture into which I was born...)

This is what I call the structure of inherent transgression: a social space is not just the space of what is permitted but also the space of what is repressed, excluded from public space, and simultaneously necessary for this public space to repro-

duce itself. This is what “*acheronta movebo*” (move the underground) as a practice of the critique of ideology means: not directly changing the explicit text of the Law, but, rather, intervening into its obscene virtual supplement. For example, one should ask here a naive, but nonetheless crucial question: why does the Army universe so strongly resist publicly accepting gays into its ranks? There is only one consistent answer possible: not because homosexuality poses a threat to the alleged “phallic and patriarchal” libidinal economy of the Army community, but, on the contrary, because the libidinal economy of the Army community itself relies on a thwarted/disavowed homosexuality as the key component of the soldiers' male-bonding.

From my own experience, I remember how the old infamous Yugoslav People's Army was homophobic to the extreme (when someone was discovered to have homosexual inclinations, he was instantly turned into a pariah, treated as a non-person, before being formally dismissed from the Army), yet, at the same time, everyday army life was excessively permeated with the atmosphere of homosexual innuendos. Say, while soldiers were standing in line for their meal, a common vulgar joke was to stick a finger into the ass of the person ahead of you and then to withdraw it quickly, so that when the surprised person turned around, he did not know who among the soldiers behind his back sharing a stupid obscene smile did it. A predominant form of greeting a fellow soldier in my unit, instead of simply saying “Hello!,” was to say “Smoke my prick!” (“*Puši kurac!*” in Serbo-Croat); this formula was so standardized that it completely lost any obscene connotation and was pronounced in a totally neutral way, as a pure act of politeness.

The key point not to be missed here is how this fragile co-existence of extreme and violent homophobia with thwarted, i.e., publicly non-acknowledged, “underground” homosexual libidinal economy, bears witness to the fact that the dis-

4 Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, New York: Routledge, 1992, 201.

course of the military community can only be operative by way of censoring its own libidinal foundation. Do we not encounter a strictly homologous self-censoring mechanism outside the confines of military life, in the contemporary conservative populism with its sexist and racist bias? Against the image, all-present in cultural criticism, of a radical subversive discourse or practice “censored” by Power, one is even tempted to claim that today, more than ever, the mechanism of censorship intervenes predominantly to enhance the efficiency of the power discourse itself.

The language we speak is, of course, not ideologically neutral, it embodies many prejudices and makes it impossible for us to formulate clearly certain uncommon thoughts – as, again, Hegel knew, thinking always occurs in language and it brings with itself a common sense metaphysics (view of reality), but to truly think, we have to think in a language against this language. The problem is, of course, that this is impossible to do since misuse is inscribed into the very heart of language – into its very notion, as Hegel would have put it. The rules of language can be changed in order to open up new freedoms, but the trouble with Politically Correct newspeak clearly shows that direct imposition of new rules can lead to ambiguous results and give birth to new more subtle forms of racism and sexism.

The contours of “concrete freedom” are, of course, historically variable, which brings us to the profound historicity of the predominant notion of freedom: to simplify it to the utmost, in traditional societies freedom does not refer to equality – freedom means that each person should be free to play its specific role in the hierarchic order. In modern societies, freedom is linked to abstract legal equality and personal liberty (a poor worker and his rich employer are equally free); from mid-19th century, freedom is more and more linked to social circumstances which enable me to actualize it (minimal welfare, free education, healthcare, etc.). Today the accent is on

the “freedom of choice” which implies that we ignore how the very frame of choices is imposed on individuals, which choices are *de facto* privileged, etc. However, Hegel knew very well that there are moments of crisis when abstract freedom has to intervene. In the December 1944 issue of *The Atlantic*, Sartre wrote: “Never were we freer than under the German occupation. We had lost all our rights, and first of all our right to speak. They insulted us to our faces. [...] And that is why the Resistance was a true democracy; for the soldier, as for his superior, the same danger, the same loneliness, the same responsibility, the same absolute freedom within the discipline.”⁵

This situation full of anxiety and danger was freedom, not liberty – liberty was established when post-war normality returned. And in Ukraine today, what those who fight the Russian invasion are free and they fight for liberty – but can we still maintain clearly this distinction? Are we not more and more approaching a situation in which millions of people think that they have to act freely (violate the rules) in order to protect their liberty? I don’t have in mind here only the Leftist anti-establishment uprisings, but also – today more than ever – the Rightist populist revolts? Did the Trumpian crowd not invade the Capitol on January 6, 2021, to protect their liberty? No wonder that there was a mix of fascination and horror present in the Left-liberal reaction to the protesters breaking into the Capitol – “ordinary” people breaking into the sacred seat of power, a carnival that momentarily suspended our rules of public life... there was a little bit of envy in their condemnation of the event. So, does this mean that the populist Right stole from the Left the last resort of their resistance to the existing system, the popular attack on the seat of power? Is our only

5 Noah Gordon, “Paris Alive: Jean-Paul Sartre on World War II,” *The Atlantic* (Sept 3, 2014), internet: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/09/paris-alive-jean-paul-sartre-on-world-war-ii/379555/>.

choice the one between parliamentary elections controlled by corrupted elites and uprisings controlled by populist Right?

Regulating Violations

The embarrassing paradox we are compelled to accept here is that, from the moral standpoint, the most comfortable way to maintain one's high ground is to live in a moderately-authoritarian regime. One can softly (following the unwritten rules) oppose the regime (without really posing a threat to it), so that one can be assured of one's upright moral stance without risking a lot. Even if one does suffer some disadvantages (some jobs are out of reach, one can be prosecuted), such minor punishments only provide the aura of a hero. And even if the punishment gets harsher, one's moral compass is never thrown into chaos: one knows clearly one's duty, one knows that those in power are morally wrong and responsible for all troubles. But once democracy comes, we all enter the domain of disorientation: choices are no longer so clear. For example, in Hungary in the mid-1990s, the liberal ex-dissidents had to make a difficult choice: should they enter into a coalition with ex-Communists to prevent the conservative Right from taking power? This was a strategic decision where simple moral reasoning is not enough. That's why many political agents in post-Socialist countries long for the old times when choices were clear – in despair, they try to return to the old clarity by equating their actual opponent with old Communists. In Slovenia the ruling conservative nationalists still blame ex-Communists for all the present troubles – for example, they claim that the high number of anti-vaxxers is the result of continuing Communist legacy; at the same time, the Left-liberal opposition claims that the ruling conservative nationalists govern

in exactly the same authoritarian way as the Communists did before 1990. So, the first gesture of a new politics is to fully admit this disorientation and to assume the responsibility for difficult strategic choices.

Here we stumble upon another paradox of political freedom: we should be very precise with regard to what the majority really wants – what if they don't really want to be free (in the sense of really choosing in elections), what if they more care for the appearance of freedom? In a “normal” democracy, the majority wants to maintain the appearance of freedom and dignity, it wants the electoral procedure to go on as if they are really making a free choice, but they simultaneously want to be discreetly told (by the media, experts, “public opinion”) what choice to make. The rare moments when people really have to make a hard choice are usually perceived as the moments of the “crisis of democracy,” the moments of anxiety when the very continuous order is threatened.

Between the two extremes of liberty and freedom there is a tension between universality of Law and its species in the sense that particular species function as attempts to formulate the exception to the universal law – this exception can also be conceived as a space of freedom. Let's take the case of Islam: Mansur Tayfuri⁶ brought out the deep ambiguity of Al-Anfal (or “haram”) which characterizes the entire history of Islam, from Muhammad's time to our present. Al-Anfal stands for a set of things and acts that are “sacred” and should as such remain out of our reach; it mainly refers to what warriors should not do in a

6 See the interview with Mansur Tayfuri, a Kurdish researcher, available at “Interview with Mansour Tayfuri on Kurdish Exodus of 1979 in Mariwan - Rawej Sunday 2016.11.20,” internet: <https://vimeo.com/193933442>, and his master thesis on the resistance of people of Mariwan “La dernière barricade de la révolution. Forme de résistance en Kurdistan après la révolution iranienne de 1979,” presented to the Université Paris VIII- Saint Denis in September, 2014.

captured territory: rape or take other's women, loot their property and land, etc. But, as it is always the case with religious prohibitions, they decree precisely what the victorious warriors desire most, so that it is de facto impossible to abstain from violating Al-Anfal. Tayfuri demonstrates that the establishment of caliphate (the institution governing a territory under Islamic rule) served precisely the function to resolve this tension. The leader of a caliphate (caliph) has the right to allow to his (selected) subjects the right to violate some rules of haram (to take women as personal slaves – a right which was recently practiced in ISIS, etc.). Through this right to make the illicit lawful as a “favor” reserved for the Muslims, the caliphate constructed itself by projecting on God its own desire for the booty.

Tayfuri thus deploys nothing less than what we could call the “political economy of Islam” – something that is crucial for every religious edifice which, as soon as it becomes an actual power edifice, has to somehow legitimize the violation of its own sacred prohibitions. Immediately after Buddha's death, even Buddhism found ways to legitimize killing in a war (for example, as a way to prevent a greater evil...). The task of a religion is no longer just to enforce its prohibitions but primarily to legitimize the vast domain of exceptions to the Law which only makes the reign of Law livable. In Christianity, this systemization of exceptions was done by St Augustin and Thomas Aquinas; in Hinduism, it was done by *The Laws of Manu*, one of the most exemplary text of ideology in the entire history of humanity. While its ideology encompasses the entire universe, inclusive of its mythic origins, it focuses on *everyday practices as the immediate materiality of ideology*: how (what, where, with whom, when...) we eat, defecate, have sex, walk, enter a building, work, make war, etc. Here, the text uses a complex panoply of tricks, displacements and compromises whose basic formula is that of universality with exceptions: in principle yes, but... *The Laws of Manu* demonstrates a breath-taking

ingenuity in accomplishing this task, with examples often coming dangerously close to the ridiculous. For example, priests should study the Veda, not trade; in extremity, however, a priest can engage in trade, but he is not allowed to trade in certain things like sesame seed; if he does it, he can only do it in certain circumstances; finally, if he does it in the wrong circumstances, he will be reborn as a worm in dog shit... The general formula of this procedure is to state one general rule, to which the whole of the subsequent treatise constitutes nothing but a series of increasingly specific exceptions. A specific injunction is stronger than a general one. In other words, the great lesson of *The Laws of Manu* is that the true regulating power of the law does not reside in its direct prohibitions, in the division of our acts into permitted and prohibited, but in *regulating the very violations of prohibitions*: the law silently accepts that the basic prohibitions are violated (or even discreetly solicits us to violate them), and then, once we find ourselves in this position of guilt, it tells us how to reconcile the violation with the law by way of violating the prohibition in a regulated way... The whole point of law is to regulate its violations: without violations, there would have been no need for the law.

Tayfuri's analysis is thus fully relevant today not just for our approach to Islam – our social reality here and now is full of the cases of granting exceptions as a special favor: wars are legitimate if they are proclaimed “humanitarian actions to protect peace,” violations of women's and gay rights are tolerated if they are proclaimed to be a component of a specific “way of life,” etc. So, when you read Tayfuri's book, don't think just about Isis or Taliban, think about all those moments when our own “developed” societies do exactly the same.

Freedom, Knowledge, Necessity

The obvious counter-argument here is: are these cases freedom in all their diversity not constrained to our socio-symbolic universe? Isn't there the domain of facts which we are not free to choose, which simply are out there in their stupid being? Science is discovering (not inventing or creating) natural laws – we, humans, can get to know (some of) these laws, we cannot change them... We enter here the question of the relationship between freedom, necessity, and knowledge. The Spinozean-Marxist tradition was unfortunately under the sign of Friedrich Engels's definition (he attributes it to Hegel) of freedom as insight into necessity: I am free when I know the necessity and act upon it, like when I know natural laws and can exploit them in changing objects for my purposes... What immediately arises here is the follow-up questions: but are my purposes not also determined by necessity? If I know necessity, does this affect in any way necessity, or is my knowledge just an epiphenomenon and necessity realizes itself independently of it? Or is my knowledge itself determined by natural necessity? Does it matter that I know it? Engels relies on the model of what Hegel called "external teleology": the industrial exploitation of nature for our purposes which have nothing to do with the exploited objects (if, knowing physical laws, I stream water to produce electricity, this use is not immanent to the flow of water). Hegel says something different: for him, freedom is the "truth" of necessity, sublated (*aufgehobene*) necessity. What this means is at least that knowing a necessity, becoming aware of it, has a performative dimension: the very act of recognizing necessity actualizes it – the purest constative (just recognizing what there is) is the strongest performative. Is this not the case especially when the agency that takes note of something "really happening" is some figure of the "big Other" like the bureaucratic state agency? A friend

from Slovenia told me of the tragic end of a young woman who wanted to change their sex into male; she went through all the procedures and, on the day she got by post the official confirmation that she is now a man, she took her life... It is too easy to speculate about the reasons that pushed her to do it (was realizing her deepest desire too much for her? etc.) – what we should note is just the weight of the symbolic act, of the inscription of my chosen identity into the official big Other. What drew her to suicide was not any change in her bodily or interpersonal reality (her parents and friends were supportive of her decision) but the mere final step of the state agency registering what she did.

The minimal gap between "what really happens" and its symbolic registration opens up the space for the opposite no less paradoxical case: what about necessity as Fate which realizes itself ONLY through being known? This paradox opens up an unexpected space of freedom: not of a freedom within the space of fate (in the sense that fate determines us, but not wholly, that we keep a margin of freedom), but a more radical freedom of changing fate itself. Recall the Arab story about the "appointment in Samara" retold by W. Somerset Maugham:⁷ a servant on an errand in the busy market of Baghdad meets Death there; terrified by its gaze, he runs home to his master and asks him to give him a horse, so that he can ride all day and reach Samara, where Death will not find him, in the evening. The good master not only provides the servant with a horse, but goes himself to the market, looks for Death and reproaches it for scaring his faithful servant. Death replies: "But I didn't want to scare your servant. I was just surprised about what was he doing here when I have an appointment in Samara tonight..." What if the message of this story is not that a man's demise is impossible to avoid, that trying to twist free of it will only

⁷ Agatha Christie also refers to this story in her *Appointment with Death* (1938).

tighten its grip, but rather its exact opposite, namely that if one accepts fate as inevitable and one can break its grasp? It was foretold to Oedipus's parents that their son would kill his father and marry his mother, and the very steps they took to avoid this fate (exposing him to death in a deep forest) made sure that the prophecy would be fulfilled – without this attempt to avoid fate, fate could not have realized itself. Daniel Gilbert wrote: "The fact that we can make disastrous decisions even as we foresee their consequences is the great, unsolved mystery of human behavior." Instead of trying to resolve this mystery with the psychoanalytic notions of death drive and pleasure-in-pain, we can consider the possibility that the very fact of foreseeing the disastrous consequences and trying to avoid them makes the disaster happen. There is an important lesson in this about how ideology functions today. Economic or social determinists like to emphasize how social processes are objective trends which actualize themselves independently of our awareness or ignorance of them – our knowledge is just a secondary epiphenomenon. My Hegelian counterpoint is that some of these processes can go on *only if individuals caught in them have a wrong notion of them*: "consciousness" is necessary, but it has to be a "wrong consciousness."

We should add yet another twist to this complex interconnection of factual necessity, knowledge and freedom: knowledge alone doesn't guarantee that I'll act accordingly. Not only I can act in disavowal of what I know, knowledge itself can serve as the fetish that allows me to disavow the reality known to me. Today, ideology functions less and less like a symptom and more and more like a fetish. The symptomal functioning makes ideology vulnerable to ideologico-critical procedure: in the classic Enlightenment way, when an individual caught in ideology understands the hidden mechanism of ideological deception, the symptom disappears, the spell of ideology is broken. In the fetishist functioning, ideology works in a cyni-

cal mode, it includes a distance towards itself – or, to repeat Sloterdijk's old formula of cynical reason: "I know what I am doing, but I am nonetheless doing it." As Alenka Zupančič wrote, in a cynical mode, the fetishist disavowal "I know very well, but... (I don't really believe it)" is raised to a higher reflexive level: fetish is not the element to which I hold so that I can act ignoring what I know – fetish is *this knowledge itself*. The cynical reasoning is: "I know very well what I am doing, so you cannot reproach me that I don't know what I am doing."

This is how in today's capitalism the hegemonic ideology includes (and thereby neutralizes the efficiency of) critical knowledge: critical distance towards the social order is the very medium through which this order reproduces itself. Just think about today's explosion of art biennales (Venice, Kassel...): although they usually present themselves as a form of resistance towards global capitalism and its commodification of everything, they are in their mode of organization the ultimate form of art as a moment of capitalist self-reproduction. But this inclusion of critical self-distance is just one of the cases of how freedom of choice can act as a factor preventing the choice of actual change. In a wonderful comment on Italo Svevo's *Zeno's Consciousness*, Alenka Zupančič⁸ shows how the very reference on a permanent freedom of choice (my awareness that I can stop smoking any time I want guarantees that I will never actually do it – the possibility to stop smoking is what blocks the actual change, it allows me to accept my continuous smoking without bad conscience, so that the end of smoking is constantly present as the very resource of its continuation.

8 See Alenka Zupančič, "The End" (in manuscript).

The Freedom to Say NO

To elaborate further this point, let me mention yet again the coffee-without joke from Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* in which the waiter replies to the customer who wants coffee without cream: "Sorry, we ran out of cream, so, instead of coffee-without-cream, I can only bring you coffee-without-milk." But we should go on with the joke: how does the customer react to the waiter's explanation? He should reject the waiter's offer because what he wants is coffee-without-cream – he is, say, tempted by cream and, as a compulsive gesture of sacrifice, wants to be deprived precisely of cream, not of milk, so what only counts as his object of desire is coffee without cream, he wants the sacrifice of cream to be inscribed into what he gets, in short: more than coffee itself he wants *no cream*. This is why if the customer gets coffee-without-milk instead of coffee-without-milk, he will miss not the cream but *not having cream*. This is how differentiality works in the symbolic universe: only in this universe we can miss not only saying something but also not saying something – or, as one of the heroes says in the BBC series on gay life in 1980s *It's a Sin* says: "We miss you not sayin'it." That's why, as Benjamin Libet argued decades ago, the most basic mode of freedom is that of a NO, of blocking what I spontaneously want to do, not a positive decision to do something.⁹

The lesson of this mess is that, as Libet put it, freedom is grounded in a NO, which ultimately means that the ultimate act of freedom is to renounce what one desires most. And we should go here to the end, to self-negation at its most radical: suicide. Can we imagine suicide as an emancipatory political

9 See Benjamin Libet, "Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action," *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 8 (1985), 529-539, and Benjamin Libet, "Do We Have Free Will?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 1 (1999), 47-57.

act? The first association are here of course public suicides as a protest against foreign occupation, from Vietnam to Poland in the 1980s. In the last years, however, a suicidal proposal aroused a wide debate in South Africa. Derek Hook¹⁰ reports how, in March 2016 Terblanche Delpont, a young white academic, sparked outrage at a Johannesburg conference at the University of the Witwatersrand, when he called on white people in South Africa "to commit suicide as an ethical act" – here are Delpont's own words:

The reality [in South Africa] is that most white people spend their whole lives only engaging black people in subservient positions – cleaners, gardeners, etc. My question is then how can a person not be racist if that's the way they live their lives? The only way then for white people to become part of Africa is to not exist as white people anymore. If the goal is to dismantle white supremacy, and white supremacy is white culture and vice versa, then the goal has to be to dismantle white culture and ultimately white people themselves. The total integration into Africa by white people will also automatically then mean the death of white people as white as a concept would not exist anymore.¹¹

How, more concretely, are we to imagine the symbolic suicide of the South African Whites? Donald Moss proposed a simple but problematic (for me, at least) solution: the racist Whiteness is a parasitic formation which parasitizes on Whites themselves:

10 I owe this reference to Delpont, Hook, and Moss to Stephen Frosh (Birkbeck College, University of London).

11 Qtd. in Derek Hook, "White Anxiety in (Post)Apartheid South Africa," *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 25 (2020), 613.

Whiteness is a condition one first acquires and then one *has*—a malignant, parasitic-like condition to which “white” people have a particular susceptibility. The condition is foundational, generating characteristic ways of being in one’s body, in one’s mind, and in one’s world. Parasitic Whiteness renders its hosts’ appetites voracious, insatiable, and perverse. These deformed appetites particularly target nonwhite peoples. Once established, these appetites are nearly impossible to eliminate.¹²

To get rid of their racist stance, the whites have to get rid of the parasitic whiteness which is not part of their substantial nature but just parasitizes on them, which means that, in getting rid of their racism, they do not lose the substance of their being – they even regain it, obliterating its distortion... I prefer to this easy way out. Hook’s comment (inspired by Lacanian theory):

Delpont’s rhetorical and deliberately provocative suggestion is perhaps not as counter-intuitive or crazy as it at first sounds. Arguably, it is the gesture of giving up what one is – the shedding of narcissistic investments, and symbolic and fantasmatic identities – that proves a necessary first step to becoming what one is not, but might become. This is the transformative potential of anxiety that clinicians work so hard to facilitate, and that I think can also be discerned – however fleetingly – in the instances of white anxiety discussed above: the potentiality that a new – and hitherto unthinkable – form of identification is being unconsciously processed and negotiated.¹³

12 Donald Moss, “On Having Whiteness,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Foundation* 69, No. 2 (2021), 355.

13 Hook, “White Anxiety,” 629.

What I nonetheless find problematic in these lines is the optimist turn: suicide does not mean the actual collective self-killing of the South African whites, it means a symbolic erasure of their identity which already points towards new forms of identity... I find it much more productive to establish a link between this idea of the whites’ collective suicide and the idea of so-called afro-pessimism. Recall Fanon’s claim that “the Negro is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly declining declivity”: is the experience that grounds today’s “afro-pessimism” not a similar one? Does the insistence of afro-pessimists that Black subordination is much more radical than that of other underprivileged groups (Asians, LGBT+, women...), i.e., that Blacks should not be put into the series with other forms of “colonization,” not grounded in the act of assuming that one belongs to such a “zone of non-being”? This is why Fredric Jameson is right when he insists that one cannot understand class struggle in the US without taking into account anti-Black racism: any talk which equalizes white and Black proletarians is a fake. (A point to be noted here is that, when the young Gandhi protested against the white rule in South Africa, he ignored the plight of the Black majority and just demanded the inclusion of Indians into the privileged White block.)

So, what if we turn Delpont’s suggestion, radical as it may appear, around and propose that it is the Blacks in South Africa who should commit a collective symbolic suicide, to shed their socio-symbolic identity which is profoundly marked by white domination and resistance to it, and which contains its own fantasies and even narcissistic investments of victimization. (In the US, the Blacks are right in using the term “Victim!” to insult their Black opponents.) One can thus repeat exactly the same words: the Blacks need to perform “the gesture of giving up what one is – the shedding of narcissistic investments, and symbolic and fantasmatic identities – that proves a necessary

first step to becoming what one is not, but might become." Consequently, I see afro-pessimism not just as a recognition of dismal social reality but also and above all as something that announces, "the potentiality that a new – and hitherto unthinkable – form of identification is being unconsciously processed and negotiated." To put it brutally, let's imagine that, in one way or another, all the Whites would disappear from South Africa – the ANC inefficiency and corruption would remain, and the poor black majority would find itself even more strongly dislocated, lacking the designated cause of its poverty... To revolutionize a system is never equal to just eliminating one of its parts, in the same way that the disappearance of Jews as the disturbing element never restores social harmony.

The key move has to be done by Blacks themselves – was Malcolm X not following this insight when he adopted X as his family name? The point of choosing X as his family name and thereby signaling that the slave traders who brought the enslaved Africans from their homeland brutally deprived them of their family and ethnic roots, of their entire cultural life-world, was not to mobilize the blacks to fight for the return to some primordial African roots, but precisely to seize the opening provided by X, an unknown new (lack of) identity engendered by the very process of slavery which made the African roots forever lost. The idea is that this X which deprives the blacks of their particular tradition offers a unique chance to redefine (reinvent) themselves, to freely form a new identity much more universal than white people's professed universality. To put it in Hook's terms, Malcolm X proposes for Blacks themselves to bring to the end their deracination with a gesture of symbolic suicide, the passage through zero-point, in order to free the space for a new identity. Such a gesture would render the White domination simply pointless, a solipsist dream, a game missing a partner with whom it can only be played. Was this not the reason why Malcolm X was treated as an enemy by all (opposed) sides in the conflict:

At the time Malcolm spoke at the Audubon Ballroom on Feb. 21, 1965, he was a marked man — spied on by the F.B.I. and the police, denounced as a traitor by the Nation leadership, viscerally hated and beloved. Mr. Farrakhan declared him "worthy of death." A week before his assassination, his home in Queens was firebombed while he and his wife and four daughters slept inside.¹⁴

One cannot but note the cruel irony of the fact that – although, as is well known, Malcolm X found this new identity in the universalism of Islam – he was (in all probability) killed on the order of the organization called The Nation of Islam, an organization which used Islam to serve its limited ethnic identity: "Was Malcolm your traitor or ours? And if we dealt with him like a nation deals with a traitor, what the *hell* business is it of yours? You just shut your mouth, and stay out of it. Because in the future, we gonna become a nation. And a nation gotta be able to deal with traitors and cutthroats and turncoats. The white man deals with his. The Jews deal with theirs."¹⁵

In short, Malcolm was killed because he blurred the clear line that separated "ours" from "yours" – he was killed to prevent the Blacks to commit the symbolic suicide that would open up the path to (not only) their emancipation. And even today we continue to live in the shadow of this failed suicide which keeps the Blacks in their subordinate position. And this goes for every true liberation: by definition it involves a symbolic suicide.

14 John Leland, "Who Really Killed Malcolm X?" *The New York Times* (Nov 17, 2021), internet: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/06/nyregion/malcolm-x-assassination-case-reopened.html>.

15 "Assassination of Malcolm X," *Wikipedia*, internet: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassination_of_Malcolm_X.

Philosophy and Politics – An Odd Couple¹

FRANK RUDA

¹ The first version of this work was prepared for the Special Dossier edited by Slavoj Žižek and Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, in the framework of a *Bajo Palabra* journal project of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2023).

“I grief different.” (Kendrick Lamar, “United in Grief”)

“It is in names that we think.” (G.W.F. Hegel)

Philosophical Complaining

This text is an exercise in philosophical complaining. But it is more than just a complaint. For philosophical complaining is different from – and this is not to say better than – usual complaining. It not complaining about a thing or feature, it is not even a form of moaning about a condition. It is rather a complaint addressed at what one can call an impossible – but unavoidable and therefore necessary – relationship. A philosophical complaint is thus a complaint at what is necessary for philosophy, but impossible to manage appropriately, sovereignly, or adequately. When in the following, the present article will mainly address the work that Sylvain Lazarus has articulated in his book *Anthropology of the Name*, the philosophical complaint is not simply a way of complaining about the book. The complaint will rather coincide with a praise of the book and its insistence on conceiving of politics from a position of radical immanence, to conceive of politics on its own terms, that is to conceive of “politics in interiority.”² This way of conceiving of politics is fundamentally different from what he calls thinking “politics in exteriority,”³ the latter operating in such a broad manner that it is able to identify a feature that is common to the contemporary parliamentary and democratic system as well as to the failed communist projects of the 20th century.

² Sylvain Lazarus, *Anthropology of the Name*, New York: Seagull, 2015, xiii.

³ Ibid., 21.

Any “politics in exteriority” defines politics in relation to a particular object, empirical or otherwise, which is external to the self-organization of a political collective. In this sense, for Lazarus, even if one refers, as in the Marxist tradition, to the structure of class antagonism, we do formulate a “politics in exteriority,” at least if one understands political action then as action within the framework of the structure of a struggle, as an action directed against an external enemy, as an action being determined by a struggle the agent of the action did not determine. In this sense, the proletariat that emancipates itself in acting against the bourgeoisie – or more precisely against the bourgeois word in which there is a proletariat – remains incapable in its action, according to Lazarus, of proper self-organization.⁴ But the distinction here gets more complicated, since there is not only a politics in interiority and a politics in exteriority, there are also two forms or types of subjectivization. The forms of subjectivization that were examined by Michel Foucault,⁵ for example, rather belong to thinking politics in exteriority – since he examined what happens to people who are subjectivized in and through an institution like the panopticon; subjectivization any politics in interiority must look constitutively different.

What follows is an attempt to take up what Lazarus calls the first proposition of the *Anthropology of the Name* – and note that proposition 1 is different from what he calls statement 1 (which is “the people think”). The first proposition is

4 In some sense, the brings back the old Foucauldian claim that in the Marxist tradition too much emphasis was put on the concept of “class” and too little emphasis was put on the concept of “struggle.” Cf. Michael Foucault, “The End of the Monarchy of Sex,” in: *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)*, edited by Silvere Lotringer, New York: Semiotext(e), 1996, 224f.

5 Cf. for example Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Penguin, 2020, and Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, London: Penguin, 2020.

that “we have to assume the task of establishing in utterly new terms the expected outcomes and methods of thought and knowledge, if the interlocution is done with [the] people.”⁶ So, if one speaks with the people and takes seriously what they are saying and thinks by taking what they are saying as one’s starting point, this may lead to and even necessitate a total transformation of everything we think about thinking. It may transform what we conceive to be our method or about what is knowledge. A brief parenthesis: might this very ‘transformation’ not already have been – even though in a distorted way – been co-opted or even ex-adapted, as one could say with Stephen J. Gould, quite successfully by contemporary and reactionary forms of “politics”? Since they also proclaim that they basically listen to the people, especially because the people have not been listened to appropriately before. But this might ultimately only prove that there is nothing that cannot be appropriated – in inverted ways – by reactionary and obscurantist modes of practice.

To fully take up, as Hegel would have said, Lazarus at his word and engage in a serious attempt to enter into an interlocution with him and his thought of politics in interiority, the following reflections will not shy away from risking to transform what philosophy. This is in a way an intricate attempt, because Lazarus understands his project as something that methodically necessitates a distancing not only from the social sciences (he refers to sociology⁷ and history), but also and importantly from philosophy.⁸ Because they are inoperable, or more directly put: useless when it comes to “the realm of pol-

6 Lazarus, *Anthropology*, xi.

7 Ibid., xvi.

8 Ibid., xvii.

itics and the thought of the people.”⁹ One could here hear an echo of the Marx, even though, certainly, not intended.

In what follows, the present text will elaborate a complaint, but one that takes the absence of anything to complaint about as an excellent reason to complain. Obviously, something not being there, something not existing can be a very good reason to complain, since complaining about what is missing makes us think that which does not exist. For example, if there is no revolution in the form of thought, in the ways in which we think (politics), to slightly alter Kant's famous formulation here, this can be a highly regrettable lack and it is an absence that needs explanation and proper conceptual working through. But in this specific case, the argument to complain about is one that directly concerns the absence of philosophy. Notably, the argument that philosophy is useless, helpless, uninformative, uninformative or inoperative when it comes to conceiving politics in and from its interiority. Why this is a reason to complain is because since if one starts from the position of the early Marx – articulated in the famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach; this thesis seems to be not applicable to and valid for most philosophical positions, since philosophy frequently if not almost always came with normative suggestions of what the world, the commonwealth, the state, a political organization or rational political action ought to be (this is true from Aristotle to Habermas, at the very least). But there are exceptions, even though only a few. One of them is without a doubt, even though surprisingly given the context of the 11th thesis on Feuerbach, Hegel. Since undoubtedly, Hegel is – as for example Mladen Dolar has pointed out – one of the very few thinkers who does not conceive of philosophy as a form of instructing or changing the world. “No philosopher has ever entertained the idea of doing something as innocuous as merely interpreting the world – ex-

9 Ibid., x.

cept for one, who spelled it out in all letters.... Marx's adage is not against the rule... but against the exception; it has only one addressee.”¹⁰

Hegel did not evaluate, judge, or interpret the world in categories, terms of concepts coming from its outside. Rather he ventured to grasp it in its own terms (when it has exhausted what it could do). He sought to articulate and conceive of its immanent rationality in its own terms, or as Hegel has famously argued in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*, that the aim of philosophy is to grasp and understand what is. What is, is not simply what exists, but what is in and of the real, since what is real (actual) is what was and is what is rational.¹¹ Why should that be? Because only that which is rational is – what is just is and just being is not being anything (really) – because only what is rational has an immanent relation to thought. This is not to say that everything that is is rational, but it means only what is rational is. But this puts pressure on what is called “rational.” To cut a long(er) story short: what is rational is what can be thought by thought as that which is (rationally conceivable and) thinkable. To add another turn of the screw here: this can mean (for Hegel) that sometimes nothing of any real – universal rational, or thinking-political – significance happens in history, even if there seem to be happening a lot of things empirically. Hegel's concept of the rational, of that which is what thought must think.¹² holds what Lazarus claims about

10 Mladen Dolar, “What's the Time? On Being Too Early or Too Late in Hegel's Philosophy,” *Problemi International* 4 (2020), 37; Mladen Dolar, “The Owl of Minerva from Dusk till Dawn, or Two Shades of Gray,” *Filozofia i društvo* 26, No. 4 (2015), 875-890.

11 A longer elaboration of the position that therefore philosophy is in Frank Ruda, “The Purlieu Letter: Toward a Hegelian Theory of Conditioning,” *Problemi International* 4 (2020), 179-199.

12 Hegel's point is that if thinking does not think what has been and is

politics conceived of in its interiority, namely that it “is sequential and rare.”¹³

Even though, philosophy is unable to do what a purely immanent thought of politics must do, it is difficult not to see the close link between Hegel's dialectical-rational and Lazarus's interior approach to politics. The following will explore this proximity and thus from this point of view deal with and address the peculiar relationship, or non-relationship between philosophy and politics. My starting point is thus Hegel's own affirmation and assertion of philosophy's “inoperability”¹⁴ vis-à-vis politics that is implied in assigning to philosophy the perspective of the owl of Minerva. What does happen to the critique of philosophy that is articulated from the perspective of thinking politics in interiority when this critique becomes the very starting point of conceiving of philosophy (thinking politics)?

On(e) Oddity

Is there a relationship between philosophy and politics? Philosophy and politics, from the former's beginning at least, form a kind of couple. But it is an odd one, since it seems that the mutual exclusivity of the philosophy-politics couple does not mean that there are no other partners involved. Rather the couple itself, internally struggles with an immanent form of exclusion. On the one side, therefore, one can claim that philosophy and politics form a couple, but that, on the other, it forms a unique couple, a couple that is different from all other couples.

thought, thought does not think (what has been) thought and thus does not properly think what it(self) is.

13 Lazarus, *Anthropology*, 23.

14 Ibid., x.

It is a couple and thus shares some things with the other couples: Georg Simmel once referred to this insight, when reflecting on the structure of love – the insight that almost everyone was in love at least once in their lives and love thus appears to be a universal thing, yet all love relationships are different and entirely unique, so that they appear to be absolutely singular, too – in terms of liquid universality.¹⁵ There is something fluidly universal in the specific, concrete and singular odd coupling of philosophy and politics. Elucidating the fluid universality of this oddity will make intelligible why in this couple, philosophy is in the position of being the – unavoidable – complainer. But why should philosophy and politics be an odd couple and why can this be taken as one of the philosophical lessons of Lazarus' *Anthropology of the Name*, even though the latter does explicitly want to engage with philosophy in its project at all?

Odd couples are obviously – philosophically – interesting entities. They bring together things that do not add up, or are not one of a kind, yet that are strangely bound and tied together. These are entities that can appear inseparable, but are at the same time of a very different and sometimes even mutually repulsive nature. But such couples are maybe the only ones of any real philosophical interest. This is – once again – and herein I am following Brecht, one of the main lessons of Hegel that is articulated in his *Science of Logic*. Since Brecht once claimed that Hegel is the greatest comedian in the history of philosophy because he tells us how two things cannot leave each other alone, even though they are constantly trying to get rid of each other. It is a book about “how they fight each other... and... enter so to say in pairs, each is married to its

15 Cf. Georg Simmel, “Über die Liebe (Fragment),” in *Fragmente und Aufsätze aus dem Nachlass und Veröffentlichungen der letzten Jahre*, Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1923, 47-125.

opposite... They can live neither with nor without each other.”¹⁶ Philosophy thrives on thinking in and through odd couples. But does the same hold for politics? Are things that are bound together and absolutely and appear in a singularly different manner to be paired together also of political interest?

The immediate answer might be “yes,” since is this not what is at stake with the concept of equality? But this kind of answer would be one that, for Lazarus, would appear to be given from an external position vis-à-vis politics, because it assigns an object or category to politics that then is proclaimed as the latter’s conceptual substance (such that all politics cannot but be about equality). But is it the case that politics is all the time in a situation where it must be interested in questions related to odd couplings, questions of equality and how would one generally know? Put differently, the thesis that all politics has an interest in organizing odd couples in such a way that one cannot avoid introducing the concept of equality seems rather to be philosophical and not political claim. It appears to assign a transhistorical conceptual destiny or framework to politics. In this sense, one could even be tempted – even though one really should not – to be talking about “the political.”¹⁷ One can therefore raise the question if equality is a constant concept, principle, or axiom of collective political action or only sometimes. Is it possible to know this in advance or does one have to inquire into what is even meant by it in a concrete situation? Since is it always clear if the same concepts always name the same thing?

If philosophy finds odd couples interesting, it could be the case that ultimately (or sometimes) politics just does not.

16 Bertolt Brecht, “On Hegelian Dialectic,” *The Auto Didact Project*, Internet: <http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/hegel-brecht.html>.

17 An instructive problematization of the category of “the political” can be found in Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, London: Verso, 2005, 10-25.

But there is no doubt that it makes an odd couple if one of its members thinks that odd couples are interesting and the other, at least potentially, does not care about them. It also seems to indicate that philosophy needs politics, but politics does not necessarily need philosophy. It is a odd relationship of one-sided dependence. If philosophy and politics are a couple, then one of the partners is clearly more autonomous than the other. But, of course, everything depends on what we mean when we say politics. Since if politics – and this is not the case for Lazarus – were to be identified with the actions or the constitution of a state – which was and is a rather common assumption –, this would explain it all, because the state does neither need philosophy nor is it a particular fan of fans of oddities. The state may tolerate them, but not much more. But if politics is understood, and this is Lazarus’ direction of thought, as something that originates always in distance from the state, because the state is identified by him as a “machine of corruption,”¹⁸ and if politics always concerns the specific historical mode of the organization of collective action, things do look different. If politics is always the organization of thought, simply because – this is the decision that becomes manifest in Lazarus’ statement that “*People think*”¹⁹ – politics is about thinking what is thought. And this means that thinking (what is thought) does not for Lazarus mean to think *that* it / someone thinks, but it is rather unavoidable concerned with thinking what thought thinks, i.e., with something specific and concrete. From this perspective and therefore one cannot know in advance and in general – only specifically and singularly – if political thought in this sense is and can be indifferent to philosophy.

18 Cf. Sylvain Lazarus, “Des conférences de Belgrade,” internet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HpZHt2ulsU>.

19 Lazarus, *Anthropology*, ix.

State politics – if this were politics and not simple administration – is and maybe must be indifferent to philosophy. Since the state does not think, as one can modify Heidegger's wrongful motto about science in this context. Because it does not think, it is a machine of corruption, of corrupting thinking for Lazarus. But the thought of the people does not per se – as there is no per se when it comes to the thought of the people – exclude any relationship to or need for philosophy, to use an expression of the early Hegel. One would be substantializing, state-ifying-politics, would inscribe the state into politics as being one of its substantial determinations otherwise. It cannot be said in overly generalizing terms if there will always and forever be a machine of corruption that politics must deal with or how it does have to deal with it. But if one seeks to avoid problematic generalizations, this cannot but also means that it is not always and generally true – pace Lazarus' own claim – that politics does not need, miss, or desire philosophy. Think here for example of the well-known anecdote about Lenin who exiled himself to Switzerland, after the Social Democratic Parties of Europe, except for the Russian one, voted for war credits. In Switzerland, he extensively read Hegel (and inter alia also Aristotle, Feuerbach or Deborin),²⁰ especially his *Science of Logic*, which depicts God's thought before the creation of nature and finite mind – and this might have actually (and historically) proved to be a helpful perspective for revolutionizing Russia.

Even though the specific historical mode of politics that was determinant for Lenin is over and "obsolete,"²¹ as Lazarus argues, another lesson one can draw from this obsolescence is that one should never over-generalize a specific historical situation in such a way that it conditions our understanding of

20 Cf. V.I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, in: *Collected Works*, Vol. 38, Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1961.

21 Lazarus, *Anthropology*, xxiii.

the constitution of politics in general. It is politically crucial to be specific about the singular situation of politics and this has also important repercussions for its relationship to philosophy. It is thus here possible to see why philosophy does here find a reason to complain. Because it can never be certain if politics needs it or not, if it is desired by it or not. The philosopher might ask a version of the famous Freudian question, namely: what does politics want? But she will not get a clear answer. Politics is clearly autonomous and self-serving, yet it leaves it structurally and perpetually undecided if there is or will be a need for philosophy or not. This fundamental uncertainty is what philosophy might, justifiably, complain about. But is this not always the case with philosophy in its relation to other forms of practice? Is it not notoriously unclear if anyone needs it at all? But if this were generally true, then there would be no specific and singular oddity to the philosophy-politics couple. It would just be one case of a more general feature of philosophy's discourse.

Singularly Twosome

To grasp how and in what way there exists a *specific* oddness of the couple of philosophy-politics, it is instructive to turn to another strange partner philosophy is often involved with. This other relationship has often been found or declared even more fundamental and long-lasting and it has been perceived as being more intense than any other. There exist thus different forms of oddities, different odd relationships, and various forms of otherness in which philosophy is involved. Therein it will certainly remain unclear if some are essentially odder than others or all of them are just singularly odd. Yet, it is important to note that these forms of otherness are not all particular instantiations of the same general structure. Otherwise, there

would not be a real difference between them, no otherness and hence no oddity. If there is an odd couple, there must be a specificity to the oddness. So, what makes the relationship²² between philosophy and politics specific and particular and singularly odd is a question that can be best answered by inspecting what other odd relations are involved in the daily life of philosophy. Philosophy obviously, and pace the cliché often raised against it, stands in more than one strange relationship with practices outside of it. This certainly implies a certain definition of philosophy.

It was once, and to my mind legitimately and instructively, defined as “the violence done by thought to impossible relationships.” It is violent because it transforms what seems foreign to its own inventory of thought into the advent of a new possibility for philosophical thinking. It is violent because it does not stop at stating the incomparability and fundamental heterogeneity of two forms of practices or thoughts, but work through and with it. One can venture to say that Hegel called this violence *Aufhebung*, sublation. Philosophy does thereby and necessarily produce a realm that singular oddities possibly inhabit together, a realm where one feels *gut aufgehoben*, that one is in good hands, as it were. It thus creates a common space where everything and everyone is odd, a space of compossibility of that which by definition subverts any definition and is thus impossible. Philosophy is in all its operations concerned with oddities, with *Schrägheiten*. It is therefore neither straight nor non-straight, but *schräg*: weird, freakish, oblique, skewed, slant, or more trivially, diagonal, a “diagonal reasoning.”²³ Odd couplings are what appears, maybe at first, maybe always, impossible couplings, couplings of the impos-

22 Alain Badiou, “On Cinema as Democratic Emblem,” in *Cinema*, London: Polity, 2013, 233.

23 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, London: Continuum, 2006, 274.

sible. They are impossible relationships and hence point out the fact that philosophy cannot do without what it can impossibly do with. Philosophy brings together what appears as if you cannot, what appears as if you can impossibly bring it together.²⁴ It is thus clear that there is no in-advance measure or standard by means of which philosophy would be able to judge what is an impossible relationship. It seems impossible to just in general say what is impossible. It would not be impossible otherwise or one would essentialize the impossible (which one ought not to).

Violence in a relationship does rarely sound good – yet, a thinker like Slavoj Žižek insists, and rightly so, that “love” – and this must also hold for the love that is specific to the love of wisdom – “is an extremely violent act.”²⁵ If philosophy’s practice practically manifests in the violence done to impossible relationships this violence is the creation of a new peace: it implies to create new possibilities, “the possibility of the impossible”²⁶ relationships, liveable relationships. If philosophy’s practice consists in such creation, then impossibility is not a neutral modal category, but rather always already in actu when identified as such. It is not transhistorical, but immensely practical and historically specific and singular. Philosophy can then be defined also as the practice that makes it possible to identify something singularly impossible. This is not making the impossible practically possible. Since philosophy does not generate a new possibility in the world, but it makes it possi-

24 Recall how after the publication of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* its readers complained that he had brought together such unrelated topics as the French Revolution, the birth and end of religion, comedy, Kant, terror, Diderot, etc.

25 Cf. the well-known lines in “Žižek!” (2005).

26 Alain Badiou, *Can Politics be Thought?* Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 79.

ble to see something impossible that potentially can or could become possible. It is like a positing of presuppositions of an “impossible possibility.”²⁷ The violence done to impossible relationships that is philosophy thus implies that

1. philosophy brings together what seems impossible to bring together.
2. it brings itself together with something it can impossibly be brought together with.
3. it identifies what is impossible in what philosophy can impossibly relate to.
4. it therefore diversifies the concept of the impossible and takes it at its basis.

1, 2 – End.

Philosophy is not only involved in one but in more than one impossible relationship. It is a love of wisdom that is conceptually and notoriously polyamorous. But the way in which philosophy thinks its own involvement in more than one odd couple, is that philosophy thinks its own embeddedness in impossible relationships. Philosophy does so by thinking twosomeness, singularly impossible relationships. To think an odd couple or coupling does not mean to think *Zweideutigkeit* (ambiguity or equivocation), but *Zweiheit* (twoness or twosomeness) and by thinking it in more than one way – how else could one really think it? – philosophy is driven forced to think four-foldly. To think one odd couple, to think one-two, one is led not only to think the twosomeness of this singular two, but thereby forced to think the concept of one-two-someness, of coupledness or odd-coupling. This means conceptually, that if there is one

27 Ibid., 97.

odd coupling of philosophy with something else, there must be more. Not simply two, but two to the power of two – this is twosomeness – and this is what makes four. There must be, according to this account, at least four different singular one-two-someness relationships. Philosophy-politics being one of them. But if there are more than one, namely at least a couple of couples of impossible relationships in which philosophy stands and which it brings together, it is important to elaborate if there are domains of impossibility that can be discriminated (not only historically, but structurally). How can one differentiate between different impossible relations? And what is the specificity of this or that impossible relation? If it seems impossible to do so, this may just be an index that the task is to think what one cannot already think, so that one invents anew what we conceive of thinking. Hegel has thought this was thinking in the first place.²⁸ If philosophy has a history, it is obvious that it must spring from the and be determined by the relation to its partners. Philosophy is determined by the history of its impossible *liaisons*, of its *liaisons* not always *dangereuses*, but *impossibles*. And because it is polyamorous there is hardly one history, hardly one concept of history, but different temporalities, different couple-stories and histories without any unification.

The singularity of the impossible philosophy-politics relationship might come to the fore more easily if one accounts for another impossible relationship and remains aware of their respective difference. It thus helps to look at the relationship that philosophy entertains with art. This is not totally arbitrary reference, but has been invited by Lazarus himself, who once himself referred to the arts to elaborate a point about his con-

28 Cf. Frank Ruda, “Hegel on the Rocks of Nature,” in: Agon Hamza, Frank Ruda, and Slavoj Žižek, *Reading Hegel*, London: Polity, 2022.

ception of politics.²⁹ So, it seems justified to turn to the arts to see how its impossible relation to philosophy differs from that of politics. The relationship between philosophy and art – if it is one at all – in general has, as some say, been “affected by a symptom – that of an oscillation or a pulse.”³⁰ It is not only that philosophy oscillates, but the relationship between the two pulsates. Because it is vibrating, oscillating, it can be compared to another type of relationship: “Historically, philosophy and art are paired up like Lacan’s Master and Hysteric.”³¹ Why is the philosophy-art relationship similar to the one of the master and the hysteric? Because in it the hysteric – that is art in this case – constantly emphasizes that truth speaks through her but will also continually flee from any attempt of the master to provide a however subtle answer as to what this truth actually is. The hysteric will repeatedly emphasize that he or she escapes the master’s grasp. But at the same time, art addresses philosophy, this is the crucial point. “Likewise, art is always already there, addressing the thinker with the mute and scintillating question of its identity while through constant invention and metamorphosis it declares its disappointment about everything that the philosopher may have to say.”³² Art has or looks for a constant reason to complain. The mere presence of art thus becomes an address to philosophy. But art is also constitutively disappointed, and it might be made worse through the fact that it cannot escape to be driven to this very

29 Cf. Lazarus, “Des conférences.”

30 Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2005, 1.

31 Ibid. And to mention this in passing, Badiou claims that Lazarus did for politics what Lacan did for love. So, he is the anti-philosophical (I leave this term in a state of allusion here) thinker of politics. Cf. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 54.

32 Badiou, *Handbook*, 1.

disappointment. This is the diagnosis, however convincing (art wants philosophy to say something about it, or at least philosophy thinks that art wants philosophy to say something about it; but when philosophy does – define it, tell it what it is all about – art thinks philosophy’s claims are insufficient and disappointing).

In this image, the reason for art’s disappointment is simple. The supposed to be master, the subject supposed to be one to know – philosophy – had historically only a limited number of options at hand of what to tell what art is. Either philosophy identifies only philosophy with the position of articulating truth, or it is, at least, the position from which one is able to evaluate and see what the essence of art is, or, finally, the philosopher is the one who understands that she has to give up any claim to either truth or evaluation and submit to the brilliant opacity of the hysteric’s discourse. This is the basic decision. There are thus three options. Either philosophy is the bearer of truth and art is pretending to literally be truth-ful, a mimesis and semblance of truth (and then philosophy can sometimes even suggest using it in a way that is appropriate; Plato therefore thought there should be military music played during gymnastic training). But art is potentially problematic because it can disorient people through its powers. Art can effectively pretend to have access to something true. Or art does not have this capacity, and this is not even a problem, because art ultimately remains without real consequence, without consequence in the real. So, different from the first assumption where art is potentially dangerous (disorienting people), the second reading does not have this problem, because art is just entertainment. The third philosophical option is that only art has access to that which philosophy would love to have access to. The name of this gem is obviously truth. How the odd relationship then was supposed to work was quite determined by the very model or schema one assumed. If philosophy assumed the master

position, this meant to administer and sometimes even censor or prohibit it, by “giving her a good beating”³³ – a beating because in art it is all about semblance of truth, fakery, masquerade, and deception. When the philosophical truth is expressed about the truth of art, the truth of art is taken into philosophical hands. Or, art was identified with a kind of therapy. Or, finally, the philosopher bowed the knee before the inexplicable and almost inexpressible wisdom of the arts and assigns the only place of truth-articulation to it. The poets and painters, musicians and sculptors must show us the way.

These three schemas of understanding the odd relationship between philosophy and art strangely explain away its oddity: philosophy is in charge or there is nothing to be in charge of or art is in charge – so strangely the relationship, the twosomeness is lost, because it is only one of the terms determining the other. All three were highly influential models that governed the history of understanding this relationship for a long period of time. Alain Badiou claimed a while ago that these models have been saturated. This is highly relevant because the method of saturation that Lazarus developed, was appropriated within a foreign, notably philosophical context.³⁴ What is the method of saturation? It is a method to immanently explain the end of a political sequence. It is the systematic consequence of the claim that politics is rare and precarious. It always has an end. And the thing that has a beginning and then an end – everything that exists deserves to perish – constitutes a “historical mode of politics.”³⁵ There are different modes that Lazarus distinguishes:³⁶ the revolutionary one that existed from

33 Ibid., 2.

34 Lazarus, *Anthropology*, 22f.

35 Cf. *ibid.*, 29f.

36 Ibid., 73ff.

1792 to 1794, the classicistic modus whose sequence lasted from 1848 to 1871, the Bolshevik mode that lasted from 1902 to 1917 and the dialectical mode that lasts from 1928 to 1958. Today, we are post-revolutionary, post-classicistic, post-bolshevik and post-dialectical. That these modes can be brought in one line is not because they share a common substance or are all structured alike. “There is no metastructure of modes”³⁷ – not even history. It is thus not that they are all historical or part of the same always already existing and encompassing history. Rather such a history must be construed and a distinction between different modes must be created. It can be created by analysing how each of them, each in its own way became saturated, i.e., encountered a problem that it itself created but proved unable and incapable to solve.

Endings

“The end of the sequence is the cessation, the exhaustion [the saturation] of its specific political capacity.”³⁸ There is no metastructure and each mode must be thought and conceived of in its singularity.³⁹ Through conceiving of something singularly impossible, one may actually detect an impossibility of the previous mode. One can thus understand how one must move from a singular impossibility to the making possible of that very impossibility. And one can do so by prescribing that what appeared impossible must be(come) possible. Where there is the impossible, there shall be the (or another) possible. This is not the Hegelian labour of the concept, but the labour of

37 Ibid., 38.

38 Ibid., xiv.

39 Cf. *ibid.*, 4.

the prescriptive – since “all thought is prescriptive.”⁴⁰ Politics is historical throughout it appears and disappears in historical modes, it disappears when its means are saturated, but there is no history as such. Politics, when it exists, exists in absolutely singular forms, and there is no form of all possible forms, which is why politics always poses the problem of how to identify what can be counted as politics and this demands concrete investigations. But it is also important that any singular mode of politics, politics in its singular historical modes always ends in a singular form. The singularity of politics is there at its beginning, throughout and at its end. These ends are new ends, novelties are novel forms of political endings. In a way, this is close to the fundamentally Hegelian idea that something can only be properly thought in its singularity when it came to an end and thus if one started to conceive of its end. This does not endorse a finitizing, a finitude of politics, rather it endorses that the ability to think specific singularity of a historical mode of politics is linked to the singular way in which it ended.

The discussion of the different philosophical schemas for how to conceive of the relations between philosophy and art having become saturated thus allows to also clarify something about the relationship between philosophy and politics (and its other couplings). Since one can learn from what types of philosophical articulation of philosophy's relationship to politics can be saturated and which ones can – in the today – be and remain to be potent and instructive. This means that sometimes a certain philosophical mode of articulating the relationship between philosophy and politics comes to an end and is saturated because it exhausted all its historically specific mode of explanatory potency. It is here important to note that this saturation is not something that can be objectively measured, but rather concerns philosophy's capacity to think what hap-

40 Ibid., xxx.

pened in one of its impossible relationships (with art or politics for example). But this cannot but mean that philosophy, certain philosophical models can also be saturated. In this sense, even the existence of philosophy is precarious, because it has to think singular impossible relationships, it can have exhausted its means to do so. If, in Badiou's reconstruction the three ways in which philosophy related to art lost their validity, this exhaustion indicated that philosophy lost the potential to say anything relevant about art at all (when expressing it according to any of these three models). Why? Because they explained away the impossibility of the relationship between philosophy and art: the exhaustion and saturation is one that directly concerns the very status of impossibility. They started treating (the philosophy-)art(relationship) as all too possible. Art for philosophy became all too possible to explain. It became an art-object. In such a situation, art is absolutely right to complain because it received an increasingly poor conceptual treatment. One loses the conceptual impossibility if one makes art into something that can be dealt with in an always stable manner. Strangely, this makes thinking art even more impossible (by seeking to eradicate the impossibility of thinking art).

By assuming that it is always possible (for philosophy to think art and for there to be art), the thought-capacities of philosophy became saturated, that is to say created the impossibility to conceive of art (and from the analysis of this specific impossibility one can prescribe and detect demands for what philosophy must think). Philosophy exhausted its language(s). This means that philosophy had absolutely nothing new to say about something whose characteristic it is to bring specific forms of singular novelties into the world. When philosophy's models started to miss the production of novelty, it got old, so old, it was on the brink of dying. But this is to say that only by affirming the impossibility of its relationships, thinking something impossible in this relationship is potentially possible. What this

means is that there one must not only start from a prescription of possibility,⁴¹ but as the method of saturation itself indicates, there must also be the necessary prescription of specific impossibilities. Affirmations of what is impossible. Already Hegel indicated that after the French Revolution no philosopher was able to effectively talk about freedom, equality, and fraternity in the same way as before, even though it is sometimes difficult to change things. There is thus a mode of saturation that contributes to what one once called a history of philosophy. It is genuinely philosophical and has to do with philosophy's odd relationship with politics. What does this mean for the relationship between philosophy and politics (since nothing forces us to assume that because the singular relationship between philosophy and art is saturated, we would also encounter a saturation in other relationships)?

In a seminar from 1991-1992 – a seminar in which he also praisingly refers to *Anthropology of the Name* – Alain Badiou gives a similar account of the concrete situation of the odd couple philosophy and politics.⁴² Three schemas or models in which philosophy accounted for what is (supposed to be) politics. The three are: political philosophy, philosophy of the political and philosophy of politics. Political philosophy articulates a typology of the *form* in which it takes politics necessarily to appear, notably the form of sovereignty incorporated in the state. Therefore, it presents a typology of good and bad states. But in this way, it transhistoricizes and substantializes the form in which politics must appear and thus cannot account for its true singular historical nature (and thus cannot account for example for actions that takes place in distance from the state or pre-state collective action). The philosophy of the political

41 Ibid., 168ff.

42 Cf. Alain Badiou, *Le Séminaire – L'essence de la politique*, Paris: Fayard, 2018.

asserts that politics always becomes manifest in a certain practice, notably the coming together and this coming together does have different way of appearance, some are liberal and democratic. But there is an essence of what is political, namely coming together. Thereby it essentializes the form of practice that is considered to be political. And the philosophy of politics assumes that there is always one goal, one aim and end of all political action, say emancipation or revolution. But thereby it essentialized this very goal. These three forms are saturated because they indicate a trouble in explaining what happens in politics. Here, philosophy is incapable to say anything about anything new happening in politics.

All these ways of thinking politics have come to an end. Now and here one has to think the end, saturation proper. The way to do this is to accept and affirm that philosophy cannot think politics, that it is impossible for philosophy to think politics. This is not simply the admission of a defeat or weakness. But it is the affirmation of something historically specifically impossible. This impossibility is the very possibility to see there something impossible can happen if we prescribe a new (im) possibility. Only by raising philosophy's incapacity to the point of impossibility, politics can be thought. Philosophy can think politics by starting from affirming the impossibility to think politics. Since then, it thinks that it is impossible that there will ever be politics.⁴³ We should rest assured, there never will be any.

43 This is a point that I develop longer in my *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*, Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2016.

Politics of the Absolute: Hegel and Object-Oriented Ontology¹

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1 The first version of this work was prepared for a Special Dossier edited by Slavoj Žižek and Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, in the framework of the *Bajo Palabra* journal project of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2023).

Introduction

The general presuppositions and first principles that are formulated regarding the possible existence of an absolute *has been* a philosophical discourse of yesteryear. That is until only recently, when speculative materialist Quentin Meillassoux openly advocated a thinking of the absolute in terms of ‘an absolute necessity of contingency’² and an absolute ‘great outdoors’ regarding an escape from what he terms ‘correlationism’ (and ‘subjectalism’ respectively). There is an almost paradoxical flavour regarding this position, and it should be further analysed;³ if one instantiates an absolute knowledge, whereby its content is at the same time *indifferent* to the human subject (mind-independent realism), then how can this even be deemed ‘knowledge’ in any normative sense as it does not refer to the history of knowledge we have formulated, such as a human ‘space of reasons,’⁴ evolutionary knowledge, or knowledge as ‘transcendentally’ guaranteed (Kant/Hegel)? If this knowledge becomes untethered to us (absolutely) then – without sounding overtly philanthropic – how can this help us? In Meillassoux’s project, it seems that we are left ‘knowing’ only the ‘facticity’ of a thing (that it ‘is’) and that this facticity is mathematically formalizable/formulatable, yet the realm of phenomenological description, moral and teleological considerations, or *a priori* necessity – has nothing to do with this ‘realist’ fact and can only be subsequently offered up to us as broken

2 Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude: An Essay On the Necessity of Contingency*, London: Continuum (reprint) 2009, 34.

3 How can one reconcile absolute knowledge with human thought (or ‘intellectual intuition’) when the absolute is in excess of the human?

4 A pragmatist theory of meaning (Sellars, etc.).

idols which comfort us in a time of disappointment or denial; *we have nothing to do with knowledge*.⁵

In fact, the 'speculative realist' movement in general has a plethora of implicit references to (what the twentieth century continental tradition had disregarded as the 'dogma' of) the absolute, such as Ray Brassier's affirmation of the power of truth⁶ and rationality against the auspices of relativism, and Iain Hamilton Grant's interest in Schelling's absolute metaphysics of nature. However, it is Graham Harman's characterisation of the 'object' – as a non-relational entity or unity – that will interest us in this essay, precisely because it signals a turn from the absolute (non-relative), autonomous 'whole' (Hegel) to the absolute autonomous independence of the individual *object* (or possibly even the 'in-itself' of the object). We will assume that this shift in contemporary philosophical readings of the absolute seeps into the collective unconscious, subconscious and conscious (intentional) activities of political theory and praxis, and, of course, such metaphysical formulations are not without political implications.

Considering the notion of a metaphysical absolute, Meillassoux reminds us that the absolutization of Being only implies the absolutisation of thinking or knowledge when Being is turned into a *sufficient* ground, origin or trajectory (Hegel), something that Meillassoux quickly disqualifies (it just so happens that Meillassoux feels ambitious enough to attempt reaching this absolute with a *rationalist* rhetoric traditionally

5 For instance, knowledge is not *co-constituted* through the standard, phenomenological methods of subject-object found in both Kant and later Hegel. Neither is it a property of subjective ideation, mind or mental context (Berkeley), nor the demarcation of various linguistic instantiations.

6 Ray Brassier states "I am a nihilist because I still believe in truth" in Ray Brassier and Marcin Rychter, "I am a Nihilist Because I Still Believe in Truth," *Modestos Stavrakis* (Feb 2011), internet: <https://xylem.aegean.gr/~modestos/mo.blog/i-am-a-nihilist-because-i-still-believe-in-truth/>.

tied to such a legacy). That the contemporary absolute is now associated with the non-conceptual, with 'hyper-chaos,' and with the necessity of contingency (as well as being offered-up as a blanket term for any absolute 'blindspot,' 'gap,' 'whole' or 'not-all' in Lacan and Žižek's work), shows that we are some way off the trajectory of Hegel's absolute idealist axiom. But in speculative realism a strange inversion appears; it seems that we can 'know' this *failure* of absolute knowledge (and its inequation with identity). Meillassoux can 'absolutely' know the 'unreason' driving the facticity of every 'thing' (i.e., that it is absolutely true that anything can change from one moment to the next; the abolition of the principle of sufficient reason). Graham Harman can also be seen to participate in this inversion of *absolute non-knowing* by suggesting that there is indeed a 'real object' or 'essence' *behind* the encyclopaedia of everyday objects we utilise as *dasein* ('being-in-the-world'), however, it is our *non-knowledge* of the 'real' object (or indirect access/allure of it) which we must uphold instead of 'undermining' or 'overmining' the object into a set of knowable traits. This is what leads Terence Blake and others to label Harman's philosophy as a 'negative theology'.⁷

It seems that we are left at this crossroads in contemporary continental philosophy; if we wish to posit an absolute which is sophisticated and post-critical enough to endure, then we must set aside the possibility that *knowledge* can be tethered to this new, alien absolute. Yet the *positing* of such an absolute is paradoxically accessed through a *type* of thought (or where thought reaches its other, a resistance, a 'withdraw-

7 See Terence Blake, "Graham Harman's THE THIRD TABLE: A Revelatory Episode," *Agent Swarm* (Oct 13, 2021), internet: <https://terenceblake.wordpress.com/2021/10/13/graham-harmans-the-third-table/> or Adam Kotsko, "OOO: A Negative Theology of the Object?" *An und für sich* (Feb 8, 2011), internet: <https://itself.blog/2011/02/08/ooo-a-negative-theology-of-the-object/>.

al') which *appears* to be a new manoeuvre beyond Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy.⁸ Or, alternatively put, knowledge of the absolute is secured if we accept that what this knowledge is of cannot be converted into anything even vaguely resembling the principle of sufficient reason, transcendental (Kantian/Hegelian) identity, or some underlying substance/form. Meillassoux in-fact makes the same point through his distinction between 'metaphysical' and 'speculative' thinking; the former is the argument for an absolutely necessary *entity* (God, Reason, Mind, Nature, 'World,' etc.), the latter being the argument for the absolutely necessary possibility underpinning any one particular entity (or that an entity might *not* 'be' in alternative scenarios). In Meillassoux's own words: "we must uncover an absolute necessity that does not reinstate any form of absolutely necessary entity."⁹ Harman manages to create a similar manoeuvre by reversing the known-unknown (Meillassoux) into an unknown-known by affirming the positive non-contradiction found in Kant's deduction of the existence of 'noumena' (or the 'in-itself') distinct from phenomena whilst simultaneously suggesting that we can never fully account for noumenal entities; the complicit form of sensual/phenomenal 'translation' that stymies any direct encounter with the noumenal is turned into a kind of universal science, epistemology and ontology by designating all 'objects' as possessing this primary strife between noumenal and phenomenal modes of existence.¹⁰

8 Hegel's dialectical and antinomical thinking comes to mind here but instead of thoughts 'other' or 'opposite' being *speculatively* 'reconciled' or 'sublated' by a supplementary mode of *identity*, we have a *speculative* form of philosophising which outstretches any *identity* capable of integrating thinking and being into a transparent relation that can account for itself *causa sui*.

9 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 34.

10 Meillassoux proposes that he can know the absolute "unreason"

Objective

There are at least four convictions in the following contents of this chapter: 1) that a mini-renaissance of the absolute has begun and indeed is upon us; 2) that this 'new' speculative characterisation of the absolute, as *knowing an unknown* (Meillassoux) or *not knowing a known* (Harman) might be compatible with some strands of Hegelian dialectical thinking; 3) that the characterisation of the absolute as independent, non-relational unit (Harman), and the characterisation of the absolute as encompassing, relational 'whole' (Hegel for example) has political consequences which have always existed as such antagonisms in the history of philosophy but may be more prescient at present considering this renaissance of absolute (speculative) metaphysical thinking; and 4) that such polarising descriptions of the absolute may in-fact be seen as *dialectically* formulated and hence less prone to the absolutization of either side (i.e., leftism as fundamentally open and relational, rightism as fundamentally closed and consolidational). This paper will achieve this by sketching out some lines of commonality between Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) and G.W.F Hegel's theory of the (dialectical) object in his most accessible work *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (*The Phenomenology*).

Hegel's metaphysics has a somewhat non-dualist character to it, a character that J.N. Findlay encapsulates in his foreword to *The Phenomenology* as a "concern always with the *Begriffe* or universal notional shapes that are evinced in fact and history, and with the ways in which *these* align them-

(unknowability) driving any thing, whilst Harman speculates upon the existence of an 'in-itself' (e.g., of objects) without equating such an existence to any form of mathematical, scientific or phenomenal identification (e.g., his critique of 'undermining' and 'overmining'). In other words, Harman purports to know that an object has some sort of essence (or non-relational aspect) without being able to derive any (conventional) knowledge from this claim.

selves and lead on to one another, and can in fact ultimately be regarded as distinguishable facets of a single all-inclusive universal or concept.”¹¹ This would seem miles away from Harman’s metaphysical model for several reasons; Harman’s model of ‘real objects’ (as opposed to ‘sensual ones’) cannot be absolutely and universally ‘overmined’ into a series of ‘Notions’ (however extra-phenomenal/logical these ‘Notions’ may be). The equation of the object with knowledge is but *one* way in which the irreducibility/inexhaustibility of the object is subsequently *translated* into a set of knowable traits, and this always follows a *reduction* of the object in some way or another for Harman. In the same way, a ‘real object’ cannot be reduced (or conflated) with the ‘sensual object’ or the many “swirling adumbrations” and “accidents” which Harman equates to the sensual ‘surface play’ of objects, a surface of accidents that Hegel would designate as necessary and quasi-teleological (in that every object “successive phases bring out what is logically implicit in its earlier phases”).¹² In other words, for Hegel, contingency – in and around the object – is always formulated retrospectively as a necessary aspect or condition of its existence, just as the many seemingly fortuitous moments of the French Revolution may appear as intrinsic to its main cause when studied after the fact, in history for example. This point also brings us to another contrast in both respective philosophies that Harman equates as sensual¹³ (i.e., as the relational aspect of reality) which is not only counter to Hegel’s crucial decision to claim that ‘phenomenal time’ (“the many moving

11 J.N. Findlay, “Foreword to The Phenomenology,” in G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, vii.

12 Ibid.

13 See Graham Harman, “Subspatial and Subtemporal,” in M. Amir and R. Sela, *Extraterritorialities in Occupied Worlds*, New York: Punctum Books, 2016.

shapes of consciousness”) is intrinsically linked to the movement of logical operations (that logic is in-fact expressed and even sublated qua the *phenomenal as its highest form*), but also counter to the intrinsic continuity between logical and phenomena-logical progression (or simply ‘becoming’).

However, it is the aim of this paper to reveal some similarities between these two philosophers’ initially incompatible views on reality. For example, does the notion of ‘preservation’ (or the movement from implicit to explicit knowledge) in Hegel’s dialectic suggest something more radical than the historical and teleological position that ‘everything is preserved as it undergoes sublation’? Does this notion of preservation not function on a more ontological basis; that a “unity of negation” or a “unity of contradiction” can be preserved beyond the phenomenal movements of knowing and experience? In other words, can we maintain a difference between ‘object’ and ‘knowledge’ which does not contradict the presupposition that absolute knowledge – to be absolute – must take along the object and subject with it simultaneously (as a mutual sublation)?

There are at least four ways of doing this with Hegel. For example: 1) we can emphasise Hegel’s own *buffering* process between implicit and explicit knowledge; 2) we can emphasise the Hegelian notion of ‘utility’ in relation to the necessary reason why an object must remain an object somewhat independent of its knowledge; 3) we can allow the object to have a *contradictory* capacity (essence as contradiction) which is hereby characterised as irreconcilable with human thought; and 4) we can distinguish between a fourfold of complementary yet distinct unities which are here seen as chronologically/historically constituted; Spirit, substance/object, subject, and unity of perception, which all avoid being conflated by the last unity (of perception) conventionally associated with absolute knowledge by Hegel. Please note: due to word limit, only a section of this chapter (the first three bullet points) can be presented here.

The Buffering of Implicit to Explicit Knowledge

In Willem DeVries little book entitled *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, he describes Hegelian Spirit as follows:

Spirit is thought to be a pure, self-generating activity. Rather than being thought of as a particular kind of thing with specific properties and interactions with other things, spirit has to be thought of as a particular pattern of activity, a special kind of organisation which interactions among things can exhibit. Spirit cannot be adequately grasped through categories or concepts abstracted from finite things, much less from sensible things, because it is not a thing or even like a thing.¹⁴

Regarding what Hegel describes as the movement from implicit to explicit knowledge (or content), there appears to be the possibility of both a non-anthropocentric and anthropocentric reading of Spirit, especially if we consider – as does DeVries – Spirit as not exclusively mental. In one sense we have a sort of topology whereby this “self-generating activity” of Spirit simultaneously actualises and organises objects. It is this ‘doubling’¹⁵ – of existing as a particular determination – and of existing as an element subsequently organised into a whole (even perhaps a *moving* whole), that acts as Spirit’s own immanent mechanism in which it gauges both particular and whole in its own transcendently constituted (albeit qua-

14 Willem DeVries, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

15 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 17.

si-pantheistic) manner. If we are to affirm a theory of inhuman logical progression, with some form of collective prehension (Whitehead/Harman) or autopoietic nature, then it is precisely this – between the implicit and quasi-contingent embodiment of the becoming of nature on the one hand, and the subsequent self-arrangement of explicit, quasi-necessary *particulars* into *kinds* through object-object means or through some underlying ideational animism, cause, purpose or means.

This already allows us to judge – albeit in a kind of process-philosophical way – a distinction or buffering between the self-movement of implicit to explicit reality and even reminds us of Harman’s polypsychism; that an object’s capacity for prehension depends on what relations it comes into contact with (relations of organisation, synthesis, sublation, etc.). It also presupposes that the movement from implicit to explicit content is a capacity *exhibited in the object* (Spirit as an *initially* mind-independent activity) with the caveat that the object only “exhibits” this activity (cannot be reducible to it), as well as process philosophy suggesting to us that no implicit content is *ever fully* made explicit (there is no final identity where this movement stops or is terminated). Regarding Hegel, there is much argument as to whether there is indeed a final stage to realities realisation (the Idea, or the fulfilment of an Absolute Science) or whether, as J.N. Findlay states, there is “no pronouncement as to what pathway to Science would be taken by men of the future, nor as to what pathway to Science would be taken in other thinkable world-situations.”¹⁶

Regarding the object, this movement of Spirit would seem to suggest that an object can *preserve* some of its earlier stages and ‘lower’ formations (‘sub’-lation) whilst other determinations may ensue. Even the Hegelian notion of the essential *contradiction of the object* – which we will look at in depth

16 Findlay, “Foreword,” vi.

in Part 3 - suggests that the objects 'identity' is still *oscillating* between this movement; from implicit to explicit (or from the immanent determination of the particular, to its transcendental reorganisation into a universality, whereby the *object expresses the whole* and not merely "the great influence" of external contingencies that Hegel pejoratively finds initially in Nature).

Regarding process philosophy, this movement from implicit to explicit in Hegel runs even deeper in his initial analysis of Being and Non-Being in the *Science of Logic*.¹⁷ In a section entitled The Opposition of Being and Nothing in Ordinary Thinking, the Being of Spirit is already a form of *determination* which requires Non-Being (or Nothing), for "in non-being the relation to being is contained: both being and its negation are enunciated in a single term [...] as it is in *becoming*."¹⁸ Even if one does not wish to permit this rhetoric, one should still try to use dialectical notions to break Being out of its self-identical tautology. To try and situate Being in that which it is not seems to hold more potential and scope philosophically, just as situating hot in relation to cold, or birth in relation to death etc. In J.N. Findlay's words:

[T]he breakdown of a notion as achieving the opposite of what it claims to achieve, the above-mentioned passage from Being to Nothing is a good example. Pure Being is a would-be concrete notion, but it does nothing to substantiate its claim. What it sets before us, *an object that is and no more*, and which is without definite character, is also indistinguishable from the absence of an object which it claims to exclude.¹⁹

17 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

18 Ibid., 47.

19 J.N. Findlay, *Ascent to the Absolute*, London: Routledge, 2019, 134.

In other words, the ostensibly self-identical object is dealing – both subjectively and objectively (implicitly and explicitly qua concepts and less explicit sublations) with its lack of identity, absence, non-being or nothingness. This *determination* of Being would seem to compliment the notion that there is a difference between what is being determined and the product of the determination itself (implicit and explicit) regarding both the object and its content and perhaps even between the real object and its subsequent sensual translation (Harman).

On the other hand, even if we designate this movement of implicit to explicit as strictly *subjective*; as the production of explicit Notions that correspond and exist within both mental and physical reality, Hegel is quick to remind us that "this substance, as Subject [...] is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediating of its self-othering with itself."²⁰ Hegel continues; "only this *self-restoring* sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself – not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such – is the True." Not only is this 'self-restoration' a process vulnerable to buffering, it also requires that it take on *form* to be *actual*; one must follow the "whole of the developed form" for Spirit, Substance, Essence, or consciousness to be "conceived and expressed as an actuality." One almost forgets in Hegel's phenomenology that the subject is a form/ object of knowledge itself and Hegel states that even "the individual certainly cannot by the nature of the case comprehend his own substance more easily."²¹ Lastly, we must always remember that with Hegel we have an absolute *phenomenology* (an absolute intersubjectivity) and the intentionality directing us toward the 'outside' is *negative*. In Bart Zantvoort's words "for Hegel, the existence of thinking is the being-outside-of-itself of the object as much as that of

20 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 10.

21 Ibid., 17.

the subject.”²² This movement of otherness does not even allow the ‘Subject’ to be a *substantial identity* which can equate contingency with the necessity of a self-identical *mind*. In other words, this buffering is inherent to the act of ostensibly subjective thought and activity in the first place.

What seems to cause most controversy in Hegel's oeuvre is his argument for the *commensuration* of the subject-ive and object-ive in his objective idealism; that both subjective and objective processes tend towards the highest form of (completed) reality, which culminates in self-consciousness's appropriation (or assimilation) of substance as the ‘for itself’ of *Subjective* consciousness (or “substance as subject”). The entire history of sublations, the epic progression of the syllogism, has “had the patience to pass through these shapes over the long passage of time, and to take upon itself the enormous labour of world-history, in which it embodied in each shape as much of its entire content as that shape was capable of holding”²³ and since “all this has already been implicitly accomplished; the content is already the actuality reduced to a possibility, its immediacy overcome, and the embodied shape reduced to abbreviated, simple determinations of thought,” then thought truly takes the reins and becomes the quintessence of the ever-complex structure (or criteria) of reality. In J.N. Findlay's words: “[T]he thinking ego is [...] connected [...] with the category of categories used in the synthetic constitution of objects by the understanding, and, at the end of the Phenomenology, the conceptualization of all objects, and their subjection to universals, is not seen as different from the imposition on them of the form of self.”²⁴

22 Bart Zantvoort, *Hegel or Meillassoux: The Necessity of Contingency and the Auto-Stabilization of Chaos* (forthcoming 2023).

23 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 17.

24 Findlay, “Foreword,” xi.

However, note that, although reality itself is shifting towards the ‘evolved,’ universal categories found in human consciousness; a cognitive and determinative mechanism which can organise many objects and concepts into an inter-relational and universal space, *the immediacy of reality* (or more aptly Nature) *lingers*. What is this *immediacy* that is entirely open to further sublations/Notions yet cannot be fully abolished as explicit content? In other words, what is this *raw material* that is commensurate with both objective recognition (sublation/syllogism) and subjective recognition (determinate ‘Notions’) yet is only ever *converted* through such circumstances and never formulated as anything other, independent or autonomous from this process.²⁵ In fact, it is in one sense preserved; as a *residue*, or as the dialectical opposite of what is not *overdetermined* into *content*. Not only is there much reality untouched by explicit content (qua the unresolved process of Spirit and its own internal attempts to *resolve its nothingness as part of the identity of exhibited objects*), the question has only ever been *subsequently* to do with the reconciliation of human consciousness with world consciousness; before this we must allow each organism and object to contribute and participate in what Hegel called ‘objective spirit’ or objective reality (if you allow me such terms). J.N. Findlay implies this when he states: “[F]or Hegel, the spiritual, the ideal, the self-conscious which is the ultimate meaning of everything, does not lie at the beginnings of thought and being, but rather at their end.”²⁶

Before Hegel can move us through the varying sequences of his Phenomenology, he must *retrospectively* account for

25 But of course, Hegel would suggest that the ‘other’ is immanently contributing to this process.

26 Findlay, *Ascent*, 132.

this “immediacy”²⁷ of being, this “alien other [...] which abstract reason does not yet contain”²⁸ before it has been colonised by the universality of consciousness reached in the full integrations of all syllogisms. Interestingly enough, regarding Harman’s philosophy, we have an inverse interpretation; while Hegel sees only “unthinking” observation of “tasting, smelling, feeling, hearing and seeing”²⁹ in the initial Nature that man is observing (as its ‘bare immediacy’), what Harman would initially separate from this primary human relation would be the ‘real object’ itself. In other words, where Hegel’s ‘Nature’ independent of mind is a realm of incomplete *sensuousness* (for the very reason that Hegel insists that mind must be integrated into Nature as its complete realisation), Harman would comfortably place a menagerie of various real objects (as well as their subsequent object-object sensual interactions might I add) as existing and subsisting beyond Hegel’s immediate realm. Yet Hegel does not denounce any realism of mind independent objects as we soon come to realise in his now famous chapter in *The Phenomenology* entitled “Sense-Certainty: Or The ‘This’ And ‘Meaning’” where he says that: “[T]he object is: it is what is true, or it is the essence. It is, regardless of whether it is known or not: and it remains, even if it is not known, whereas there is no knowledge if the object is not there.”³⁰

What is emerging in this account is the moment where determinate notions are ventriloquised (or assimilated) by the human rational subject, yet what is initially (or “immediately”) given – in the analysis of Nature – are empty concepts and empty objects. But this does not disqualify the object from be-

27 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 146.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 147.

30 Ibid., 59.

ing “True” or “real,” just that our understanding of natural objects – and the speculative enterprise of conceiving of objects as *understanding themselves* (‘for itself’), have not been hitherto developed through human understanding as a progressive ingredient of universal understanding itself (consciousness as an objective science). There is a radical claim hidden behind this argument; that the logical development and self-reflexive nature of human thought bestowed upon us is both the key to resolving the *absolute identity* of objects in nature (essence as contradiction) but also that this form of cognition *completes* or *enhances* the reality of such entities from the radical viewpoint of an objective reality which is trying to identify itself *through* human thought (human thought being a development of the universal progression of the syllogism that existed in a half-state before humans existed).

But it is worth emphasising here that the desired commensuration (or reconciliation) – between subject and object – in the act of knowing – does not abolish these two poles (these “two thises”) although both “move into their opposite.”³¹ Rather, subject and object are restored but as two determinations of the same Notion (absolute knowledge or identity). This allows Hegel (and subsequently ourselves) to uphold a kind of dialectical movement whilst not advocating wholeheartedly a process philosophy which would put subject and object under the whims of a boundless apeiron or flux. There is a Hegelian dialectic here which *maintains* both the reality of object-object interactions (before definitive realisation and appropriation into the realm of universal Notions qua human cognition) and also the more traditional subject-object distinction, for the very same reason. We have explained this maintenance in terms of Hegel’s buffered movement from implicit to explicit stages of realisation and how this links to the possibility of simulta-

31 Ibid.

neously upholding an object-oriented realism that is akin to Hegel's initial comments on the "true" object "regardless of whether it is known or not" whilst respecting the *explicitation* of the object (into determinate particulars and universals) as a knowledge of the object. The more ambitious question here is not only whether the *knowledge of the object* is *universally* valid (as a science) but whether such knowledge – emerging as real structures of ideation in reality – changes how the world identifies this object – giving knowledge a universal footing in a more ontological and speculative fashion. Regarding the maintenance of the distinction between subject and object (and implicit and explicit knowledge), there also exists a metaphysics of necessity and teleology, exemplified in Hegel's writings on *utility*, that defends this division.

Hegelian Utility

The notion of Hegelian utility is connected to our first numbered point regarding the movement from implicit to explicit, yet it argues that the *maintenance* of the distinction itself is an *absolute* one. For example, in J.N. Findlay's foreword to Hegel's phenomenology he writes: "The notional integration thus indicated ends, according to Hegel, in Absolute Knowledge or the Absolute Idea, the test of whose absoluteness consists simply in the fact that nothing further remains to be taken care of. Even the contingencies and looseness of connection that obtain in the world are such as the sort of system we are constructing does and must involve."³²

In predictable Hegelian lingo, Findlay is saying that the surface contingencies, accidents and errors that necessarily distinguish objects from other objects and their environments,

32 Findlay, "Foreword," x.

and the various "loosely connected" trajectories of determination that do or do not find themselves purposively integrated into a world, are *themselves necessary* upon reflection. This is the dialectic of utility itself; the necessity of a primary object *that utilises*, to a secondary object that becomes utilised, both interdependent in a sense yet both uncovering a *lack* in the movement/operation itself; that something necessitates or requires utility in the first place. For Hegel, this postulation of dialectical utility – *preserves* both accident and essence, contingency and necessity and the non-purposive and purposive – as part of the Absolute Ideas design; it's very specific chain of events, which have presented us with our present-day reality (all eventual paths lead to the Absolute Idea but this is our – actual and irreversible – one). It would then be – in a sense – the necessity of contingency, the purposiveness of non-purposiveness, etc. (the identity of both identity and difference) that is truly characteristic of Hegel's absolute.

In this sense a kind of utility of essence and accident, implicit (real) and explicit (ideal), is maintained (as necessary) and an analysis of their distinctions can be carried out (as a phenomenology for example – whether Husserlian, Heideggerian or Harmanian). This theory also allows object to be distinct from content in the sense that the 'object' that Hegel describes as "what is true [...] regardless of whether it is known or not" necessarily has to preserve or remain as both implicit and explicit movements of Spirit (Hegel's theory of utility); as both non-conceptual and conceptual (but both logical for Hegel). This is in-fact what Hegel says: "there is no knowledge if the object is not there."³³ This is, of course, also aided by our earlier reflections on the becoming explicit of objects through Hegel's Spirit; that which can never totalise itself as identity and hence total content.

33 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 59.

Not only is Hegel's notion of utility being mobilised here to uphold the *ontological necessity of distinctions* which are more accepting to Graham Harman's own philosophy, we also begin to see some common ground between the two; is Harman's 'real object' that which forever remains implicit, that which (without appearing too anthropomorphic/panpsychic) refuses the operation of explicitation? In Hegel's words "the explication of the notion in the sphere of being does two things: it brings out the totality of being, and it abolishes the immediacy of being, or the form of being as such."³⁴ Both of these desired results of explicitation are to be categorically refused by Harman: 1) the individual object does not engage in a holistic or equipmental totality of being; and 2) the immediate existence of the real object should not be reduced or converted into the "abolition of immediacy" (in other words, Hegel is saying that the explicit notion shows that *everything must be mediated*, and hence the immediate is abolished, but this is opposed to Harman's affirmation of the non-mediated aspect of real objects; the conversion of immediacy into mediation might be viewed as a reduction of the immediate into *the sensual* for Harman). Although Hegel encourages explicitation as the realisation of the Absolute Idea, it seems that Hegel simultaneously upholds the distinction of subject and object, and implicit and explicit content, because such a process (or passage) must be continually instantiated for the dialectic to exist. One may wish to go even further and suggest that the limit presupposed in the distinction between subject/object and implicit/explicit, is itself a limit that absolute knowledge *knows* and restores in itself.

34 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel*, translated by William Wallace, Frankfurt: Outlook Verlag, 2018, 120.

Essence as Contradiction

The Hegelian integration of *nothing* into the objects identity, as a "movement into its opposite," a "contradiction," a "negative unity," or a process of sublating nothing into "an aspect of Being," also provides a similar function to the previous attempts at maintaining the distinction between object and subject (or object and human knowledge) because it provides a determination that in-fact limits both the object and subject as an actual tension between Being and Nothing (Becoming). Being, qua Becoming, tries to integrate Nothingness or Non-Being into itself, only partially succeeding by exhibiting some form of nothingness as a dialectical aspect or movement of Being but never disclosing nothingness itself (nothing is always converted into something). Hegel sometimes characterises this nothingness as an aspect of circular finitude; "finite things, in their indifferent variety, are therefore just this: to be contradictory, internally fractured and bound to return to their ground"³⁵ as a movement (and return) to their opposite side of Being (Non-Being) and the negativity that makes up part of their identity. However, there are some Hegel interpreters, like myself, who view nothingness as a negation which can never be fully sublated or integrated into the teleological system of Hegel³⁶ (the impossibility of Being's sublation of Nothingness) and hence this leaves us with a spectre of nothingness which cannot be transferred into explicit knowledge; which is in-fact a speculative problem for knowledge in a similar way that Brassier sees the problem of extinction for any horizon of thought: "[T]he earth will be incinerated by the sun 4 bil-

35 Hegel. G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 384

36 As opposed to those who see Nothingness as solely the development or reconciliation of the Being of the Object with its Other.

lion years hence; all the stars in the universe will stop shining in 100 trillion years; and eventually, one trillion, trillion, trillion years from now, all matter in the cosmos will disintegrate.”³⁷

Nothingness indeed finds its place within Hegel's system in several ways but its association with movement, the operation of determinate negation, and the object as a 'negative unity,' are all ways of circumscribing nothingness into utility; as a nothingness which is never just nothing but maintains the distinctions of subject-object operations, or a nothingness which discloses the finitude of things (and their teleological “Ends” in Hegel's case), or a nothingness which haunts the object like a spectre and encourages the ‘fuller’ realisation of identity as the reconciliation of these two opposites, etc. This is very similar to the way that Hegel utilises exteriority – as something concomitant or complicit with internal self-consciousness and essence; the Hegelian characterisation of subjectivity as “a being-for-self which is for itself only through another,” which can never define itself purely in self-relation to an ‘ego’ but rather through its interaction with the external world, where it becomes aware of its self-consciousness through its relationship with others. Just as subject and object are retained in their utility whilst simultaneously offering up a newer development of knowledge and a newer more refined topology of object and subject inter-relations, internal and external are also retained as necessary meta-categories, whilst the two are sublated as a movement (or oscillation) of interior and exterior ensconced and given justification through the absolute. “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.”³⁸ However, this “acknowledgement” through

37 Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 49.

38 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 111.

otherness/exteriority in-fact converts the acknowledgement of exteriority (found in the contradistinction of the ‘for us’) into an interiority as soon as it acknowledges ‘otherness’ as ‘for itself.’ Although Hegel believes that this subsequent, sublatory identity always trumps the external or other it encounters (the identity of identity and difference), it becomes harder to affirm the initial distinctions of subject/object in the first place through the ostensible success of absolute sublation, and this is possibly why so many contemporary Hegel scholars dismiss the totalisation of the dialectical process (Adorno and Žižek come to mind).

Although we must affirm a non-translatable aspect in Harman's ‘real object,’ the arena of Harman's objects exist – albeit in a non-totalisable way – in a very similar manner to Hegel's objects; they constantly negotiate their internal integrity (or self-determination) with external relations,³⁹ in other words, they are constantly complicit within the tension between the existence of immediate implicit being (the object as immediately real and lacking larger structures of relations) and the mediated, explicit translation that either Harmanian polypsychism⁴⁰ or Hegelian dialectical process (or Spirit) exhibits. For Hegel, this is achieved simply through the passage of time; the preservation of instances which simultaneously progress past such instances (implicit to explicit). Both philosophers also utilise the sensual as an operation of explicitation; whilst Hegel views the

39 The following passage from Harman is eerily Hegelian; “The relation between an object and its own real qualities (we called this essence) is a relation produced by outside entities,” Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, Hants: Zero Books, 2011, 106-7.

40 By using Harman's neologism ‘polypsychism’ I mean the process whereby a (‘dormant’) object comes to participate in larger contexts of objects through its “mode” of relating and prehending other objects, which will subsequently produce the possibilities of “fission” and “fusion” enhancing the explicit identity of the objects involved in such a process.

sensual as a motivating/purposive criteria of 'givenness' available to all objects that participate in one's own explicitation/reflection (inviting such to be a "moving shape of consciousness" which leads to the upper echelons of the 'Idea'), Harman allows the 'sensual' to be the fundamental bridge between the confrontation of two 'real' objects; 'prehension' being the sensual translation that ensues between them. We can also establish the opinion that both Hegel and Harman convert (or translate) both nothingness, otherness and alterity into Identity in some way or another. For example, Harman suggests that space – and therefore the spatial aspect of the object – is "both relation and non-relation,"⁴¹ which posits non-relation as having an existence, just as Hegel posits nothingness as having an existence within Spirit and its many "exhibited" objects. Furthermore, if Hegel can be seen to sublate differences into identity, such as a new developed unity of differences (which he exemplifies through his musing on the series of dialectical stages of flowers and plants), Harman can equally be seen to make difference and alterity a surface phenomenon found *on the interior of the object*; as the way the object *translates difference* into an internal, sensual component of itself. This is how Harman safeguards the non-changing and even non-temporal aspect of the real withdrawn object; by displacing movement into a purely relational and hence sensual capacity that rarely affects the dormant interior (or non-relational aspect) of both objects participating in any confrontation.⁴²

41 Graham Harman, "The Road to Objects," *continent* 3, No. 1 (2011), 171-179.

42 The remainder of this excerpt can be found published in Charles' new book on Hegel and Speculative Realism published by Palgrave 2023.

Anti-Antigone: From a Politics of Desire to a Politics of Love – Rethinking the Politics of the One-All-Alone

WANYOUNG KIM and MARK MURPHY

Introduction: The Problem with a Politics of Desire

In an early work by Todd McGowan, he argues that we have moved from a political paradigm of duty to one of satisfaction exemplified by the neoliberal commandment to enjoy. He posits that the way we can move forward from this super egoic commandment is to move toward a politics of desire.¹ He states:

I contend, however, that the importance of this shift is now being rivalled by another historical change. This is the transformation from a society founded on the prohibition of enjoyment (and thus the dissatisfaction of its subjects) to a society that commands enjoyment or *jouissance* (in which there seems to be no requisite dissatisfaction). Whereas formerly, society has required subjects to renounce their private enjoyment in the name of social duty, today, the only duty seems to consist in enjoying oneself as much as possible [...]²

If in the past – for instance – society operated by the symbolic coordinates of duty, now there has been a transition to a more tyrannical injunction, that of super egoic enjoyment. He is talking about the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism and the transformation of duty to a duty to consume. Moreover, he shows how that eventually morphed into the post-soviet attenuated optimism that came with Fukuyama's End of History.

In short, if in the past, the problem was a problem of de-

¹ Todd McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction? Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment*, 1st edn, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004, 1-9.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

sire in the face of the prohibition of the father who demands that we relinquish the pleasure principle, now we have the rise of an injunction that tells us that there is nothing outside of the pleasure principle, and this comes with its own collective psychological trauma.

In response to the paralytic superegoic commandment that one must enjoy through the image, McGowan argues that we need to embrace what he terms 'partial enjoyment':

In order to save the social order, according to this line of thought, we must re-establish a prohibition that will protect us from the horrible enjoyment proliferating everywhere today. Without such a return, society will not survive; civilisation will descend into anarchy [...] Today, after enjoyment has become a social duty, the embrace of partial enjoyment—rather than the pursuit of an illusory total enjoyment—emerges as a unique political possibility.³

He argues that prohibition needs to be re-established to protect us from a culture of commodified enjoyment lest civilisation descends into chaos. He then argues that this 'partial enjoyment' is defined by uncertainty and that one of its defining features is that we do not know if we actually have this partial enjoyment. He then says this partial enjoyment is politically valuable precisely because it allows a connection to others. Hence, there is an ethical imperative when preserving our embrace of partial enjoyment as it also applies to that of the other. In short, he argues that in the face of such imaginary unitary satisfactions that permeate our lifeworld, there is an ethical imperative to preserve desire as what he terms 'partial enjoyment'.⁴

3 Ibid., 191; 194.

4 Ibid., 194-6.

However, this argument seems to me to be defunct. Apart from operating from a time that has passed, the idea of partial enjoyment as an answer to a whole enjoyment is mistaken. Partial enjoyment is another way of arguing that we must re-establish a politics of desire in the face of neoliberal phallic enjoyment. And is this not precisely what we are seeing today who are speaking about a return to tradition? A return of prohibition to create the coordinates out of a saturated culture of endless enjoyment. We can see this in the new work of the theologian Jacob Phillips, whose new book, *Obedience is Freedom* argues precisely this. Although writing from a traditional theological perspective, the book argues that the only way to find our way through this egoic super injunction is through personal moral development.⁵ By giving up the freedom that is not a freedom, we need to re-think and re-establish a virtue ethic of obedience to find a more three-dimensional understanding of being free.

Although I agree with the book's premise, I'm afraid I have to disagree with its solution. There can be no return to a politics of prohibition – no matter how subtle – precisely because the condition under which the paternal signifier is instantiated has 'evaporated.' A similar issue can be seen with the Marxist philosopher Daniel Tutt. He argues that this is due to the initiation problem stemming from the nuclear family's dissolution. He draws on the arguments of Christopher Lasch but filters them through Lacanian and Badiouan radical politics. His conclusion is, therefore, a structural argument – as opposed to a moral one – about the inventive value of the commune as a way of countering the aforementioned problem:

To draw these insights back into the politics of the family, we must consider how the patient commitment to the

5 Jacob Phillips, *Obedience Is Freedom*, Malden: Wiley, 2022, 1–5.

revolution of everyday life, which the counterculture introduced, must also be thought as a commitment to thinking and experimenting with new forms of the family. The commune is one such proposal and despite many of the challenges this form presents in the era of punitive neoliberalism, the commune is an important alternative family form to think through.⁶

However, again, the idea that we can find our way outside tyrannical enjoyment and punitive neoliberalism is precisely the problem. Arguments that hinge on the fantasy of preserving the social bond via a logic of constitutive lack are defunct via valorising the Oedipus complex or any paternalism. They are – to my mind – representative of the figure of Antigone in Seminar VII.

The Issue of Antigone

Terry Eagleton summarises the Ethics of Antigone like this:

In effect, Lacan remarks of Antigone that she has been declaring from the outset ‘I am dead and desire death’—and tragedy, one might add, is above all the art-form that investigates the problematic relation of humanity to its own mortality, and thus in Heideggerian style to its own essential being. But there is also a positive aspect of the Real—a way of plugging into this lethal drive which can carry us beyond the fudges of the so-called symbolic order, the domain of conventional morality, law and social consensus, into some far-flung outpost of being where

6 Daniel Tutt, *Psychoanalysis, and the Politics of the Family*, Cham: Springer Nature, 2022, 127.

one is in a sense both alive and dead, and where one manifests the kind of purity or integrity of selfhood which Lacan so admires in Antigone.⁷

The decision of Antigone is a desire that takes it beyond the symbolic order and thus represents its destruction. Indeed, at the end of the play, everyone dies. Furthermore, Antigone chastises Creon’s ‘happiness’ before her immurement by telling her that *she is of the tribe that asks questions and hates man’s hopes*.

For a long while, Lacan’s writing focused on this ethics of desire as being apophatically emptied of any reference to a truncated good as happiness. For Lacan, the ethics of analysis is an ethics of desire qua desire. Antigone, therefore – for Lacan – represents a subject at the end of analysis. They have refused to give up on their desire at the expense of the symbolic order.

However, such a treatment presupposes an outlook on analytic treatment that can be called neurocentric.⁸ The assumption of the general functionality of the symbolic as sustained by the paternal metaphor needs to be considered. But what happens to this form of singularity if there is no framework to sustain desire? What if the paternal function is not just lost, but foreclosed? What if Creon does not exist, and there is no point of resistance we can latch on to?

It is known that in psychoanalytic theory, we can speak of the condition of extraordinary psychosis and what we can call

7 Terry Eagleton, “Lacan’s Antigone,” in *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism*, edited by S.E. Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 102.

8 A term coined by Alasdair Duncan.

ordinary psychosis.⁹ The latter is a type of foreclosure that still functions as if it is neurotic through a process of Self-Naming.¹⁰ This is what Lacan's work on seminar twenty-three is about. Joyce cured himself of psychosis through self-naming but ultimately ended up in a predicament of becoming isolated in his cure through writing. In the circularity of the *sinthome*, unlike the neurotic who can eventually use the fiction of love to make up for the failure of the *rapport*, Joyce had a direct relation with his *sinthome*, which therefore attenuated his ability to love (a point to which I will return).

I believe our problem today is that our previous world's very coordinates of desire are lost forever. There is no return to a politics of desire precisely because neoliberalism has shifted that much. With the advent of Covid and the conflation of catastrophic crises upon crises, we are now in the era of generalise foreclosure and what Lacan called the one-all-alone via the prevalence of the lathouse.¹¹ We live in an era of ordinary psychosis where self-naming is a necessary part of what it means to live as ones-all-alone. We endlessly write to each other – instead of speaking – but at the same time, even as we are more connected, we are more disconnected, separated by our own antagonistic *jouissance*. To be sure, the capitalist discourse has commodified the need to self-name, and we are forced to write and write and write – we are scripturient – without end as part of the attention economy where we become objects in the *aleothesphere* to be consumed by the other.¹²

9 Thomas Svolos, "Ordinary Psychosis," *The Symptom* 10 (2009), internet: <https://www.lacan.com/symptom10a/2016/04/22/ordinary-psychosis/>.

10 Luke Thurston, "Lacan's Analytic Goal Le *Sinthome* or the Feminine Way," in *Reinventing the Symptom*, New York: Other Press, LLC, 2022, 59-82.

11 Isabel Millar, "Black Mirror: From Lacan's Lathouse to Miller's Speaking Body," *Psychoanalytische Perspectieven* 36, No. 2 (2018), 1-16.

12 Richard Seymour, *The Twittering Machine*, London: The Indigo Press,

As Wulfinf states, "Subjects reduced to numbers have become speaking bodies, who rely on numbers to measure their bodies. Diets, exercise, and substance abuse, as well as social media and phone apps [that replace speech with writing], all reduce human activities to numbers."¹³ This is the point; there is no escaping isolation now. Or rather, there is no escaping the era of *Jouissance* as isolating certainty. She states further:

The body is in the constant and repeated attempt at regulating *Jouissance* [without speech] is not alive. The bodies move zombified through the metropolis, contributing to produce ever more numbers. Numbers to save money, as efficiency, numbers to make money, as profit, numbers to evaluate, as insurance, numbers to verify, as control, numbers to confirm, as proof, numbers to reduce, as savings, numbers to increase, as output... ...in a city of Ones-all-alone.¹⁴

Moreover, because of the failure of symbolic efficiency, the horror we deal with is not one of post-modern flux and a neurotic injunction-to-enjoy as mapped out above, but overbearing static 'reality,' a saturated meaning that bears down on us from all angles through the prevalence of the lathouse. The psychoanalyst Marie-Helene Brousse reflects this; she says that the modification of the metaphor means that it has lost its hitherto dominant role in symbolic functioning. Moreover, she argues that the image, instead, becomes central. "The em-

2019, 11.

13 Natalie Wulfinf, "LONDON - Tale of a City of Ones-All-Along," *The Lacanian Review* (2016), internet: <https://www.thelacanianreviews.com/london-tale-of-a-city-of-ones-all-alone>.

14 Ibid.

pire of the image is constantly being increased by new technologies via the multiplication of screens.” Hence, she says, ‘the Gaze has become central to the social bond.’ Moreover, ‘Omnivoyance and, consequently, metonym and proximity have come in the place of the signifying chain.’ We have thus moved from a world predicated on demonstration to one based on monstration (showing).¹⁵

This problem is reflected directly by the philosopher Byung-Chul-Han in his work on Capitalism and the Death Drive. Concerning the latter, Byung-Chul Han’s intervention on the digital panopticon is relevant here.¹⁶ From his perspective, the current digital apocalypse is about a relentless desire to be ‘seen’; it is about a pitiless manufactured digital gaze destroying people’s stories in the name of transparency and proximity, and data replaces narrative.

There is thus a choice, we argue, between the aloneness of the capitalist discourse or the singularity of the analytic discourse and encounter with the Real. There is the isolation of the Capitalist Discourse or the solitude of the One-All-Alone in the analytic act, *which allows the invention of the social bond via love* rather than the lure of being in the lathouse.

To summarise, in a neurocentric world, the overriding problem concerns dealing with the permutations of lack, which takes the form of unceasing doubt, uncertainty, and not knowing what one desires. The problem – however – today is one concerning the damage of ‘certainty.’ One of the consequences of our digital age is that our suffering does not come in the form of a lack but as a lack of a lack and the opaqueness of being alone, completely alone, even as we try to write our

15 Brousse, Marie-Hélène, *The Feminine: A Mode of Jouissance*, New York: Lacanian Press, 2022, 23, emphasis mine.

16 Byung-Chul Han, *Capitalism, and the Death Drive*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021, 27-33.

way out of isolation. And we see how our aloneness is made all the more concrete as we fail to account for the other in our self-naming and the bubbles and fraternities (echo chambers) this certainty creates.

The Disintegration of the Social Bond: The Rise of the Attention Economy and Paradigm of Isolation

The philosopher and psychoanalyst Isabel Miller argues that what holds the social bond together today is what Lacan calls the lathouse. She states:

As Lacan explains, the lathouse is a machine, an artificial object for siphoning off enjoyment – a neologism combining the French “vent” for wind, alluding to the breath from the lungs; “venthouse” suction cap; and the Greek word ousia for Being. They latch on to us from our phones, via our laptops, in our Alexias, and even maybe soon sex robots. The lathouse is merging forms of enjoyment with forms of intelligence and communication at an exponential rate and is omnipresent all over the digital, capitalist technoscape. The crucial point Lacan was making was not just that these objects are causes of desire, but that they contain something of the voice. In that sense they are impossible objects that attempt to capture something of jouissance of the other’s body; in short communication devices, which allow the truth of our enjoyment to be recorded by the Other qua alethosphere.¹⁷

17 Millar, “Black Mirror,” 6.

Moreover, these gadgets proceed from a logic which fundamentally differs from and so unsettles the “normal” libidinal economy of sexed human beings qua beings of language.¹⁷ In short, these gadgets close the necessary gap needed for desire to work and lead us to the Capitalist Discourse’s singularity. We are trapped as commodified Antigones trying to engage in a fraudulent analytic act in the digitised cave of the lathouse. Remember that at the end of Creon’s play, Antigone is seen as beautiful because she engages in the act. And can we not see this in our paradigm of ‘monstration’ each person trying to show that they are engaging in an act in their bubbles? Each person is trying to recover the coordinates of their desire after repeated trauma.

And can we not see this today in much of our trauma discourse? In the work of Alenka Zupančič. We can see today a kind of replacement of political discourse with this prevalence of therapy speak that helps us engage in some refusal of suffering.¹⁸ We see it everywhere, from apps that can offer quick-fix mental health cures, to online tests we can take to measure and quantify the kind of suffering that has battered us in our day-to-day life. Zupančič makes the astute point that the language of trauma distracts us from the trauma itself. This means that when we are faced with the loss of a world – the loss of a loved one or political trauma – and are made to be completely alone, then the very therapeutic strategies we engage in becomes about not looking at the whole we have lost; otherwise, we will lose our minds.

Hence, we take it daily, engaging in various spirituality techniques, distracting ourselves with work, and breathing exercises. And what we result in is just a way of coping with our

18 Katy Waldman, “The Rise of Therapy-Speak,” *The New Yorker* (Mar 26, 2021), internet: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-rise-of-therapy-speak>.

lost world.¹⁹ Zupančič very aptly calls this the act of mourning without a lost object. In other words, we cope with our isolation by pouring all our energy into ignoring precisely what is lost. However, the problem with such lathousian therapeutic techniques is that they preclude any invention of a social link. Indeed, in tending to existential wounds, we lock ourselves perpetually in the attention economy²⁰ in a logic of addiction: a logic of oedipal recovery, endlessly writing without speech.

However, I think Zupančič is ultimately wrong in arguing that we need to free ourselves of hope to move forward, a courage of hopelessness to fight for the world we have already lost in the future. I still think this falls into a castrative logic that – again – falls into the category of giving up the pleasure principle.

I think what is needed is a separation of therapeutic optimism from hope. A foreclosure of optimism, if you will. We need to separate therapeutic optimism from Hope to recover the latter. A dark hope. Opaque. Interruptive. Anxious, consciously impractical: A hope without optimism.²¹ A hope that is not afraid of suffering and looking directly at broken bodies and what we have lost. We believe that such a hope, a radical hope, begins with love.

19 Alenka Zupančič, “The Apocalypse Is (Still) Disappointing,” *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, Nos. 10/11 (2017-18), 16-30.

20 Seymour, *Twittering*, 40-41.

21 Terry Eagleton, *Hope Without Optimism*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015, 1-39.

A Politics of Love: The One Who Does Not Give Up on Love as Desire Disappears

How do we move from our isolation toward creating a new social link? As mentioned, we argue that the latter Antigone is a mourning figure, while Julian is a figure of radical hope and love.

Antigone represents a figure who wants to change the world in defiance of the world; in defiance of the law as a figure of the radical act, while Julian is a figure who has already lost the world, accepts that loss for what it is, has already died and from this position re-creates a world through a radical formulation of love via a confrontation of the speaking body and knotting that replaces oedipal logic.

But first, we will give an examination of some of the key biographical themes and ideas of Julian's Life and work:

In the 14th-century writings of the anchoress Julian of Norwich, we can see a radical politics of love where love operates as a constitutive fullness that operates from and within the body. This is opposed to an earlier Lacanian conception of desire and lack.

In Julian, every human possesses an embodied sensory being united with the fullness of the soul created by God. She states:

Our soul is breathed into our body, when we are created as sensory beings, mercy and grace at once begin to work, taking care of us and protecting us...; and during this process the Holy Spirit forms in our faith the hope that we shall rise up above again to our substance, into the virtue of Christ, increased and accomplished through the Holy Spirit.²²

22 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 470.

The highest part of the soul, its substance or essence, remains grounded in God and his uncreated being. As far as God created the human soul, there is nothing metaphysically more like God than the human soul. The human soul is actualised into its essential substance by partaking in a love of all created things in the universe. As Julian describes in one of her visions,

[God] also showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball, as it seemed to me. I looked at it and thought, "What can this be?" And the answer came to me in a general way, like this, "It is all that is made." I wondered how it could last, for it seemed to me so small that it might have disintegrated suddenly into nothingness. And I was answered in my understanding, "It lasts, and always will, because God loves it; and in the same way everything has its being through the love of God."²³

In other words, the soul is always united to a sensory being and substance. As far as this is true, we can compare Julian's conception of the soul to D.W. Winnicott's conception of the psyche-soma as constitutively joined together:

Gradually the psyche and the soma aspects of the growing person become involved in a process of mutual inter-relation. This inter-relating of the psyche with the soma constitutes an early phase of individual development.²⁴

23 Ibid., 7.

24 D. W. Winnicott, "Mind and Its Relation to the Psyche-Soma", *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 27, No. 4 (1954), 202.

For Winnicott, the 'soma' refers to the bodily aspect of being that is united to the mental aspect of the psyche. Winnicott says that "the perfect environment adapts to the needs of the psyche-soma" (ibid). This environment is emotional, or psychological, or social, and one example is the care and love provided to an individual from the time of infancy. However, as we argue later, we will see that it can also relate to Lacan's concept of the speaking-body.

Julian of Norwich's notion of an embodied soul united to a sensory being is grounded in time. This can be compared to how the body politic, or a collective body of beings, exists in a collective historical and political sense. In Julian of Norwich's ideal society, human beings are united by love for each other, reflecting God and Jesus's undying and unconditional love for humanity. As theologian Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt writes,

Jesus, seated as ruler within the soul as his city, draws together substance and sensuality by conforming the soul to his atoning passion. For Julian, the city of God is, in a sense, hidden within the soul, which is in turn 'hidden within God.' But it is visible and present in its effects: not only in the sacraments as the effective signs of God's grace, but also in the acts of compassion brought about by those who are conformed to the love of God displayed in Christ's cross.²⁵

In near darkness, going by the natural light provided by God, Julian has visions of Christ's body and head bleeding profusely. This vision of Christ's bleeding body represents the collective community of the Church. Although Julian recognises

25 Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999, 183.

the failures and shortcomings of the Church in her time, she does not give up on a vision of a church that provides a more perfect redemptive vision for humanity. As Bauerschmidt writes,

[Julian's] constant affirmations of loyalty to the Church would seem to indicate that she is quite aware of the temporal as well as the spiritual peril that might be occasioned by a lapse of orthodoxy. But just as Julian stubbornly refused to lift her eyes from the suffering body of Jesus, so too she will not let go of the Church as a visible, historical entity in which she can dwell in unity with her fellow Christians.²⁶

Although Julian is referring to the Church qua the Catholic Church, tied to the material aspect of Jesus's body, we extend the notion of the human community implied by the Church to a more widely encompassing view inclusive of all human beings regardless of their spiritual or religious denomination or lack thereof. This view more closely follows Julian's conception of one-ing, which knots all human souls together in the love of God.

It is important to note Julian's concept of the one-ing of the soul as the likeness of every human soul to that of the creator. It is in the knot of one-ing that all souls are conjoined in their essence as souls created by God and kept alive in their unity and wholeness for eternity. Julian writes,

And so created nature is rightfully united to the creator, which is essential uncreated nature, that is, God. And so it is that there neither can nor shall be anything at all between God and man's soul. And in this endless love man's soul is kept whole... Christ's beloved soul was pre-

26 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, 109.

ciously joined to him in the making; with a knot so subtle and so strong that it is united to God; and in this unity it is made endlessly holy. Furthermore, he wants us to know that all the souls which shall be saved in heaven without end are united and joined in this unity and made holy in this holiness.²⁷

Within the body-politic of Christ, all human souls are united toward a final end-state of heaven in which there is justice and salvation. This apokatastasis of eschatology means that all souls are saved, and none are excluded from heaven. This is precisely what made Julian so dangerous to the establishment. Indeed, her sinthomatic statement of “all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well” gave it a sense that sin and evil were necessary, and all souls will avoid hell. This hope stemmed from the knot that sought to create a new social order that appeared with her confrontation with the body in her solitude.

The one-ing of all creatures in God represents the restoration of all souls to a perfect state. As Bauerschmidt states, “Salvation as the ‘onying [union/atoning]’ of God and humanity is inseparable from the union of human beings with each other.”²⁸

So, we can ask ourselves, what does this 14th-century anchorite teach us about politics in the 21st century? Of course, the theology above is, at best anachronistic. But there is something about her relationship to what Lacan called the *Parlêtre*: the speaking body, that allows us to see her philosophical and psychoanalytic value for our current crises of the ones-all-alone and the capitalist discourse.

To my mind, we can see that she is representative of an alternative Antigone who can show us how to escape the horror

27 Ibid., 143.

28 Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich*, 108.

of the lathousian paradigm we are in. She is representative of one who can speak from the knot via the body. In other words, she shows how to replace that lathouse with the Sinthome and then transform inward-turning enjoyment into the possibility of ‘inventing’ a new social link.

In other words, if Antigone, in her psychoanalytic act, says ‘No’ to the law and symbolic order as one who refuses to give up on her desire, then what we see in the wonder of Julian is one who sees that desire is gone, all there is left is oneness. In other words, the body is singular, and from this point, there is a choice to affirm it all in the fullness of its positivity. Indeed, we see this from the very beginning. Unlike Antigone, she enters her enclave already in the fullness of death. What we know about Julian is that at a certain point in her life, she decided to live as an anchoress. This means that nearly all of her adult life was completely isolated, cut off from the rest of the world.²⁹ To be selected to live in this specific vocation was a difficult process. After being selected, there would have been a special ceremony, and psalms would have been sung as she was led to her cell. The ritual – in essence – was a celebration of her death. She was literally to be sealed in a wall for the rest of her life in a state of living-death.

Very little is known of Julian’s life. But during her time, the plague spread throughout Europe. It was a time of distraction, disruption, and a sense of apocalypse as people experienced death and destitution on an almost daily basis. Moreover, according to Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, there was a rising nominalist conception of God where God’s power took precedence over all else, while concepts such as love became

29 Matt Gardner, “Julian of Norwich: ‘A Theologian for Our Time,’” *Anglican Journal* (2020), internet: <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/julian-of-norwich-a-theologian-for-our-time/>.

an expression of an arbitrary divine will.³⁰ This went hand in hand with the terrifying idea of the Last Judgement, where people – already terrified by brutalising conditions – had to face the prospect of offending God and ending up in perdition. My thesis is that we cannot separate the radical impact of Julian's message of essentially upending and overturning a problematic ideology from her decision to conceal herself to give up her world and create a new world altogether from love.³¹

Unlike Antigone, whose relation to the father is one of resistance and a refusal to give up her own desire. As one who is already enjoying death, Julian finds that the more she seeks out the transcendent signifier of God, the more her gaze is drawn to the battered and bloodied body of Christ on the cross, which begins to speak to her. Moreover, Baurischmidt argues that there is a transposition between how Julian's body begins to speak in affect with that of Christ's. The very body itself becomes a text, a foundation that becomes the point from which we can build a new social link.

Conclusion: Lacan and Love

We see in Lacan's seminar twenty-four, which roughly translates to that "love is the failure of the one blunder," that he attempts to move from the singularity of Joycean sinthome creation toward a movement where enjoyment of the sinthome is transformed into love. Love is, therefore, less about Lacan's earlier understanding as giving something you do not have to someone who does not want it but becomes synonymous with a space for invention. Voruz writes:

30 Baurischmidt, *Julian of Norwich*, 29.

31 Ibid., 191-200.

Love in psychoanalytic theory has three dimensions: imaginary – love invested in the reversible movement of ego-libido (the classical Freudian interplay between identification and object-choice): Symbolic—love as the supposition of knowledge (at the heart of transference and thus of the possibility of analysis, although it supports the fiction of the existence of the Other); and finally, of the Real—love of absolute difference, the one that makes *jouissance* condescend to desire." The "failure to love" ascribed to Joyce would refer to this third kind of love which, Lacan tells us, sometimes comes about at the end of analysis "love beyond the law."³²

And can we not see this imperative now in a post-Covid world? Indeed, all around us, we see economic catastrophe after catastrophe, prices skyrocketing, and anger fermenting at the thousands upon thousands of deaths. But what we see now with is less a need to return things to the way they were but an inchoate sense of creating a world from the ashes we find ourselves in. People are organising strikes again – indeed, as of writing, there is talk of a general strike in England, the first one in over a century. People are beginning to see that meeting body-to-body face to face can communicate something beyond the endless play of written words that the aleo-*thosphere* demands. Communities are pulling themselves from enforced isolation and the circular enjoyment toward creating a new radical social link by a love beyond the law.

This is only a possibility, and we could still slouch toward more neoliberal brutality, given that we know how its violent plasticity can melt all hope and love into the air. But as we em-

32 Veronique Voruz, "Acephalic Litter as a Phallic Letter," in *Reinventing the Symptom*, edited by Luke Thurston, New York: Other Press, LLC, 2022, 111-140.

brace the end of our world, as it has already happened – with all the horror and violence that this has entailed – we need to learn to speak again in a way that opens a space for radical invention.

In one of the most beautiful statements Lacan said in seminar VIII, he said

The hand that extends toward the fruit, the rose, or the log that suddenly bursts into flames – its gesture of reaching, drawing close, or stirring up is closely related to the ripening of the fruit, the beauty of the flower, and the blazing of the log. If, in the movement of reaching, drawing, or stirring, the hand goes far enough toward the object that another hand comes out of the fruit, flower, or log and extends toward your hand – and at that moment, your hand freezes in the closed plenitude of the fruit, in the open plenitude of the flower, or in the explosion of a log which bursts into flames - then what is produced is love.³³

In our reading, our very reaching outward from isolation is a movement of hope, and in that movement, we can create the radical space of invention, a space – a positivised void synonymous with what Lacan called the pass - that we can call love. And it will allow us all to say, “all shall be well” in the face of engrained impossibility.

33 Jacques Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017, 52.

The Slovenian School, Contributions and Current Debates: An Exploration from a Latin American Perspective¹

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¹ The first version of this work was prepared for the Special Dossier edited by Slavoj Žižek and Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, in the framework of a *Bajo Palabra* journal project of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2023).

Introduction

“Man alone is a triumphant error who makes his
aberration the law of the world”
—Louis Althusser

The 21st century remains abysmally marked by transcendent issues fostered by the academic, political, institutional, economic, social and/or cultural structures and environments of our time. Some enigmas that wander in the coordinates of our time have their origin in the 19th century... Others come from further back.

Within the framework of this work, it is relevant to mention the contributions of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), founder of what he himself called in 1914 as a psychoanalytic “movement” (*Bewegung*). Psychoanalysis is recognized in four main areas of application that gradually appeared after the search for the etiology of neurosis: a theory of the functioning of the human mind, a method and device of psychic treatment, a research method and a useful tool to analyze social, political, cultural dilemmas. The wide variety of uses that this knowledge

maintains at present and from an early date makes it impossible to delimit the field clearly and definitively.^{2, 3, 4, 5}

In *Pueden los legos ejercer el análisis?* (1926/1992) – a text that Freud wrote in defense of Theodor Reik, who had been accused by a patient of malpractice and by psychoanalyst doctors of being an intruder within psychoanalytic practice,

2 To learn more about Freud, it is suggested to review any of his biographies, such as *La vida y Obra de Sigmund Freud* by Ernest Jones (Buenos Aires: Horme, 1997), *Sigmund Freud Biografía: La vida trágica* by Raymond de Becker (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1999) and *Freud: En su tiempo y en el nuestro* by Elisabeth Roudinesco (Barcelona: Debate, 2015). In his work with hysterical patients, Freud learned and identified that neurotic symptoms were messages carrying repressed and unconscious psychic contents. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (*The Assault on Truth: Freud's suppression of the seduction theory*. New York: Parrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1984; *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985) has done a historical reconstruction work and has published Freud's correspondence to W. Fliess from 1887 to 1904, offering us glimpses of what would later be a sophisticated and evidence-based theory.

3 Although the movement owes its origin to science, it is necessary to clarify that it does not respond to a mere scientific discourse because it addresses and is interested in everything understood from "subjectivity."

4 For example, in the late 1910s, Sigmund Freud showed an affinity with the social democratic project of Red Vienna. From that same year, the psychoanalytic field began to consolidate the training criteria for psychoanalysts, integrating the question of *Wilde Psychanalyse*.

5 Since psychoanalysis was made known by Freud, it began to evolve and transform into various schools, devices and techniques of intervention. Among its main exponents of the 20th century, some of whom ended up distancing themselves from Freud, it is worth mentioning Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), Alfred Adler (1870-1937), Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) Melanie Klein (1882-1960), Wilfred Bion (1897-1979) and Donald Winnicott (1896-1971), who took Freud's central topics and reformulated them, giving way to new theories and psychoanalytic concepts. In this context, we must locate the "return to Freud" that, since the 1950s, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) put forward, proposing a new modality of institutional organization.

the father of psychoanalysis warned⁶ about the little convenience of psychiatry taking over psychoanalysis, which seems to have finally happened since medicine and psychiatry became the predominant perspective of practicing such praxis.

Furthermore, almost as old as psychoanalysis itself is the topic of the resistance it generates. Russel Jacoby, for example, pointed out the repression of psychoanalysis that implied its domestication and adaptation to American society between the 1930s and 1940s.⁷ Regarding this scenario, Paul-Laurent Assoun affirmed that "el psicoanálisis tenía por esencia y vocación suscitar resistencias (Widerstände) en cierto modo estructurales [psychoanalysis had the essence and vocation to arouse resistance (Widerstände) in a certain structural way]."⁸ Due to the increasing frequency and intensity of these resistances, it was necessary for the founder of the school to adopt a position regarding the context and situation in the fields of politics, science and the university, specifying the conditions that a psychoanalyst "must" meet.

To respond to these pressures, the 1960s offered an ideal panorama for rethinking the structure of psychoanalysis. In this context, Jacques Lacan affirmed that "le psychanalyste ne s'autorise que de lui-même [the psychoanalyst only authorizes himself]" and a referent of the French Communist Party, Louis Althusser (1918-1990), proposed an open vindication of psychoanalysis within the framework of his radical reformulation

6 It must be remembered that Reik was not a doctor, he had studied psychology at the University of Vienna, for which reason psychoanalysts were against his practice.

7 Russel Jacoby, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Political Freudians*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

8 P. Assoun, *Fundamentos del psicoanálisis*, Buenos Aires: Prometeo libros, 2016, 17. Throughout the text, the translations that have been placed between brackets are of our own elaboration.

of the work of Karl Marx in texts such as *Pour Marx, Lire Le Capital and Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État*.

The reformulations in the psychoanalytic current continued later and, in the 21st century, the debates are wide and extensive. There are issues that are still burning and have not yet been resolved. What is the role and relationship that psychoanalysis should assume regarding politics? Is it possible to identify antinomies within psychoanalysis about its functioning as an approach, device and/or practice? How to deconstruct the dominant structures and logics that seem to proliferate and be adopted without apparent conscious criticism of the potency of ideas and their inclination?

The issues we have referred raise important dilemmas in psychoanalysis about practice and theory, clinic and culture, healing and political reflection. The words of Slavoj Žižek are related to these dilemmas, when he states that, when cultural studies are ignored in clinical practice, the latter remains trapped in a pre-theoretical empiricism, and when cultural studies deny the clinic, we end up in an empty ideological exercise.⁹

There is a debt present in the questioning regarding the ideological exercise inserted in the usual practice. A wide variety of intellectuals only appeals to propose slight modifications of the productions and doctrines elaborated in the dominant centers, excluding what develops in what is conceived as the “margins” or the “periphery.” This situation finds its origin in one of the objectives of this work.¹⁰

9 S. Žižek, *La suspensión política de la ética*, Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005.

10 As Plotkin and Ruperthuz mentioned, “es sorprendente comprobar la ausencia casi total de menciones a América Latina en la gran mayoría de la historiografía general sobre el psicoanálisis, producida fundamentalmente en Europa o en los Estados Unidos. [...] Por otro lado – y esto también resulta significativo –, ninguna de las biografías sobre Freud hace referencia –con la excepción de algunas pocas menciones presentes en la clásica escrita por

From a brief historical tour of psychoanalysis in Latin America, we will exhibit some of the dilemmas and/or debates that cross the psychoanalytic field in the region and in the contemporary world. We will examine how Krajnik’s arguments fit into a larger project that seeks not only an expansion of the World Association of Psychoanalysis (WAP) headed by Jacques-Alain Miller, but a monopoly on psychoanalytic theory and its political effects by part of the organized Millerian clinical analysts. We will show how this process has manifested itself in Latin America since before Miller and his WAP. We will contemplate some current contributions of the Slovenian school that we will take up from a Latin American perspective. We will reflect on the theoretical, institutional, political, ideological, and cultural implications of the domination and hegemony of the Millerian current in the psychoanalytic field. This logic of power, as will be seen, has not prevented the emergence and development of some radical and irreverent proposals. The proposals exist, but they failed: in some Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Millerian psychoanalysis has been imposed even more intensely than in France itself. This poses a challenge and a dilemma worth questioning.

Ernest Jones – a los vínculos de Freud con personajes Latinoamericanos [It is surprising to note the almost total absence of mentions of Latin America in the vast majority of the general historiography of psychoanalysis, produced mainly in Europe or the United States. [...] On the other hand – and this is also significant –, none of the biographies about Freud refer – except for a few mentions present in the classic written by Ernest Jones – to Freud’s links with Latin American characters]” (M. Plotkin and M. Ruperthuz, *Estimado doctor Freud: Una historia cultural del psicoanálisis en América Latina*, Barcelona: Edhasa, 2017, 10-11).

1. Is it Possible to Speak of a New History of Psychoanalysis in the 21st Century?

Pero así se desenmascara como un simple heredero de aquella primitiva reacción contra lo nuevo, como un nuevo disfraz para asegurar su subsistencia [But this is how he unmask himself as a simple heir of that primitive reaction against the new, as a new disguise to ensure his subsistence]. (Freud, 1924 [1925])

Until the 1960s, the history of psychoanalysis was essentially hagiographic. These were stories that sought to highlight the Freudian epic and that reduced the history to a biography or, at most, to a summation or chain of biographies. *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* by Ernest Jones (1953) became, in this sense, the pattern and referent of this historiographical model.

In any case, the histories of psychoanalysis that emerged later began to present new and diverse approaches. Indeed, without ignoring the unavoidable relevance of Freud, they sought to locate psychoanalysis in a historical process that includes and overflows widely. This is the case of the ambitious research: *The Discovery of the Unconscious* by Henri Ellenberger (1970), *Freud and the Americans* by Nathan Hale (1971), *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France* by Elisabeth Roudinesco (1982), and *Freud: A Life for Our Time* by Peter Gay (1989),¹¹ among many others.

11 H. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, New York: Basic Books, 1970; N. Hale, *Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876-1917*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971; E. Roudinesco, *La bataille de cents ans: Histoire de la psychanalyse en France: La bataille de cent ans*. 2 volúmenes. Paris: Seuil, 1982-1986; and P. Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988.

However, these new narratives were clearly focused on their development in the central countries and the references to other contexts were, in general, merely anecdotal. One of these contexts was Latin American, which is striking, because as Pavón-Cuellar puts it,

América Latina siempre se ha dejado infectar con mayor facilidad por las pestes provenientes de Europa. Ocurrió con la revolución, con la secularización y el anticlericalismo, con el marxismo, con el socialismo y el comunismo, incluso en parte con el anarquismo. Ha sucedido también de algún modo con el psicoanálisis [Latin America has always been more easily infected by pests from Europe. It happened with the revolution, with secularization and anti-clericalism, with Marxism, with socialism and communism, even in part with anarchism. It has also happened in some way with psychoanalysis].¹²

In fact, the Chilean psychoanalyst and historian Mariano Rupérthuz recently argued that “[s]i bien, el psicoanálisis se ha constituido como uno de los sistemas de pensamiento más influyentes en el mundo occidental a lo largo del siglo XX, no han existido investigaciones a nivel local que reconstruyan toda su riqueza como objeto histórico [while psychoanalysis has become one of the most influential systems of thought in the western world throughout the 20th century, there have been no investigations at the local level that have reconstructed all its richness as a historical object].”¹³ It was towards the

12 D. Pavón-Cuellar, “Represión del psicoanálisis en América Latina: psicologización, elitización, mercantilización profesional, subordinación colonial y normalización heteropatriarcal” (2020), available at: <https://lacaneman.hypotheses.org/1647>.

13 Rupérthuz, *Freud*, 35.

end of the last century that the first investigations into the history of psychoanalysis in Latin America began. These initially adopted an essentially local approach, proposing stories that showed the development of psychoanalysis at the national level.¹⁴ It will be at the dawn of this century that a transnational or even regional perspective began to be adopted, which will seek to illuminate the drifts of psychoanalysis in Latin America.

These works allow us to recover and exhibit the assiduous exchanges that, from an early date, Chilean, Brazilian, Mexican, Colombian, Peruvian and Argentine intellectuals and doctors maintained with Sigmund Freud. In *Estimado doctor Freud: Una historia cultural del psicoanálisis en América Latina*, Plotkin and Rupertuz reveal the correspondence that Freud maintained with his regional followers¹⁵ – with some of whom he held personal interviews in Vienna¹⁶ – as well as the incorporation of their books and publications into his personal library.

These diverse histories of psychoanalysis also allow us to illuminate a much more complex panorama than a mere direct and unidirectional relationship between production centers and peripheral countries. In addition to showing the impact of social, cultural, and political contexts, they allow us to account for the role played by local and regional figures in the diffusion of psychoanalytic production in Latin America, which was

not limited simply to reproducing foreign models. In any case, no local or Latin American school of psychoanalysis, as in the case of England, France and even the USA, was established, and references to Freud, Klein, Lacan, and others will be a constant source of authority for their followers in the region.

In general terms, this centralizing bias is also present in the institutional history of psychoanalysis in Latin America. The Sociedade Brasileira de Psicanálise (SBP) and the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association were the first to be recognized by the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA), promoted by Freud in 1910, for which they had to meet the requirement of including in their ranks a didactic analyst, who should have been trained as such in Europe. For decades the IPA's local branches, mostly driven by doctors, were recognized as the legitimate training ground for psychoanalysts, until alternative spaces to the *establishment*¹⁷ began to emerge. This is the case, for example, of the Freudian School of Buenos Aires (FSBA) that was founded on the initiative of Oscar Masotta in 1974, following the model of his Parisian namesake directed by Jacques Lacan, whose work was already beginning to spread in Mexico and Argentina since the end of the previous decade. The reference center moves here from London, headquarters of the IPA, to the capital city of France.¹⁸

14 J. Balán, *Cuéntame tu vida: una biografía colectiva del psicoanálisis argentino*, Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1991; M. Plotkin, *Freud in the Pampas: The Emergence and Development of a Psychoanalytic Culture in Argentina*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, trans. as *Freud en las Pampas*, Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2003; H. Vezzetti, *Freud en Buenos Aires, 1910-1939*, Buenos Aires, Puntosur, 1989 [2nd edition, University of Quilmes, 1996].

15 Plotkin and Rupertuz, *Estimado doctor Freud*.

16 H. Scholten and F. Ferrari, *Los freudismos de Gregorio Bermann. Un recorrido sinuoso (1920-1962)*, Córdoba: Aletheia Clio, 2018.

17 Since 1925, at the IX International Congress of Psychoanalysis, didactic analysis had been established together with control analysis (supervision) and theoretical training, as the fundamental triad in the training of a psychoanalyst. In the cases of Brazil and Argentina, it was possible to meet these conditions after the arrival in Brazil of the German psychoanalyst Adelheid Koch in 1936, and the Spanish psychoanalyst Ángel Garma, who had trained at the Psychoanalytic Institute in Berlin, in Argentina in 1938.

18 In 1953, Lacan himself came into conflict with the Psychoanalytic Society of Paris and founded, together with Daniel Lagache, the French Society of Psychoanalysis. However, it was not yet in his plans to leave the ranks of the IPA. This rupture was finally imposed in 1964, which led Lacan to found the

At the same time, a problem was highlighted that, although it knew antecedents, will assume a particular relevance in this context: the relationship of psychoanalysis with politics. In the hectic climate that the region was going through at that time, the propagation and appropriation of the ideas of Louis Althusser,¹⁹ already mentioned previously, began while the contributions of various figures of “Freudomarxism” were rescued. In general terms, these were figures from outside the psychoanalytic movement (even expelled from its ranks, as in the case of Wilhelm Reich). At the regional level, it is worth mentioning at least the case of the *Platform* and *Document* groups, formed by members of the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association who submitted their resignation from the institution in 1971, for essentially political-ideological reasons.

However, the subsequent development of the psychoanalytic movement at the regional level maintained an essentially clinical bias. With a few exceptions, it sought to keep psychoanalysis away from politics, and initiatives to incorporate Freudian conceptions into political debates were external to the psychoanalytic *establishment* – that is, alien to psychoanalytic institutions that, over the following decades, fragmented, dissolved and multiplied.

On the other hand, from the 1980s, the relationship of psychoanalysis with the academic field began to be reformulated. This is especially remarkable in the case of Argentina: in 1985, the law of professional practice of psychology was

Freudian School of Paris, which he led until its dissolution in 1980. Masotta (“Comentario para la École Freudienne de Paris sobre la fundación de la Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires,” in *Ensayos lacanianos*, Barcelona: Anagrama, 1976, 239-252) presented the EFBA to Lacan in 1975 and was appointed as an analyst member of the Parisian institution.

19 M. Rodríguez Arriagada and M. Starcenbaum (eds.), *Lecturas de Althusser en América Latina*, Santiago: Doble Ciencia, 2017.

sanctioned, which authorized psychologists to practice psychotherapy, at the same time, the plan of the psychology career of the University of Buenos Aires was radically renewed and the Faculty of Psychology was created – whose cloisters are occupied mostly by psychoanalysts, many of them come from the ranks of Lacanism. This turned the academic field into a space for the training of psychoanalysts, parallel or complementary to the *multiverse* of psychoanalytic institutions – whose activities, from the legal point of view, did not qualify for the exercise of psychoanalysis, but whose representatives were integrated into university chairs.

Now, after more than three decades, both the “political potential” of psychoanalysis and the valid spaces of psychoanalytic training seem to be under discussion. More precisely, different assessments are proposed regarding the application of psychoanalytic concepts and ideas beyond the narrow framework of the clinic. While, in some cases, considerations about “good use” are restricted to the scope of the clinic and are promoted within the framework of psychoanalytic institutions that operate in parallel or outside the university environment; in other cases, it is figures from the academic space who propose an extended application of psychoanalysis that allows illuminating the current socio-political scenario.

2. Against the Elitization of Psychoanalysis: Contributions and Challenges of the Slovenian School

Only the concept can be truly added to a world. Unreflected practices cannot but handle what is already there. Therefore, the way to summarize Žižek's politics is through the title of his talk in the first series of the Idea of Communism conferences: “to begin from the beginning,” that

is to say, a ruthless insistence on theoretical (philosophical) rigor with a realistic and pragmatic intervention in our predicament. When Žižek calls us to “step back and think” it is not a call of the “beautiful soul”— that position that presupposes the higher moral position of a given subjectivity that will do no wrong. The urge to do nothing doesn't imply a neutral position with regard to a certain political development, a political event, popular uprising, or even elections, critique or even celebrate them from a certain (usually a safe) distance. Žižek does not urge us to withdraw from acting into thinking, thus occupying a position that, from a higher “moral” position, is always afraid of wrongdoings.

—Agon Hamza

The main interest of some texts worth addressing is that they contain “timeless elements” (Merkl), “universal ideas” (Bluhm), “wisdom without time” (Catlin), or some “universal application” (Hacker). These documents, by virtue of their characteristics, are contributions to the field recognized as “the history of ideas.”²⁰

In the psychoanalytic field – specifically in some sectors of the movement led by Jacques-Alain Miller – an internal structure is reproduced, sometimes weak in its theoretical rigor, strongly conservative and elitist, but very profitable, being a faithful ally of academic positions. These are some of the reasons why it has managed to penetrate the most remote corners of the planet, generating true sects that have turned psychoanalysis into a mere depoliticized product and with logics related to neoliberalism.

20 Q. Skinner, “Significado y comprensión en la historia de las ideas,” *Prismas* 4, No. 4 (2000), 149-191.

Regarding the apparent depoliticization that Millerian psychoanalysis can present externally, Slavoj Žižek has observed that in the last decade a liberal cynicism of enjoyment has clearly been promoted, actively intervening in the socio-political space and actively attacking what could be called “the left.”²¹ In the opposite direction and seeking to exhibit the logics of the dominant discourses, we find precisely Žižek himself, one of the founders of the *Ljubljanska lakanovska šola* (the Lacanian School of Ljubljana), also integrated by other contemporary philosophers such as Mladen Dolar and Alenka Zupančič.²²

The rivalry between the Ljubljana school and Jacques-Alain Miller's World Psychoanalytic Association (WAP) was especially evident in 2017. In this year, the Slovenian psychoanalyst Nina Krajnik, supported by Miller and the WAP, led a campaign against Slavoj Žižek and his collaborators. The violent tone of the campaign, on which we will dwell in the next section, can be exemplified by the titles “In the Jaws of Žižek”²³ or “Žižek, the Fraud,”²⁴ used in the articles published in the French Millerian magazine *Lacan Quotidien*. The articles included strong accusations of “misleading” use and the spread of a “false” version of psychoanalysis. These accusations inevitably lead

21 References obtained through a personal 2020 communication with the Slovenian philosopher.

22 According to Slavoj Žižek, in a personal communication, these names have been joined by younger and “much more Lacanian” philosophers such as: Simon Hajdini, Gregor Moder, Samo Tomšič, and Jure Simoniti.

23 N. Krajnik, “Nina's Story (1). In the Jaws of Žižek,” *Lacan Quotidien* 719 (2017a), 11-12, available at <http://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/LQ-719-B.pdf>.

24 N. Krajnik, “Nina's Story (2). Žižek, The Fraud,” *Lacan Quotidien* 720 (2017b), 8-9, available at <http://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/LQ-720.pdf>.

us to wonder about the distinction between the “true” and the “false” of stories and interpretations, a distinction that, in itself, contains an impossibility.²⁵

3. Krajnik vs. Žižek: A Crusade Against “True” Psychoanalysis

The distinction between true and false is the guiding axis of Krajnik's campaign against Žižek. This campaign aims to rectify and refute what is unambiguously described as “falsehood” and “falsification,”²⁶ as “delirium,” as “deception,”²⁷ as “fraud,” as “quackery,” as “slander” and as “sophistic comments.”²⁸ There are no gradual transitions or half-measures between true and false here. The two terms also do not interpenetrate, problematize or transcend in more complex configurations such as those that psychoanalysis discovers in dreams, lapses or symptoms.

It is disconcerting that Krajnik, speaking in the name of the psychoanalytic clinic, uses a criterion of truth more akin to the legal field or to the first chapter of a school textbook of propositional logic. This pre-philosophical criterion does not serve to think about the nuances of the psychoanalytic practice sup-

25 A. Schaff, *Historia y verdad*, México: Grijalbo, 1982; A. Pons, A. “Verdad narrada. Historia y ficción,” *Historia, Antropología Y Fuentes Orales* 31 (2004), 119-128, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27753161>; C. Ginzburg, *El hilo y las huellas, lo verdadero. Lo falso, lo ficticio*, Buenos Aires: Grijalbo, 2011; and I. Jaksic, “Imparcialidad y verdad: el surgimiento de la historiografía chilena,” *Estudios Públicos* 132 (2013), 141-170.

26 A. Gilbert, “Nina Krajnik and the Dream of Uncle Zizek,” *The Times of Israel* (2017), par. 12, available at <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/nina-krajnik-the-dream-of-uncle-zizek/>.

27 Krajnik, “In the Jaws,” 11-12.

28 Krajnik, “Žižek, the Fraud,” 9.

posedly defended by Krajnik in her struggle against the Lacanian philosophy of Žižek. The true that is revealed in the false or that has a fictional structure, for example, does not exist in the binary simplism with which Krajnik's Manichean argumentation operates. For her, everything is too simple: either you are in the truth or you are in the lie, and it is obviously she who is always in the truth, while Žižek is hopelessly in the lie.

In Krajnik's argumentation, in which there is no room for any dialectic, the false is the contradictory, while the true is tautological. The truth that Krajnik attributes to herself is that of being what he is, that of being the psychoanalyst and Lacanian that he is, while the falsehood that she repeatedly imputes to Žižek is that of being what he is not or that of offering something that is what he is not. According to Krajnik, Žižek is in the false, he is false, because he “introdujo el psicoanálisis sin psicoanálisis [introduced psychoanalysis without psychoanalysis]”;²⁹ because “logró marcarse a sí mismo como psicoanalista, aunque no lo es [he managed to mark himself as a psychoanalyst, although he is not]”;³⁰ because, just as Alain Badiou would be a “revolutionary without revolution,” so Žižek would be a “psicoanalista sin psicoanálisis [psychoanalyst without psychoanalysis].”³¹

Note that Žižek's problem, for Krajnik, is not exactly to pretend to be what he is not, but to be so without being so, to be what he lacks, the supposed in what he lacks. This definition of the false psychoanalyst could be the very definition of the true analyst, the one who does not take himself seriously

29 Ibid.

30 Gilbert, “Nina Krajnik,” par. 7.

31 N. Krajnik, “Nina's Story (3). The Slovenian Acheron,” *Lacan Quotidien* 721 (2017c), 6, available at <http://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/LQ-721-1.pdf>.

as such, the one who puts himself in the place of the object, the one who does not get lost by essentializing, by identifying himself with his role in the analysis, but such subtleties have no place in a broad-stroked argument like Krajnik's. For her, Žižek is simply what it is not because it works like a counterfeit currency that is because it works, but it is not because it is the product of a counterfeit. In circular reasoning, it is false because it is counterfeit, without us knowing well why the hell it is counterfeit.

Žižek's comparison to a counterfeit coin is not Krajnik's own merit, but comes, according to her, from Jacques-Alain Miller. It is he who would have said "once" that "la Sociedad de Žižek para el psicoanálisis teórico es la fausse monnaie, un dinero falso [Žižek's Society for theoretical psychoanalysis is the *fausse monnaie*, a fake money]," which, according to Krajnik's penetrating interpretation, means that Žižek is "trading" with a currency that "es un fraude [is a fraud]," whose value "es falso [is false]."³² Žižek would be false because it is false. No matter how much we squeeze Krajnik's speech, we will not get anything more out of it at the level of rational argumentation. It is always about the same reasons that are repeated, the same argumentative circularity, the same tautologies. There is no room for the logical connection of one reason with another in reasoning, which could explain in part, at least in part, Krajnik's repugnance towards the theoretical and the philosophical.

What there is in Krajnik is the multiplication of disjointed and unfounded reasons to justify her attack on Žižek. In addition to attacking him as false, she attacks him as a "plagiarist," because his work "se basaría enteramente en el plagio de los textos de Jacques-Alain Miller [would be based entirely on

32 Gilbert, "Nina Krajnik," par. 12.

the plagiarism of Jacques-Alain Miller's texts,"³³ and because he would be together with Badiou one of the "dos grandes plagiadores de Lacan [two great plagiarists of Lacan]."³⁴ Žižek is also attacked for selling his books, for selling them even though he has left-wing convictions, which would be "buen ejemplo [a good example]" of "capitalismo que puede vender el comunismo [capitalism that can sell communism]."³⁵ These extravagant incriminations can be included in the same category of accusations against Žižekian falsehood: Žižek would be falsely communist for selling his books, just as he would be false in his ideas by pretending that they are his when in fact they would be Lacan's and Miller's.

4. Clinical vs. Theory: Against a Supposedly Non-Existent Theoretical Psychoanalysis

Of the various acts that would falsify the Žižekian contribution, the most serious for Krajnik are curiously those of theorizing and philosophizing. Žižek's great deceptions would be theoretical psychoanalysis and Lacanian philosophy. This is where the crux of the fraud lies.

For Krajnik, theoretical psychoanalysis is fraudulent because it is "algo que no existe [something that does not exist],"³⁶ while Lacanian philosophy is misleading because it is philosophy, because philosophy, as Lacan said, is an "sueño eterno

33 Krajnik, "Žižek, the Fraud," 8.

34 Krajnik, "The Slovenian Acheron," 6.

35 Gilbert, "Nina Krajnik," par. 11.

36 Ibid., par. 12.

[eternal dream].”³⁷ In both cases, we have a huge deception into which everyone would have fallen in Slovenia, where “nadie entra en análisis, todos estudian Lacan; nadie hace los cambios políticos, todos los piensan [nobody goes into analysis, everyone studies Lacan; No one makes political changes, everyone thinks them].”³⁸ The problem is to think and study Lacan. This study and this thought are unbearable to Krajnik.

It must be recognized, in all honesty, that Krajnik’s approach has its nuances. What is deceptive is to think the political without doing it or studying Lacan without analyzing it. The deception lies not so much in theory as such, but rather in “la teoría sin la clínica [theory without the clinic],”³⁹ or in “la clínica que es simplemente un adorno de la grandiosidad del conocimiento filosófico [the clinic that is simply an ornament of the grandeur of philosophical knowledge].”⁴⁰ Philosophy must submit to the psychoanalytic clinic and not maintain its freedom as in Žižek and in the other Lacanian philosophers of Slovenia. This freedom is the alleged deception denounced by Krajnik.

The great Slovenian fraud, in Krajnik’s own terms, is that “nadie necesita hacer análisis para desarrollar conceptos psicoanalíticos [no one needs to do analysis to develop psychoanalytic concepts]” when studying “fenómenos sociales y culturales [social and cultural phenomena].”⁴¹ An interpretation

37 Krajnik, “The Slovenian Acheron,” 7.

38 N. Krajnik, “Delirium lacaniano esloveno: 35 años de la ortodoxia de Žižek,” presented on Sept 27, 2017 (2017d), par. 10, available at <https://seminariolatinodeparisdotorg.wordpress.com/2018/06/24/delirium-lacaniano-esloveno-35-anos-de-la-ortodoxia-de-zizek/>.

39 Krajnik, “The Slovenian Acheron,” 7.

40 Krajnik, “In the Jaws,” 12.

41 Ibid., 12.

in Freudian or Lacanian terms would require, for Krajnik, the experience of the couch. In the absence of such experience, the interpretation would be fraudulent. The fraud, under this criterion, would not be only of certain Slovenian philosophers, but of some structuralists and post-structuralists, of several exponents of the Frankfurt School and of a large part of the most important thinkers of the last century who would have deceived us by using psychoanalytic concepts without being analysts or analyzers.

Krajnik throws overboard most of the philosophical thought nurtured by psychoanalysis in the last century. For her, the true thought inspired by the Freudian heritage is that which arises in a direct relationship with the couch. Everything else is a simple “defensa contra el psicoanálisis [defense against psychoanalysis],”⁴² even “la defensa más fuerte contra el psicoanálisis que existe en nuestro tiempo [the strongest defense against psychoanalysis that exists in our time].”⁴³ This is because the psychoanalytic, as Krajnik conceives it, it is only in the analysis that is made and not in what is thought.

Krajnik goes so far as to suggest that “psicoanálisis lacaniano [Lacanian psychoanalysis]”⁴⁴ did not exist in Slovenia before her. What Žižek, Zupančič, and Dolar have done for decades would have nothing to do with psychoanalysis, consisting at most of its “mal uso filosófico [philosophical misuse].”⁴⁵ For Krajnik, psychoanalysis is exclusively in the clinic and in the schools and organizations that support it. Thus, the psychoanalytic is reduced to a liberal profession of health, a medicine of the soul, a specialized technique, and it is repressed as an

42 Gilbert, “Nina Krajnik,” par. 9.

43 Krajnik, “In the Jaws,” 12.

44 Ibid., 11.

45 Krajnik, “The Slovenian Acheron,” 7.

act, as political subversion, symptom of history, cultural force, and intellectual adventure. It is the same repression that psychoanalysis suffered when it expanded during the 1930s and 1940s in the United States.⁴⁶ It is the same repression against which Lacan revolted in criticizing the psychology of the self.

Krajnik tries to reverse the return of the repressed. Psychoanalysis, for her, can only be a clinical, technical, specialized, professional, associative, Millerian work. As for theoretical psychoanalysis and Lacanian philosophy, they are literally a “desviación [deviation]” that “hace daño al psicoanálisis [harms psychoanalysis],” an “discurso antilaciano [anti-Lacanian discourse],”⁴⁷ a “traición a una causa analítica [betrayal of an analytical cause].”⁴⁸ These words are exactly the same as those used in the communist parties in the stage of greatest bureaucratization and persecution of dissent. Krajnik’s tone is not only pathetic and frenetic, but violent, dogmatic, and intolerant.

Krajnik’s words, moreover, involve a strange fetishization of Freudian and Lacanian heritages. What could psychoanalysis be to be *harm*ed by the simple fact of theorizing it without the clinic? Why would a discourse already be *anti-Lacanian* because it is not based on the experience of analysis? All this is too enigmatic and betrays an irrational, sectarian and persecutory relationship with psychoanalysis.

Krajnik’s message is very clear: if you are not in the clinic, you are against psychoanalysis. In order not to be anti-Lacanian, one must “aceptar las consecuencias [accept the consequences]” of “ser laciano [being Lacanian],” that is, “practicar el análisis [practice analysis].”⁴⁹ Only the psychoanalyst can think of psychoanalysis consistently, truthfully, and without *harm*ing it.

46 Jacoby, *The Repression*.

47 Krajnik, “In the Jaws,” 12.

48 Krajnik, “Žižek, the Fraud,” 9.

49 Ibid.

5. From Slovenia to Latin America, from Krajnik to Miller, from Superstructural Truth to the Base of Economic and Political Power

Psychoanalytic theory is for Krajnik the monopoly of clinical psychoanalysts, preferably millennials, members of WAP. What is at stake here is not only truth, but power and money. Krajnik says it clearly when attacking Žižek and the other Lacanian philosophers in the field of their “recursos financieros [financial resources],” their influence on “departamentos universitarios [university departments],”⁵⁰ their “conexiones en los ministerios [connections in ministries],” the “presupuesto público para asegurar las publicaciones de su agenda [public budget to ensure the publications of their agenda].”⁵¹ In short, in the entire conflict with Žižek, what is at issue is who will have “el poder sobre el significante Lacan [power over the signifier Lacan],” according to Krajnik’s own expression.⁵² This power is political, but above all economic. Thus, we come to the root of the problem.

At the economic-political basis of the conflict, Krajnik is openly defending a monopoly of Lacanian psychoanalysis in Slovenia for Millerian clinical psychoanalyst members of the WAP. This requires her, at the superstructural level, to discredit the theorists and philosophers who seem to have monopoly power over the signifier “Lacan” now and for three decades. It is an advertising strategy against the main competition in a petty market logic.

50 Krajnik, “In the Jaws,” 12.

51 Krajnik, “Žižek, the Fraud,” 9.

52 Gilbert, “Nina Krajnik,” par. 6.

Krajnik's advertising strategy in Slovenia was the same as Jacques-Alain Miller was simultaneously developing in the world. This strategy became evident, just before Krajnik's campaign, when Miller threatened his competitors who "hacían malabares con juguetes tomados de Lacan para entretener a un público aturdido y que recorrían los campus estadounidenses jugando a los matamoros pseudo-comunistas [juggled toys taken from Lacan to entertain a stunned audience and who roamed American campuses playing pseudo-communist matamoros]."⁵³ In a clear allusion to Žižek and his followers, Miller announced the expansion of the range of products offered by a powerful transnational, the WAP, which would now venture into the profitable sector of politics. This sector could not be left in the hands of theorists and philosophers!

It must be well understood that Krajnik's interests are those of the WAP. The purpose is to conquer the Slovenian market with the French Millerian franchise. It is a phenomenon that we already know quite well in Latin America, where the various associations and schools of psychoanalysis compete with each other for market dominance, which also makes them enter into rivalry with other competitors, including intellectuals, theorists and philosophers, who often receive questions very close to those received by Žižek, Zupančič, and Dolar in Slovenia.

Krajnik's arguments are nothing more than variations or exaggerations of the automatic formula "le falta clínica [he lacks clinical]" systematically used in Latin America to disqualify the psychoanalytic contributions of the new "laymen" or "profane." Intellectuals and academics, as well as members of other psychoanalytic collectives, are instantly neutralized by reproaching them in a lapidary way for "lacking clinic." This formula, which is

53 J-A. Miller, "Entretien nocturne," *Lacan Quotidien* 698 (2017), 10, available at <http://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/LQ-698-2.pdf>.

heard in Argentina as well as in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, has served and continues to serve so that the Freudian and now Lacanian heritage is monopolized by schools and associations, such as the WAP, which function according to the institutional forms currently most favored by neoliberal capitalism, such as sects, corporations, lucrative companies, elitist clubs, professional guilds and other interest groups.

Psychoanalytic schools and associations not only tend to turn psychoanalysis into an onerous privilege of the wealthy classes of Latin America, but also isolate it from society, attenuate its cultural strength, weaken its theoretical vigor, de-intellectualize it, reduce it to a headless professional activity and seem to depoliticize it by disassociating it from radical movements and abandoning it to conservative inertia logically related to neoliberalism. The latter has been verified in the political positions of Latin American psychoanalysts affiliated with the WAP and supported by Miller: positions against the lack of rule of law in the leftist regimes of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, but not against the violence of the right-wing regimes of Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico and Sebastián Piñera in Chile; pronouncements in favor of the Bolivian coup and racist right, but not in support of the Chilean, Ecuadorian and Colombian progressive and democratic social movements.

It is no coincidence that the Millerian bloc simultaneously supported the reactionary right in Latin America and Macron's neoliberal political option in the last elections in France.⁵⁴ Nor is it a coincidence that it was the same bloc that gave its unconditional support to Krajnik's campaign against theoretical psychoanalysis in Slovenia. All three supports go in the same direction.

54 D. Pavón-Cuellar, "Política de la Asociación Mundial de Psicoanálisis: lacanismo, neoliberalismo y crítica del populismo," *Topía* (2018), available at <https://www.topia.com.ar/articulos/politica-asociacion-mundial-psicoanalisis-lacanismo-neoliberalismo-y-critica-del-populismo>.

By suppressing the theory, an empty space is left for what always springs up in its place: what should continue to be called by its name, the dominant ideology, with which both the visions of the French and Latin American right and the reduction of psychoanalysis to a petty professional practice well paid and well adapted to neoliberal capitalist society can be justified. This practice is the truth of the *truth* underlying the clinic defended by Krajnik against the supposed deception of theoretical psychoanalysis. It is the same truth invoked by wealthy Latin American psychoanalysts, those who have their offices in the Mexican neighborhood of Polanco or in the Argentine neighborhood of Palermo, against theorists: intellectuals, academics and politically committed activists who apparently “les falta clínica [lack clinical],” which causes them to deviate – as Krajnik would say – towards radical left positions in their work of the repoliticization of psychoanalysis.

The overestimation of the empirical pole of the clinic, always at the expense of theory, is a maneuver that can only benefit the dominant ideology, which is imposed with experience, which can only be hindered by theory. This would have been clear to Althusser,⁵⁵ but it will never be clear to his brilliant student Miller, much less to the not so brilliant students of the student, precisely because clarity would require a theory that they must do without in order to continue justifying themselves with the ideological effectiveness of their arguments, as Gabriel Tupinambá has recently shown.⁵⁶ What Althusser predicted happened, once again, as so many other times.

55 L. Althusser, “La place de la psychanalyse dans les sciences sociales (1963),” in *Psychanalyse et sciences humaines*, Paris: STOCK/IMEC, 1996a, 17-72; L. Althusser, “Psychanalyse et psychologie (1964),” in *Psychanalyse et sciences humaines*, Paris: STOCK/IMEC, 1996b, 73-122.

56 G. Tupinambá, “‘Pandora’s Box Has Been Opened’: Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Politics after 2017,” *Crisis & Critique* 6, No. 1 (2019), 340-363.

6. Beyond the Biomedical Model in Psychoanalysis

Previously, we have referred to a clear discussion and/or theoretical, practical debate, bordering on ethical issues between the North American associations of psychoanalysis – which became powerful towards the end of the 1930s due to the emigration of psychoanalysts to North America – and the European associations of psychoanalysis.

It should be noted that what was discussed between the United States (New York Psychoanalytic Society) and the International Psychoanalytic Association in Europe at the end of the 1920s was that the American side did not accept non-medical psychoanalysts to exercise the psychoanalytic practice. This position did not change until the end of the 20th century, accepting non-medical professionals to practice psychoanalysis at the beginning of the 1990s.

Freud always defended non-medical exercise in psychoanalytic practice and believed that in this way the practice could benefit from other theories and disciplines. In a letter to psychoanalyst Fritz Wittels, who was in the United States, he comments:

Me place saber que comparte mi opinión sobre el valor del análisis en los tratamientos médicos, en pedagogía y en la formación cultural en general, sin restricciones. No obstante, si se presentara usted allí con mi programa en favor de la aplicación del análisis lego, suscitaría la hostilidad de los analistas médicos cuya desconfianza hacia nuevos visitantes de nuestro círculo aumentaría. En América no puede imponerse este criterio. (...) Desde luego, no quiero decir que debe usted descartar la cuestión del lego, o mantener en secreto su opinión; pero no haga bandera de ella. A esos primitivos les interesa poco toda ciencia que no tenga aplicación práctica directa. Lo peor

del modo de ser norteamericano es su llamada amplitud de criterio, por la que se sienten hasta magnánimos y superiores a nosotros, los intolerantes europeos; esto, en realidad, no es sino el práctico velo con el que tapan su completa falta de discernimiento. Ellos elaboran –casi a modo de tendencias inconscientes– un compromiso o mezcla de análisis, misticismo junguiano y adlerismo, una estupidez vergonzosa, naturalmente, que sólo merece burla. Esta labor les resulta tanto más fácil por cuanto no han leído prácticamente ninguna de las publicaciones originales, por falta de tiempo y de voluntad. [I am pleased to know that you share my opinion on the value of analysis in medical treatments, in pedagogy and in cultural formation in general, without restrictions. However, if you were to go there with my programme in favour of the application of lay analysis, you would arouse the hostility of medical analysts whose distrust of new visitors to our circle would increase. In America, this criterion cannot be imposed. [...]] Of course, I do not mean that you should dismiss the question of the layman, or keep his opinion secret; but don't flag it. These primitives care little about any science that has no direct practical application. The worst thing about the American way of being is its so-called broad-mindedness, whereby they feel even magnanimous and superior to us, the intolerant Europeans; this, in reality, is nothing but the practical veil with which they cover their complete lack of discernment. They elaborate –almost like unconscious tendencies– a compromise or mixture of analysis, Jungian mysticism and adlerism, a shameful stupidity, naturally, that deserves only mockery. This task is all the easier for them because they have read virtually none of the original publications, due to lack of time and will].⁵⁷

57 E. Timms, (ed.), *Freud y la mujer niña*. Memorias de Fritz Wittels, Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1997, 105.

Beyond certain Freudian prejudices regarding American society in this letter, what is also questioned there is the pragmatic character that neglects, as Freud himself points out, any element that is not at the service of a direct practical application. Isn't this discussion about secular analysis the current antecedent of the affirmation that psychoanalytic environments "le falta clínica [lack clinically]"?

Faced with this question, it is necessary to recall the fact that although for several decades non-medical professionals have been able to engage in psychoanalytic practice, and they are admitted to the different psychoanalytic schools and institutions that provide "official" psychoanalyst training –including those of the International Psychoanalytic Association – the medical logic underlying clinical practices is still being upheld.

Let us not forget that it is this same implicit perpetuation of the maintenance of the formal "requirements" that turned the clinic into another branch of medical psychopathology, with its defense mechanisms, its rigid frameworks that did not allow psychoanalytic practice to be removed from the offices and couches, their diagnoses including the so-called "low transference" based on the clinical structures of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Not to mention the "presentations of patients" that Lacan himself helped to consolidate.

Fortunately, there is also another Lacan and other Lacanian psychoanalytic practices that among other things do not base their act from a diagnosis to be able to "direct" a cure, the French psychoanalyst Allouch (2006) comments:

Muchos psicoanalistas dicen que primero hay que tener un diagnóstico para saber qué tratamiento seguir. Sin embargo, en la práctica psicoanalítica, cuando una persona le habla a otra, no hay necesidad de establecer previamente un diagnóstico. Algunos imaginan que el diagnóstico ayuda para psicoanalizar, para intervenir, pero

no es así. El psicoanálisis no es una medicina. [Many psychoanalysts say that you must first have a diagnosis to know which treatment to follow. However, in psychoanalytic practice, when one person speaks to another, there is no need to pre-establish a diagnosis. Some imagine that diagnosis helps to psychoanalyze, to intervene, but it is not so. Psychoanalysis is not a measure].⁵⁸

In this sense, we can identify that the medical heritage that prevailed in the various psychoanalytic associations after Freud continued to prevail in the Lacanians, and today. It is this inheritance that ultimately continues to impose the existence of a “true,” “official,” and “institutionalized” psychoanalysis, one that for many should not leave the “analytical device” of the clinics, differentiated that “true” psychoanalysis devoted exclusively to the clinical, and that, of course, cannot leave its “natural environment” and be led to an analysis of social phenomena or sociopolitical dilemmas.

7. What is Excluded from the Clinic: The Clinic

The way in which psychoanalysis has been constituted in most cases in Latin America, and how it spread (like a plague, using the Lacanian myth of Freud and Jung reaching America) was that of a practice that was consolidated as “clinical,” a psychoanalysis that some call in “intention” to refer to it as a pure and true practice, that which begins with Freud and continues with others and ends with Lacan and the Lacanians, leaving psychoanalysis in “extension” as a minor matter.

58 J. Allouch, “El psicoanálisis está en crisis permanente,” *Elcuencodeplata* (2006), par. 4, available at https://www.elcuencodeplata.com.ar/en_los_medios/121.

The difference between *clinical* and *psychoanalyst* was addressed by Lacan in different contexts, texts and occasions. It is precisely from this fact that many psychoanalysts turned their practice into a hermetic question that could only be known in select and limited groups. Fortunately, the exceptions are many, there are gaps, loopholes where subjects emerge that no longer sustain these practices, being active agents in the true struggle for the implantation of a hegemonic and dominant psychoanalysis.

In Latin America, for example, there are many examples of psychoanalysts who have managed to remove psychoanalysis from the sacrosanct clinics: Marie Langer (1910-1987), Enrique Pichon-Rivière (1907-1977), or Fernando Olloa (1918-2002), just to mention a few in Argentina, even Estanislao Zuleta (1935-1990) or Álvaro Villar Gaviria (1921-1999). The list would be long including Mexico, Brazil, Chile and other countries.

In our opinion, this is where the Slovenian School of Psychoanalysis becomes important through Dolar, Župančič, and Žižek. It is usually thought that these authors, being philosophers, only provide theoretical tools to be able to think or rethink the philosophical discipline, art, or popular culture, and from that background, articulate it with some psychoanalytic elements. It is also often thought that these theories, in the best of cases, serve to reflect on social issues from certain psychoanalytic elements.

The idea is to dare to weigh in something more, that these approaches of the Slovenian School, despite the fact that they themselves refuse to be clinical and to be cataloged as psychoanalysts, serve to think about the clinic and that their contributions serve to question a practice that little by little has become ideological under an ideal of purity or the existence of a true clinic that only sustains itself in the transfer between analyst-analysand within the limits of the consulting room and the couch.

This dilemma that has been developed in a general and in-depth way in this work, becomes important in a social context where only space is left for the ideal of a “pure” psychoanalytic praxis focused and allowed for the “pure,” which in this case they are of an elitist whiteness both for the speaker and for the listener.

Lacan already warned when he stated that we cannot be “garantes del sueño burgués [guarantors of the bourgeois dream],”⁵⁹ where analysts confine themselves to a couch at the service of people who can pay high costs under the assumption that this is how the unconscious is made to work and be able to solve “intimate” problems.

It is necessary to assume that there is an impossibility of talking about a psychoanalysis. Actually, we would have to dare to speak of “psychoanalysis” of “clinical practices” in the plural, since it is always a socio-symbolic matter, it has to do with the Other and has “una dimensión intrínsecamente social, objetiva y crítica [an intrinsically social, objective, and critical dimension].”⁶⁰

Psychoanalytic praxis must take care of pointing out that the realities that appear to be immutable in Latin American contexts are not such, that the socio-symbolic reality where a subject is immersed is the result of fixations of jouissance that, through signifiers, locate it in a social discourse, and just as it could be located there, it could develop a know-how to be able to locate itself in another place, but not before being able to question that place and its relationship with an Other.⁶¹

59 J. Lacan, *Seminario libro 7. La ética del psicoanálisis*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2003, 362.

60 A. Zupančič, *¿Por qué el psicoanálisis? Cuatro intervenciones*, México: Paradiso, 2013, 12.

61 But in that same “neutral” place, certain psychoanalytic practices have historically been located, from Freudian through Klenian to Lacanian, all of

The point is that despite these norms that have governed psychoanalytic training and clinical practice, it must always be linked to a theoretical interrogation. Both in Freud and Lacan as in other psychoanalysts, this question comes from different disciplines, even from the same philosophy. For example, the fact that Freud has remained outside philosophy does not mean that he did not use it for the same clinic and, in the case of Lacan and his antiphilosophy, its use is even more widespread and almost all his work is crossed by authors such as Hegel, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Plato, and other disciplines such as ethnology and mathematics or in the last years of topology or string theory.

In short, the theory serves to question what is put into action in clinical practice. But the clinic on many occasions fell into a kind of technical formulation, and thus a practice was ritualized, standardizing it.

In Latin America, despite presenting a series of psychoanalytic practitioners who are faithful participants of different Lacanian schools and institutions that are founded as branches obedient to the opinions that are almost always written in Paris, there are as always disobedient, and fortunately there are more and more. There are those who question this colonizing knowledge and practice in which psychoanalysis has also been involved. Others try to contextualize this theory with a praxis in public health systems or even propose an exercise in psychoanalytic listening in public squares or on the streets; others by converging psychoanalytic theory and practice with other knowledge, not only traditional such as philosophy and social sciences, but indigenous and Afro-descendant ancestral knowledge.

them traversed by a medicalized ideal, turning clinical practice into a supposed practice without ideals – as if clinical practice was outside the ideals – returning from the repressed the ideal without ideal of a practice without context, an aseptic practice. Thus, for almost a century, most psychoanalysts did not get involved with anything beyond their clinic, confined to their office.

All this provides new perspectives on psychoanalytic practice. By linking the clinical signifier with other signifiers, this practice is reworking a new future in Latin American contexts and takes it out of what dominated psychoanalysis for many years: the office as the exclusive space for psychoanalysis. That is the clinic that can bring us in a commitment to a praxis in Latin America, one that is up to the subjectivity of the time so as not to renounce that impossible thing that is to try to sustain a praxis from psychoanalysis.

8. Conclusions on the Remaining Challenges

So far, some of the contributions and challenges of what is known as The Slovenian School have been reviewed, understanding that psychoanalytic clinical practice and theory requires, from our point of view, new approaches. In this it becomes necessary to rigorously and critically approach the study of the productions that the authors of this philosophical movement have been producing for decades.

It is necessary to incorporate and accept new interpretative prisms that are up to the demands of individuals, of society. It is necessary not to limit ourselves exclusively to the study of European authors, and to follow their texts and indications without adopting a critical position. Only by questioning both external and internal productions and practices we can abandon what seems to be perpetuating: continuing to cling to Eurocentric practices and theories of the last century.⁶²

62 For this, we aim at a reconfiguration of the logics that are currently dominant, and from here, it becomes necessary to revalue the scope of the local contributions.

However, we must see that, from early date, the study of philosophical, theoretical or literary works of other times was one of the focuses most addressed by large groups of historians. It was not a phenomenon concentrated in a specific historical moment, it is a common practice among scholars of the social sciences to resort to the legacies of those exponents or classical references. At present, this practice seems to have undergone some slight modifications in the local terrain where in emphasis they are not only in authors of other times, but authors who, although they are from other times, are also European.

Scholars and writers of the 21st century resort to these practices repeatedly, specifically there is an inevitable return to the history of ideas,⁶³ since this field quickly became a different and singular field with a wide variety of resources that began to articulate their framework. Understanding this, we do not affirm that the study of Sigmund Freud or Jacques Lacan is something that must be set aside to advance, or progress, let us remember that both opposed the term progress, due to the imposed violence that exists in it. If not, we invite you to leave the modality of faithful subjects who try to be part of the select groups that today “officially” continue with their unfinished legacy.

In this sense, we consider that not only the Slovenian School is a contribution to the field of the history of ideas, being a process of history in construction, something that is developing or gestating incipiently but that has managed to produce a theoretical and critical power regarding the unethical practices that try to spread. It must be clarified that we

63 According to Donal R. Kelley (*The Descent of Ideas: The History of Intellectual History*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), the history of ideas had its independent birth in the 19th century, until before this, it was related to philosophy without establishing any distinction. It was Victor Cousin who named the field we know today as such as “L’histoire des idées.” Therefore, the starting point for this document finds its origin in Cousin’s work.

are not indicating here to a limit to movement, a more or less correct direction. Nor do we propose a singular device of universal applicability. It would be falling into the same abyss from which we intend to get out. We only point to one of the many current contributions that are being produced by authors not only from the world of psychoanalysis, but from fields usually little considered.

One of the concepts that can help us summarize the issues between the supposedly true and the false, or the place that psychoanalysis has in our time, is the notion of ideology, understanding it in its broadest sense, as Slavoj Žižek points out in *Mapping Ideology*:

La palabra “ideología” puede designar cualquier cosa, desde una actitud contemplativa que desconoce su dependencia de la realidad social hasta un conjunto de creencias orientadas a la acción, desde el medio indispensable en el que los individuos viven sus relaciones con una estructura social hasta las ideas falsas que legitiman un poder político dominante. Parecería surgir justamente cuando intentamos evitarla, mientras que no aparece cuando es claramente esperable. [The word “ideology” can designate anything from a contemplative attitude that ignores its dependence on social reality to a set of action-oriented beliefs, from the indispensable environment in which individuals live their relationships with a social structure to the false ideas that legitimize a dominant political power. It would seem to arise just when we try to avoid it, while it does not appear when it is clearly expected].⁶⁴

64 S. Žižek (ed.), *Ideología. Un mapa de la cuestión*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica de Argentina, 2003, 10.

This antagonism presented when trying to define the concept of ideology can be extrapolated to the complexity of defining a clinical practice, a concept, an approach, a movement. However, this dilemma seems to be easy for some institutions to address by replacing questions and turning psychoanalysis into one more product that is part of the showcases of their formative processes. Is it possible to think of a psychoanalysis without it being an ally of capitalism and the ideology that corrupts our world? We believe that it is possible, even though it is not something that is common, nor are there traces of the direction that should be taken for such release to occur.

For now, the local challenges and the challenges of the psychoanalytic discipline show their tension in those elements that do not seem to be questionable, those ideas, thoughts, practices, theories that prevail as untouchable and irreplaceable. It is not just a matter of decolonizing practices and knowledge –which is a powerful and necessary movement–, nor is it simply about replacing reference figures, or of placing ourselves reactively in an antagonistic position, which could lead to everything changing to stay the same.

In his book entitled *Lacan en México, México en Lacan: Miller y el mundo*, Manuel Hernández carries out a review of those official and public discourses, from which the future of psychoanalysis is analyzed from a critical position. This excerpt, which is quoted here in its extension and which summarizes the author’s work, is as follows:

Pero antes de la colonialidad siempre hay un movimiento de conquista colonial. Fue con lo que me topé hace más de veinte años en boca de Eric Laurent cuando dio un seminario en México y dijo que la Asociación Mundial de Psicoanálisis, fundada por Miller en 1992, se había propuesto conquistar todos los territorios donde la IPA había expulsado a Lacan. Jamás lo he olvidado. Hace al-

gunos años Jacques-Alain Miller fue todavía más específico cuando hizo un nuevo llamado a los miembros de la EOL en Buenos Aires a que vinieran a México a instalarse y “abrir México a la orientación lacaniana.” [But before coloniality there is always a movement of colonial conquest. It was what I came across more than twenty years ago in the mouth of Eric Laurent when he gave a seminar in Mexico and said that the World Association of Psychoanalysis, founded by Miller in 1992, had set out to conquer all the territories where the IPA had expelled Lacan. I have never forgotten it. A few years ago, Jacques-Alain Miller was even more specific when he made a new call to the members of the EOL in Buenos Aires to come to Mexico to settle and “open Mexico to the Lacanian orientation”].⁶⁵

So, given the amount of productions that the EOL has generated, the theoretical contribution is undeniable, but it is our duty to face the fact that what is being carried out is only a massive diffusion of a new product that is trying to spread regardless of whether it is a contribution, a dilemma or if it responds to allied ambitions of estate capitalism where there is a “boss” who has bought everything and only wants to expand his territory of exploitation and domination.

It is not exclusively about Mexico, a specific situation that has been unfavorable for the local authors of that country, it is a real virus that tries to enter the very bowels of every attempt at literary and theoretical subjectivity, destroying the freedoms of reflection, criticism and progress.

The pending challenges are not only a point that must be considered when looking at the productions of the Slovenian school, it is rather a pending challenge for the productions

of our century, we continue without a fair and dignified future for Latin American authors because, in each return, we return to the same authors and, in our time, our attention persists abroad. We are a theoretical periphery due to our own practices, which although influenced by cultural elements, by a sort of colonized imprint, is not a reason to justify and maintain the scenario unchanged.

Just as the Slovenian school has had to confront attacks that call into question the veracity and contributions of its discourse and productions, local authors, thinkers, and writers repeat the same practice, but not on external enemies, but on those we have to consider our allies.

65 M. Hernández, *Lacan en México, México en Lacan: Miller y el mundo*, Ciudad de México: Ediciones Navarra, 2016, 15.

PART

II

The Political
Crisis

Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego: The Trans-Individual Movement¹

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1 Previously appearing as, É. Balibar, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego: The Trans-Individual Moment," *Research in Psychoanalysis*, 21 (2016): 43-53.

2 The editors thank Étienne Balibar for generously allowing the re-publication of this text.

Here at the outset I will call upon your indulgence for two reasons. First, even though this colloquium is devoted to the centenary of *Totem and Taboo*, my paper will only refer to it in an oblique manner, by way of some of the aspects of its "*reprise*" in a later work by Freud, the 1921 text "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego." I will be focusing my attention on this later text for reasons that I am going to indicate. Second, not only am I not a psychoanalyst, which means that I lack the indispensable clinical experience without which the interpretation of Freud's writings always runs the risk of going astray; but my familiarity with the oeuvre has a fragmentary character and is in some way opportunistic, which exposes me to naivety and to misinterpretation. Believe me when I tell you that I do not extract any glory from all this. Rather, it leads me to recognize the fragility of the hypotheses that I am going to present to you. At the same time, I thank you warmly for the great honor you have shown me in inviting me.

I am focusing on the 1921 book (which I will refer to under the abridged title of *Massen*) because I consider that his theory of a correlation between the formation of the "ego" (or rather, of the *Ich*, because one must try to avoid the mistakes that are induced by the different regime of personal pronouns in French [and English]) and the theory of "groups" or "masses" (here, once again, the translation has consequences) constitutes the key moment in overcoming the opposition between an "individual psychology" and a "collective psychology" (or a "social psychology"), which affects the very definition of the unconscious, and which I propose to call the *moment of the trans-individual*. The other reason that I have to privilege *Massen*, is that what we have here is a collection of texts that truly mark a turning point in the history of political philosophy, outside of which, in particular, the political and theoretical configuration of the twentieth century in Europe would remain unintelligible. In his own way, like Lenin, Weber, Arendt, or Schmidt, Freud in

Massen also sets out a “concept of the political.” This exposé, which I have argued for elsewhere, is linked to the fact that he produced therein a “critique of political psychology” that is comparable in many respects to what Marx had produced beforehand by way of a “critique of political economy,” albeit, of course, with results that are totally different and which even take an opposing view.³

Naturally, these two points are not independent of one another: I am convinced that between them there is a relationship of reciprocal presupposition. With others, some of whom are present here, I have stated that whereas the introduction of the concept of the unconscious⁴ radically transforms our intelligence of the political field, the inverse is no less true: interference with the political (and with politics) brings with it tensions and contradictions (which are reflected at the very heart of the psychoanalytical movement by the divergences or even by the institutional splits), but this is *required* as such by the definition of the unconscious insofar as, precisely, it is reducible *neither* to individual psychology (even when revolutionized by taking into account the repression of the sexual drives in the constitution of the psychical apparatus), nor to social psychology, that is to say, to an interpretation of cultural and institutional phenomena, or collective modes of behavior, in terms of conflicts of passion or conflicts between the drives. One may hypothesize that what is neither individual nor social

3 Regarding the place of Freud's work in the conjuncture of discussions on the formation and the political function of the “masses” (in particular the dilemma of authoritarianism and anarchy) in central Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, see the new and remarkable book by Stefan Jonsson, *Crowds and Democracy: The Idea and Image of the Masses from Revolution to Fascism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

4 And not simply the introduction of an unconscious of the political, as Pierre Kaufmann wrote in what nevertheless remains a very fine book, *L'inconscient du politique*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1979.

is, precisely, political, even though this is in a direction that still has to be determined historically and conceptually.

From this point of view, naturally the full sequence of Freud's works between 1912 and 1938 present a particular interest. I would say that the political *insists* constantly in these works, even though it is never exactly in the same form or from the same point of view, in a way that runs through the successive shifts in certain hypotheses, like that of the death drive or that of onto-phylogenetic regression, but which also determines changes in the contemporary political conjuncture (which, I think you will agree, is a very turbulent conjuncture, and which Freud followed with great conviction). It is very striking that none of the books or major essays that we may think of from this perspective intersect exactly with the others, nor, with all the more reason, do they repeat. At the same time as the concept of the political undergoes a shift – a concept that is insistent in Freud's writing – his theorization of the unconscious also changes. This intellectual adventure, which knows no end except the one that is introduced accidentally by death, clearly cannot be reduced to a linear evolution. One of the ways of clarifying the meaning of this lies precisely in the examination of references to *Totem and Taboo*. They are sometimes explicit, as in *Massen*, or else implicit and indirect, and thus more problematic. Some facts of writing are intriguing, for example the fact that *Massen*, where the reference to *Totem and Taboo* comes to provide a grounding for the notion of regression as applied to the functioning of institutions, never mentions the death drive by name, even though it had been introduced the previous year in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*. Conversely, the 1923 essay *Das Ich und das Es* – in which Freud introduces the notion of the “Superego” that will have control over all the subsequent analyses of the progress of civilization and its specific “discontent” by relating it to a “pure culture of the death drive” – does not contain any reference whatsoever

to the themes of *Totem and Taboo*. It will fall to the later works to try to fill this hiatus.

On the basis of this philological remark, it would be tempting to try to problematize the relationship between the speculative anthropology of *Totem and Taboo* and the no less speculative biology of the *Jenseits*; this is not my aim here. I will nevertheless remind you that there are apparently two different and inverse ways of “reading” the relationship between Freud’s late works and the “theory” or the “fiction” of *Totem and Taboo*. One can think that in 1912 Freud acquired and formulated an *anthropological* conception of the origins of repression (and of primary repression), and thus of the very possibility of the unconscious, which all the later texts will apply to culture, education, politics and religion, and which in this sense lends them a foundation, at least in an “as if” manner. One can think, conversely, that the references to the “myth” of the killing of the father of the primal horde are a host of transformations, not only of its function in relation to the interpretation of the origins of guilt that dwell within the formations of the unconscious, but of the very signification of the ideas of guilt and of origin in the Freud’s analysis. Each of the later texts in which an open or implicit reference to *Totem and Taboo* features is, therefore, actually a reworking of *Totem and Taboo*, a reopening of questions that it had already asked, a reiteration of its postulates (notably the evolutionist postulates) – and without doubt this is true in particular for those writings that come after the explanation of the hypothesis of the *Todestrieb* – until, in *Moses and Monotheism*, in which there is an articulation between the question of the constitution of the people and the historical enunciation of law (as Bruno Karsenti has just shown, again, with great brilliance), the anthropological evolutionist discourse in fact gives up its place to a theological and political conception. This happens in such a way that one can think that, though Freud is still referencing *Totem and Ta-*

boo, it is practically in order to refute himself. I position myself on the side of this second interpretation, and I will add, then, a last hypothesis before turning to the text itself. In this open progression, which should not be given the sense of teleology, even if, as is clear from the evidence, each step entails something irreversible, *Massen* occupies a strategic place, precisely because of what I have called (citing Kojève, Simondon and Lacan) the trans-individual moment that he makes explicit both in a discourse and, in a yet more eloquent way, and perhaps a typically “structuralist” way, in a *graph* (one of the three that we find in Freud’s oeuvre). This is tantamount to suggesting – and here I am anticipating – that the elaboration of a concept of the trans-individual maximizes the tension with the evolutionist myth. It is time, therefore, to turn to this elaboration.

First of all, I will observe, in a categorical manner, that Freud’s entire text can be placed under the sign of reversals and reversibility. There exists a deep solidarity between these different operations, which bear on the founding categorical antitheses of philosophy, politics, and the *episteme* that underlies the “human sciences” in the field, from which Freud’s oeuvre inscribes a polemical counterpoint. This is the case, first and foremost, for the antitheses between the individual and the collective (or the social) on the one hand, and between the normal and the pathological, on the other.

On the first point, one can note from the opening of Freud’s text that he takes up a cautious but clear position against the idea of pitting an *Individualpsychologie* against a *Sozial- oder Massenpsychologie*. According to Freud, this opposition must be superseded (and clearly it is up to psychoanalysis to find the means to do so). But the ensuing part of the book, which is not exempt from fluctuations, shows that fundamentally there are two ways of understanding this. There is what I will call a weak way (in the logical sense): the one that consists of showing that it is not possible, in practice, to separate the phenom-

ena of individual psychology from the phenomena of collective psychology, because they are, on the contrary, complementary (as, for example, the psychology of “masses” and that of “leaders” will be in the tenth chapter on “The Group and the Primal Horde,” and which we may note holds no further interest for Freud). It would, therefore, be epistemologically rational to study them together, in the framework of one same science. But beyond this, there is a *strong* way: the one that consists of positing (and of demonstrating, through a theoretical construction of the object) that the individual and the collective stem from one single *structure*, whose poles or functions they constitute, and which are themselves reversible. In the end, this is the point of view that is progressively developed in the text, and whose strong moment is constituted by the design and the interpretation of the graph of identification, which I will be coming back to, in so far as it can be read in one direction or in another: *either* from the division of the subject into an “Ich” and an “Ichideal” towards the substitution of one single “exterior object,” with objects onto which libido becomes fixated in states of love or, according to another modality, in hypnosis, and thus towards that which they have “put in a common place” and which renders them indistinct, or else, the inverse path, from a libidinal lack of distinction towards the division that it brings about in the subject. By referring explicitly to the idea that love and hypnosis constitute “group formations in twos” (*Massenbildungen zu zweit*), and that hypnosis in particular is not a term of comparison with the “group” because in reality it is “identical” to it (or they have the same structure), Freud prepares an even more radical reversal, that will effectively be brought about (I will be coming back to this) in the final chapter that is titled, ironically, *Nachträge*, that is to say, retroaction or supplements: the one that will consist of presenting individuality itself (or individualization) as a particular case of *Massenbildung* or group formation (clearly, in so far as this is a

“formation of the unconscious”). From the book’s introduction through to its conclusion, the primacy and even the autonomy of “individual psychology” have been reversed, not in favor of a primacy of the social or of sociology (a note to the fourth chapter, in the 1923 edition, defends against Kelsen’s notion that it has hypostasized “society” in the manner of Durkheim) (don’t even mention the collective unconscious!), but in favor of their equivalence, given their dependence on one same structure, which we may call the trans-individual structure.

Here, we can see the possibility taking shape of “defining” or “characterizing” psychoanalysis as a science, precisely through this operation that has, as I am going to show, a political signification through and through. But before doing so, the effects have to be combined with a second reversal, which is no less decisive, and no less political: the one that affects the categories of the normal and the pathological. This point is extremely difficult in principle because throughout his entire life’s work, Freud was constantly oscillating between different possible positions, going from a return to the founding postulate of positivist medicine which holds that the pathological is a deviation from the normal (in particular the “normal” of the succession of stages of libido and of heterosexual “object choice”) to the idea that the “normal” is an unknown pathology, or even to the idea that psychoanalysis suspends any distinction between these “values.” But in *Massen*, an extremely clear and radical operation is carried out, which at the same time goes against common representation and against the “theoretical” elaboration put forward by Le Bon in his bestseller (which is still being reissued today), the 1895 *The Psychology of Crowds* (which was translated into German in 1912), from which he nevertheless borrows an entire phenomenology, but whose meaning he completely reverses. For Le Bon and the theoreticians of the psychology of crowds in general, the constitution of groups, following the privileged example of

the revolutionary movements characterized by their power of suggestion and by the belief, on the part of those who adhere to them, in “the omnipotence of ideas,” as well as by the suspension of moral and rational capacities, by regression, then, to a primitive or infantile state, which favors the crisis of institutions as well as various educative, social, and racial factors, is a pathological phenomenon par excellence. He defines a pathology of public order, against which the state and society should defend themselves.

For Freud, on the contrary (who was clearly instructed by the experience of the Great War, in which the unchaining of criminal instincts was justified and normalized), the affective and cognitive processes that degrade both the subject’s capacity to judge in an autonomous way and the rationality of the collective, and from which he extracts the principle of identification as a mode of the canalization and fixation of libido, are applied *first of all to the institutions of established order*, two examples of which he finds in the Church and the Army (I come back to this). These are, Freud tells us, veritable “primary crowds,” and it is not ruled out that here we can hear an intra-psychoanalytical play on words: indeed, we have to hear that, in order to witness the emergence and the development of a “primary process” in the clear light of day, in which the association of ideas and their investment by affects obeys, with neither guard rail nor “secondary elaboration,” the laws of the unconscious, there is no need to look into political and social pathologies (or phenomena that are considered by the dominant rationality to be pathological at the same time as criminal). One has on the contrary to observe the mainspring behind the cohesion of institutions and the adhesion that they command. Or more exactly (and this idea is even more remarkable), these institutions need to be considered as defense mechanisms against the phenomena of de-segregation that always threaten them from within, and against which they have to constantly

mobilize the powers of thought and unconscious affectivity, which are nevertheless fundamentally of the same nature. In the fifth chapter of *Massen*, Freud identifies these phenomena very precisely: for the Army, he cites panic or disarray, and for the Church, sectarianism or intolerance. Thus, the army appears as an organization that is woven together from a libido that resists against panic (as long as it does not give in to it), just as the Church appears as an organization that resists against intolerance (as long as it does not give in to it). Politically speaking, this reversal is crucial, because all at once it deconstructs the *idéologèmes* of order and disorder, and it introduces into the heart of the political a dimension that is fundamentally *impolitical*, outside of which the concept of the political is empty. The political is a sort of violence that turns against itself, and in this way lends itself the figure of order and cohesion in a manner that is more or less stable and durable. But it is just as crucial, psychologically speaking, because it turns the unconscious into the matrix or the interplay of representations and affects, which “fixates” individuals in the modality of a collective binding, or of a collective conformism, or on the contrary, thrusts them into the uncontrollable dimension of a subversive or self-destructive “*un-binding*.”

Furthermore, there is a close connection between the two points that we have just mentioned under the heading of the reversals and reversibility of which Freud informs us in *Massen*: because the judgment of normalcy that comes from individuals or is applied to them is conditioned (in any case in modern society) by maintaining a *distance* between personality or individual conduct, and the incorporation of mass movements. Inversely, the social institutions and situations are judged normal or pathological according to whether they favor or abolish the distance between the individual and the collective. The opposition between the two poles of psychology is a fiction kept up by a social order that nevertheless hinges, in the end, on

their lack of distinction. Before we turn, by way of conclusion, to a third reversal, or at least to a third ambivalence, the one that affects the notion of “regression,” I can now linger for a short while over the developments that are founded on this double subversion of received antitheses (which I am tempted to qualify as “bourgeois” antitheses), one that suspends the distinction between the individual and the collective in favor of a trans-individual structure, and one that suspends the opposition between the normal and the pathological in favor of a primary process that commands both of them as modes of existence that are relative and relational. I will do this in two phases, by following the central developments of the text, albeit in a necessarily abridged and schematic fashion. First of all, by examining the signification of the “phenomenologies” put forward by Freud with regard to the army and the church, and then by examining the impact that the ontology of relation, which Freud constructs by means of the schema of identification, has on the problematic of individualization or the individual’s autonomy.

Clearly, the lack of distinction between the political and analytical registers appears most immediately at the level of these descriptions and interpretations of the principle of functioning that lies behind the major state apparatuses represented by the Army and the Church. I have just spoken in terms of examples, but it is clear that we need to look again at this qualification. The Army and the Church cannot be mere examples, even if it is possible to consider them as types of models after which other institutions (for example, political parties) can manifestly be described, because their “artificial” (*künstlich*) character (previously translated as “conventional”) paradoxically combined with a “high degree of organization” and stability, leans, according to Freud, on both an external constraint (*äusserer Zwang*) and a libidinal binding or “structure of libidinal binding” (*libidinöse Struktur, Libidobindungen*),

and therefore leans also on the over-determined combination of a necessity and a choice, or of an adherence and an adhesion, which can only arise from a (hi)story. By placing this discussion back into its historical context, that of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire under the effect of war and its specific inner social tensions (mentioned by Paul Federn in a pamphlet that came out just before, in 1919, *Zur Psychologie der Revolution: Die Vaterlose Gesellschaft*, which I believe Freud was reacting to, at least in part), it is hard not to suppose that this combination has the signification of describing the articulation of the two “pillars” of the state, or of the state of a certain authoritarian type. Indeed, it names the state metonymically. In Althusser’s terminology (which clearly was largely inspired by this text of Freud’s), one could say that the Army and the Church constitute two major “ideological state apparatuses” whose inner mainspring is the libidinal structure of the love for the real or imaginary “leader” (*Führer*), or better still, that together they form what would have to be called, in the singular, the *ideological state apparatus*, with essentially unconscious mainsprings, even though they are visible and out in the open (this analysis is an essential moment in the dissociation between the categories of the unconscious and the invisible or imperceptible).

But then the question cannot not be asked as to why Freud *eludes* the reference to the state as such, when his entire analysis presupposes it, thus contributing to the possibility of “de-politicizing” his analysis of the political – for whom at least the concept of the political cannot be dissociated from a reference to the state. A first possibility, still in an Althusserian vocabulary, would be to suggest that here the state has to be considered as an “absent cause,” acting through substitution, the effects of which are observable in the field of psychical phenomena, but the historic origin of which is exterior to it as such. An inverse possibility consists of seeing a ruse in the

Freudian construction of the institution, a ruse that avoids any reference to that which forms at the same time the object of a violent dilemma, in relation to which the psychoanalysts are, moreover, divided (state or revolution), but by the same token clarifying this *impolitical* foundation of any type of politics that I might have been referring to above, and which partisans as well as adversaries of the stability of the state cannot fail to recognize, even though they follow the “paths” prescribed by the unconscious, those that the Oedipus complex has led us to “choose,” in what is clearly a limited choice, between excessive love for the father (or for one of his ideal substitutes) and loathing for him (even in the name of fraternity). Finally, there is a third possibility, which partakes of the two previous possibilities but displaces what is at issue in them. It consists of supposing that Freud, in reality, is *searching*, by means of psychoanalysis, for a possibility of thinking about the difference between the different types of state, not only inasmuch as they govern populations, but inasmuch as they organize them. Let us not forget, without being able to insist on it here (I have attempted to deal with it elsewhere, in regard to the circumstances of “the invention of the Superego” in *Das Ich und das Es* in 1923), that it is into this uncertainty that Kelsen’s objection will be inserted. Kelsen’s objection was that when Freud treated the state, or its “normative” capacity, he omitted the specificity of law, which is both constraint and ideality, in the construction of the institution. This was an objection that Freud could not ignore, but the scope of which he was able to displace in the direction of the analysis, precisely, of the unconscious mainsprings behind the adherence to constraint. For the time being, if we stick with *Massen*, with its absent cause or its vanishing point, different structural characteristics may be evoked that are both positive and negative. Naturally, this would require a longer presentation, so I shall just make do with pointing them out.

The first, which is the object of a constant *reprise* throughout the text, concerns the *double modality* of identifications that are covered by the extensive (but also problematized) use of the word “leader.” In the case (and the type) of the army, the leader is “real,” or rather he is living and visible, even if the libidinal investment of which he is the object is fantasmatic, and this living reality, which one is tempted to call an incarnation, also colors the tests of love that the members of the military group expect from him, both together and separately (*omnes et singulatim*). In the case (and the type) of the Church (and Freud tells us explicitly that this concerns the Catholic Church), the true “leader,” that is to say, the mystical leader, who is not the pope but Christ, is an “idea,” that is to say, he is imaginary, or more precisely, he is dead, a dead man represented as the carrier of the life of the living, and this modality also colors the fantasmatic modality of the libidinal binding, which implies a sublimation or a desexualization. In sum, what appears above all else is the intrinsic division of the idea of an “object” or a “model” of identifications (Freud uses the term “*Vorbild*”), which may be considered to be a structural characteristic. If we are not speaking of plural *identifications*, which can be ascertained at different levels and in different contexts, at different stages of crystallization and at different degrees of stability (which Freud gives us different examples of in the ensuing part of the text), but rather of *identification* in the singular, as a structure or constitutive mechanism of social life, which has as a correlate the constitution of individual “egos” that are both autonomous and interdependent (as though they had been so from the beginning in the family structure), one can see that identifications require each of the two modalities, both “real” and “ideal,” both of which are inscribed into the field of the fantasy. It is their complementarity that harbors the effectiveness of the binding to which Freud gives the generic name of “group” (*die gegenseitige Bindung der Massenindividuen*).

But by the same token – and this is the second characteristic – Freud's presentation, with its series of examples, entails yet more astonishing elisions. One of these concerns the way that he skips out the fact that groups, or certain groups (the Church rather than the army), are not only founded on a common link of libidinal investment, but are effectively sexuated, constructed on an internal or external use of the difference between the sexes. Freud is astonishingly elusive on this point, which also confers upon it the character of a disavowal in the way that he exhibits the constitutive homosexuality of institutions, which he describes without ever naming them as such. Likewise, he is elusive regarding the fact that the very indications that he speaks about, through the army and the church, are not only identifications with a positive model, but also negative identifications through the rejection and the exclusion of the other, of the enemy, or of the foreign body, in other words through hate and not only through love – at least if we consider that we have a reference, by implication, to this ambivalence in the “impolitical” articulation of the normal and the pathological, which I have already spoken about, which would come to the fore in the phenomena of dissolution, panic, and religious intolerance, and would “normally” remain hidden by the efficacy of a defense mechanism. One can also suggest that all of these questions, even though they are eluded by Freud, are opened up by his analysis, which is tantamount to conferring the potentiality of a work program upon it.

I shall now turn, still in a very schematic way, to a second series of questions, those that I linked to the idea of an *ontology of relation*, or the idea of a specifically Freudian elaboration of the ontology of relation. Clearly it also has to do with an anthropology (which is not “scientific” but philosophical), and if one follows my argumentation, one will say that this anthropology (like that of Hobbes, that of Spinoza, or that of Marx) is political through and through, but what counts for us here

and now is to try to specify its originality in the treatment of categories that are traditionally those of ontology. I will say two things here.

Rapidly (and I regret that this is so) concerning the first: contrary to appearances, Freud's point of view is not “individualistic,” but nor is it “holistic” either. He does not postulate any preexistence, any preeminence of the “all” in relation to individuals (one can even suppose – by coming back yet once more to this *impolitical* face of the political that is represented by the constitutive threat of dissolution, and which has to be averted by a reiterated identification – that Freud provides us with the means to understand what allows for the fantasmatic representation of the *given* “all,” whether this is as a people, a race, or a fraternity, namely the exclusion of the foreign body). But the elements that enter into the construction of the all, or which produce an effect of totalization, are not directly “individuals,” they are the *affects of individuals*, linked to “representations” of what renders them similar or dissimilar, in other words, these are *relations of individuals*, which are given *at the same time as them*, or which simply are as one with them, even if they divide as much as they unite. The society that Freud tells us about is not a composition of individuals; it is a composition of relations – and it is also in this sense that one can read the reiterated affirmations, with an apparently tautological character, which hold that the only force that is able to unite men in a society must belong to the order of a “binding” or of *Eros*. And it is for this – this is the very meaning of the graph – that the relations must be conjugated between them following the schema of a double *mimesis*, functioning at once horizontally (as identifications between subjects with one another, identifications with one's fellow men, or even identifications that project an imaginary similitude) and vertically (although, paradoxically, the graph designed by Freud inscribes this verticality on a horizontal axis), as identification with a “model” (*Vorbild*) that is also

imaginary, whose power of attraction and suggestion induces, through a return effect, the Spaltung of the subject into an *Ich* and an *Idealich*, which are both him and different from him, or better still, as Lacan will say in his commentary (in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*) it is “in you more than you,” and thus is at once the same as you and different from you.

Here I will leave to one side the analogies and the differences that this doubly mimetic articulation, which forms the structure of identification, and in which, in truth, no one aspect precedes any other (even if, for the needs of a theoretical quasi-narrative, *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit* we might say that Freud “generates” the entire structure on the basis of the vertical relation, that is to say, on the basis of *descent*, in every sense of the word, which also allows him to insert the Oedipal scheme into the schema of identification), entails with the classical constructions of the “social contract,” and I will insist on one last consequence. Precisely because it is neither individualistic nor holistic, the Freudian schema opens symmetrically onto the twofold question of modalities of totalization and modalities of individuation, or rather of individualization, because we are not on the biological plane here, but on the plane of the psychical conditions of social autonomization. These two questions are symmetrical, but one is not immediately the inverse of the other. They are inscribed into a typology of effects of structure, which is a typology or variants of *being in relation*, in the way that psychoanalysis enabled them to be interpreted. The tableau for this was provided, very rapidly, but in a complete way, in the final chapter entitled *Nachträge*, which designates all the modalities of this being in relation, and thus of being *tout court* (in the psychical sense of the term), as *Massenbildungen*, as formations of the unconscious (or, says Freud, of the “symptom”) which are “mass” formations. His typology follows an apparently arithmetic formula, and is strongly

evocative of Simmel's descriptions from the previous period, in that it uses the elucidation of “couples” and their modality of “binding” (or their specific *eros*) as the lynchpin of the entire construction. As we know, there are four types of “group”: the “group made up of many” (*zu vielen*), that is to say, formally more than three, but in fact an undefined number of participants whose libido is fixed upon the same object that, for all of them, comes “to the place of the ego ideal.” This is the institutional group that has been composed or is in the process of decomposition. Then there are the “groups of two” (*Masse zu zweit*), whose principle is antithetical: on the one hand there is the love relation, on the other the hypnotic relation, whose dissociation allows for an interpretation of the presence, directly in the functioning of institutions as well as in circumstances of individual existence, of two major principles that correspond at least indirectly to the intrinsic duality of the identificatory “model:” on one side (this is the “love” aspect) there is what Freud calls *the overestimation of the object* (the negation of its faults), and on the other (and this is the “hypnosis” aspect) the *suspension of the judgment of reality*, or better: “delegation” to the other (the “real” leader, hypnotizing the masses, but also the “idea” or “principle”, and therefore ideology, whether it is religious or not) of *reality testing*, which the subject renounces for himself by installing truth in the other.

To come to an end, and this is clearly the most remarkable point, there is what Freud calls the “group of one” (*Masse zu eins?*) (*Einsamkeit*), that is to say, the individual, not as a “given,” but as an *effect* and even, we can see this easily, a random effect, which is intrinsically fragile, of a certain modality of previous relations that “isolates” some from the *others* who carry them.⁵ This idea had been stated at the outset, at the be-

5 In accordance with the needs of the “dynamic” (and not only topographical) use of Freud's typology, this can be represented in two ways. Either by

gining of the text. It reappears at the end in a way that is now “grounded,” but also with a highly significant variant, and which we may consider as the sign of a residual difficulty (or perhaps an undermining difficulty) within the Freudian construction. Because for this isolation, which is itself a phenomenon of relation and a function of the “group,” Freud needs experimental models, even generalized ones, which will bring out their lived modality. The introduction cites, albeit with precaution, Bleuler’s autism, whereas the conclusion refers to the neurosis that is – and this could be said to be the most immediate lesson of psychoanalysis – our common condition. Now, this is really not the same thing! An “autistic” model suggests that the relationship between individuality and the group, through the intermediary of affective relation, is essentially *negative* or even *destructive*. It describes not only a subtraction, but also a wrenching (and first and foremost from language). It obliges us to return to an opposition between the “normal” and the “pathological,” either assigning the pole of the pathological to the individual, or, in a projective fashion, assigning it to society or the institution of which the individual is the victim. But this has the appreciable advantage of suggesting that extreme violence is the immanent possibility of processes of individualization, in so far as they

inscribing four symmetrical cases (since there are two heterogeneous types of “couple”):

Dyadic Love Group	Unary group (solicitude, individual)
Plural Group (crows, institution)	Dyadic hypnotic group

Or by making the dyadic group (which is itself subdivided) the mediation between the extreme poles of the multitude and solitude:

Plural group (Multitude as crowd or institution)	
Dyadic Love group	Dyadic Hypnotic group
Unary group (solicitude, individual)	

are themselves modes of “socialization,” just as it is the immanent possibility of processes of aggregation or of the “group.” In contrast, a “neurotic” model (the one that Freud ultimately favors) suggests not a *positivity* of being in an individualized relation – I do not believe that there has ever been any “positivity” in Freud, in absolute contrast to his successors who were upholders of ego psychology – but an essential ambivalence or “uncertainty” that is affective as well as representative: what I will call here, as I have elsewhere, an *unease of the subject* that is correlative to the “discontent in civilization” itself, or to the discontent in *upbringing*, which is always imposed on the drives by institutions, starting with the family and finishing with the state (unless it is the other way around).

Lastly, if one asks the question, which once again is intrinsically political, as to how to “pass” (and also to *pass back*, because in principle, for all the *citizen subjects* of modern politics that we are, it is a matter of an oscillation or a transformation that is brought about sometimes in one direction, sometimes in the other, and is therefore a new *reversibility*) from this modality of rational existence that is constituted by the multitude or the *being in a group* (with “many” others) to this other, paradoxical, modality that is constituted by autonomization or isolation within a group, or if you want the limit state, the convergence line in relation to the group, to which we attach the idea of “autonomous” individuality, it seems that two major paths of interpretation open up. And in a certain way they bring into conflict, within Freud’s text, two developments that constitute respectively its *conclusion* and its *retroactive effect* (which means that in fact they divide its conclusion and give it variance).

One of these is *regression*, which gives rise (in fact in the last three chapters of *Massen*) to the “return” of *Totem and Taboo* within the setting of the theory of identification, less as an anthropological origin as a mechanism of the drive. This is

centered on the idea that the constitution of crowds (including, especially, “normalized” crowds such as institutions, and in particular state institutions) “repeats” an archaic scenario that constitutes, precisely, its unconscious dimension. We may note that this hypothesis strongly accentuates *hypnosis* as a model for the relationship of dependence between the ego of subjects and their common “ego ideal,” doubtless because, in the description that Freud gives of it at this moment, the hypnotic subjection (which he characterizes, differentiating himself from Le Bon, not only as a “voluntary servitude,” but as producing a veritable “thirst for obedience,” *Durst nach Unterwerfung*), though it does not belong to the order of *hate*, nevertheless belongs to the order of *fear*, and fear does not seem to sit well with love – we might say that it is more “castrating” than love. But correlatively, it also emphasizes the problem of equality between subjects, whose model is again that of the “demand for equality” (*Gleichheitsforderung*) between the “brothers” of the primal horde. Thus, one can think that, for Freud, following this hypothesis, while “institutions” are not primitive hordes (even though they can always become so once more, following the “degenerative” correlate of evolutionary schemes), they are at least a secondary elaboration of the original fantasy, in which – at the cost of an isolation that can be painful – equality between individuals is acquired through the desexualization of the death drive or the sublimation of its violent and destructive components. This is how the city-state “manages” the permanent contradiction between authority and anarchy, and represses (more or less completely) the violence that constitutes it. There can be no doubt that this schema of Freud’s is, in many respects, a conservative scheme.⁶

6 And I think that this should also be related with Freud’s position in relation to communism (which at the time some of his disciples were very close to, in particular Ferenczi), and which he saw as a radical equality, without really distinguishing it from an anarchy.

The other path – which could be termed the repressive hypothesis – was only to be fully explicated in the next book, *Das Ich und das Es* (1923), where there is an introduction of the hypothesis of the “Superego” as a doubling of the “Ego Ideal” which is at the same time a limit case, and where, doubtless not by chance, as I was reminding you earlier, there is no reference whatsoever to *Totem and Taboo* (nor is there, in fact, any reference to an evolutionist argumentation, but only to a recourse to the *individual history* of subjects). This is the hypothesis of an individualization through neurosis, in so far as it installs the “ego” in the uncomfortable space in-between the pressures that the drives and the superego exert upon him, thus in the alternative between a *repression* and a *transgression*. But is not this path already present, between the lines, or as a question, in the way that *Massen* “filled” the fourth of these “cases” with a paradoxical *Massenbildung* that would be universal neurosis? We know that this path (which will find its full development after the drafting of *Massen*, in part thanks to Kelsen’s objections which reproached Freud for having failed to recognize the specific type of the legal constraint: *Rechtsordnung als Zwangsordnung*) is not founded so much on the desire for subjection or voluntary servitude, as on guilt as a *need or demand for limitless punishment (Strafbedürfnis)*⁷. The question of equality has perhaps not been eliminated here, but it is clearly subordinate to that of *singularity*. Because, in a singular fashion, each individual (that is to say, each neurotic) is called upon to “manage” or “negotiate” their unconscious guilt, which stems from a history (or a childhood) that cannot be reduced to any other, in the course of which he interiorized the repressive injunctions of the law and the institution, even

7 See my essay “Freud et Kelsen 1922: l’invention du Surmoi,” in *Citoyen Sujet et autres essais d’anthropologie philosophique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011.

if the principle is the same for all. Without doubt, there is no less violence in the repressive hypothesis than in the regressive hypothesis, but its vector is not oriented in the same direction. Perhaps we might suggest at the end of the day that Freud resorts more to the regressive hypothesis in order to explain how individuals abandon their autonomy by grounding themselves in institutions and in groups, whereas he resorts more to the repressive hypothesis to explain how they become autonomous in relation to the group in order to gain access to "solitude" (*Einsamkeit*: literally "to be each time one," or "each time to be just oneself alone"). And perhaps one can even add that what is at work in each of these processes is always the death drive, even though it is not the case for its components. Nothing of all this is very "optimistic," nor even very "progressive," even though there is a difference between *overturning the idea of progress* (progress as regression) and demonstrating its *ambivalence* (progress as discontent).⁸

8 Georges Canguilhem, "La décadence de l'idée de progress," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 4 (1987).

A Philosophical Approach to the Political Crises of Our Time¹

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¹ The first version of the paper was published in the journal *Discusiones Filosóficas de la Universidad de Caldas*, available at: [http://190.15.17.25/discusionesfilosoficas/downloads/Discusiones22\(38\)_2.pdf](http://190.15.17.25/discusionesfilosoficas/downloads/Discusiones22(38)_2.pdf).

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic came as a surprise and triggered changes in the structure of our world. Many of the prevailing logics, typical of the neoliberal capitalist model, were undoubtedly confronted by the force of nature. Regarding this dilemma, it is worth mentioning that this phenomenon, in its totality, is provoked by a virus from nature, and it has an effect on the very entrails of nature's constitution and variables. It should be no surprise that nature in the 21st century has become deeply altered, mutated, and transformed by late capitalism and globalization. And the great ambitions of power, control, and progress end up affecting life itself.

The thesis of Pavón-Cuellar (2021) is that the pandemic virus is driven by the virus of capital, the latter being even more deadly and has been threatening the species, nature, fertile land, and the future. The neoliberal capitalist project has since the 1990s been gaining ground, consolidating itself, and brought us closer and closer to the end of the world.²

One of the phrases that quickly went around the world in the context of the Chilean revolt of October 18, 2019, was written on a mural in the city of Santiago by protesters: "Another end of the world is possible." This phrase did not encrypt what in an extremely short time gap would happen: the virus. The pandemic ended up exhibiting and at the same time producing a modification to the underlying logics in which everything was dragged along by capitalism.

² D. Pavón-Cuellar, *The Virus of Capital*, 2021, manuscript: "Perhaps the most transformative, the most revolutionary, is to use the pandemic to turn to ourselves and remind ourselves: to remember what we are, to rediscover that we are more than ourselves; that it is not my life but ours that matters, and that only together we will become all that we are, what we have not wanted to be, what we are constantly immolating to capital, with its logic of accumulation and devastation."

As an effect of the process and the evolution of the pandemic, the priorities of governments, the social differences of ethnicity,³ gender,⁴ the inequity that is increased in the regions of Latin America⁵ and Africa,⁶ and the scarcity of social justice;⁷ in short, many of the pre-existing gaps were increased. It is from this complex pandemic scenario that the false image of “Universality,”⁸ produced by the propagation and persistence

3 W.F. Marshall, “Why Are People of Color More at Risk of Coronavirus Complications?” *Mayo Clinic* (2020), internet: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/expert-answers/coronavirus-infection-by-race/faq-20488802>; Shirley Sze, et al., “Ethnicity and Clinical Outcomes in COVID-19: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *eClinicalMedicine* 29 (2020), internet: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370\(20\)30374-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370(20)30374-6/fulltext).

4 J. Woulfe and M. Wald, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Transgender and Non-Binary Community,” *Columbia Psychiatry* (2020), internet: <https://www.columbiapsychiatry.org/news/impact-covid-19-pandemic-transgender-and-non-binary-community>; W.H. Chang, “Understanding the COVID-19 Pandemic from a Gender Perspective,” *Taiwanese Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology* 59 (2020): 801-807; P. Chauhan, “Gendering COVID-19: Impact of the Pandemic on Women’s Burden of Unpaid Work in India,” *Gender Issues* 38 (2021): 395-419; D.A. D’Annibale, et al., “Viewing the COVID-19 Pandemic Through a Sex and Gender Lens,” *Journal of Women’s Health* 30, No. 4 (2021), internet: <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/jwh.2020.8847>; F.M. Estrela, et al., “Covid-19 Pandemic: Reflecting Vulnerabilities in the Light of Gender, Race and Class,” *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* 25, No. 9 (2020): 3431-3436.

5 According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) we found that the hit in *Latin American* economies corresponded to -8.1%, recovered from: <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/publication/global-economic-prospects>.

6 Pavón-Cuellar, *The Virus*, manuscript.

7 A. Sánchez-Vidal, “Empoderamiento, liberación y desarrollo humano,” *Psychosocial Intervention* 26, No. 3 (2007): 155-163.

8 L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, London: NLB, 1971; Judith Butler,

of the virus, propitiated the ideological veil to collapse.⁹ The pre-ideologica¹⁰ conditions and the political disavowal after their collision activated new “processes of ideologization”¹¹ and new forms of ideology, of which it only remains to wait for their outcome: the proposal is to de-globalize the pandemic in order to subjectivize the phenomenon and confront it according to the material and non-material needs of each geographical space.

At the same time, we can find in the history of humanity similar events that invite us to look at the event of the COVID-19 pandemic as a mere repetition of what capital needs for its expansion and proliferation. For example, the well-known Black Death, “despite the centuries that have passed since then, is still recent and weighs in our imaginary, because it was by far the most deadly of the pandemics suffered by the European population, which, under its scourge and in less than a decade (from 1346 to 1355, approximately) was cut in half”;¹² societies, after overcoming that historical crisis, began to articulate a false illusion of omnipotence that again falls again with the arrival of COVID-19.¹³

Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, London: Verso, 2010; Jorge Larraín, *The Concept of Ideology*, London: LOM, 1979.

9 We will understand ideology for the framework of this work as Terry Eagleton points out, we quote: “the term ideology, in other words, seems to refer not only to belief systems but to matters of power,” T. Eagleton, *Ideología: Una introducción*, Barcelona: Paidós, 1993, 24.

10 S. Žižek, *Sublime objeto de la ideología*, Buenos Aires: Siglo, 2003.

11 I. Ellacuría, *Ideología e inteligencia*. San Salvador: UCA Editores. 2009.

12 J. Juaristi, “La Peste Negra y sus secuelas en la historia y en la cultura,” *Cuaderno de Cultura* (2020), 98-99, internet: <https://www.revistas culturales.com/xrevistas/PDF/103/2083.pdf>.

13 Here the notion of ideology is, according to Žižek, “not to offer us a

We cannot affirm that nothing has been learned from the plagues and viruses that throughout the last century, such as influenza, Ebola, AIDS, cancer, have attacked and disrupted daily life, indeed there have been changes: improvements in health policies, increase of structures in charge of socio-cultural problems, scientific advances focused on health, and immunity. However, we are back to where we started, a return to the point of origin is what has been happening since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, a return that does not ensure the future, it only manages to incorporate the crisis signifier in A world equation that composes A formula for approaching the end of the world or A new end of the world.¹⁴

Another fact to consider is that the rapid proliferation of the virus, in part, was driven by the same advances of the time, and, in this sense, we are only living and feeling what it is to be in our time, rethinking what it is like to live in the midst of the effects of capitalism: inevitably we are immersed in the weight of what is the construction of history in the present time.

Althusser, with his concept of “Geschichte” does not provide a starting point for questioning the viewpoints and perspectives from which we can observe reality or the realities that are active. Through the notion of the late Althusser it is

vanishing point from our reality, but to offer us social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real core (...) An ideology 'takes hold of us' really only when - we feel no opposition between it and reality - namely, when ideology manages to determine the mode of our everyday experience of reality,” Žižek, *Sublime*, 76-77.

14 According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) we find ourselves “in an unprecedented situation in which a global pandemic has turned into an economic and financial crisis. Given the sudden disruption of economic activity, global output will contract in 2020,” “Declaración conjunta del Presidente del Comité Monetario y Financiero Internacional y la Directora Gerente del Fondo Monetario Internacional,” *Comunicado de prensa* 20, No. 14 (2020), internet: <https://www.imf.org/es/News/Articles/2020/03/27/pr20114-joint-statement-by-the-chair-of-imfc-and-the-managing-director-of-the-imf>.

possible to find a type of history that is random, far from repetition and the endless return that produces a becoming reduced by the same return. Perhaps, the socio-political, health and global dilemma unfolded and evidenced with the pandemic of the 21st century produces, after this tiredness of repetition, a new chapter that is reworked and a different opening emerges from the spontaneous, the uncontrolled and the predetermined, and that is what makes a fissure appear in the co-construction of the reality(ies) of capital, the model and history itself have perpetuated.

2. Reloading a New Repetition

COVID-19 fatigue now extends even to theory: since the beginning of 2021, it is usual to be tired of writing and reading newer and newer commentaries on the pandemic: the same situation is dragging on and on. This weariness even extends to trying to make the same point over and over again.¹⁵ The paradoxical thing here is that, although obeying repetitive and stable habits is supposed to make life tiresome, what we are tired of these days is precisely the absence of those stable habits: we are tired of living in a permanent state of exception, waiting for new regulations from the State to tell us how to interact, unable to relax in our daily lives.

15 “In the Pandemic, the sale of this type of smart phones, computers, tablets, in short, all the wide range of offers and models increased significantly. Locked up in our homes, without much to do, and without other options, the telephone helped us to ‘feel connected,’ to feel accompanied, to try to repair the fissure of our daily life; however, thanks to this, the wealth of many increased, the illusion of freedom must have vanished when the symptoms of stress in the western population unfolded to infinite levels, the cell phone or the computer do not represent a form of distraction, rest or enjoyment,” N. Barria-Asenjo, paper prepared in the framework of the book launch of *The Virus of Capital* by D. Pavón-Cuellar in 2021.

Rainer Paris, among many others, published on the topic; in September 2020, "Die Zerstörung des Alltags," an essay in which he deplores the ongoing destruction of everyday life, appeared. He claims that the pandemic poses a threat to the routines that hold a society together.¹⁶

In this connection, the American producer Sam Goldwyn, after being informed that critics complain that there are too many old clichés in his films, wrote a memo to his scenario department: "We need more new clichés!" He was right, and this is our most difficult task today: to create "new clichés" for everyday life. There are, of course, great cultural differences in the workings of this fatigue.

Byung-Chul Han is right when he points out that Covid fatigue is much greater in Western developed societies because subjects live there more than elsewhere under the pressure of the compulsion to achieve:

The compulsion to achieve to which we subject ourselves [...] accompanies us during leisure time, torments us even in our sleep, and often leads to sleepless nights. It is not possible to recover from the compulsion to achieve. It is this internal pressure, specifically, that makes us tired. [...] The rise of egotism, atomization, and narcissism in society is a global phenomenon. Social media turns all of us into producers, entrepreneurs whose selves are the businesses. It globalizes the ego culture that erodes community, erodes anything social. We produce ourselves and put ourselves on permanent display. This self-production, this ongoing "being-on-display" of the ego, makes us tired and depressed. [...] Fundamental tiredness is ultimately

16 R. Paris, "Die Zerstörung des Alltags," *Die Welt* (2020), internet: <https://www.welt.de/kultur/plus216264982/Corona-Die-Zerstoeerung-des-Alltags.html>.

a kind of ego tiredness. The home office intensifies it by entangling us even deeper in our selves. Other people, who could distract us from our ego, are missing. [...] An absence of ritual is another reason for the tiredness induced by the home office. In the name of flexibility, we are losing the fixed temporal structures and architectures that stabilize and invigorate life.¹⁷

One would have thought that if depressive tiredness is caused by the way we are all the time self-exposing in late capitalism, then the pandemic lockdown should make things easier (since we are much more time socially isolated, we experience less pressure to perform for others). Unfortunately, the effect is almost the opposite one: our business and social contacts are to a large extent transferred onto Zoom and other social media where we play the game of self-exposing even more intensely, attentive of how we will appear there, while the space for socializing where we can relax and are can escape the pressure to exhibit is largely eliminated. The paradox is thus that, with the pandemic, the continuous being-on-display is even strengthened by lockdown and homework: one shines with energy on Zoom, one sits tired alone at home...

So, we can clearly see how even such an elementary feeling like tiredness is ultimately caused by ideology, by the game of self-exposing which is part of our everyday ideology. Mladen Dolar designated our predicament with the term borrowed from Walter Benjamin, *Dialektik im Stillstand*: dialectic at standstill, but also in suspense, awaiting anxiously that things will begin to move, that the New will explode. However, the feeling of standstill, the numbness and growing unresponsiveness which lead more and more people to ignore news and to

17 Byung-Chul Han, "The Tiredness Virus," *The Nation* (Apr 12, 2021), internet: <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/pandemic-burnout-society/>

stop even caring about the future, is very deceptive: it masks the fact that we are within an unprecedented social change. Since the rise of the pandemic, the global capitalist order has changed immensely, the big break that we are anxiously awaiting is already going on.

3. COVID-19 and the Capitalocene

The global health crisis provoked by the pandemic has opened up a wide spectrum of political discussions, which transcend the debate of the now classic dispute between left versus right or capitalism versus socialism. The discussion has now been placed into a broader field that would encompass all aspects of our existence (culture, politics, economy, health situation, environment, etc.) as a species. In other words, the pandemic crisis of COVID-19 forces us to focus on the balance between *zôê* and *bios*.¹⁸ At stake, the zero point of the construction of any political and social project to come. What is at stake are no longer the great maneuvers of struggle for the destructuring (and even eventual destruction) of the capitalist economic project (accompanied by political neoliberalism), but it must be observed how to construct a change in politics and economics that takes into account, on the one hand, "life as such or natural life" (*zôê*) of all that makes up the set of species that inhabit the planet and, on the other hand, the "human way of life" on which rests the possibility of existence of any political community, a *bios politiko*.

18 "Les Grecs ne disposaient pas d'un terme unique pour exprimer ce que nous entendons par le mot vie. Ils se servaient de deux mots [...]: *zôê*, qui exprimait le simple fait de vivre, commun à tous les êtres vivants (animaux, hommes ou dieux), et *bios*, qui indiquait la forme ou la façon de vivre propre à un individu ou à un groupe," G. Agamben, *Homo sacer*, vol. I, *Le Pouvoir souverain et el vie nue*, Paris: Seuil, 1997, 9.

Is it worth asking how this shift in interest from the human or nature occurs, and why now? However, the question of life and the place it occupies in the spaces of political dispute has always been present, although placed in the background. Thus, for example, we could suppose that the demand for social and economic rights presupposes - in an indirect way - the demand for the equal sustainability of the "human way of life" for all the subjects of the species, regardless of the geographical spatiality in which they are located (countries of the North or of the South; developed or developing countries). A different thing happens with "life as such," which has been left in the background.

The non-equivalence, in terms of value, of animal and plant species with the human species has been a constant in the history of ideas and sciences. Modernity as heir to this tradition ended up potentializing the hierarchy between life and human forms through the distinction between culture/nature or human/non-human.¹⁹ In this way, human life was placed at the center of the debate on politics, generating an anthropocentrism in the various analyses and proposals around politics.

The reason for this renewed interest in the ecosystem and its relationship with capital and the state (legal order) is (re) updated with the COVID-19, the world-system theory (Wallerstein), social and environmental history that highlight the fact that economic and social dominations must think about the place of the Human in the scale of the planetary ecosystem.

This has been the debate that has been agitating in a semi-underground way the theoretical disputes of the last 20 years.²⁰ The works of several authors such as Bruno Latour or

19 B. Latour, *Où atterrir?*, Paris: La Découverte, 2017.

20 While the Western world was entering a new cycle of international war tensions, marked by the "fight against terrorism" after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the US was entering a new cycle of international war tensions,

Naomi Klein,²¹ have placed the climate issue at the heart of the debate as the heart of a global geopolitical dispute, in which what would be at stake are no longer international markets; value chains in production or capital. What is in dispute is the capacity to ensure a terrestrial space for the human species itself; what is in dispute is our very existence as a species.

For Latour, this situation has substantially transformed the terms of the debate, thus the very vision of the future and of progress have been modified:

We have moved from a temporal version to a spatial version. In the progressive tradition, the future had no space. From now on, any temporal projection is superseded by the fact that we must also define the space in which we will have a future. This changes the game, and the ideas of progress, emancipation, hope.²²

Indeed, for Latour, the question of the future and/or progress now necessarily passes through the question of the Anthropocene, that is, the impact that invasive human activity has generated on the planet's ecosystems, to the point of being seen as a destructive force on a geological scale. The human footprint has ended up generating a geological epoch in

marked by the "fight against terrorism" after the 9/11 attacks in the United States.

21 Latour, *Où atterrir?*; B. Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: essai d'anthropologie asymétrique*, Paris: La Découverte, 1991; N. Klein, *La stratégie du choc*, Paris: Actes Sud, 2008; N. Klein, *Plan B pour la planète. Le New Deal vert*, Paris: Actes Sud, 2019.

22 "Nous sommes passés d'une version temporelle à une version spatiale. Dans la tradition progressiste, le futur était sans espace. Désormais, toute projection temporelle est rattrapée par le fait qu'il faut, aussi, définir l'espace dans lequel nous aurons un futur. Cela change la donne, et les idées de progrès, d'émancipation, d'espoir," Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, 16.

the history of the planet.²³ The understanding of this negative impact of the human species has produced a field of debate within which it is sought to determine – on a timeline – from what moment the presence (footprint) of human life becomes a threat to the planet itself.²⁴ In this context, the notion of capitalocene appears²⁵ from which it seeks to specify that the cause of the climate disaster that threatens the planet's biosphere is the result of the capitalist mode of production and neoliberal policies. This is how French historian Christophe Bonneuil explains it:

If the trigger point of the Anthropocene is still the subject of debate (The conquest and ethnocide of America? The industrial revolution and the birth of fossil capitalism? The atomic bomb and the "great acceleration" of the post-1945 era...), it is now widely recognized that what we are experiencing, much more than an "environmental crisis," constitutes a geological change and a new human condition [...] the Anthropocene was an Occidentalocene! In 1950, North America and Western Europe had Europe had emitted almost 3/4 of the greenhouse gases since 1750. While the human population has multiplied by ten in

23 W. Steffen, K. Richardson, J. Rockström, S. Cornell, I. Fetzer, E. Bennett, R. Biggs, S. Carpenter, W. de Vries, C. de Wit, C. Folke, D. Gerten, J. Heinke, G. Mace, L. Persson, V. Ramanathan, B. Reyers, and S. Sörlin, "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet," *Science* 347, No. 6223 (2015), internet: <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/1259855>.

24 O. Gonzalo, "La 'gran aceleración' en la actividad humana se inició en 1950," *Gestión Digital*, No. 254 (2015), internet: <https://revistagestion.ec/analisis-investigacion/la-gran-aceleracion-en-la-actividad-humana-se-inicio-en-1950>.

25 J. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, Oakland: PM Press, 2016; C. Bonneuil and J.P. Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, New York: Verso, 2017.

the last three centuries, the capital has multiplied by 134 between 1700 and 2008.²⁶

For Bonneuil, climate disruption and the threat of the so-called sixth extinction²⁷ are first and foremost the result of a logic of organization of economic production in the service of the self-styled modern Western world, in which an idea of technical progress, whose centrality in a logic of accumulation of capital, of goods, of means of exploitation of nature and of the human,²⁸ is abounding. In other words, the "great acceleration" (the geological, morphological and climatic modifications on the main ecosystems of the planet) must be seen in the light of historical-economic events. The industrial revolution of the 19th century, followed by globalized capitalism and neoliberalism²⁹ are events that have been shaping not only the forms of production and accumulation, but also the power relations around life itself.³⁰

26 Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock*, 53-54: "Si le point de déclenchement de l'Anthropocène reste discuté (la conquête et l'ethnocide de l'Amérique? La révolution industrielle et la naissance du capitalisme fossile? La bombe atomique et la 'grande accélération' d'après 1945?), le constat est désormais partagé que ce que nous vivons, bien plus qu'une 'crise environnementale,' constitue un basculement géologique en même temps qu'une nouvelle condition humaine [...] l'Anthropocène fut un Occidentalocène! En 1950, l'Amérique du Nord et l'Europe de l'Ouest avaient émis près des 3/4 des gaz à effet de serre depuis 1750. Si la population humaine a grimpé d'un facteur dix depuis trois siècles, le capital s'est accru d'un facteur 134 entre 1700 et 2008."

27 "Léxico del Antropoceno," *UNESCO* (2018), internet: <https://es.unesco.org/courier/2018-2/lexico-del-antropoceno>.

28 Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock*, 53-54.

29 P. Bourdieu, "Le néo-libéralisme, utopie (en voie de réalisation) d'une exploitation sans limites," in *Contra-feux*, Paris: Raison d'agir, 1998.

30 R. Esposito Roberto, *Immunitas. Protection et négation de la vie*, Paris:

A new reading of the notions of capital, development, production, exchange and accumulation seems to be imposed on those who attest to the existence of this Capitalocene and Occidentalocene. Thus, for example, Bonneuil is indispensable for a new vision of the very notion of inequality. In the context of the Capitalocene, inequality should not only be measured in terms of wealth distribution but also in terms of the "ecological and historical debt" of Western industrial countries (North America, Western Europe) towards developing countries. It is a question of taking into account the system of world-ecologies. The idea would be that in the face of the climate threat, all the exchanges that have a major impact on the fragile ecosystem that guarantees the bios must be observed:

While the Marxist notion of unequal exchange was concerned with a degradation of exchange relations between the periphery and the center measured in terms of quantity of labor, that of "unequal ecological exchange" explores the asymmetry that occurs when peripheral or dominated territories of the world economic system export products with a high ecological use value in exchange for products that have a lower ecological use value or even generate pollution. This ecological value can be measured in terms of the hectares needed to produce various goods and services, using the indicator "ecological footprint."³¹

Bonneuil's position joins that of other authors from the global South who have been demanding a new reading of development, for example Arturo Escobar, in his work "The Invention of the Third World" (2007), questions the vision

Seuil coll. L'ordre philosophique, 2021.

31 Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock*, 55.

of development based on the triad of Technology, Science and Capital, as engines of any possibility of social progress. This vision of neoliberal development that has been imposed (through discursive representation regimes such as “good development”) must give way to a new phase for the struggles for global biodiversity from the territories.³² It becomes urgent to overcome the characteristic features of the advanced societies of the time: high levels of industrialization and urbanization, the technification of agriculture, rapid growth of material production and living standards, and widespread adoption of modern education and cultural values.

For Escobar, classical Marxism focused its interest on the exploitation of humanity, on surplus value, on the accumulation of capital. Leaving aside the problem of the capitalization of nature, today it is urgent that contemporaneous Marxism turns its eyes to this great oblivion. From these notions we bet on a holistic critique of capitalism and neoliberalism, which tends to a renewed alternative and that elevates us above the debate Capitalism versus Communism.³³

For if, as the French philosopher Barbara Steigler (2020) suggests when referring to COVID-19 that “evidently, this is

32 “Struggles against poverty and exploitation can be ecological struggles insofar as the poor try to keep natural resources under community rather than market control, to control and resist the monetary valorization of nature,” A. Escobar, *La invención del Tercer Mundo*, Caracas: Fundación Editorial el perro y la rana, 2007, 337.

33 To go deeper, see S. Žižek, “Coronavirus es un golpe al capitalismo al estilo de ‘Kill Bill’ y podría conducir a la reinención del comunismo,” *Sopa de Wuhan* (Mar 2020), 21-28, originally published with *Russia Today* (Feb 27, 2020): “perhaps another ideological virus, and a much more beneficial one, will spread and hopefully infect us: the virus of thinking of an alternative society, a society beyond the nation-state, a society that actualizes itself in the forms of solidarity and global cooperation” (22).

an exceptionally serious phenomenon because, beyond the viral attack, the progression of the disease is linked to social inequalities and the ecological crisis. The continuous increase in chronic diseases makes populations more vulnerable to aggravated health risks.”³⁴ The pandemic, with its rapid spread and its lethal consequences, is first and foremost the expression of a syndemic. That is, the convergence of an epidemiological factor (in this case COVID-19) and a set of unfavorable socioeconomic circumstances that have affected several vulnerable groups in terms of health and access to quality medical services.³⁵ The great challenge is to establish a new critique that returns to neoliberalism to fracture its tentacles of biopower, its “founding violences” in the economy, institutions, law and governance,³⁶ including the ecosystem-world and thus precede the new fascisms that would seek to re-domesticate, re-conduct society to order, using the category of Pandemic as a strategy of control of the social body, legitimizing states of exception to come, characterized by disjunctions: health/freedom or life/democracy.

34 “En clair, il s’agirait d’un phénomène d’une gravité exceptionnelle car, par-delà l’attaque virale, la progression de la maladie serait liée aux inégalités sociales et à la crise écologique. L’augmentation continue des maladies chroniques fragilisant les populations face à des risques sanitaires aggravés” (translation ours), these statements were given by Steigler to the newspaper *Le Monde* in P-J. Catinchi, “De la démocratie en pandémie” de Barbara Stiegler : quand le Covid-19 change les règles du jeu” (2021), internet: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/02/03/de-la-democratie-en-pandemie-de-barbara-stiegler-quand-le-covid-19-change-les-regles-du-jeu_6068583_3232.html.

35 A. Montes, *Del antropoceno a la pandemia como ideología*, Colombia: Revista Hodos, 2021.

36 M. Lazzarato, *El capitalismo odia a todo el mundo, Fascismo o revolución*, Honduras: Eterna Cadencia Editorial, 2020.

4. By Way of Closing

Undoubtedly, we are facing one of the most complex pages of global society in the last century. Not since the Second World War and its end in 1945 has there been a scenario of such misery in different corners of the globe. Of course, we are not going to compare the 70 to 83 million deaths caused by World War II with the 3 million deaths caused by COVID-19, but the pandemic has wreaked havoc at all levels of our societies. The poorest segments of the population cannot afford to stay at home and must continue to work. The policy implication is that social protection measures in the form of food or cash transfers must be complementary to physical distancing measures.³⁷ In turn, the pandemic revealed that poverty is more strongly impacted by external-situational and less by internal-dispositional causes. In this sense, the ease with which the financial security of working-class individuals can be destabilized by factors beyond personal control.³⁸

The relations of production change in each territory and it is sufficient to demonstrate that this principle retains its validity when applied to the various classes. With the pandemic, certain productive functions have disappeared or are relegated to second place, other functions have been created, etc. In this way, a constant and progressive regrouping of classes has changed social forms and relations, since the physical distancing is accompanied by a social distancing that has been encapsulated from the ontological foundation of digital cap-

37 O. Bargain and U. Aminjonov, "Poverty and COVID-19 in Africa and Latin America," *World Development* 142 (2021), internet: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33612919/>.

38 D. Wiwad, B. Mercier, P.K. Piff, A. Shariff, and L.B. Aknin, "Recognizing the Impact of COVID-19 on the Poor Alters Attitudes Towards Poverty and Inequality," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (in press).

italism when it enables pseudo-approaches with an ephemeral character, causing distances by having less and less time available, which is paradoxical with the amount of hours we spend connected, in the face of which a situation of frank conflict or incomplete harmony prevails. Therefore, class psychology is determined by the totality of the living conditions of each class and in many spaces there is a psychology of weariness and disgust with life.

In the past, hunger strikes in tsarist prisons were acts of class struggle, of protest in order to fan the flame of a conflict, as a symbol of solidarity.³⁹ Today, the pandemic has dynamited a regrouping of forces. Social psychology emerges to be a kind of storehouse for ideology. The ideology of the struggle in the pandemic crystallizes in a program, in a system of demands such as the social struggle for the recovery in Chile of the money appropriated and stagnated in a system of forced savings by the Pension Fund Insurers created in 1980 (AFP). The vast majority of people receive pensions of approximately 210 US dollars, while the armed forces and their families receive larger amounts. Due to the economic difficulties caused by the Pandemic, the political party Federación Regionalista Verde Social began the political struggle to achieve the first withdrawal of 10% of the workers' money, but the second and third withdrawals would not have been possible without the struggle of non-governmental and social organizations. Sartre expressed it very well in *Materialism and Revolution*, when he argued that the members of the ruling class are (were) convinced that the oppressed classes are (were) part of nature, for the sacred humanity and therefore, they should not command. In this case, the major economic groups have developed an extraordinarily secure business for their businesses, at the cost of paltry pensions for the people who have been oppressed for years.

39 N. Bujarin, *El materialismo histórico*, Madrid: Editorial Cenit, 1933, 260

However, it is not enough to be oppressed to be revolutionary. Sartre reminds us that the Canuts of Lyon, the workers of the June 1848 days, were not revolutionaries but revolters, since they fought for an improvement in the conditions of their lot but not for its radical transformation.⁴⁰

In this analysis, it is important to add the role of philosophy in order to safeguard ethnic (social) justice and to go against governmental hegemony.⁴¹ The ideology of philosophy is to get to the root causes and the ultimate reason for the pandemic is our relentless destruction of nature and even ruthless exploitation of animals.⁴² Philosophy has a relevant role in modifying the existing conditions and as self-consciousness of the *zeitgeist*,⁴³ it presents its belief systems and to be revolutionary it must make explicit a critical thought that, when linked to action, becomes militant and allows the development of the consciousness of the people in the social structure and enables the *bios politiko* to take off, leading to a more natural coexistence of the *zôê*.

The time has come to conclude this chapter. We have already said it at the beginning: the pandemic has evidenced new processes of ideologization and although certain tendencies exist, it is necessary to de-globalize and subjectivize the phenomenon to be analyzed according to the needs of each territory. Since the first part of 2020, there has been a wors-

ening of the inequality that plagues our nations and while the pandemic continues its course, the most dispossessed continue to be the most affected. The management of the pandemic should seek new ways of solidarity, of collaboration to speak of a new “empowerment process” to found a new balance of the social body, not only on an economic basis, but on a revolutionary, conscious and solidary psychology, where a history of harmoniously constituted societies can begin.

40 J.P. Sartre, *Materialismo y revolución*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Dedalo, 1960.

41 E.P. Ziarek, “Triple Pandemics: COVID-19, Anti-Black Violence, and Digital Capitalism,” *Philosophy Today* 64, No. 4 (2020), 925-930.

42 J. Oksala, “Philosophy in a Time of Pandemic,” *Philosophy Today* 64, No. 4 (2020): 895-899.

43 German expression meaning “the spirit (*Geist*) of a time (*Zeit*).” It refers to the intellectual and cultural climate of an era.

Displacing the State of Nature: A Disagreement with Graeber and Wengrow¹

GRAHAM HARMAN

¹ The first version of this work was prepared for the Special Dossier edited by Slavoj Žižek and Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, in the framework of a *Bajo Palabra* journal project of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2023).

David Graeber and David Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything* was already one of the most anticipated books of recent years, and public interest only increased with Graeber's unexpected death in 2020.² The subtitle of the book, *A New History of Humanity*, rings with the sort of ambition that the reading public loves, even in an era that likes to imagine that heroic aspirations are somehow outdated. Although rich in examples and specific claims, the argument of this 526-page work is nonetheless fairly simple. Namely, the authors want us to consider alternatives to the pillar of modern political theory: the notion that humans in the so-called state of nature are either good or evil, with vastly different conceptions of the role of government resulting from the choice one makes between these competing narratives (2 ff.). The "good" version of the state of the nature is the one promulgated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and through him the work of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and most other figures on the modern Left.³ As Graeber and Wengrow summarize this view: "Once upon a time, the story goes, we were hunter-gatherers, living in a prolonged state of childlike innocence, in tiny bands" (2). Through the intervention of agriculture and metallurgy, motivated in part by excessive population growth, this primitive idyll was destroyed. What followed was a process of urbanization and specialization that led in turn to "almost everything bad in human life: patriarchy, standing armies, mass executions and annoying bureaucrats demanding that we spend much of our life filling in forms" (2). As Graeber and Wengrow note, popular writing

² Graeber, David and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2021. In the present article all page numbers in parentheses refer to this book.

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, translated by D. Cress, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by R. Tucker, New York: Norton, 1978.

is saturated with this Rousseauian outlook, as in the frequently encountered proclamations that pre-civilized humans lived in small groups of hunter-gatherers, or that everything was ruined by agriculture.

Unfortunately, those who oppose this outlook too often assert the opposite error, the “evil” vision of the state of nature: “if not Rousseau, then Thomas Hobbes” (2). In the Hobbesian vision, humans are wild and bloody beasts: murderers, thieves, and rapists to the core.⁴ The only reason we have been able to surpass this awful human nature is “largely due to exactly those repressive mechanisms that Rousseau was complaining about: governments, courts, bureaucrats, police” (3). In one respect Hobbes can actually be viewed as the founder of liberalism, given that he seeks to depoliticize the interior of society and reserve to the sovereign the right to combat other nations in an international version of the state of nature. But his vision of human nature can be linked with the modern Right just as easily as Rousseau can be associated with the Left. If humans are naturally vicious and licentious predators, this might suggest that we need to be fierce with our enemies, ruthless in our treatment of criminals, cohesive in our patriotic and religious ceremonies, and strict in our sexual mores. Along with Hobbes we might also add such thinkers as Niccolò Machiavelli and Carl Schmitt.⁵ In Schmitt’s words, for instance: “One could test all theories of state and political ideas according to their anthropology and thereby classify these as to whether they consciously or unconsciously presuppose man to be by nature evil or by nature good [... by their] answer to the question whether man is a dangerous being or not, a risky or a harmless

4 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

5 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Second Edition, translated by R. Adams, New York: Norton, 1992; Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, translated by G. Schwab, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

creature.”⁶ The typical right-wing decision on this issue is obviously the former. Humans are inherently dangerous for other humans, and must be held in line by strict, even violent means.

Graeber and Wengrow reject both alternatives, on the grounds that the theories of Rousseau and Hobbes “1. simply aren’t true; 2. have dire political implications; 3. make the past needlessly dull” (3). Initially, the first two of these reasons might seem the most serious and hence the most worthy of our attention: after all, what could be more important than truth and politics? But in many ways the third point is the key to Graeber and Wengrow’s book: they are bored with the standard narratives of modern political theory, and offer enough surprises to provide the reader with as much entertainment as enlightenment. What reader could forget their hilarious idea that precious shells spread over vast distances in North America were moved not due to some sort of proto-market economy, but in part due to female gambling habits (22-24)? In part, their book is an effort to capitalize on “evidence that has accumulated in archaeology, anthropology, and kindred disciplines; evidence that points towards a completely new account of how human societies developed over roughly the last 30,000 years” (3-4). Those readers who –like me– are not professional archaeologists, anthropologists, or prehistorians will surely find much that is new in these pages. In the wake of reading this volume, politics feels less like a tense life-or-death exercise and more like a playground for various brainstorming forays.

But we return to politics. What sort of new political theory do Graeber and Wengrow intend with their attempt at a new history of humanity? This is the questions that drive the present article. As mentioned, the authors dismiss the usual Left and Right political theories, each of them based on a different conception of humans in the state of nature. Graeber

6 Schmitt, *Concept*, 58.

and Wengrow replace such theories with a model of humans as natural experimenters, able to try out and play with different forms of culture and governance. A second key human feature for them, the ability to amass surplus goods that go beyond immediate needs, receives less detailed treatment; they seem to regard it mostly as a springboard for tyrannical elites able to control such surplus (128). Yet their new variant on the *homo ludens* theme does provide them with significant leeway for speculation in considering different models for how prehistory might have unfolded.⁷

But by the same stroke, I will claim, they render themselves unable to escape the same Hobbes/Rousseau dualism that they otherwise criticize. For even if we replace the notion of good or evil humans with that of imaginative and playful ones, it is still humans who remain at the center of the picture, and this still gives us just another variant of modern political theory. The only way to escape the modern deadlock is to give non-human entities a far greater role in political theory. Motivated by New Materialism, Actor-Network Theory, and Object-Oriented Ontology, some efforts in the directions of a politics of things have already been made: I am thinking for example of contributions by S.S. Strum and Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, Noortje Marres, Peer Schouten, as well as in my own book on Latour's political theory.⁸ Graeber and Wengrow, by constraint, are sus-

7 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, translated by R.F.C. Hull, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949.

8 See S.S. Strum and Bruno Latour, "Redefining the Social Link: From Baboons to Humans," *Social Science Information* 26, No. 4 (1987): 783-802; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010; Graham Harman, *Bruno Latour: Reassembling the Political*, London: Pluto, 2014; Noortje Marres, *Material Participation: Technology, the Environment and Everyday Publics*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; Peer Schouten, "The Materiality of State Failure: Social Contract Theory, Infrastructure and Governmental Power in Congo," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, No. 3 (Jun 2013), 553-574.

picious of granting any political role to things. They treat such discussion warily, as if it were a matter of caving in to mechanisms that channel or condition choice and experimentation, countering their wish to stress the political imagination as the human feature *par excellence*.

The Creative Animal

Graeber and Wengrow are not the first on the contemporary Left to emphasize the mostly unlocked powers of the human political imagination. For some years, the usual refrain that capitalism is evil has been accompanied by the complaint that capitalism is a bore. This is easy to understand, given the way in which "capitalism plus liberal democracy" has assumed a near-monopoly state in public political reflection. Given this atmosphere, Slavoj Žižek has become fond of quoting Fredric Jameson's words: "Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism."⁹ Matthew Beaumont has traced the initial inspiration for this remark to some comments by H. Bruce Franklin about Jean Baudrillard; in any case, Žižek repeats the phrase so frequently that he is often wrongly identified as its author.¹⁰ The late Mark Fisher took it as the premise for his widely read *Capitalist Re-*

9 Jameson, Fredric, *The Seeds of Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, xii.

10 Beaumont, Matthew, "Imagining the End Times: Ideology, the Contemporary Disaster Movie, *Contagion*," in *Žižek and Media Studies*, edited by M. Flisfeder and L.P. Willis, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 79-89; Bruce Franklin, "What Are We to Make of Jean Baudrillard's Apocalypse?" *Adventure Thru Inner Space: Essays and Articles* (1979), Internet: http://www.jgballard.ca/criticism/ballard_apocalypse_1979.html.

alism.¹¹ This call for imagination feeds, in turn, into the notion that all political transformation takes is the will to do so. As Peter Hallward puts it: “By ‘will of the people’ I mean a deliberate, emancipatory and inclusive process of collective self-determination.”¹² Even Catherine Malabou, whose work generally emphasizes the reality of brain structure against untrammelled claims to free will, has taken a sharp turn towards political voluntarism unconstrained by outside forces.¹³

This recent stress on the naked political imagination, unconstrained by non-human forces, is also the keynote sounded by Graeber and Wengrow. As mentioned, they see both sides of the political spectrum as stuck in the same rut: “At the time of the American Revolution, the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ themselves did not yet exist. A product of the decade immediately following, they originally referred to the respective seating positions of aristocratic and popular factions in the French National Assembly of 1789” (69). Viewed in this context, “Rousseau did in fact write the founding document of the left as an intellectual project” (69). While they find Rousseau innocent of promulgating the myth of the “noble savage,” they find him guilty in the case of the “stupid savage,” joining Pierre Clastres in arguing that so-called simple peoples are “actually *more* imaginative than we are” (73).¹⁴ They soon cite another authority as

11 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009.

12 Peter Hallward, “The Will of the People: Notes Towards a Dialectical Voluntarism,” *Radical Philosophy* 155 (May/Jun 2009): 17-29.

13 Catherine Malabou, “Le vide politique du réalisme contemporain,” in *L'écho du réel*, edited by C. Crignon, W. Laforge, and P. Nadrigny, Sesto San Giovanni, Italy: Mimesis, 2021, 485-498. For a critique of Malabou's position, see Graham Harman, “Malabou's Political Critique of Speculative Realism,” *Open Philosophy* 4, No.1 (2021), 94-105.

14 Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*,

their ally: “As Christopher Boehm puts it, we seem doomed to play out an endless recycling of the war between ‘Hobbesian hawks and Rousseauian doves’: those who view humans as either innately hierarchical or innately egalitarian” (85-86).¹⁵ The truth lies elsewhere, they hold. For in fact, “the very essence of our humanity consists of the fact that we are self-conscious political actors, and therefore capable of embracing a wide range of social arrangements [...]” (86). Humans are imaginative and interesting. By contrast, Graeber and Wengrow claim in an eye-opening lament: “Social science has been largely a study of the ways in which human beings are not free: the way that our actions might be said to be determined by forces beyond our control” (498). As a result, “these days we can hardly envisage our own past or future as anything other than a transition from smaller to larger cages” (514).

Graeber and Wengrow do not fall into the trap of romanticizing non-Western peoples. They dutifully record instances of slavery, mass executions, and raids devoted to kidnapping and rape among various prehistoric and even historic units. But what they admire in such societies is a flexibility that we today can scarcely imagine. They give several examples of large cities that were either used only intermittently, or which seem to have been voluntarily abandoned after centuries of use. One of their go-to examples is the now well-known phenomenon of “seasonality,” in which a given society is able to flip between authoritarian and democratic structures at different times of year. There is also the topsy-turvy experience of inverted social order known from many festivals: “Seasonal festivals may be a pale echo of older patterns of seasonal variation— but, for the last few thousand years of human history at least, they

New York: Zone Books, 1987.

15 Christopher Boehm, *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behaviour*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

appear to have played much the same role in fostering political self-consciousness, and as laboratories of social possibility. The first kings may well have been play kings" (117). But somehow, we got stuck with real kings (115; 519). Their vision of this transition is grisly enough: "Play kings cease to be play kings precisely when they start killing people; which perhaps also helps to explain the excesses of ritually sanctioned violence that so often ensued during transitions from one state to the other" (505).

Another token of the human political imagination can be seen in the contrarian political force known as "schismogenesis" (56-58), a term borrowed by Graeber and Wengrow from Gregory Bateson.¹⁶ This refers to a process of conscious cultural differentiation from one's neighbors: "after the end of the last Ice Age, the archeological record is increasingly characterized by 'culture areas': that is, localized populations with their own characteristic styles of clothing, cooking and architecture; and no doubt also their own stories about the origin of the universe, rules for the marriage of cousins, and so forth" (166). This fits well with the idea of Marcel Mauss that "[c]ultures [are], effectively, structures of refusal. Chinese are people who use chopsticks, but not knives and forks; Thai are people who use spoons, but not chopsticks..."¹⁷ (174). Along with the classic example of Athens and Sparta (180) – one might also think of the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War– Graeber and Wengrow enter at length into the striking cultural differences between the natives of northern California (characterized by an almost Protestant spirit of self-discipline and the accrual of wealth) and their neighbors

16 Gregory Bateson, "Cultural Contact and Schismogenesis," *Man* 35 (1935), 178-183.

17 See David Graeber, "Culture as Creative Refusal," *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 31, No. 2 (Autumn 2013), 1-19.

in the Pacific Northwest (a militaristic slave-culture devoted to boastful speeches, human sacrifice, and extravagant displays of wealth) (504). There is also the more general example of how urban grain states and pastoral barbarian hordes remained "dark twins" for thousands of years, as exemplified in the history of China (445). By showing a negative dependence of cultures on each other, the authors verge on a theory of politics as trapped in a human echo chamber, much like the anti-realist meditations of René Girard.¹⁸ They extend this idea into an interesting meditation on the strange ancient Mexican city of Teotihuacan, which they interpret as having reversed direction from an expansionist centralized state into a conscious utopian political experiment around the year 300 A.D., marked by lavish public housing provided to all residents (332).

The intellectual jackpot that Graeber and Wengrow think they have struck by stressing both individual imagination and cultural schismogenesis is to have freed themselves from what they see as a perilous use of environment to explain all cultural and political history. They happily report the findings of Mauss that only about forty percent of Inuit culture could be explained by environmental factors; other nearby peoples had very different forms of social organization (108). They reject Clark Wissler's early attempt to trace Pacific Northwest slavery to their fish-based diet, by contrast with the acorn-gathering norms of northern California (177).¹⁹ They even go so far as to say that "the idea of classifying human societies by 'modes of subsistence' looks decidedly naïve" (188-189). Instead, "the process by which cultures define themselves against one another is always, at root, political, since it involves self-conscious arguments about the proper way to live" (203). Yuval

18 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by P. Gregory, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.

19 Clark Wissler, *The American Indian*, New York: Douglas C. McMurtrie, 1922.

Harari's argument that wheat domesticated humans, rather than the reverse, would fit nicely in an Actor-Network Theory context, given the ANT proclivity for seeing the human-object relation as symmetrical.²⁰ But Graeber and Wengrow dismiss this effort at symmetry as just another Rousseauian tale, as just another version of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden: a strange claim, given Harari's reversal of the anthropocentrism found in both (231). They insist that rather than agriculture being encouraged by environmental or demographic concerns, it was a consciously "playful" process (241). If we do not leave everything in the hands of inventive and politically self-conscious humans, they worry, we will be trapped in such deterministic discourses as optimal pathway theory (204) or even a structuralism or post-structuralism in which "language speaks us" (205).

I am generally opposed to calling those with whom one disagrees "naïve." But since Graeber and Wengrow have already used that term for their opponents, it seems fitting here to say that they have what looks like a "naïve" commitment to modernist ontology. On one side we have creative human beings, limited by nothing but their own imaginative horizons. On the other we have "the world," working according to deterministic clockwork and therefore totally incompatible with the basic conditions of political life. It is not specified where animals fall in this duality, but modern philosophy generally assigns them to the "world" side of the divide, making humans a more or less miraculous singularity in an otherwise cold universe of unbreakable mechanical law. This makes human decisions, especially political decisions made after considered collective debate, a source of utter ontological novelty. That is

20 Yuval Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, London: Harville Secker, 2014, 80; on Actor-Network Theory, see Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, translated by C. Porter, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

the background ontology of Graeber and Wengrow's book. It is the sort of unreflective modernism attacked by Latour, and which I have re-christened with the term "onto-taxonomy," referring to the notion that the universe contains only two basic kinds of things: (1) human beings, and (2) everything else.²¹ This comes through in their rather Kantian worry about people and things becoming interchangeable, which they see as lying at the basis of debt, servitude, and bureaucracy (426-427). Interestingly, Graeber and Wengrow's hostility toward the role of things in history also makes them suspicious of the idea of sudden revolutions that one normally associates with Left standpoints like theirs. Contra Rousseau, the shift from foraging to agriculture was by no means sudden; for 3,000 years, humans were "play-farming" (248; 429). Although Rousseau famously links cereal farming with violent war-waging aristocrats, this did not happen for some 5,000 years (523). To focus the study of history on sudden revolutions, they worry, "is a way of representing our species as decidedly less thoughtful, less creative, less free than we actually turn out to have been" (501). Against all usual patterns, Graeber and Wengrow's anthropocentrism also allies them with historical gradualism, or at least with social oscillations having little in common with "progress."

21 Graham Harman, *Dante's Broken Hammer: The Ethics, Aesthetics, and Metaphysics of Love*, London: Repeater, 2016, 237; Graham Harman, "The Only Exit From Modern Philosophy," *Open Philosophy* 3 (2020), 132-146; Niki Young, "Only Two Peas in a Pod: On the Overcoming of Ontological Taxonomies," *Symposia Melitensia* 17 (2021), 27-36.

Thing Politics

The problem, we have seen, is that Graeber and Wengrow's conception of history empowers the human imagination at the cost of adopting something like a Sartrean subject able to produce political reality *ex nihilo* using nothing but human creative power.²² The reason this happens is that they have a strong motivation to avoid what they regard as the "determinism" that they see as entailed by non-human entities. In this respect their argument is reminiscent of Raymond Williams's critique of Marshall McLuhan as a "technological determinist," despite McLuhan making plenty of allowance for humans to choose and change the media they inhabit.²³ Of course, this is not an all-or-nothing issue. Earlier I cited Schouten's work on the materiality of state failure in Congo. Are the ongoing problems really due to a "failure of imagination" by the Congolese? Or perhaps we could blame the situation there on such abstractions as "Western colonialism" or even "neoliberalism"; in the present intellectual climate there would be no shortage of applause for such a maneuver, although this really just amounts to a new sort of determinism, one aimed at the supposedly irredeemable corrupting force of Western civilization.²⁴

It is also worth mentioning Timothy Mitchell's *Carbon Democracy*, with its powerful argument that we cannot just speak of a disembodied capitalism, since a capitalism that traffics in oil entails very different structures than that of cotton or

22 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by S. Richmond, New York: Washington Square Press, 2021.

23 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, London: Routledge, 2004; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.

24 Schouten, "Materiality."

spice.²⁵ Graeber and Wengrow's reliance on "schismogenesis" as a purely cultural differentiating force is often enlightening, but it cannot explain how the acorn-gathering proclivities of indigenous northern Californians would differ from an equally schismogenetic choice to rely on deer rather than acorns, both of them equally opposed to the piscocentric culture of the Kwakiutl further to the north. To choose one food source rather than another is to change one's lifestyle, even if that choice is at some point marked by free human innovation; in turn, that choice will entail different infrastructural frameworks that will make the future of the culture highly path-dependent, no matter how frequently Graeber and Wengrow say that record speaks of rapid shifts or "play" between one lifestyle and another. Stated differently, to downplay the pressing and different realities that follow from fish-based or acorn-based culture borders on the argument that "guns don't kill people, people do," forgetting that a human with a gun is a different sort of creature from a human with a bronze or (later) iron sword.²⁶

Whereas Graeber and Wengrow would rely on the modern conception of "freedom" as what distinguishes humans from other animals, Strum and Latour reach a different conclusion.²⁷ It is baboons, not humans, who are constantly attentive to shifting social conditions within their group. Human life, by contrast, is heavily mediated by inanimate objects that stabilize identity, rather than identity emerging through the purely social form of schismogenesis. Our lives consist of fixed residences, identification cards, wedding rings, and the various forms

25 Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, London: Verso, 2013.

26 Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 176-181.

27 Strum and Latour, "Redefining."

of private property that Graeber and Wengrow (nad not just they) convincingly link with older forms of “the sacred” (159). In principle, I as a resident of Los Angeles *could* decide to sell my car and use public transportation instead, in an effort to reduce the impending catastrophes of human carbon-dependence; in practice, this would make my life nearly impossible without major changes in employment status and standard of living. Graber and Wengrow’s account render impossible any account of what the archaeologist Christopher Witmore calls “anthropoiesis,” in which humans and their things can and do exchange properties, in a way not dissimilar from that of metaphor.²⁸ To be a gun owner is not just to be a human who can freely decide whether to shoot or not shoot an intruder, or to murder the employees and customers of a supermarket: instead, the range of one’s choices is radically changed by the human acquisition of lethal gun-qualities.

28 Graham Harman and Christopher Witmore, *Objects Untimely: Conversations Between Archaeology and Object-Oriented Ontology*, Cambridge, UK: Polity, forthcoming 2023.

A Dupuyan Wager Towards Comic Melancholy

GREGG SMITS

“Nostalgia is cowardice.”

– Mario Vargas Llosa, *The War of the End of the World*

“The future is inevitable and precise, but it may not occur.”

– Borges

Our times are characterized by two tendencies: first, at least in the West, what remains of the Left is stuck in what Wendy Brown and others has called Left-Wing Melancholy: “a Left that is thus caught in a structure of melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its own dead past, whose spirit is ghostly, *whose structure of desire is backward looking* and punishing.”¹ Secondly, it has become an ubiquitous cliché that it is easier to imagine the end of the world, then it is to imagine the end of capitalism. Yet one must add to this today that the end of the world has already happened – it is just not equally distributed. The historic sequence of 2008-2020 brought an end to the End of History, and the world is turning towards what has been called “corporate techno-feudalism.” While some political analysts of post-capitalism make it rather seem easy to imagine the end of capitalism, it remains the case that our imagination runs up against a cul-de-sac: we either cannot imagine the end of capitalism, or only as something worse. There is, in short, a general absence of “futurability.” The cultural critic of the slow cancellation of the future is Mark Fisher, who argued that after a modernist impulse of ‘great expectations’ for the future, the very distinction between past and present has broken

¹ Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy,” *boundary 2* 26, No. 3 (1999), 26 (emphasis mine).

down, giving way to a postmodern inertia of “formal nostalgia,” “as omnipresent as it is disavowed,” in which “the very sense of a future shock” has disappeared: “Jameson’s postmodernism – with its tendencies towards retrospection and pastiche – have been naturalized.”²

In this context of Left-Wing Melancholia and formal nostalgia vis-a-vis lost futures, Fisher has affirmatively described an “hauntological melancholy.” He differentiates the latter with left-wing as well as with post-colonial melancholy (conceptualized by Paul Giroy as the refusal to work through the imperial and colonial past and transform a paralyzing guilt into a more productive shame) – and one might add to this list an identitarian melancholy that desperately clings to supposed lost roots. In contrast to these positions, Fisher’s hauntological melancholy is not haunted by what positively existed: “not the *no longer* of an actually existing social democracy, but the *not yet* of the futures that popular modernism trained us to expect, but which never materialized. These specters – the specters of lost futures – reproach the formal nostalgia of the capitalist realist world.” Žižek too has written about the *future of the past*, but whereas for Fisher the virtual trajectory of expected futures never got materialized (and now seem to have disappeared from the horizon), Žižek speaks of haunting virtualities precisely in the context of events (in the Badiouian sense) that materialized, but where in its actualisation the virtual dimension got betrayed and for that reason haunts the event’s aftermath. Marx was aware of this when he remarked that the ideals of the French Revolution turned into ‘liberty, equality and Bentham.’

When Žižek points towards the sobering ‘morning after’ of an event, he also notes that such events in themselves are often excessive, and bear a certain self-erasure in its aftermath.

2 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of my Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and lost Futures*, Winchester: Zero Books, 2014, 14.

The Jacobins, for example, not only knew that those who want a revolution that is not excessive want a “revolution without revolution,” they also were aware that this excess had to be rejected afterwards, reduced to an avoidable accident. Right before Saint Just was executed by guillotine, he pointed at the Constitution and heroically said: ‘I am the one who made this.’ In this way it is true that some revolutions eat their own children. This self-erasure of the event, when the excess of the event is disavowed in its aftermath, should be seen as “the ultimate indication of its triumph,” Žižek wrote. The lesson is that the excess of divine violence that ruptures the continuity of time is betrayed in its actualisation: “as such, this excess is not simply abolished, dismissed as irrelevant, but, as it were, transposed into the virtual state, continuing to haunt the emancipatory imaginary as a dream waiting to be realized. The excess of revolutionary enthusiasm over its own ‘actual social base’ or substance is thus literally that the future of/in the past, a ghost-like Event waiting for its proper embodiment.”³

Žižek combines this hegelo-marxist notion of the necessity of excess and its self-erasure with what Badiou would call “insurrection” or the Benjaminian model of re-actualizing the ‘crushed potentials for the future that were contained in the past.’ It is crucial not to confuse what Žižek was “tempted to call a leftist politics of melancholy” as a left-wing melancholy enjoying its own backwards-looking impotence, lamenting missed opportunities, and silently accepting global capitalism as the only and final game in town. What is at stake here is the Kierkegaardian notion of repetition that Žižek employs. “Repetition and recollection are the same motion, except in opposite directions,” Kierkegaard wrote, “for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is

3 Slavoj Žižek, “Badiou: Notes from an Ongoing Debate,” *Lacan.com* (2014), internet: <https://www.lacan.com/zizou.htm>.

recollected forward.”⁴ Lenin and Mao, for example, didn’t simply return to the actual formulas of Marx, but were even more orthodox in their reinvention of Marxism. They betrayed the actual letter of Marx by repeating, qua recollecting forwards, the spirit of the gesture of Marx. Similarly, Lacan didn’t simply “return to Freud,” he rather repeated the virtual excess in Freud that got betrayed in its actualisation. This also means that the virtual ‘future of the past’ is open for rewriting. As Benjamin knew, history is written by the victors who decide on the meaning of the past and its virtualities according to their own standards. A revolutionary event always succeeds (or self-erases) by its own standards.

Note that while the melancholy of both Fisher and of Žižek are backwards-looking, what they point at is a virtuality in the past that in itself is forward-looking. Fisher’s hauntological melancholy is the refusal to “give up the desire for the future” that was foreclosed in capitalist realism. He stubbornly recollects a time where there were ‘Great Expectations’ (to allude to Dickens), a virtual trajectory of a ‘not yet.’ It is ultimately the latter that he wants to bring back, an impulse that was future-oriented. Perhaps the excess of an event that Žižek describes also has to be thought of not in the first place as a Benjaminian re-actualisation of past virtualities, but as a Kierkegaardian repetition qua recollection forward. Perhaps in this way it is more accurate to say that it’s not so much that Lacan returned to Freud, but that Freud plagiarized Lacan by anticipation; just as Marx plagiarized Lenin by anticipation.⁵

Žižek wrote: “In so far as the melancholic mourns what he has not yet lost, there is an inherent comic subversion of

the tragic procedure of mourning at work in melancholy.”⁶ In what follows I will stay true to this Žižekian anatomy of melancholy, but with a parallax shift in temporality in the spirit of Jean-Pierre Dupuy, author of *For an Enlightened Catastrophism*. What is at stake today when we speak of “lost futures” is not primarily the future of the past, but the present prospect of future catastrophes. Perhaps here we should be willing to go to the end of melancholy, and ask ourselves, with Dupuy, what about the *past of the future*? That is, if we accept that the present victors rewrite the past, Dupuy takes a speculative step further and asks us: what kind of future is writing our present? Or to use a metaphor: instead of in a Benjaminian way dissecting lost potentialities of the past, we must imagine a future Benjamin looking back upon our present. My claim is that when we think of the future itself as the lost object of melancholy, this radically converts the structure of melancholy in a way that can be useful for changing our fate. In a homology to Frank Ruda’s comic fatalism, I propose to do two similar things as Ruda does with pessimism:⁷ first, to exaggerate melancholy to such a degree that it forces out what is in melancholy more than melancholy, and second to distinguish a tragic and a comic melancholic stance.

Žižek recently wrote that Lacan makes a sort of Pascalean wager: “knowing that God/Other exists (that I am caught in its chain), I put my wager against him/it.”⁸ Dupuy makes a similar

4 Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, translated by M. G. Piety, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 3.

5 See Pierre Bayard and Jeffrey Mehlman, “Anticipatory Plagiarism,” *New Literary History* 44, No. 2 (2013), 231–50.

6 Slavoj Žižek, “Melancholy and the Act,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, No. 4 (2000), 661.

7 Frank Ruda, “From Catastrophic Messianism to Comic Fatalism - Part I,” *Provocations* 1 (Sep 2020), internet: <https://www.provocationsbooks.com/2020/09/25/from-catastrophic-messianism-to-comic-fatalism-part-i/>.

8 Slavoj Žižek, “A Pascalean Wager Against Scientific Determinism,” *Sublation Magazine* (Jun 6, 2022), internet: <https://www.sublationmag.com/post/a-pascalean-wager-against-scientific-determinism>.

move: his “enlightened catastrophism” assumes that the future catastrophe is inevitable, yet he nonetheless wages against it. Dupuy’s thinking is paradoxical in normal temporality, or what he calls “occurring time”: how can one act against the inevitable if this future is fixed? Yet, what Dupuy wages upon is that accepting catastrophe as a fixed future is the only way we believe that it poses a real threat, and only on such a condition can we change fate. His catastrophism implies another kind of temporality, what he calls “projective time.” It is not enough to know that a future catastrophe will occur, one must believe it first, accept it as necessary, and then, in a kind of negation of negation, one looks from the standpoint of this future back towards the present and ask what we should have done to avert the inevitable future. Dupuy fully accepts and masterially theorizes the paradoxes this temporality implies. Again, the only way to change fate is to stage a lost future, and then one counter-factually acts from the standpoint of this future to make possible the impossible rupture in time that avoids the fated future. I claim Dupuy’s method is a melancholic one but of the comic sort. But what is melancholy? Žižek wrote:

the melancholic is not primarily the subject fixated on the lost object, unable to perform the work of mourning, but rather the subject who possesses the object but has lost his desire for it because the cause that made him desire this object has withdrawn, lost its efficiency. Far from accentuating to the extreme the situation of the frustrated desire, of the desire deprived of its object, melancholy rather stands for *the presence of the object itself deprived of the desire for itself*. Melancholy occurs when we finally get the desired object, but are disappointed in it. In this precise sense, melancholy (disappointment at all positive, observable objects, none of which can satisfy our desire) effectively is the beginning of philosophy.⁹

9 Ibid.

Dupuy’s enlightened catastrophism is a sort of melancholy insofar as he stages a loss where strictly speaking there is no lost object, since it concerns the future – and an undesirable one at that. Although he bypasses the Hegelian prohibition to predict the future, he radically accepts Hegel’s lesson that everything might go wrong. He does so as a speculative method that loops from the future back to the present, its real contradictions and virtual trajectories. Insofar as a future is presupposed to be determined, he invites us to think the impossible and change fate itself (he renders ‘lost futures’ into real future: necessary and impossible).

There are of course several problems with melancholy, which I cannot elaborate in full here. A first problem concerns the status of the object-cause of desire, object *a*. In terms of vision one can say that the object *a* is what occupies the void that is constitutively excluded out of the frame of vision in order to see. Desire allows one to look at a situation awry, and without this function of the object *a*, the field of vision falls flat. As Eric Laurent pointed out: “What separates melancholia from depression and breaks the continuity between them is that in melancholia what’s at stake is the object *a* outside any phallic punctuation. When the subject runs up against the impossible inscribed in the inexistence of the sexual relation, an imperative *jouissance* returns in the place where phallic *jouissance* is lacking.”¹⁰ A second problem with melancholy is its structural similarity with fetishism which posits a lost object as a fetish to cover-over a more traumatic loss at the core of the drive. Melancholy and fetishism display “the same temporal logic in reverse,”¹¹ Comay notes. Whereas the fetishist wards off loss

10 Éric Laurent, “Melancholia, the Pain of Existence and Moral Cowardice,” *Hurly-Burly*, No. 12 (2015), 152.

11 Rebecca Comay, “The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism,” in *Walter Benjamin and History*, edited by Andrew Benjamin, London, Continuum, 2005, 95.

as always already a 'not yet' in the future, the melancholic pre-emptively assumes future catastrophe by insisting on its absolute anteriority, in a mode of 'too late,' and loss is thereby staved off as always already in the past.

In short, what I propose to name *comic melancholy* should be neither fetishistic because it short-circuits into the not-yet, nor tragically melancholic because although it posits catastrophe as if it is 'too late,' it does so with the intention to return back to the present and force an impossible rupture. Precisely insofar as the melancholic goes to the end and nonetheless continues she is comic, in the exact sense of "continuing even after everything seems to have been relinquished, even the character himself."¹² The comic melancholic is the one who foresees an inevitably catastrophic future without the desire for it, yet nonetheless persists to struggle for another fate in virtue of the absurd. Perhaps Kierkegaard was a comic melancholic when he wrote: "For it is great to give up one's desire, but greater to stick to it after having given it up; it is great to grasp hold of the eternal but greater to stick to the temporal after having given it up.

12 Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016, 168.

Žižek and Violence in the Philippine Context

RUBEN O. BALOTOL JR

Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek pointed out that our common understanding that violence can only happen when there is identifiable identity of the perpetrator, we simply know who did it. However, Žižek argued that “we should learn to disentangle ourselves from the fascination of this subjective violence.” One must learn to step back in order to identify the “objective violence.” Objective violence is caused by the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems. A violence which goes on but we do not even notice it as violence because what we know about violence is the disturbance of the established order.¹

Moreover, objective violence is considered as the background for the exposition of the subjective violence. A form of violence, that goes on quite naturally, like capitalist violence, anonymous and systemic. Drawing from Žižek's concept of violence, this chapter is intended to provide a discussion on the question, what is the problem with our (Philippine) system that policies, government programs and other forms of solution fails to provide a concrete and visible inclusive growth? Demanding a step backward to perceive the contours of the background that generates the outburst of violence.

Furthermore, to elaborate the point of the paper. First it will discuss it will discuss cultural colonialism in the Philippine context. It centers on some events and policies in the Philippine history that paves the way for colonial mentality. Next, *sakop* (group-orientation), *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and *hiya* (shame) as factors in the understanding Filipino sense of propriety. It aims to provide a background that Filipino understanding of propriety is deeply connected to these ideologies. Lastly, the possibility of Žižek's objective violence in the Philippine context. It proceeds to discuss violence in the Philippines in the lens of Slavoj Žižek.

1 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, New York: Picador, 2008, 2-8.

Philippine Cultural Colonialism

In the Theses VII of Walter Benjamin's, *On the Concept of History*, he pointed out that it is an important task for scholars of history to brush history against the grain. To view from the standpoint of the defeated, the pariahs.²

In the case of the Philippines, the present Filipino culture is an assortment and product of three dominant traditions: Southeast Asian tribalism and animism, Spanish- Catholic tradition and the American enterprise. The first refers to the *barangaic* socio-political structure under the leadership of a *Datu*. Most members of the community were related to one another by blood or marriage. Native-Filipinos were coastal, near-coastal, or riverine in orientation which suggest that their livelihood and trading were commonly done in these areas.³

Next, aside from the expensive Catholicism, there are important events that implicitly contributed to the Christianization-Hispanization of the Filipinos: to reside within the *abajo de las campanas*; making of Manila (1834), Iloilo (1855) and Cebu (1865) ports to become commercial, managerial and professional centers to merchants from all around the world;⁴ 1894 Claveria Decree; and the introduction of extravagant feasts of patron saints and major religious festivals.⁵

2 Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, available at http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/Theses_on_History.html; 5-6.

3 Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited (Pre-Spanish-1941)*, Manila, Philippines: Tala Publishing, 1975), 26-35.

4 Luis H. Francia, *A History of the Philippines: From Indios Bravos to Filipinos*, New York: Overlook Press, 2014, 70-75.

5 Reinhardt Wendt. "Philippine Fiesta and Colonial Culture" *Philippine Studies* 46, No. 1 (1998), 3-23.

In addition, for Filipinos their adaptation of Spanish *apellidos* (surname) becomes the source of their pride and prestige and at the same time becomes a way to exclude and discriminate those who possess *apellidos* that does not sound Spanish. Living under the *bajo la campana* it did not only serve as a reinforcement of administrative structure, but native Filipinos were introduced to true faith, civilized life and political order but at the same time it resulted to prejudice to people living in the hinterland defining their ways of life as uncivilized and that their primitive methods should be change. The opening of Philippine ports did not only allow Filipinos to taste the wide range of food and culture outside, but it also teaches the concept of property and the commercial value of natural resources. The ceremony, diversity and entertainment of the fiesta ushered Filipinos through the course of time to the resolve that celebrating fiesta is a form of expressing gratitude for the rich harvest; protection from evil spirits and dark forces; sheer pleasure; reunion; and temporary release from the daily routines and obligations.

Lastly, the coming of United States pave the way for turning Filipinos into so called "little brown Americans."⁶ The political and economic expansion of United States to the Philippines brought a hefty influence among Filipinos. These are the key factors that fermented the annexation of the Philippines: First, the Ilustrado ideologues. The misreading and maligning of the Ilustrados to the struggle and social movement of the masses led to the death of thousands Filipino.⁷ In addition, the Ilustrados (men of substance) was a factotum to Americans

6 Eric A. San Juan, *History and Form: Selected Essays*, Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 1996), 1-4.

7 Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "The Predatory State and Duterte's Radical Politics: The Case of the Philippines," *Journal of ASEAN Studies* 7, No.2 (2019), 162-175.

expansionist ambition contributed greatly to the annexation of the Philippines and keep American factories running.

Next, the “Philippines for Filipinos” policy. For Filipinos it meant that America being truthful to their promise of independence but for the Americans it was just a business strategy at the expense of Filipino taxpayers. It was an opportunity to enhance American exploitative economic control. The goal of developing roads and railroads, educating Filipinos (American-orientation), improving the standard of living was to mold a consumerist Filipino. Howard Taft’s policy laid the groundwork for the economic manipulation and pacification of the Philippines. Lastly, Japanese occupation. The occupation was considered by Filipinos as traumatic and negative. Anti-Americans even prefer the Americans compared to the Japanese. As a result, upon the return of the American forces, it was perceived as their liberator and because of that most Filipinos hold the idea that the freedom enjoyed by Filipino during and at the present are an *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) to the Americans.⁸

These three backgrounds play an important role in understanding and interpretation of the contemporary Philippines and the reason for having a so called “damaged culture” that still on the process of reconciling with the past.⁹

8 Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, 2nd edition, Manila, Philippines: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2017, 159-163.

9 Eric A. San Juan, “Making Filipino History in a ‘Damaged Culture,’” *Philippine Sociological Review* 37, No.1/2 (1989), 1-11.

Utang na Loob, Sakop and Hiya: Key Factors in the Filipino Sense of Propriety

To trace the Filipino concept of propriety, it can be reflected through *asal/pamatasan* (proper behavior). *Asal/pamatasan* is a set of commonly shared values and norms that Filipinos use as points of reference in expressing, interpreting others’ actions, and in regulating interpersonal and intergroup relations. Moreover, three dominant *asal/pamatasan* (proper behavior) that an individual should observe are *Utang Na Loob* (debt of gratitude), *Hiya* (guilt), and *Sakop*-orientation (family/group thinking).¹⁰

Sakop orientation (group orientation) means Filipino always identifies himself/herself with a group, finding fulfillment in the harmony of the *sakop*. This *sakop* orientation is an extension of Filipino’s emphasis on the importance of the family. The aim is to build a strong interpersonal relationship with those who are not part of the family and establish a kinship.¹¹

The concept of *sakop* is linked to the idea of *kapwa*, which means ‘shared self, shared identity, or self-in-the-other’ similar to *kapwa*. The *sakop* requires the adherents to control and restrains selfish desires for the welfare of the *sakop*. *Sakop*, similar to a family framework, expects economic, emotional, and moral support. It is further reinforced by a continuous flow of assistance, favors among members of the *sakop* and reciprocal exchanges. Besides, *sakop* orients an individual to behave appropriately towards one another; that is why one must avoid *kanya-kanya* (each to his/her interest) as a trait. Instead, a Filipino should understand that in a *sakop*, one is expected

10 Florentino Timbreza, *Filipino Values Today*, Mandaluyong City, Philippines: National Bookstore 2003, 113.

11 Leonardo Mercado, *Applied Filipino Philosophy*, Tacloban City, Philippines: Divine Word University, 1977, 57-58.

to know *pakikisama* (get along, be concerned and supportive) and *pakikitungo* (act humbly, to concede, and to deal with individuals properly).¹²

Hiya (guilt/shame) is the universal social sanction that regulates the give and takes of *utang na loob* and, in general, all social behavior. When one violates such a norm, the person ordinarily feels a deep sense of shame, a realization of having failed to live up to society's standards. One must be mindful not to cause another person's embarrassment. Filipinos are taught to be sensitive, not to openly criticize or insult others for fear that they offend someone else's self-esteem and incur another's ire or retaliatory action. The virtue of *hiya* is a kind of 'self-control' that avoids someone from making another person suffer the passion of *hiya*.¹³

Every Filipino is expected to possess *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude). A person should be aware of the obligation to those from whom he/she receives favors and should repay them in any acceptable manner. Since *utang na loob* invariably stems from a service rendered, even though a material gift may be involved, quantification is impossible. One cannot measure the repayment but an attempt to make it, nevertheless, either believing that it supersedes the original service in quality or acknowledging that the repayment is partial and requires further repayment. In practice, *utang na loob* comes in various forms ranging from job opportunities, professional services, money credit, and another form of kindness.¹⁴

12 Jeremiah Reyes, "Loob and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics," *Asian Philosophy*, 25, No.2 (2015), 148-171.

13 Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "Oligarchic Patrimonialism, Bossism, Electoral Clientelism, and Contested Democracy in the Philippines," *Comparative Politics* 37, No.2 (2005), 229-250.

14 Virginia Miralao, "The Family, Traditional Values and the Sociocultural Transformation of Philippine Society," *Philippine Sociological Review* 45,

Objective Violence in the Philippine Context

In the opening pages of Slavoj Žižek's *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* talks about a worker who is suspected of stealing. Every night as he leaves the factory, the wheelbarrow he rolls in front of him is carefully inspected. The guards can find nothing, always empty. One evening, as the guard, inspects the worker, a penny drops. It can be inferred from that scene that what the worker is stealing is the wheelbarrows.¹⁵

The anecdote preliminarily captures the whole point of Slavoj Žižek's objective violence. The worker who steals wheelbarrow represents the disorder of capitalism that constructs illusion to the individual and pushes to own and satisfy that capitalist chimera. In contrast, the guard represents the victim of capitalism's solipsism — the ordinary individual who under capitalist beguilement fails to point the violence.

But are we not merely exaggerating here, painting much too dark a picture? Advocates of capitalism often point out that, despite all the critical prophecies, capitalism is overall, from a global perspective, not in crisis but progressive more than ever — and one cannot agree with them... it is not in crisis — it is just the people caught in this explosive development are in crisis. This tension between overall rapid growth and local crises and misery is part of capitalism's normal functioning: capitalism renews itself through such crises.¹⁶

In the Philippines, capitalism started when it was officially opened for trade and residence to merchants of any na-

Nos.1-4 (1997), 189-215.

15 Žižek, *Violence*, 1.

16 Slavoj Žižek, *The Courage of Hopelessness*, New York: Melville House, 2017, 33.

tionality.¹⁷ The demands of the capitalist modernity forced the country to develop an agriculture economy, fostering a national market, and attracting commerce. With time, capitalism gave rise to a new class of commercially-oriented landowners. The class became the Philippine economic elites, which eventually found a favorable advantage in politics. The association of wealth and power become popularly known as crony capitalism. It is based on monopoly, exclusive access in the government's financial programs, and brute forces.¹⁸ The prevalence of cronyism brings about the so-called booty capitalism, which explains the disposition of why for the country's long-standing difficulties in converting its enormous assets into sustained developmental progress.¹⁹

Moreover, the Philippines cannot combine enough positive factors from macroeconomic stability, strong technocratic bureaucracy, export competitiveness, political stability, and political consistency. This is so because the anarchy of particularistic demands from has frequently obstructed the state apparatus, and particularistic actions on behalf of, those oligarchs and cronies favored by government top officials, acquire the highly coveted loan or import license, and enjoy a stake in the cartelized industry protected by highly discretionary state regulations. The detrimental impact of capitalism on the country can be traced at various times, particularly in the industrialization era. From pre-martial law years (1946-1972), martial law years (1972-1986) to post-Marcos years (1986-present)

17 Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2017, 75-90

18 David Kang, *Crony Capitalism: Corruption and Development in South Korea and the Philippines*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 1-21.

19 Paul Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism: The Politics of Banking in the Philippines*, London: Cornell University Press, 1998, 1-9.

manifested that the only way to achieve economic competitiveness in global capitalism is through foreign dependency and debt from multilateral institutions such as World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The so-called "generosity" is remunerated through liberalization of the Philippine economy, privatization, dismantling of cartels and monopolies, and other policies put in place as a result of commerce help to nurture capitalism in the country.²⁰

The two faces of Bill Gates parallel the two faces of Soros. The cruel businessman destroys or buys competitors, aims at virtual monopoly, employs all the tricks of the trade to achieve his goals. Meanwhile, the great philanthropist in the history of mankind quaintly asks: "What does it serve to have computers, if people do not have enough to eat and are dying of dysentery?" In liberal communist ethics, the ruthless pursuit of profit is counteracted by the charity. Charity is the humanitarian mask hiding the face of economic exploitation. In superego blackmail of gigantic proportions, the developed countries "help" the undeveloped with aid, credits, and so on, and thereby avoid the critical issue, namely their complicity in and co-responsibility for the miserable situation of the undeveloped.²¹

The oppressive effects of capitalism in the Philippines forces its citizens, particularly the marginalized to sacrifice elementary political freedoms and hampers economic sustainability which the adverse effect in the inability to expand determinants of freedom such as educational and health accessibility as well as rights.

The *Utang na Loob*, *Hiya*, and *Sakop*-orientation are used not only as measures of the quality of behavior but also as sources of imperatives in the social system, making human fel-

20 Ibid., 10-11.

21 Žižek, *Violence*, 23.

lowship euphemistic. Its function as instigators of sentiments within the individual and as primary references of outside regularities of actions in group transactions. They also act as the generative force of what should be done and acts to avoid. These imperatives specify how one should read meanings in actions and what to expect from people when interacting with them under certain circumstances, situations, and conditions. The Filipino displays strong family-centric and personalism, which are extended to a broader community or institutional setting by remaining pleasant, preserving good relations with people, and shunning conflicts and signs of the antagonism.²²

In the philosophical parlance of Žižek, the failure to recognize that the basis of economic and political regress is due to capitalism, because of the ruling ideology which imposes a narrative that places the blame not on the global capitalist system, but secondary and contingent deviations (overly lax legal regulations, the corruption of big financial institutions, and so on). The danger is that the predominant narrative of global capitalism will be the one which, instead of awakening people from a dream, enables us to continue dreaming. A worrying condition not only the economic consequences but about the apparent temptations to reinvigorate interventionism from the United States and other countries with military or economic advantages, to keep the motor of the economy running, or at least use the crisis to impose further stringent measures of structural adjustment which pushes to widen the gap between the rich and the poor within all societies, particularly in the impoverished Third World nations.²³

Žižek, in agreement with Alain Badiou, claimed that capitalism is effectively not a civilization of its own, with a specific way of rendering life meaningful. Capitalism is the first

22 Miralao, "The Family," 190-191.

23 Slavoj Žižek. *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, New York: Verso, 2009, 14-16.

socio-economic order which de-totalizes meaning: it is not global at the level of meaning. The fundamental lesson of globalization is that capitalism can accommodate all civilizations, from Christian to Hindu and Buddhist.²⁴ In a nutshell, Žižek, through the use of an anecdote, presented his concept of objective violence: a German officer visited Picasso in his Paris studio during the Second World War. There he saw *Guernica* and, shocked at the modernist chaos of the painting, asked Picasso: "Did you do this!" Picasso calmly replied: "No, you did this!"²⁵

Paradigmatically, often politicians and top government officials in the Philippines blatantly remove their responsibility from the socio-economic deficiencies. They deny their involvement in issues such as why voters during elections willingly sell their votes and the rampant vote-buying, why people delinquently spend their money given by the government under its poverty alleviation program, or why farmers despite government programs failed to translate into a concrete realization of progress. Instead, they claim that it is part of the reality that people, the individual is the cause of one's failure or the reason for the chaos. Similar to Picasso, one must tell them that it is the result of their politics.

Conclusion

The distress of political anxiety and impossibility is taking its toll, waiting to erupt into great unrest. This violence seems to arise out of nowhere, which fits Walter Benjamin's divine violence. The hidden history of objective violence in the country

24 Ibid., 25.

25 Žižek. *Violence*, 11.

in the modern global discussion fails to understand Filipinos' struggle. As a result, it contributes to the decay of Filipino patriotism, and their policies drift the interests and institutional austerity measures towards uncertainties. Moreover, such struggle in the present Philippine politics can be recounted Apolinario Mabini's dismay on the Philippine revolution under Aguinaldo's leadership. He said,

it failed because it was badly directed because its leader won his post not with praiseworthy but with blameworthy acts. Because of employing the most useful men of the nation, he jealously discarded them. Believing that the advance of the people was no more than his advance, he did not rate men according to their ability, character, and patriotism but according to the degree of friendship or kinship binding him to them; and wanting to have favorites willing to sacrifice themselves for him, he showed himself lenient to their faults...May we never forget such a terrible lesson learned at the cost of unspeakable sufferings!

Planetary Memory and Trans-species Immunity

CHUN-MEI CHUANG

*I am the daughter of Earth and Water,
And the nursling of the Sky;
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;
I change, but I cannot die.*

— Percy Bysshe Shelley, “The Cloud”

For a Trans-species Noösphere

In the era of COVID-19, we are drawing an increasingly entangled molecular picture of immune memory with growing planetary awareness about the intrinsic relationship between knowledge and life. The pandemic has expanded the horizon of the philosophy and politics of immunology. The ever more sophisticated multiscale apparatuses of extended sensory devices present a profound trans-disciplinary challenge: the re-configuration of senses and the reorganization of sensibilities; in other words, the creative evolution of human intuition.

As Vladimir I. Vernadsky wrote almost a century ago, one has to put science back into its context to understand it scientifically, as a historically specific “framework of the scientific analysis of reality.”¹ Vernadsky points out three levels of reality identified by science in the 20th century.

¹ Vladimir Vernadsky, *Scientific Thought as a Planetary Phenomenon*, translated by B.A. Starostin, Moscow: Nongovernmental Ecological V.I. Vernadsky Foundation, 1997, 62-3.

These levels are: the phenomena of space; the planetary phenomena of the “nature” akin to us; and the microscopic phenomena in which gravitation loses its importance.²

In the 21st century, the subatomic scientific narratives have gradually become our epistemic and affective resources for worlding—the continually evolving molecular sensibilities to remember the future. Such are sensible evolutionary inclinations that we, as living organisms, embody when our observation activities and measurement scales change.

Life as a microscopic and planetary phenomenon has gained currency, although still wanting the necessary depth for a radical socio-economic transformation. The pandemic has demonstrated the critical importance of genomic surveillance technology. On March 30, 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a 10-year strategy to bolster the genomic surveillance of pathogens worldwide. However, one in three countries still cannot use the critical gene sequencing tool. Besides access, they also need appropriate infrastructures and networks.³

The significance of genomic surveillance must be understood in the broader context of multiscale microscopic politics that marks our times. Nowadays, scientists constantly conduct sub/molecular mapping of microscale entities/relations/processes elusive to our naked senses and everyday human intuition. The genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV2 as live tracking of viral mutation that ensures early detection of potential variants is a timely reminder of the intricate relationship between the biosphere and the noosphere, *the sphere of mind*, which is at the center of the Anthropocene predicament.

2 Ibid., 63.

3 Lisa L. Carter, et al., “Global Genomic Surveillance Strategy for Pathogens with Pandemic and Epidemic Potential 2022-2032,” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 100, No. 4 (2022), 239-239A.

Both life and science are planetary phenomena, as Vernadsky asserts.⁴ According to Vernadsky’s concept of the biosphere, Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, and many geobiologists, *life* has always been a geological force. Indeed, “life is *the* geological force.”⁵ Meanwhile, geology has long been a life force. Without life as we know it, “the crustal mechanism of the Earth would not exist.”⁶

The biosphere is a “region of transformation of cosmic energy,”⁷ 20 kilometers from top to bottom comprising the atmosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere, and other interlocking elemental cycles, as well as the increasingly complicated circuits in the techno-cognisphere. The coevolutionary processes connecting matter, life, and thought are molecular, planetary, and cosmic, embedded within and energetically depending on the solar system.

For Vernadsky, it is reasonable that the biosphere should be transformed into the noosphere, a new world recreated with humanity’s rational and technological achievements. But the narrow rationalist connotation of mind could be misleading. Vernadsky felt the crisis of his times, just like we do ours.

The noosphere is a new geological phenomenon on our planet. In it for the first time man becomes a large-scale geological force.⁸

4 Verdansky, *Scientific Thought*; Vladimir Vernadsky, *The Biosphere*, translated by D.B. Langmuir, New York: Springer Science Business Media, 1998.

5 Lynn Margulis, et al., “Forward,” in Vladimir Vernadsky, *The Biosphere*, translated by D.B. Langmuir, New York: Springer Science Business Media, 1998, 15.

6 Verdansky, *The Biosphere*, 58.

7 Ibid., 47.

8 Verdansky, *Scientific Thought*, 249.

Human expansion and development drastically amplify the integral connection between life and geology. Vernadsky admits that it is possible that “all the natural living bodies” possess the capacity for reason. Still, he insists that “the spiritual life of a human personality in its special manifestation” is crucial for the noosphere.⁹ Pondering the project, Vernadsky asked the following famous question.

*Thought is not a form of energy. How then can it change material processes?*¹⁰

What if thought is not only a form of energy but precisely energy that makes the trans-species connections in and for a creative noosphere possible? I contend that the *spiritual* dimension of noosphere is by no means restricted to the humanist-linguistic model of thought and potentially opens up a trans-species posthumanist space of diffractive politics. Perhaps it is time to talk about a trans-species noosphere that comprises species and lifeforms at all scales, diverse human groups included, without privileging the abstract ideal of humanity.

Contemporary philosophy of science has gradually acknowledged that not only life sciences as research areas but all sciences can be regarded as “living sciences” – significant activities of human beings as lifeforms in historically specific coevolution. Human or nonhuman lifeforms are “purposeful,” interacting and extending in a particular ecological environment.¹¹ The planetary noosphere, in a dynamic sense, is about the evolutionary reconstruction of the boundaries between hu-

9 Ibid., 222-3.

10 Ibid., 249.

11 Bruce MacLennan, “Living Science: Science as An Activity of Living Beings,” *Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology* 119, No. 3 (2015), 415.

mans and nonhumans, as well as the material and epistemic landscapes inhabited and transformed.

In planetary life, negotiating and reconstituting different modes of *life-techne*, or *zoe-techne*, are common evolution strategies.¹² Notable examples include the phenomena of endosymbiosis and symbiogenesis, both seriously questioned when first described. Different organisms may form symbiotic and/or parasitic relationships and internal symbiosis; sometimes, one organism becomes an inner part of another, with the original genome intact to a certain extent.¹³ Using next-generation gene-sequencing techniques, scientists are now confident that anaerobic microorganisms are rich in unique genes and metabolic pathways that allow them to survive in various extreme environments and perform element exchange and energy conversion, predating the evolution of photosynthesis technology.¹⁴

In defiance of humanist pride, Margulis argues that life on earth will do just fine without us. Humans transform the biosphere incessantly, not unlike countless nonhuman beings, in particular, innumerable tiny microorganisms invisible to human eyes. The microscopic agents have rewritten the connotation of individuality, exceeding the humanistic framework in various ways. As the Gaia theory points out, the earth’s atmosphere is

12 Chun-Mei Chuang, “Politics of Molecular Feminism: A Multispecies Postcolonial Perspective (Toward a Planetary Molecular Feminism),” *The International Conference of Gendering Transformations: Feminist Knowledge Production and Trans/national Activist Engagement*, online, 28 October 2021.

13 Boris Mikhaylovich Kozo-Polyansky, *Symbiogenesis: A New Principle of Evolution*, translated by Victor Fet, edited by Victor Fet and Lynn Margulis, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010; Lynn Margulis (Sagan), “On the Origin of Mitosing Cells,” *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 14, No. 3 (1967), 255-74; Lynn Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet*, New York: Basic Books, 1998.

14 Daniel Colman, et al. “The Deep, Hot Biosphere: Twenty-five Years of Retrospection,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 114, No. 27 (2017), 6895-6903.

biologically modulated, such as the oxygen ratio, atmospheric composition, acidity, temperature, and these conditions, in turn, affect the (re)distribution of life. Specific biotas coevolve with rocks and other environmental elements, co-creating life-sustaining conditions. These processes involve myriad feedback loops and the hybrid system's capacity to restore homeostasis when perturbed.¹⁵

The noösphere should include the sphere of *microbial minds and consciousness* that Margulis and many microbiologists have revealed. Even the simplest bacteria and protists were already “conscious” entities at the beginning of evolution.¹⁶ The artificial tension between the biosphere and the noösphere can only be resolved with a radical reconceptualization that expands the spiritual scope of the noösphere to welcome the zoe-techne of innumerable nonhuman lifeforms and benefit from the invisible trans-species coevolution of sub/molecular sensibilities. It is time to explore the trans-species diffraction politics of immunity.

Diffractional Mattering of the Immune Self/Nonself Patterns

The idea of the immunological self successfully captured the public imagination in the late 20th century. Popularity also led to conceptual rigidity, overlooking historical conditions. The immunological self “has been reified into the governing principle

15 Lynn Margulis and James E. Lovelock, “Biological Modulation of the Earth's Atmosphere,” *Icarus* 21 (1974), 471-489.

16 Lynn Margulis, “The Conscious Cell,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 929 (2001), 55-70; Lynn Margulis, “Microbial Minds,” in *Forces of Change: A New View of Nature*, edited by Daniel B. Botkin *et al.*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2000, 128-129.

of modern immunology.”¹⁷ The impact of self/nonself distinction on immune tolerance is controversial, and concerns both acquired and innate immune responses.¹⁸ Innate immunity relies on a system of receptors to recognize “pathogen-associated molecular patterns” unique to microbes distinct from the self. However, innate receptors may also identify self molecules not present in a healthy state.¹⁹

Recent studies suggest our immune system's innate-adaptive distinction is not so clearly defined. For example, neutrophils, the first line of innate defense against invading microorganisms, can also modulate the adaptive immune response.²⁰ Moreover, the immune system is increasingly viewed as “a highly diffuse organ” throughout the body, including its microbiome, which is vital to the host's health and “tightly intertwined with the immune system.”²¹

After World War II, Frank Macfarlane Burnet proposed the “immunological self” concept without assuming a rigid binary. His research context includes the complicated relationship between bacteria and viruses. Regarding the contrast between lysogenic and lytic cycles, as Alfred I. Tauber and Scott H. Podolsky suggest, Burnet might have wondered, “was it lysing itself or being lysed by another, and what was the symbiotic re-

17 Arthur Silverstein and Noel R. Rose, “On the Mystique of the Immunological Self,” *Immunological Reviews* 159 (1997), 198.

18 Stefan Kaufmann, “Immunology's Coming of Age,” *Frontiers in Immunology* 10, No. 684 (2019).

19 Segundo Gonzalez, *et al.*, “Conceptual Aspects of Self and Nonself Discrimination,” *Self/Nonself* 2, No. 1 (2011), 20.

20 Carlos Rosales, “Neutrophils at the Crossroads of Innate and Adaptive Immunity,” *Journal of Leukocyte Biology* 108, No. 1 (2020), 377-396.

21 Kaufman, “Immunology's Coming of Age.”

lation of this other to the host?"²² The boundary between self, another, and other is neither absolute nor relative but involves symbiotic pathway connection among different lifeforms. Burnet explored immune self/nonself relation from an "ecological and evolutionary perspective"²³ and presented an "ecological/symbiotic orientation"²⁴ since the early stage.

As Peter Brian Medawar puts it, the complex immune response to skin grafting embodies the "uniqueness" of the individual.²⁵ However, the combinatorial patterns of individual uniqueness are "virtually infinite."²⁶ Medawar succeeded in demonstrating the acquired immune tolerance of skin grafts in mice. Nevertheless, such experiments are difficult to apply clinically.²⁷ Selfhood is a highly abstract theoretical concept, perhaps even more than individuality, which has been deconstructed and reconstituted at many levels in recent biological studies.²⁸ The reified duality of self and nonself is not foreign to the modern mind based on "the cult of the person and individual dignity," as Emile Durkheim put it at the end of the 19th

22 Alfred Tauber and Scott H. Podolsky, "Frank Macfarlane Burnet and the Immune Self," *Journal of the History of Biology* 27 No. 3 (1994), 536-7.

23 Ibid., 534.

24 Ibid., 536; 538.

25 Peter Brian Medawar, "A Biological Analysis of Individuality," *American Scientist* 40, No. 4 (1952), 639.

26 Ibid., 634.

27 Hyung Wook Park, "Managing failure: Sir Peter Brian Medawar's Transplantation Research," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 72, No. 1 (2018), 91.

28 Thomas Pradeu, "Organisms or Biological Individuals? Combining Physiological and Evolutionary Individuality," *Biology & Philosophy* 31 (2016), 797-781.

century.²⁹ However, sometimes the so-called self is no more than a consistent patterning in the molecular field of fluctuation.

The composition of the immunological self is inseparable from the phenomenon of immunological tolerance. Burnet argues that embryonic life can distinguish between self and nonself patterns and can also develop a tolerance to foreign microorganisms.³⁰ Burnet's notion of the immune pattern may be influenced by his admirable philosopher friend Alfred North Whitehead. According to Whitehead, in the ever-changing flow of life, it is a specific pattern, or "identity of pattern," that sustains through and in organisms.³¹ An event is the "ultimate unit of natural occurrence,"³² and patterns' emergence and persistence help us recognize an event.

There is thus an intrinsic and an extrinsic reality of an event, namely, the event as in its own prehension, and the event as in the prehension of other events. The concept of an organism includes, therefore, the concept of the interaction of organisms.³³

The continuation of a given being – its "self" or "identity" – is a process of ecological entanglement and differentiation of time, space, matter, and information in the multiscale fields

29 Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, translated by W.D. Halls. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1984, 333.

30 Silverstein and Rose, "On the Mystique," 198.

31 Warwick Anderson and Ian R. Mackay, "Fashioning the Immunological Self: The Biological Individuality of F. Macfarlane Burnet," *Journal of the History of Biology* 47, No. 1 (2014), 153.

32 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, New York: The Free Press, 1997, 105.

33 Ibid., 105-6.

of existence. All modes of patterns are scientifically detectable in the force field of organisms and their interaction, or rather *intra-action*, to borrow Karen Barad's term.

In the third year of the epidemic, what concerns us is the formation, maintenance, and decline of immunity. The temporality of immune memory, the superimposition of multiple infections, and the evolution, emergence, interference, reinforcement, and evasion of immunity, all involve microscale diffractive politics and semiosis and boundary negotiation.

Due to the limits of human sense organs, the phenomena of diffraction, reflection, and refraction are far more common than we thought. Donna Haraway stresses that diffraction is a better trope for critical thinking than reflection and refraction because diffraction can produce modes of interferences and differences instead of displacing the same.³⁴ Barad emphasizes that "diffraction is a matter of differential entanglements;" that is, about "*the entangled nature of differences that matter*."³⁵ The relation between diffraction and mattering is on-to-epistemological, that is, about practice and living together.

That is, every finite being is always already threaded through with an infinite alterity diffracted through being and time.³⁶

34 Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Crossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A Treichler, New York: Routledge, 1992, 300; Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.femaleman@_Meets_OncomouseTM: Feminism and Technoscience*, New York: Routledge, 1997, 16.

35 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, 381.

36 Karen Barad, "TransMaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings," *GLQ A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, No. 2-3 (2015), 401.

When the analytical boundaries between time, space, and matter are constantly challenged, their ontological becoming-together and intra-action are also manifested. The production of a difference is simultaneously producing an entanglement and vice versa. Nevertheless, they are not in a linear context but a theoretically infinitely divisible present. Entanglement and differentiation co-constitute at all possible scales. The scale problem is also complicated, as the concept of space now implicates both time and matter.

Difference is not some universal concept for all places and times, but is itself a multiplicity within/of itself. Difference itself is diffracted. Diffraction is a matter of differences at every scale, or rather in the making and remaking of scale (spacetime-matterings). Each bit of matter, each moment of time, each position in space is a multiplicity, a superposition/entanglement of (seemingly) disparate parts.³⁷

Just as Whitehead's organic philosophy cuts through the distinction between the organic and the inorganic with the energetic persistence of patterns, or patternings, so does mattering as the emergence of events traverses the division of time and space. Barad's concept of spacetime-matterings can be understood as the multiple evolutionary and historical specificities sedimented in active becomings.

Emergence, formation, mattering, and patterning are not merely about epistemological enacts of the human subject. They are coevolutionary processes of all agents becoming with the world they inhabit, measure, and transform. From the perspective of *diffractive mattering*, mutual interference in the coevolution of planetary life has contributed to the perceptible immune memory and the co-constitution of self and nonself.

37 Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *Parallax* 20, No. 3 (2014), 176.

Mapping Diffraction Patterns of Immunity

The visualization of viruses in the late 1930s and several major pandemics have made the coevolution between viruses and cellular organisms an essential field for rethinking immunity. By mapping the diffraction patterns of immunity and uncovering hidden ecological entanglements, we can reconstruct the trans-species memory embodied in the diffractive mattering of our planetary biosphere.

Learning from other lifeforms and natural forces has always been one of the most indispensable resources in human technology. The 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry was jointly awarded to two chemists for developing CRISPR/Cas9 “genetic scissors,” named “one of gene technology’s sharpest tools.” CRISPR clustered, regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats is the bacterial immune system defending against viruses, and Cas9 stands for CRISPR-associated protein 9. In short, the bacterial CRISPR system incorporates a viral-derived new spacer while destroying the invading viral genome and thereby acquires sequence-specific adaptive immunity. The system’s operation mainly includes three steps, adaptation, crRNA (CRISPR RNAs) biogenesis, and interference. The most critical and challenging to determine is adaptation, i.e., immunization and spacer acquisition.³⁸

Recent research has revealed remarkable diversity in these systems’ mechanisms. At the same time, the prokaryotes need to develop mechanisms to avoid autoimmunity since the foreign antigenic sequences have been inserted into their memory array.³⁹ In some cases, it can even “vaccinate” cells

38 Robert Heler, et al, “Adapting to New Threats: The Generation of Memory by CRISPR-Cas Immune Systems,” *Molecular Microbiology* 93, No. 1 (2014), 2.

39 Philip Nussenzweig and Luciano A. Marraffini, “Molecular Mechanisms of CRISPR-Cas Immunity in Bacteria,” *Annual Review of Genetics* 54 (2020), 104.

against “undesirable genetic elements” acquired in the process.⁴⁰ Moreover, CRISPR systems can optimize their immune response against the newest invaders by ordering spacers chronologically, deploying the so-called “differential expression” of crRNAs across the array.⁴¹

Maintaining immune memory is a great challenge, although not all immune cells have the ability to memorize. According to a review paper by Sandra C. Garrett, the frequency of spacer additions depends on species, system, and many conditions. The length of spacer arrays is typically no more than 50 spacers in bacteria and 100 in archaea, although there are a few exceptions. Also, some genomes may include more than one CRISPR system. New spacers are continuously added to the array in response to new invaders, thus clearing some old spacers. However, the spacers are not always ordered chronologically, and sometimes the arrays collapse or rearrange. Understanding how immune memory is acquired, maintained, and rearranged requires a better understanding of the dynamics of CRISPR arrays.⁴²

The foreign sequence spacers employed to remember invaders are not rigid but maintain the structural integrity within which evolutionary selection and adaptation can work, allowing specific patterns to persist amid change. Spacer acquisition, maintenance, and change are critical events in evolution at the molecular level.

40 Rodolphe Barrangou and Luciano A. Marraffini, “CRISPR-Cas Systems: Prokaryotes Upgrade to Adaptive Immunity,” *Molecular Cell* 54, No. 2 (2014), 239.

41 Jon McGinn and Luciano A. Marraffini, “Molecular Mechanisms of CRISPR-Cas Spacer Acquisition,” *Nature Reviews. Microbiology* 17, No. 1 (2019), 8.

42 Sandra Garrett, “Pruning and Tending Immune Memories: Spacer Dynamics in the CRISPR Array,” *Frontiers in Microbiology* 12, No. 664299 (2021).

The system sometimes forms “self-targeting spacers” that cause damage to its own cells. The researchers found that this kind of “endogenous CRISPR-Cas system” may play other functions, belonging to a mechanism of programmable gene regulation. The trouble is that viruses often exploit this situation for immune escape, driving the host’s CRISPR-Cas system for autoimmunity rather than striking the pathogens. In saving oneself, the host may mutate or delete the system and lose the function of defending against invaders.⁴³ The two conceptual sets of protection/attack and self/nonself do not entirely overlap but require a broader space-time scope allowing for a spiral dynamic of boundary maintenance, confusion, negotiation, and reorganization.

Symbiosis is ubiquitous. As Thomas Pradeu points out, scientists have discovered the phenomenon of “co-immunity”: microorganisms participate in the host’s immune defense against pathogens.⁴⁴ The concept of biological individuality still plays a crucial role, but with greater emphasis on the continuous reconfiguration of heterogeneous elements. We need to reassess the negotiation of molecular boundaries between self and nonself through the lens of reticular evolution. As Nathalie Gontier explains,

Reticulate evolution today is a *vernacular concept* for evolutionary change induced by mechanisms and processes of *symbiosis, symbiogenesis, lateral gene transfer, hybridization or divergence with gene flow, and infectious heredity*.⁴⁵

43 Franziska Wimmer and Chase L. Beisel, “CRISPR-Cas Systems and the Paradox of Self-Targeting Spacers,” *Frontiers in Microbiology* 10, No. 3078 (2020).

44 Pradeu, “Organisms,” 20.

45 Nathalie Gontier, “Reticulate Evolution Everywhere,” in: *Reticulate Evolution: Symbiogenesis, Lateral Gene Transfer, Hybridization and Infectious*

In 2003, researchers confirmed that the unidentified bacteria discovered ten years ago were giant viruses. They were called Mimivirus because of the characteristics of “mimicking microbes.” Giant viruses are not uncommon and are highly diverse and structurally complex. Their genome size is bigger than some smaller bacteria.⁴⁶ Later it was discovered that giant viruses could also be infected by smaller viruses called “virophages,” which were named “Sputnik” because they behave like satellite viruses that co-infect cellular hosts with giant viruses. While satellite viruses replicate in the cellular host nucleus, Sputnik virophage must use virus factories established by their viral host in the cellular cell and cause giant viruses to produce defective particles.⁴⁷ Studies show constant genetic interaction between cellular organisms, giant viruses, and virophages. In other words, during the co- and super-infections of cellular hosts, there is “an intricate, multilayered network.”⁴⁸

Just as bacteria invented the CRISPR system against bacteriophages, giant viruses formed their unique immune memory system concerning virophages, named “MMIVIRE,

Heredity, edited by Nathalie Gontier, Cham: Springer, 2015, 21.

46 Bernard La Scola, et al. “A Giant Virus in Amoebae,” *Science* 299, No. 5615 (2003), 2033.

47 Bernard La Scola, et al., “The Virophage as a Unique Parasite of the Giant Mimivirus,” *Nature* 455, No. 7209 (2008), 100-4; Christopher Desjardins, “Unusual Viral Genomes: Mimivirus and the Polydnnaviruses,” in: *Parasitoid Viruses: Symbionts and Pathogens*, edited by Nancy E. Beckage and Jean-Michel Drezen, Amsterdam: Elsevier Inc, 2012, 117; Christelle Desnues, et al., “Sputnik, a Virophage Infecting the Viral Domain of Life,” *Advances in Virus Research* 82 (2012), 63-89.

48 Jan Diesend, et al., “Amoebae, Giant Viruses, and Virophages Make Up a Complex, Multilayered Threesome,” *Frontiers in Cellular and Infection Microbiology* 7, No. 527 (2018).

mimivirus virophage resistance element).⁴⁹ Some researchers questioned this analogy, pointing out that MIMIVIRE is unlikely to be an adaptive immune system because it lacks many key properties of CRISPR, especially the process of distinguishing between self and nonself; after all, virophages are “absolute parasites” of the giant viruses.⁵⁰

Another diffraction pattern is about the way virophages assist cellular organisms in developing “anti-giant virus immunity.” In a lab co-infection system, where a giant virus and its virophage simultaneously infect a protist, the cellular host integrates the virophage genome, whose gene expression can be activated later as an agent of “adaptive immunity” when a giant virus superinfects the host. The process is similar to the CRISPR-Cas system of prokaryotes.⁵¹ The analogy between the two mechanisms is incomplete, especially regarding the degree to which foreign sequences are “domesticated.” The connection between protist hosts and virophages is more like a symbiotic state than an immune system and can be regarded as a different stage of defense system evolution.⁵²

Tracking the trans-species coevolution of planetary life, we now understand the omnipresence of microorganisms and their multilevel symbiotic networks at all scales of life. The politico-ecological significance of these findings is not in the analogy but in the fact that microscopic biological entities

such as virophages, viruses, bacteriophages, archaea, bacteria, and protists – substantial forces invisible to the human eye – play a vital role in the comprehensive immune and memory system of the earth’s biosphere. These all involve microscale interface dynamism in which immunity and memory are interlaced, revealing the pluralist temporalities of immunological self/nonself patterns.

Recent discoveries, including the aforementioned giant viruses, their virophages, and corresponding complex interaction networks, have contributed to the emerging ecological perspective in virology.⁵³ Both capitalism and climate change have dramatically increased the chances of viral transmission across species barriers. Viral surveillance and biodiversity surveys are central to preventing future zoonotic disease outbreaks.⁵⁴

Much research on the structure and function of SARS-Cov-2 has focused on its pathways into the cell because it instructs us on the possible way to block it effectively. The virus’ spike protein, the front line of entry into the cell, is the hotspot for its rapid mutation.⁵⁵ All available vaccines produce nonvirulent SARS-Cov-2 spike proteins directly or indirectly, stimulating the body’s antigen-presenting cells, triggering a series of immune responses, producing antibodies, killer T cells, and finally generating specific memory B cells and memory T cells.⁵⁶

In the early days of the pandemic, the public was con-

49 Anthony Levasseur, *et al.* “MIMIVIRE is a Defence System in Mimivirus that Confers Resistance to Virophage,” *Nature* 531, No. 7593 (2016), 250.

50 Jean-Michel Claverie and Chantal Abergel, “CRISPR-Cas-like System in Giant Viruses: Why MIMIVIRE Is Not Likely to Be an Adaptive Immune System,” *Virologica Sinica* 31, No. 3 (2016), 202.

51 Eugene Koonin and Mart Krupovic. “Polintons, Virophages and Transpovirons: A Tangled Web Linking Viruses, Transposons and Immunity,” *Current Opinion in Virology* 25 (2017), 12.

52 *Ibid.*, 13.

53 Nadav Brandes and Michal Linial, “Giant Viruses-Big Surprises,” *Viruses* 11, No. 5 (2019), 404.

54 Colin Carlson, *et al.*, “Climate Change Increases Cross-species Viral Transmission Risk,” *Nature* (2022).

55 Cody Jackson, *et al.*, “Mechanisms of SARS-CoV-2 Entry into Cells,” *Nature Reviews Molecular Cell Biology* 23 (2022), 3-20.

56 Jonathan Corum and Carl Zimmer, “How Nine Covid-19 Vaccines Work,” *New York Times* (May 7, 2021), online: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/health/how-covid-19-vaccines-work.html>.

cerned about herd immunity. Today, the high mutation rate and immune escape exhibited by SARS-Cov-2 have made herd immunity nearly impossible. Instead, deploying hybrid immunity has become an essential research focus.⁵⁷ Vaccines remain a necessary strategy to reduce infection rates and severe conditions. With vaccines, we inject critical parts of the virus or its genetic instructions into the body to acquire an immune memory against the virus. Memories are tricky things irreducible to a rational formula, especially at the sub/molecular level. Intimacy replaces hostility.

Planetary Trans-scale Streams of Consciousness

Every particular lifeform measures its world primarily with itself, i.e., its own body and senses, constituting the world and itself as phenomena. As Barad says, when we enact a measurement, “we are ‘peeking’ inside a phenomenon.”⁵⁸ As levels of observation, scales are not merely an epistemic problem but reflect the observer’s changing conditions.

In bacteria, bacteriophages, viruses, virophages, protists, and even multicellular organisms like humans, the diffraction patterns of immunity show multiple superimpositions and sub-

57 Victoria Hall, et al., “Protection against SARS-CoV-2 after Covid-19 Vaccination and Previous Infection,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 386, No. 13 (2022): 1207-1220; David Goldblatt, “SARS-CoV-2: From Herd Immunity to Hybrid Immunity,” *Nature Reviews: Immunology* 22, No. 6 (2022), 333-334; Peter Nordström, et al., “Risk of SARS-CoV-2 Reinfection and COVID-19 Hospitalisation in Individuals with Natural and Hybrid Immunity: A Retrospective, Total Population Cohort Study in Sweden,” *The Lancet. Infectious Diseases* 22, No. 6 (2022), 781-790.

58 Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 345.

tle boundary negotiation between self and nonself, endogenous and exogenous, internal and external forces. At the sub/molecular level, the dynamic configuration of boundaries is like countless minuscule Gaias, sharing, exchanging, negotiating, and transforming in the chain feedback loops of information and matter.

Difference is a site of contestation in our times, not only in the cultural field but also in the life sciences, particularly regarding microscale differentiation. Gilles Deleuze praises Charles Darwin for his “great novelty” of “inaugurating the thought of individual difference.”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it is not always possible to make sense of individual differences because we can never sense all of them. As Deleuze suggests, body parts are composed of “actualised pre-individual singularities.”⁶⁰ A pre-individual singularity is an infinitely differentiating site of multiplicity, for instance, a molecular species. An antigen is a specific molecular species that elicits a particular response upon entry into an organism’s substance, including antibodies’ production.⁶¹ In so far as the immune system functions at the sub/molecular level of differential multiplicity, the self/nonself distinction evades a holistic definition. In that case, the identification between molecules can only concern patterning in dynamic configurations.

The trans-scale diffraction patterns of immunity and memory make the concept of self turbulent, continuously forming a non-linear spiral feedback loop. One of Burnet’s most famous quotes is his description of a virus as “a stream of bi-

59 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton, London: Athlone, 1994, 279.

60 Ibid., 279.

61 Frank Macfarlane Burnet and Frank Fenner, “Genetics and Immunology,” *Heredity* 2 (1948), 290.

ological patterns.”⁶² Life is consciousness. Margulis’s notion of microbial consciousness is not a metaphor but a vital clue manifesting a nonhuman embodied perspective in the coevolution of planetary life. As such, viruses as streams of biological patterns are like trans-species and trans-scale streams of consciousness that constantly co-write the planetary memory with cellular lifeforms via vibrant information/matter shuttles. The diffraction patterns of immunity mapped here are only a tiny slice of the 3.7 billion-year-long life/consciousness duration stream. Today, we know that every little piece is a site of infinitely differentiating multiplicity, nourishing our molecular sensibility to remember the future.

Besides technology and rationality, a trans-species noösphere is also about sensation, pleasure, pride, humility, and affective intoxication. Rationality and affectivity are enmeshed in living corporeality. Viruses – latecomers in the territory of human knowledge, volatile and potent agents of infection and immunity – have a lot to teach us about sense and nonsense, between self and nonself, form the sensible and insensible, and the evolutionary urge for a molecular intuition mutation. The possibility of political life as a heterogeneous co-constitution lies in this ongoing lesson about sense and sensibility.

Tomorrow is yesterday. NASA just released the first images on July 12, 2022, of the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), launched on December 25, 2021. JWST is an infrared eye at minus 266 degrees Celsius that can visualize the first galaxies formed after the universe was born 13.5 billion years ago.⁶³ As the universe continues to expand, the lights of

these distant spacetime matters have been stretched over a long time.

In a sense, our immune systems are not unlike distant galaxies. When we study them, we look at the unknown origin and prolonged coevolving infection and immunity of planetary life and mind, that is, the trans-species intertwined enfolding of the biosphere and noösphere. The past and the future are infinitely differentiable multiplicities, condensed in the imperceptible singularities of the present, both at the beginning of galaxies and the winding memory of life. Our immune memories, which appear so short in duration, also stretch into eternity in an instant.

62 Qtd. in André Lwoff, “The Concept of Virus,” *Journal of General Microbiology* 17, No. 2 (1957), 248.

63 Alexandra Witze, “Webb Telescope Blasts Off Successfully – Launching a New Era in Astronomy,” *Nature* 25 (Dec 2021).

On the Possibilities for Future Communisms: Rethinking Communism as Biocommunism¹

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1 The first version of this work was prepared for the Special Dossier edited by Slavoj Žižek and Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, in the framework of the *Bajo Palabra* journal project of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2023).

Introduction

Biocommunism, while not a new concept,² has yet to be the subject of considerable academic research. Wróbel has most recently taken it up.³ Beginning with Dyer-Witheford's suggestion of a return to Marx's concept of species-being, or *Gattungswesen*,⁴ this essay will elaborate on the influence of this term in the early Marx and the role which the notion of species held in the Kyoto School. The essay concludes with an allusion to Agamben and Butler that aims to provide a much-needed discussion about the feasibility of the term biocommunism as an improved notion of communism more suitable for the current reality.

Dyer-Witheford originally proposed that the early Marx already took such a standpoint. Hence, Dyer-Witheford's original argument construed biocommunism as a return to a neglected concern with "life itself."⁵ A concern that is already present in Marx's early writings, particularly in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.⁶ Thus, biocommunism is in no way the same kind of Communism often connected with what Foucault called biopolitics: a term that delineates the usage of "diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies

2 N. Dyer-Witheford, "Species-Beings: For Biocommunism," presented at the *Historical Materialism Conference "Many Marxisms"* (2008, November 7-9).

3 S. Wróbel, "Biocommunism or Beyond the Biopolitical Paradigm," *Philosophy Study* (2020), 293-308; S. Wróbel, "Biocommunism and its Role as it Overcomes Biopolitics," *Polish Sociological Review* (2020), 301-321.

4 Dyer-Witheford, "Species-Beings."

5 Ibid., 1.

6 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Marx's Concept of Man*, edited by Erich Fromm, translated by Thomas B. Bottomore, New York: Continuum, 2004 [1844], 93-109.

and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'biopower.'⁷ Instead, biocommunism rejects such a political agenda.⁸ Biocommunism is instead an orientation towards a life without direct state control. Suppose the human species is, as Dyer-Witheford states, capable of "transforming itself, directing its own evolution."⁹ The state then becomes, at best, a dynamic construct (and at its worst, it becomes a somewhat monstrous creation à la Hobbes' Leviathan.¹⁰

Marx's Alienation

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx described four kinds of alienation that workers are subjected to: 1. *alienation from the product of their labour*; 2. *from the work process itself*; 3. *from their species-being*; and 4. *from themselves*. The relationship between the four kinds of alienation can be described as follows: the subject of Marx's inquiry (the worker) progressively becomes alienated from the world and themselves through each type of alienation they find themselves subjected to.

In the first kind of alienation, each worker is alienated from the object of their production by being waged instead of selling the fruit of their labour. This makes them a commodity that can be bought or rented on the market. The owner of the machines of production hires the skilled or the cheapest

labour to perform increasingly simple tasks. With each step towards an increased simplification (by, e.g., introducing a new piece of automatic equipment), workers find themselves in a relationship with the means of production, which increasingly sees them as cogs in the industrial process. Workers under these conditions rent their time and skill to the highest bidder – thus, they become employed. Workers can sell themselves short (if workers are abundant, wages are low, and it is often better to have a low wage than none), or they can negotiate for higher wages (if workers are scarce, wages tend to rise). Marx described this as an auction, where the owner's goal is to pay as little as possible. Without any checks or controls, Marx stipulated that "[t]he needs of the worker are thus reduced to the need to maintain him during *his work*, so that the race of workers does not die out."¹¹

The second kind of alienation, where the workers are alienated from the mode of production, is closely connected to the first kind. The specialization of production (as seen in Fordism and later gains in automatization of production processes) means that the individual worker loses sight of the whole process of production. Instead, each worker only knows how to produce a limited number of parts needed to assemble the final product. An effect of this is that each worker's skill becomes increasingly specialized and thus also easier to come by. Despite what common sense might suggest, it is impossible for an increase in specialization to lead to the individualization of the worker. Each worker is simply a cog in the machine, and the more specialized the task, the easier it is for the owner to train someone else to perform it. Reducing complicated production processes to repetitive tasks made it possible to produce complex products without needing workers who are masters of many trades. As an example of the producing class,

7 M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. I: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978 [1976], 140.

8 Wróbel, "Biocommunism or Beyond"; Wróbel, "Biocommunism and its Role."

9 Dyer-Witheford, "Species-Being," 1.

10 T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London: The Clarendon Press, 1965 [1651].

11 Marx, "Economic and Philosophical," 92.

a shoemaker was a person who could make a whole shoe, from measurements to the finished product. In capitalism, the honed skills of a single shoemaker have been divided among many unskilled workers who only know how to make a single part of the shoe.

The third kind of alienation is the alienation that workers experience from themselves. This form of alienation comes about because workers must compete against one another. Workers no longer see each other as having a connection to their common struggle for a better life and society; instead, each worker lives simply for themselves. In a sense, they are divided from each other and have lost their class cohesion. Under this regime, the workers increasingly view each other as competitors rather than equals (following this, one might also argue this follows not from the fourth but rather from the first kind of alienation). The undermining of class cohesion in capitalism is vital for production lines to run smoothly and profit margins as high as possible. Collective bargaining, a unified working class, is perhaps one of the biggest threats to the capitalist *ratio*.

Additionally, the need for surplus value in capitalism effectively means that this system depends on a certain level of unemployment (a redundant population) to keep wages low. The fragmentation of the workers, and to a large extent, the majority of the population, intensifies as jobs become fewer and wages drop. This often leads to nationalist sentiments as political parties blame the lack of employment on foreigners, migrants or refugees. Thus, capitalism's successful fracturing of class cohesion can be considered an explanation for the surge in nationalist tendencies before and after the world wars.¹²

12 E.g., T. Adorno, et al. *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York: The Norton Library, 1969 [1950]; or M. Goodfellow, *Hostile Environment*, London, New York: Verso Books, 2019.

The fourth kind of alienation directly relates to Marx's concept of species-being. In this form of alienation, the workers are alienated from the processes and products of production or from each other and their biological needs. This alienation focuses on the fact that the workers are no longer treated "as a *universal* and consequently a free being."¹³ Since capitalism treats workers' humanity as less than universal and free, it warps each individual's life into a parody. Under capitalism, the needs humans share with animals become the *telos* of work: each worker works to afford; eating, drinking and procreating, while the work itself becomes a means for securing the satisfaction of these needs by fracturing humans' connection with their nature, which capitalism does by imposing a strict mind-body dualism that gives preferential treatment to contemplation (a position that is criticized in the 11th thesis on Feuerbach).¹⁴ By making the human body a simple means to an end, as if it were an object like food, shelter or clothing, capitalism makes basic needs into the highest. The term species-being is the specific category that makes it possible to delineate humans and their alienation from their bodies or nature. This alienation follows from a particular understanding of (human) nature that equates nature with something humanity can conquer by making it useful. The workers treat their bodies as tools that can be sold or rented out. Such a situation facilitates understanding the body as a possible site for profit generation, making old age and bodily degeneration a natural enemy of capitalism. Alienation from one's species-being means that humans have come to regard work as a means to fulfil their basic needs. This starkly opposes Marx's understanding of labour as a life-affirming activity in itself – labour for the sake of life is the most

13 Marx, "Economic and Philosophical," 83.

14 K. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Marx/Engels Selected Works Vol. 1*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976 [1845], 15.

human activity. However, in capitalism, labour has become a means pressed into the service of survival. By making the body a vessel containing the mind and making work a necessary activity for securing life, the capitalist mind-body dualism reasserts itself as a natural state of affairs. However, as Marx writes, “[p]roductive life is, however, species-life,”¹⁵ which means that labour is not only having something to do with our bodies. Instead, and more importantly, according to Marx, labour is also an integral part of what it means to be human – it is the life of the human species; it is their species-being.

Biocommunity understands the species-being of humans to be a particular sensitivity towards humanity’s connectedness, both with nature and with each other. Species-being constitutes humanity’s ability to “identify and assemble itself as a species and alter itself.”¹⁶ Biocommunity construed in this sense aligns with recent scholarship within the tendency of post-humanism; we will return to this later. Hence, Dyer-Witherford’s conception of biocommunity and its return to Marx’s species-being suggests a critique of how the capitalist ratio renders particulars into the same.

Society and Individuals in the Kyoto School

The following sections offer the reader a concrete example of a specific discussion of species in relation to society and individuality. I offer this example for two reasons. On the one hand, Miki’s critique of Tanabe’s notion of species informs the conclusion of this essay. On the other hand, this example offers a warning related to applying the idea of species as the

15 Marx, “Economic and Philosophical,” 84.

16 Dyer-Witherford, “Species-Being,” 2.

foundation for nation-states. Tanabe’s logic of species and Miki’s critique of Tanabe offer precisely this.

Tanabe’s intervention in the philosophy of the Kyoto School was a reorientation of the founder Nishida’s logic of (absolute) nothingness, a reorientation that saw the term species take centre stage. Tanabe diverged from Nishida’s logic by shifting its focus from individuals to society by focusing on the notion of species. This reorientation is directly related to Tanabe’s exposure to historical materialism, which Tanabe sought to combine with the logic of nothingness.¹⁷ In eurocentric terms, Tanabe’s reorientation refuted Hobbes’ claim that the individual precedes the state. Instead, Tanabe proposed that “society is not a relationship that simply proceeds from individuals. Rather ... [it] exist[s] as something preceding them.”¹⁸ This directly links Tanabe’s philosophy with the Japanese Empire’s conduct during the second Sino-Japanese war and the second world war. Tanabe argued that the rise of ethnocentric state ideologies in Asia during the early 20th century proved this. Some commentators have interpreted this claim as fuelling Japanism and effectively turning imperial citizens into tools the state could use and abuse as it saw fit. Leaving a detailed account of this aside, let us look at the intersections between Tanabe and Marx’s writings.

Stating that society proceeds from individuals, Tanabe echoes Marx’s claim that part of what it means to be a human is to be a biological or material being. However, Tanabe fails to emphasize Marx’s realization that each human being is also an individual whom neither precedes nor comes after society. Instead, Marx’s individual, which differs from Tanabe’s, is both

17 Nakaoka in F. Masakatsu, et al., *The Philosophy of the Kyoto School*, edited by Fujita Masakatsu and John Krummel, translated by Robert Chapeskie, Singapore: Springer. 2018, 43.

18 Tanabe in Masakatsu, *Philosophy*, 25.

the condition for and conditioned by society – this is a dynamic process that is also historically situated in the present state of affairs. However, Tanabe and Marx share the conception that humans are *universal* and *free beings*. Tanabe promotes precisely such a vision by stating that “the rational individual has no reason to blindly follow any state ideology because ‘external coercion [does not] possess a morally binding force.’”¹⁹ Instead, “the coercion of state society must be converted to autonomy through reason,”²⁰ which surprisingly enough means for Tanabe that the autonomous individual is reasonable enough only to follow a morally righteous state and not an immoral one (the Japanese Empire, the Third Reich and Stalin seem to offer examples that contradict Tanabe’s argument). It would appear that Tanabe’s using the term species-being comes with a promise and a curse.

On the one hand, it promises a communal life and a renewed focus on society,²¹ while also rejecting what Bloch, in opposition to Marx’s branch of humanism, called “general and abstract [humanitarianism].”²² On the other hand, it is cursed by being all too easily misappropriated by totalitarian ideologies. However, the danger was that Tanabe’s philosophy was susceptible to propagating ethnic supremacy and encouraging state coercion.

Another figure associated with the Kyoto School, Miki, opposed the nationalistic use of Tanabe’s philosophy. Miki’s critique is essential for biocommunity because it addresses the conservative tendency to put society before individu-

19 Ibid., 26.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 27.

22 E. Bloch, “Karl Marx and Humanity: The Material of Hope,” in *On Karl Marx*, translated by John Maxwell, London; New York: Verso. 2018 [1968], 21.

als. Miki’s critique involves shifting focus from species (which Tanabe understood as specific to each culture or society) to each individual’s creative force. Thus, Miki instead suggested a “logic of imagination.”²³ With this logic, Miki stipulated that art and technology are near-perfect examples of each individual’s creative force and that the individual’s creativity has the power to change society. This critique is essential for biocommunity because Miki’s focus on the creative force of each member of humanity suggests the possibility of conceiving biocommunity as an imaginative project of individuals attempting to change their common conditions.

Zoe, Bios, and Grievability

In the preface to *The Highest Poverty*, Agamben states that the book is concerned with “life as that which is never given as property but only as a common use.”²⁴ As an example of communal life, Agamben alludes to the monastic life while, at the same time, proclaiming that it is “surprising that the monastic ideal [the contemplative life]... should have given origin to a model of total communitarian life.”²⁵ The reason behind Agamben’s surprise is rooted in the fact that while the monastic life is communal, it is also secluded from the other parts of society. It is, moreover, a life utterly devoted to contemplation and seclusion. However, the monastic life is a template rather than a mould for a communitarian future. In an attempt to juxtapose Agamben with biocommunity, the following section

23 Miki in Masakatsu, *Philosophy*, 59.

24 G. Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, translated by Adam Kotsko, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013 [2011], xiii.

25 Ibid., 9.

elaborates on Agamben's concern with biopolitics and communal life and supplements this with Butler's conception of grievability and precarious lives and insights gained from Miki's critique of Tanabe's logic. In the end, the goal of juxtaposing these thinkers is to present biocommunity as a concept concerned with critiquing biopolitics for turning its gaze solely on life itself.

Similar to Agamben, Butler's book *Precarious Life* and her Adorno Prize Lecture "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life?" share Agamben's concern with issues related to how one understands life. In both texts, Butler defines a precarious life as a life in danger of being lost. Thus, a precarious life is, first and foremost, constituted by its vulnerability. Such an understanding of life can be gleaned from Butler's portrayal of humans as "socially constituted bodies, [which are] attached ... [and] exposed to others."²⁶ The tension expressed here between one's own life and the other is of course Hegelian at its core.²⁷ I am, of course, referring to the master-slave dialectic where Hegel uses the allegory of the master and slave battling for recognition as a metaphor for the tension between, e.g., individuals and society (a tension which plays a predominant role in Marx's philosophy). Like Hegel, Butler recognizes the relativity of knowledge and its situatedness in the world. Still, in moving beyond Hegel, Butler follows in the footsteps of Levinas, whose notion of 'the face' to Butler suggests that a "body implies mortality ... the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others."²⁸ Hence, Butler and Marx's material dimension of human life, their actual lived lives, becomes the point

26 J. Butler, *Precarious Life*, London, New York: Verso. 2004, 20.

27 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, edited and translated by Terry Pinkard, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2018 [1807], 112-3.

28 Butler, *Precarious*, 24.

of departure for any philosophical inquiry into inter-human relationships.

The notion of bare life (*zoé*) is by Agamben opposed to the political life (*bios*). Agamben makes a similar argument in *Homo Sacer* by distinguishing bare life from political life. The former is a vulnerable life without political influence, while the latter is a political life – it is the citizen's life. Thus, not unlike Foucault, for whom biopolitics began as "a form of power that subjugates and makes"²⁹ subjects into citizens, Agamben locates the beginning of biopolitics with the human body becoming politicized; the human body becomes political when "birth immediately becomes nation."³⁰ Under such conditions, life is subject to a calculable ratio that only sees citizens or foreigners (non-citizens). There are no longer human beings, only citizens subjected to various nation-states.

A grievable life is a life whose disappearance warrants grief. Butler describes the notion of grievability as a condition for a life being understood as being worth living – "[if] I have no certainty that I will have food or shelter, or that no social network or institution would catch me if I fall, then I come to belong to the ungrievable."³¹ This predicament leads Butler to claim that "it surely does not seem worth it to survive under such conditions [being ungrievable]."³² Hence, it seems that grievability can be a helpful term for elaborating on Agamben's

29 M. Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Essential Works of Foucault*, Vol. 3: Power, edited by James D. Faubion, New York: The New Press, 2000 [1982], 331.

30 G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1998 [1995], 128.

31 J. Butler, "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life?," *Radical Philosophy* (2012), 15.

32 Ibid.

distinction between Zoé and Bios. On the one hand, grievability allows us to understand those specific conditions under which a life can be deemed liveable or not.

On the other hand, Butler's notion is also easily translated into Agambian terms. The grievable life is comparable with bios, and the precarious life with zoé. *If a bare life is not worth living because it is regarded as worthless in the eyes of the state or society, how can we begin thinking about those lives that take up such a position in our societies?* To answer this question, Agamben's idea of Homo Sacer seems useful. The sacred human is a term that describes a (human) life exempt from the political sphere, a human who can be killed or sacrificed – it is a profane life, a bare life – and the killing of the sacred human is, therefore, neither murder nor is it sacrilege. In Butler's terms, such a person constitutes an ungrievable existence – a person “who are unreal ... [who] cannot be mourned ... [and thus] must be killed.”³³ Thus for Butler, “human vulnerability ... emerges with life itself ... [and is the] condition of being laid bare from the start.”³⁴ The notions of bare life, species-being, and grievability all seem concerned with a similar question: *what are the conditions of life itself?* This concern is, therefore, something which both Agamben and Butler share with biocommunism.

Conclusion

The introduction showed that Dyer-Witheford's conception of biocommunism was directly related to Marx's idea of humanity's common species-being. Following this, I suggested that

33 Butler, *Precarious*, 33.

34 Ibid.

biocommunism could be a novel intervention, a new kind of communism, which is reoriented towards a sensitivity towards the social life of humans instead of a focus on mechanical production and the state. With the detour to Japanese modernity in general and Tanabe in particular, we saw how the notion of species became problematic because of the nationalistic tendencies that so easily perverted it. Furthermore, with Miki's critique of Tanabe, we were led to our present task: to inquire into the emancipatory possibilities of biocommunism in light of Miki's rejection of those kinds of social ontologies that emphasizes society above individuals. Moreover, Miki's critique of Tanabe suggested that creativity and imagination are shared universally by all humans, a sort of shared, as Marx would have called it, species-being.

Restrictions to what possibly counts as a grievable life must necessarily foreclose any possibility of understanding what it means to be a human being. In light of this, biocommunism should attempt to provide an unrestricted account of all the nuances of human life. I must, however, confess here that I do not mean this in a logical or progressive sense. Instead, I suggest that biocommunism must refrain from becoming a static theory of what constitutes a human(e) life. Therefore, biocommunism must, if it is to be a successful term, always be ready to backtrack on its claims and reiterate the constant need for reevaluating its attempts at providing a complete description of what constitutes a life worth living.³⁵ By making the biocommunitistic life negotiable, fluid and dynamic, it is possible to hint toward it being a utopian project without settling on a consensus regarding its final form. From Marx's writings, we know that any description of a society is always limited to the specific historical situation in which it finds itself. Hence, biocommunists must be aware of the term's limited perspective.

35 Dyer-Witheford, “Species-Beings,” 5.

This awareness must materialise itself as a constant preparedness to reexamine one's own assertions as much as those of one's opponents. Biocommunism constitutes a possibility of understanding humans in their ever-evolving stages of development without being restricted by pre-given theoretical givens. Moreover, biocommunism would be a kind of communism concerned with the creative force of humanity in all its shapes, present and future alike. However, the rise of biopolitical regimes means that the individual has lost direct control over their development, which suggests that society is currently being dictated by institutions rather than by the individuals themselves.

There is a sense in which biocommunism is a specific conception of communism, which could align itself with Bookchin's idea of social ecology (a theory whose emphasis on the relationship between nature and society, ecology and social disaster, makes it specifically well suited for engaging with current humanitarian predicaments, e.g., the Kurdish cause, climate change and so on). However, in this text, Bookchin's writings figure only in the back of my mind.³⁶ Therefore, I must urge the reader to remember that if biocommunism turns out to be viable, then the real test of this term will not be in the head of any academic but in the hands of a freedom fighter. Biocommunism is, therefore, an attempt at insisting on the need for an increased sensitivity towards individuals' lives, and this means to insist on biocommunism's possibility of rethinking our alienation from our species-being in new ways that enable each individual to be creative and through this creativity to have a direct relationship with their development both as individuals and as social beings living in a society.

36 M. Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*, Edinburgh; Oakland: AK Press, 2006; M. Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, Montréal; New York; London: Black Rose Books, 1996.

Of the Knowledge and Love of the Unconscious¹

SILVIA KARGODORIAN

¹ The first version of this work was prepared for the Special Dossier edited by Slavoj Žižek and Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, in the framework of a *Bajo Palabra* journal project of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2023).

Never has our future been so unpredictable, never have we depended so much on the political forces, forces that suffer from sheer insanity and in which there is no political forces, forces that suffer from sheer insanity and cannot be trusted if one follows common sense and self-interest. trust if one keeps to one's own common sense and self-interest.

-Hannah Arendt

Francis Ponge in the early 1950s was commissioned to write a book on François Malherbe (1555-1628), a classical poet, and in this book we find the term “réson,” what Ponge called the “surrealism” of reason. Later it appears in Lacan’s work in “Function and Field of the Word” in 1966, here in a note he adds at the end of a writing in the section called “The resonances of interpretation and the time of the subject in psychoanalytic theory” and then again he uses it in “I speak to the walls”... Lacan uses the term “réson” and evokes a poem:

Between man and woman, there is love.
Between man and love, there is a world.
Between man and the world, there is a wall.

- Antoine Tunal

And what does this have to do with the question that summons us today?... Is there a political unconscious? Lacan then, tries to take and catch that space, a place, where interpretation and symptom meet; and therefore, one can influence the other. This is how he takes Francis Ponge’s réson.

“Réson” is a neologism that condenses a zone between body and discourse. Réson is a “between,” “resonance and reason.” It opens a space, a place between body and discourse, between word and jouissance. The jouissance of the body knits against the unconscious. Jacques Lacan posits discourse as something structural, founded on the structure of language.

To say that the unconscious is structured as a language supposes that it has a structure, that it is not an indiscernible flow, that it has, like language, elements that form a system, that are locatable and where it is possible to distinguish the signifier and the signified. The word is on its side, diachronic and individual, always marked by dialogue, it is the word addressed to the Other.²

Ernesto Laclau observes that for language to become a system of signification based on differences, it is necessary to establish a limit, a radical heterogeneity that becomes another difference. We thus find that the closure of the social is not possible and that there is no universe of representation. Demands are the signification of a need and also imply demands for recognition, identity and inscription in the community. We already know that since demands are always addressed to the Other (the field of language) and to the similar other they always involve the relational dimension, "the between."³

Discourse is an apparatus that has nothing imposed, as one would say from a certain perspective, nothing abstract with respect to any reality. On the contrary, we are encouraged to say that it is what functions as reality (...). Reality is not a totality. There is a constitutive fracture of reality. What happens to the actors of this reality?

In Seminar XVII, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan raises what he calls the legibility of a discourse, what we find there is the master signifier. In the theory of the four discourses, presented in "Radiophony," is where Lacan begins to use the concept of "discourse," as a social bond founded on inter-

2 Jacques Alain Miller, *La fuga del sentido*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 2012.

3 Nora Merlin, *Populismo y Psicoanálisis*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Letra Viva, 2015.

subjectivity and also to emphasize the transindividual nature of language, speech always implies another subject.

On the other hand, the political question appears, that of domination; that is, the discourse of the Other as the discourse of the master. This discourse is conceived in order of the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave: the master puts the slave to work, seizes the excess of jouissance and at the same time maintains in the slave the hope of a possible suppression of separation. This centrality of the political in psychoanalysis is shown again in the phallic signifier, as well as in the fundamental triad: Symbolic, Real, and Imaginary.⁴

Jacques Lacan in 1957 had indicated this grasping of the political in the order of exchange and the phallic signifier: "In all cases, even in matriarchal societies, political power is androcentric." The "political context" or "the order of power" is referred to "the order of the signifier, where the scepter and the phallus are confused."⁵ We find in this text, Lacan evoking "very strange anomalies in exchanges, modifications, exceptions, paradoxes, which appear in the laws of exchange at the level of the elementary structures of kinship."⁶

We know that Lacan thought in the 1960s, shortly before the outbreak of the events of May '68, the features of the master's discourse whose structural necessity was extended in the following decades, this discourse became particularly vile, because the domain was very compromised; already because of

4 Jean Pierre Clero, "Conceptos Lacanianos," in Jacques Lacan, *Psicoanálisis y Política*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Nueva Visión, 2003, 128.

5 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire IV, La relación d 'objet*, sesión del 27 de febrero de 195, París: Le Seuil, 1994, 191. [*El Seminario 4, La relación de objeto*, Editorial Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1996, 194].

6 Paul-Laurent Assoun, "De Freud a Lacan: El sujeto de lo político," in Jacques Lacan, *Psicoanálisis y Política*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Nueva Visión, 2004, 25.

a utilitarianism that had been triumphing for almost two centuries, but coveted nonetheless with similar eagerness, became the target of a lamentable demagoguery; the master, in fact, did not pretend to assume dominion at all, but only to occupy the place of master, pretending to do, after listening to the dominated, what they expect of him.⁷

In the true dialectic of the master's discourse we see that it is situated on the plane of identification. The tyrant and the slave share the same subjective arrangement: the appetites are first with respect to reason. The tyrant is the one who is subjected to the despotism of his own desires, he rules unjustly. Slavery then begins to take a plot, sometimes the whole terrain of pathos and obedience that politically organizes the polis, and can be elucidated.

Starting from the fact that we find different social phenomena or contemporary symptoms that will help us to see the manifestations of the subject. How? By interpreting the subject of the collective. Jacques Lacan took from Freud a quote that applies to these questions "Individual psychology is simultaneously social psychology" (from *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*), thus establishing a place of parity between the subject of the individual and the subject of the collective and he will continue with this line in a writing of May 1967 entitled "Lituratierra" where there appears: "The symptom institutes the order in which our practice is revealed, which implies that everything that is articulated from this order is possible of interpretation."⁸

We can conjecture that Lacan was referring to the politics of the cure, and we can also apply it to the social facts that cross us today, to the reading of the symptoms that afflict our world. What is there of that master in his discourse? What

7 Clero, "Conceptos Lacanianos."

8 Jacques Lacan, Prologue: "Lituratierra," in *Otros escritos*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 2012, 16.

do we hear from him? What is the interpretation we make? If psychoanalysis is related to the vindication of the rights of the subjects, we can observe that being listened to is recognized by the other as a good. In other spheres, the cause of this is that listening is privileged but erasing all interpretation "between" what is said and what one wants to hear/listen to.

Félix Rueda brings us that the intentionality of saying it well, as a will to speak in a kind way, is produced as a pretense to erase the pretension of erasing all interpretation "between" what is said and what one wants to hear/listen.⁹ It is produced as a pretension to erase evil from the discourse, that jouissance disappears from the field of the Other, as he says: "modifying language will never eradicate evil."¹⁰

We also find the capitalist discourse, which is close to the master's discourse, and this "fifth discourse" that is pronounced without a historical legacy or symbolic inheritance. We highlight Jorge Alemán, where he refers that this discourse eliminates the distance between the subject and the truth, knowledge and production, what he calls a network metamorphosis, which not only operates by coercion and institutional disciplining among others, but seeks to establish a new subjectivity docile and attached to its unlimited desire to endure. Thus, it produces an invisible symbolic fabric that functions in this way, naturalizing the dominant ideas and hiding its act of imposition. Neoliberal power disguises itself as consensus, disguises its ideology as the "end of ideology" and needs the complicit acceptance by the subjects.¹¹

9 Félix Rueda, "La época del impasse," (2021), available at https://elp.org.es/la-epoca-del-impasse_

10 Dario Villanueva, "Modificar el lenguaje nunca erradicará la maldad," (2021), 1, available at <https://www.elespanol.com/El Cultural>.

11 Jorge Alemán, *Capitalismo. Crimen perfecto o emancipación*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Ned Ediciones, 2019.

The Unconscious is Politics

The unconscious is politics because it is what binds and opposes men, in the form of acceptance and rejection. Politics supposes the exchange that concerns a relationship. The unconscious is politics, and we can infer; and politics is aesthetics. Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy devoted to the study of beauty. Philosophers have not built the material of their science on reflection, they have first taken to perception. Then we could think of the perception of the symptom.

This question of perception makes us know something extremely important, namely that, everywhere, in order to sustain this or that figure of the Other, texts, stories, representations, dogmas, grammars, knowledge – that is to say, a culture – were required to sustain these figures of the Other through which the subject could be subjected, that is to say, produced as such; to govern his ways, obviously different ways here and there, of working, speaking, believing, thinking, living, eating, singing, counting, loving, dying. We find that what we call education is never more than what has been institutionally installed with respect to the type of submission that has to be induced in order to produce subjects. So, this form, this figure of the Other, is sustained, constructed, essentially, in and by art: story, representation, iconography, image, etc. We note that the subject is the subject of the Other, which we take a direct relation with this: desire is the desire of the Other.¹²

We try to dive that the psychic unconscious is never in solitude, it never closes on itself but it is immediately a function of the Other, that is to say, a function of the discourse that

12 D.-R. Dufour, "Lección inaugural: El inconsciente es la política," *Desde el Jardín de Freud* 7 (2007), 241-256, available at <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/jardin/article/view/8381>.

identifies it: "The unconscious is a relation or something that is produced within a relation."¹³

On the other hand, when we speak of politics, the only politics is the politics of the symptom. The perception of that symptom. The symptom, then, is what makes the bond. For Lacan, the symptom is synonymous with lack, and therefore acts as an exchange. The symptom is structured by language, with which we can conjecture that the unconscious is political in the structure of the symptom. It appears then the recognition of the unconscious as a determining factor of the doing and feeling of the subjects. A treatment of desire is then produced, which will give as an opening to otherness and its organization; it conditions the political management of intersubjectivity and outlines what will be the assignment of roles in the polis. The notion of symptom has been introduced long before Freud by Marx, as a sign of what is not in the real.

Lacan said that if we are able to operate on the symptom it is because the symptom is the effect of the symbolic in the real. In the political discourse, psychoanalysis allows the discussion of jouissance. Taking this point, it is all the events of discourse, such as history, social and political events. History allows us to glimpse a causal order that does not locate events as advances and retreats by virtue of some ideal. Here we find at the level of enjoyment, in which psychoanalysis states that the subject does not reveal progress and that these ideals do not guarantee his destiny.

The unconscious is politics, in which Lacan institutes the Freudian unconscious by the term "parlêtre" in his approach to language. The words are the body from the inscription on the body, from the event of the body. We see that the body of the speaking being is always opposed to the body of the subject. It speaks, ratifies the discourse, criticizes, bears witness,

13 Clero, "Conceptos Lacanianos," 128.

and by means of it favors the opening of the social bond that comes to inscribe itself on the body. The subject thus tends to become the owner of his own power – that is, of his unconscious, of his desire – and to become the efficient cause of his ideas and of the actions of his body.

We find in a reading of Spinoza that “the more apt a body is than others to act or to suffer many things at once, the more apt its soul is than others to perceive many things at once; and the more the actions of a body depend on that body alone, and the less other bodies cooperate with it in action, the more apt its soul is to understand distinctly.”¹⁴

For Artaud and Marx it would seem that life was inseparable from the symptom. We find in the prologue of the “Children of the Night” a work of the philosopher Santiago López Petit, where he says “Marx remains. A Marx read via Artaud, capable of taking as a starting point an existential burden that seems to be neutralized without causing public effects, although suffering persists. The discomfort produced by life is heir to the radical-critical potential of the proletariat and is called upon, like the proletariat at the time, to experience its strength. Making pain, the base of operations to attack reality.”¹⁵ We can then infer that if the symptom is message, disobedience sometimes, it can be thought as a testimony of resistance, or even revolt and not always of pathology.

Why did Lacan say at the end “it is a question of psychoanalysis being a practice without value”?¹⁶ Because of this, the politics of the unconscious cannot be evaluated, it is full

14 Baruch Spinoza, *Ética demostrada según el orden geométrico*, Barcelona: Editorial Orbis, 1984, 129.

15 Santiago López Petit, *Los hijos de la noche*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Limón, 2015, 12.

16 Jacques Lacan, *El Seminario, Libro n° XXIV, Clase XI, “L’Insu que sait de l’ une- bévue s’ aile a mourre”*, inédito, 1976-1977.

of contingencies and *réson*. The truth of politics, the politics of truth.

Psychoanalysis says that the truth of the symptom is the younger sister of *jouissance*, it is not only gunpowder for unity with its eventual gods and its rules, but it is a danger for philosophy, and for psychoanalysis itself, when it joins with its brother the *sinthome* that makes failure its success. What is it to subjectivize a political expression, but to traverse it through the unconscious, the language? A political expression acts as a death drive for a subject. We think then, not to abandon psychoanalysis to neoliberal individualism.

We find ourselves with the definition of Hannah Arendt in relation to the mass and the people with politics and defines a political action as the word in the public, which makes political praxis meaningful. Politics is revelation in the world, appearance that consists in becoming visible in the public, whose condition is the word. The human world, a reality of words delimited by common space, takes place in the “between” in what happens to politics. Space that is the realization of language, both individual and collective insofar as it needs the other. We observe how Arendt recovers in the collective the subjective dimension of politics, since it is in action, in speaking and listening, where politics is played. Therefore, this action, an act of freedom proper to the human condition, is located as a beginning, not so much of something as of someone. Political thought and plural action then always refer to distinction, never to mere otherness or uniformity proper to the mass. We can observe that the mass does not constitute a discursive social bond, it is not a political formation but we can delimit it as a paradigm of a moral model.¹⁷

17 Merlín, *Populismo y Psicoanálisis*.

Psychoanalysis and Philosophy

And as for the danger that runs in “that saying” the truth of philosophy, we can see that philosophy is consummated, for the existent, in society. Having been at first only an idea (in the same way as the unconscious and psychoanalysis), philosophy is only really consummated by instituting society as true and just, as it has longed to do since the beginning of history. Society is characterized by the fact that in it everyone can, with all his radical finitude and the consequent risks of violence, come to his uniqueness as an individual and even to his autonomy as an ego. This society leaves all its place to capitalism, although, it is true, imposing on it the corresponding political limits. Only by its own grace, not to the individual subject but to the social subject – that which is inscribed in the various fundamental discourses – does it institute the philosophy of such a society.¹⁸

Yves Charles Zarka will say in relation to the use of Jacques Lacan's thought in the field of political philosophy that it would be a healthy use, since it is necessary that political philosophy also addresses the questions relative to the nature of desire, to the reasons of conflicts and to the relativity of solutions. At this point, the author observed that contemporary currents in the field of political philosophy have almost ignored Lacan and, more generally, the contributions of psychoanalysis. Now, to return to the question of desire, prohibition, *jouissance*, sacrifice, etc., is in fact nothing other than to return to the type of political reflection proper to Plato, Machiavelli or Hobbes. It is important that “political philosophy wakes up, otherwise it will end up being a normative discipline without any carnality.”¹⁹

18 Alain Juranville, *La philosophie comme savoir de l'existence*, 3 vol., 3: *L'inconscient*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000.

19 Yves Charles Zarka, *Jacques Lacan, Psicoanálisis y Política*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Nueva Visión, 2004, 12.

The Inseparable

This is how the symptom should be political, when it circulates and makes a link with another, exchange of faults and/or knowledge, and when this does not happen, it mortifies the subject, satisfaction and benefit at the service of suffering, thickening the trauma, original mark, indelible furrow, but instead of allowing it to deepen and deepen, work that the phantom knows how to do very well, we should rather “know how to do with the symptom,” *savoir et faire*, recuperation of *jouissance*, so that the symptom becomes a bond, a politics of exchange via the saying, through the demand of a subject in an analysis, its adventure, its becoming, as well as the surprise of a new happening.

But the terrain of politics is also the terrain of ideals, these are constituted, fall and are reedited, varying in multiple ways. It is given that the politician operates in a field where it is necessary that his own *jouissance* does not enslave him too much to the old forms, nor precipitate him slightly to the new ones. According to Freud,²⁰ the ideal is a particular and collectivizing symbolic operator that constitutes the ideal self and the mass. If on the one hand the ideal allows the constitution of the ego, on the other hand it produces its fall into the mass effect.

We observe then that, as Freud puts it, the leader and the mass are fused in the ideal by a mechanism of the ego and an operation on the object, the identification.

We should differentiate the concept of politics as “reality shock” that will consolidate the National Socialist (Nazi) movement in Germany, articulation given by Hannah Arendt, to how psychoanalysis thinks of the symptom as a political bond, which is precisely at the antipodes of “reality,” but rather inhab-

20 Sigmund Freud, *Obras Completas*, Volume VIII, Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 1984.

its the subjectivity of the One for One, its diversity that makes its richness.

Politics as ideology is a human dimension of work and production and then, Hannah Arendt thinks that identity is confused with uniformity, the mimetization of the masses where the creativity of the One as diversity, could very well be read; as a punitive harassment during the totalitarian government of Hitler and of any demagogue who very well knew how to emulate it today, in the cosmetics of the enemy.

Lacan strongly emphasizes this point with regard to the victims of Nazism and the concentration camps, naming new categories of victims is part of the powers of the biopolitics of the state. This underlines that the suffering body is not only trans-individual, but also beyond the psychological dimension. For he says that it is not enough to underline that every victim participates in his misfortune, he can also remain oblivious to it.²¹

Politics according to Thomas Hobbes is born of making war against each other precisely because of not accepting and accommodating differences, it is senseless hatred, imposing the inhuman in politics precisely because of not tolerating diversity, the difference of enjoyment, resulting in the domination of the superior over the inferior, with Nazism being the new Paradigm of Evil in that it carries out to the extreme this policy of discrimination, killing and domination. Then, Hannah Arendt will define very well that "there is only freedom in the particular of the between of politics." In the in-between as a relation of the ones with the others and in that definition we base ourselves to define the symptom as political because it promotes the bond due to the lack of both the one and the other, enriching in this way the bond, the love and the shared discourse among human beings.

21 Assoun, "De Freud a Lacan."

The Psychoanalyst's Desire

Let us begin with a question: What is the use of psychoanalysis, what is the use of a psychoanalyst? A question not so easy to answer, but to do so we could appropriate the words of Gershom Sholem in a letter he sends to Walter Benjamin where he refers, given that he has not heard from him for a long time then, he says "it seems that the threads of our epistolary attributions have slipped away to fall under the empire of some demon of silence." We observe in this way that silence gives place to the inner demon, its own articulations and obsessive repetitions as the only scenario to the lack of answers from that other, his epistolary interlocutor. The same can be said of a subject who, if he does not pass on his ruminations, obsessions and imaginary repetitions and put them in front of that Other, his unconscious, once called psychoanalyst, is also taken by a deafening silence commanded by his demons that construct the scene of his jouissance and that satisfies and feeds on it.

We find in the writer John Berger who brings us his idea of trace, furrow and takes it out of the concept of loss and suffering giving it another destiny, that of gain for art and creation in a fuller life. He goes on to say: "traces are not only what remains when something has disappeared, but they can also be the marks of a project, of something that is going to be revealed." And it is precisely in this orientation that we make of the symptom a creative path together with the inaugural traces, plus those contributed by that called Life, following the "intuition" of the unconscious as the first abductive warning until its own and only truth manifests itself as corroboration of that first intuition, which, if we hear it, will be the royal road to the knowledge of the unconscious.

Then, we bet on the psychoanalyst's desire because it is the cause of his own lack, and when he offers it together with

his interpretative generosity, we bet that the unconscious of his analyst together with his symptom makes a bond, so that it finally makes itself known, becomes known and finally emerges with that act, establishing a community of analysts that would be at the antipodes of the group phenomena, sustained by a policy of demagogic and totalitarian leaders at the service of their own interests. Therefore, a worked, unveiled, already warned unconscious will never be fooled by fallacious, imaginary and artful discourses.

We were able to observe that the unconscious being thus a sign of exchange in transference love, we can conjecture that it is political as a sign of relationship, of riches to be shared, of gains in knowledge in the conduction of the cure by both parties, analyst and analyst, and without this politics as a bond and discovery, there would be no path that would lead us to unveil and make known the enigmas so well protected of the unconscious, status that acts as symptom and trauma in every neurosis.

We find in Judith Miller when she offers us her heartfelt words when she says that “every analyst has two destinies, either he is generous or he is an infatuated,” meaning by infatuated according to Lacan, the one who “believes in his agalma.” The same definition can be applied to any subject who is willing to be analyzed, either he is generous, giving his suffering to the analyst to know what to do with it, or he is an infatuated given that he thinks that he already knows everything and that he has nothing to say because there is nothing to correct his “perfect infatuation.”²²

Warned that for there to be bond, link and dialogue, it is necessary that the policy of the rulers be based on the concept of freedom. Hannah Arendt doubts that politics is cur-

rently useful, given that the balance left by Nazism with its demagogic and totalitarian policy leading the masses “to the Worst,” then, she thinks that this horror has not ended and that the threat is still in force, where every non-democratic leader strives to impose his prejudices, his narcissism and his political and economic gain for his own personal benefit and not for the benefit of his nation.

To conclude, we counterpose to this malicious form of politics the knowledge of the unconscious unveiled, warned, which does not cease to be political, since it promotes a community of analyzers, and that each one with his trauma as a fault, without infatuated saturations, knows how to do with it, by means of a bond and to this we nominate in Lacan’s words: the warned unconscious must know how to do with his particular, creative symptom, what he nominates: “the only politics is the politics of the symptom,” maximum expression of the knowledge and love of the unconscious.

22 Bejla Rubin, *Auschwitz, Paradigma del mal del siglo XX*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Letra Viva, 2012.

PART

III

The Knot
Between
Psychoanalysis,
Philosophy,
and Politics

Psychoanalysts Have Contributed to Their Own Downfall¹

ELISABETH ROUDINESCO

¹ Originally published in *Le Monde* (Feb 9, 2019), and translated into English by Agnès Jacob as “Psychoanalysts Have Contributed to Their Own Downfall,” *European Journal of Psychoanalysis* 6, No. 1 (2018).

Since Jacques Lacan's death in 1981 – the last great representative of the Freudian lineage – the situation of psychoanalysis in France has changed. Common vernacular uses only the undifferentiated term “psy.” In other words, the term “psychoanalysis” used by Sigmund Freud in 1896 to designate a talking cure based on exploring the unconscious, which, by extension, became the foundation of a discipline, is no longer distinguished from a cluster made up of psychiatry (the branch of medicine specialised in treating diseases of the soul) and of psychology taught in universities (clinical, experimental, cognitive, behavioural, social, etc.).

As for the term “psychotherapy” – a treatment based on the power of transference –, it is now shared by psychiatry, clinical psychology and psychoanalysis. Psychotherapeutic schools continued to emerge during the 20th century under different designations: 400 to 700 throughout the world at any given time. Among them, hypnotherapy, Gestalt therapy, relational therapy, behavioural and cognitive therapies (BCT), personal development, meditation, etc. Psychology magazines regularly update the list. What these therapies have in common is that they promise happiness to those who are suffering.

Suffering

Since May 2010, these therapies are regulated in France: practitioners have to obtain a university diploma (Master's in clinical psychology) in order to call themselves psychotherapists. Otherwise, they use the title “independent psycho-practitioner.”

Today, there are 13,500 psychiatrists, 27,000 clinical psychologists and about 5,500 psychoanalysts in France; almost all of them have a diploma in clinical psychology. Since these regulations do not apply to the title of psychoanalyst, only the psychoanalytic schools (governed by the 1901 law) can train

psychoanalysts, qualified on the basis of having been analysed, and having received supervision from a training analyst.

Statistics show that 4 million people in France are subject to psychic suffering, but only one third – 70% of them women – consult a psychotherapist. New terms have been created to describe the unwellness associated with the crisis existing in democratic societies characterised by economic precarity, social inequality and disillusionment: depression, anxiety, stress, burn-out, attention deficit disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolarity and borderline, dysphoria, addictions, etc. These terms cover what used to be called psychosis (madness) neurosis (hysteria and its various forms), mood swings (melancholia), perversions. As a result, these conditions are now treated with psychotropic drugs prescribed by psychiatrists and general practitioners alike: anti-anxiety medication, antidepressants and sleeping pills, consumed excessively.

Strongly influenced by psychopharmacology, psychiatry – prominent in all University Hospital Centres (CHU in France) – has lost its former prestige because it has given up its dynamic plural approach based on subjectivity – psychic, social, biological – in favour of a practice based on symptom description, thereby reducing thinking to neuronal activity, the subject to a behaviour, and desire to a level of serotonin. This is made clear by the different versions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders, whose definitions of pathology include the human condition itself: timidity, fear of dying, fear of losing a job or a loved one, etc. We have stopped counting the groups whose petitions object to this Manual and demand, like the “Manifeste pour un printemps de la psychiatrie” (Manifest for the Rebirth of Psychiatry) published by *L’Humanité* in January 22, 2019, a return to so-called “humanist” psychiatry.

“Psychoanalysis is no longer reflected in psychiatric know-how and no longer holds the place it used to hold in France in literary and philosophical circles since the Surrealists, up to

the structuralists, with Marxists and phenomenologists along the way.”

Under these circumstances, psychoanalysis has entered an endless phase of decline. It is no longer reflected in psychiatric know-how, and no longer holds the place it used to hold in France in literary and philosophical circles since the Surrealists, up to the structuralists, with Marxists and phenomenologists along the way. Practitioners use incomprehensible language in their writings. Intended for their inner circle, these works are printed in small editions not exceeding 700 copies. As a result, publishers of literary works for a general readership have made psychoanalytic books the smallest portion of their output, or have eliminated them altogether. This is the case for Seuil, Gallimard, Aubier, Presses universitaires de France and Payot, where psychoanalytic writings flourished for thirty years.

The classics – Freud, Melanie Klein, Sandor Ferenczi, Winnicott, Lacan, Dolto, etc. – in paperback editions, continue to be sold on a regular basis. But contemporary works, with a few exceptions, have taken refuge at Erès, a publishing house in Toulouse, founded in 1980, which publishes books and journals in editions of less than 500 copies intended for mental health professionals, educators and pediatric specialists. As a result, psychoanalysts are no longer seen as authors or intellectuals, but as mental health workers.

Divided into nineteen associations with a majority of women members, psychoanalysts constitute an assemblage of communities which often know nothing about each other. They organise conferences, enjoy belonging to an association, like to travel and profess to love their profession. The gap between the generations has widened to the point where the private clientele sees the elders, those between 60 and 85, to the detriment of young analysts (30 to 40 years old), who are

underpaid in institutions (medicopsychological centres, medicopsychological centres of learning, day hospitals, etc.).

Younger analysts have difficulty setting up their practices. To become known, they create Web sites with photographs of their couches and armchairs, and offer negotiable prices, listing a variety of therapies. Clients have become scarce: psychoanalysis attracts fewer and fewer patients. But, paradoxically, interest in its history, its past and its major figures is increasing, as if Freudian culture has become a museum piece, to the detriment of clinical practice. "Humiliated by the success of abject rantings discrediting Freud, psychoanalysts have abandoned public debate, turning a blind eye to any undertaking critical of them."

The most influential associations – with 200 to 800 members – are divided into three branches: the first (called classical Freudian) belongs to the Société Psychanalytique de Paris (created in 1926); the second is home to the Lacanians (created between 1981 and 1994); and the third brings together all the various Freudian groups (created between 1994 and 2000).

Not only is there criticism of their dogmatism and inflexible training program, but psychoanalysts have contributed to their own downfall by adopting, since 1999, an objectionable position against homosexual marriage, and by having endless and exhausting disagreements about autism. Humiliated by the success of abject rantings discrediting Freud, psychoanalysts have abandoned public debate, turning a blind eye to any undertaking critical of them.

Sébastien Dupont, author of a lucid study on the Self-Destruction of the Psychoanalytic Movement (*L'autodestruction du mouvement psychanalytique*, Gallimard, 2014), has experienced this disdain: "As soon as one dares to express a critical opinion, one is accused of anti-Freudianism." Moreover, some psychoanalysts regularly play their favourite game on seedy media: analysing political figures. Emmanuel Macron

is their preferred target: "He suffers from an unresolved Oedipus complex, he married his mother, he has no superego, he is narcissistic."

Territory

For decades, psychoanalysis was taught in psychology departments as a psychopathological approach to the psyche. Until 2009, Roland Gari, an advocate of teaching the discipline outside psychoanalytic schools, and Pierre Fédida (1934-2002), played a major role in the training of Freudian clinicians, particularly through the recruitment of teaching researchers within the 16th district of the National Council of Universities (CNU). Unfortunately, Gari's successors, unlike him, have been unable to gain the respect of their adversaries, who want to drive them out of their territory in the name of the alleged scientific superiority of psychology. They are about to take advantage of the imminent merger of Paris V-Descartes and Paris VII-Diderot to achieve their aims.

This is why the Training and Research Unit in psychoanalytic studies at Paris VII-Diderot, a huge Freudian stronghold founded in 1971 – with 36 tenured professors, 270 doctoral students, numerous teaching assistants and 2,000 students – is now threatened with extinction. Three professors of the 16th district of the National University Council (CNU) have resigned, stating that it is no longer possible to have a dynamic and humanist approach within the current framework of scientific developments in psychology (letter dated December 21, 2018). Once again, calls for help are heard everywhere.

No Need to Despair

Although the clinical training offered at Paris-VII is of excellent quality and achieves great successes – such as the general assemblies on radicalisation and Jihadism –, there are also questionable attempts to “modernise” psychoanalysis, such as “queer” and “decolonial” analysis. How can one read with a straight face the announcement of proposed topics of discussion such as (Dec. 15, 2017): “Although psychoanalysis adopts a stand contrary to Cartesian logic (...), how aware is it of the ethnocentricity of its own tools?” Or: “How does the consideration of gender and coloniality contribute to psychoanalysis, to influence its perception of minorisation and othering practices?”

Yet we must not despair, knowing that thousands of French practitioners trained in an intelligent form of the Freudian tradition are dedicated to treating children in distress, mentally ill patients in serious difficulty, and wounded families.

Freud and Politics

DANIEL BRISTOW

This short contribution concerning Sigmund Freud's multifarious relations to politics will be set out under three headings: 'Freud and Politics'; 'Freud on Politics'; and 'Freud with Politics.' If the reader is of a Lacanian bent, they may already be attuned to the subtleties of difference between the connecting words within the first and last headings: '*and*' in its usage here goes beyond mere conjunction and implies a *relation-to* – that is, of Freud's relation to politics, generally; and of his relation to the ever-shifting politics of his day – whilst '*with*' implies *intersection*: that of Freud's scientific project – psychoanalysis – with the political endeavours connected to – and potentialised and actualised by – it, during its most concrete period (in Freud's lifetime) as a scientific and clinical project itself. The middle section concerns what Freud himself had to say on political issues and events themselves, and what kinds of politics are derivable from his works. These sections will thus chart a flow from Freud's political and politicising *conditions*; through his *assessments* – intuitions and misrecognitions—thereof; into resultant *legacies* – after the inauguration of psychoanalysis—that may have been as wayward as they have been wayfaring; and which will culminate in a *return to Freud*: that is, a return to politicisations made by – and of – Freud, at the time of Freud.

Freud and Politics

The chapters "The Historical Context" and "Being Jewish in Vienna" in Patricia Morris' *Freud, Politics and Civilisation* (2015), whilst brief, serve as a sturdy primer on the political atmosphere – and state of national and international relations – that Sigmund Freud was born into and which surrounded him throughout his life. Freud's date of birth was 6 May 1856; he was initially raised in the town of Freiburg, in Galicia, where

the Freuds lived until he was three years old. At this point the family moved to Vienna, at the centre of the Habsburg empire. As Morris puts it: “the region [of Freud’s birthplace] ceased to exist after the First World War when it was allocated to Poland, was contested by Ukraine, and was involved in several border disputes”; subsequent to these, it is now located in the Czech Republic and has become Příbor (the Czech version of ‘Freiberg.’ Etymologically, it is not known for sure which is the older, the Czech or the German word, and which derived from the other, giving the town’s name different possible meanings).¹ The house in which Freud was born is now a museum outside of which stands a copper cast of the analytic couch, created by sculptor Ivan Houska.

Élisabeth Roudinesco attests in her biography of Freud that – based on a centring of the latter for a period in his letters – “there was great similarity between the young Freud’s political choices and” the socialist jurist, activist, and philosopher, Ferdinand “Lassalle’s. Both men rejected Roman Catholicism and the Habsburg dynasty. But above all, Freud posited a parallelism between the social revolution sought by Lassalle and the one to which he aspired,” the latter being the scientific revolution that psychoanalysis would herald.² Whilst Freud’s albeit rather infrequent critiques of establishment structures and state apparatuses didn’t spill over into a declared or formalised socialism along the lines of Lassalle’s own, the revolutionary potential of the theory and practice of psychoanalysis was a motor force Freud would hold onto and assert throughout the rest of his life and career.

1 Patricia Morris, *Freud, Politics and Civilisation: An Essay*, London: Irene Press, 2015, 27.

2 Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Freud: In His Time and Ours*, translated by Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [2014] 2016, 90.

It was ten years after the father of psychoanalysis’ birth that Jews in Austria were fully granted equal rights by emperor Franz Joseph I (1830-1916); this came after a period of integration inaugurated by his predecessors, primarily Joseph II (1741-1790) and Francis II (1768-1835). Being Jewish in Vienna before the turn of the century and the onset of the First World War – the catalyst of which was the assassination of the emperor’s nephew and heir-presumptive Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Gavrilo Princip in 1914 – thus entailed, politically, a period of relative prosperity. Such was enjoyed by the Freuds, and contrasted the conditions and treatment of the Jewish population in Galicia. For Freud himself, this was the environment in which he found his bearings within the medical community – of Vienna; Austria; and then Europe – and in which he would establish the early coordinates of psychoanalysis, and its tightknit circle.³

In the aftermath of the First World War, the Habsburg monarchy became for Freud something of a symbol of what Europe should, again, aspire to. Whilst such nostalgia was somewhat conservative, its basis lay in Freud’s disappointment with the Treaty of Versailles and what he saw as failures of American interventionism. Indeed, as Paul Roazen writes: “Gore Vidal [has] suggested that Freud could not forgive [then-US President Woodrow] Wilson for the part he played in the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and all that followed,” and – as we shall see presently – this focus on Wilson, seen as a harbinger of a flimsy and untenable peace, extended beyond the little dig Freud has at him in the thirty-first of the *New Introductory Lectures* (1933), in which he emphasises that geopolitical partition, like psychological topography, never quite fits as

3 On the political operating of the inner psychoanalytic circle, which came to be known as ‘the secret committee,’ and for the select members of which Freud had rings made up, see Phyllis Grosskurth, *The Secret Ring: Freud’s Inner Circle and the Politics of Psychoanalysis*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1991.

neatly the landscape of facts as its idealistic architects might envisage or wish.⁴ Thus, if the Habsburg empire ever represented a stronger sense of unity, it was due to the ravages, fragmentation, and irreparability of WWI and its results that it was now irrevocably and irrecoverably lost; lost to a new period, in which Adolf Hitler and Nazism were in the ascendent, and antisemitism on the rise.

In relation to Freud's own sense of his Judaism, Roudinesco states that:

Freud had never stopped claiming his Jewish identity even though he refused to submit to the rituals of Judaism. Similarly, he felt himself to be Jewish only because he opposed the Zionist project of reconquering the Promised Land. In a word, Freud was a diaspora Jew who did not believe that the answer to anti-Semitism could be translated, for Jews, as a return to some particular territory. Even though he quite often supported the implantation of Jewish colonies in Palestine, he showed great prudence regarding the project of founding a "State of Jews."⁵

4 Paul Roazen, "Oedipus at Versailles," TLS (22 April 2005), internet <http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/l%27mnotcrazy/OedipusatVersaillesTheTLS.pdf>. See Sigmund Freud, "Lecture XXXI: The Dissection of the Psychical Personality," *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* [1933], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXII (1932-1936): New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, edited by James Strachey, with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 24 vols, London: Vintage, 2001, Vol. XXII, 73, in which Freud says of an idealised dissection of territory: "if the partitioning could be neat and clear-cut like this, a Woodrow Wilson would be delighted by it." (Hereafter, the Standard Edition will be referred to as SE, followed by volume and then page number.)

5 Roudinesco, *Freud*, 355.

In his own words, and fore-echoing somewhat the sentiment of his statement in Lecture XXXI, Freud replied in a letter of February 26 1930 to Chaim Koffler, who had asked him – in Roudinesco's words – "to support the Zionist cause in Palestine and the principle of allowing Jews access to the Wailing Wall," that "to me it would have seemed more sensible to establish a Jewish homeland on a historically unencumbered soil; I do know that with such a rational plan one could never have won the enthusiasm of the masses or the financial backing of the rich. [...] Nor can I summon up any trace of sympathy for the misguided piety that has made a piece of Herod's wall into a national relic, thereby provoking the natives' feelings."⁶

As a consequence of the consolidation of Hitler's power and influence, and the instalment of the Nazi regime and its increasingly threatening and actively violent persecution of Jews, in June 1938 Freud and his family moved from Berggasse 19, Wien – long the epicentre of psychoanalysis – to 20 Maresfield Gardens in Hampstead, London, England. This location provided a new locus point for the continuing legacy of psychoanalysis: Anna Freud (Freud's daughter) would subsequently practice here, and set up the Hampstead Clinic at 12 Maresfield Gardens, whilst Melanie Klein, her rival, was a few streets away, at 42 Clifton Hill, St John's Wood. Both shifted the focus of ongoing work to child psychoanalysis. Freud himself would die the following September, finally surrendering to the jaw cancer that had plagued him for the past 16 years of his life since its first diagnosis – through which he retained his habit of smoking up to 20 cigars a day – and this only through requesting of and arranging with Max Schur to be euthanised, due to its now intolerable and inoperable condition; dying, thus, in what is today one of the most legally and polit-

6 Ibid., and Sigmund Freud, "Letter: 26 February 1930," translated by Ivan Ward (revised anonymously), quoted in *ibid.*, 356.

ically contested ways possible. Remaining in Vienna, Freud's sister Adolfine was deported to the Theresienstadt fortress ghetto, and died there of internal haemorrhaging in 1943; his three other sisters in Vienna, Rosa, Marie, and Pauline were all murdered by the Nazis in the Treblinka gas chambers in 1942.

Freud on Politics

I am a *zoon politikon*, a political animal.
—Sigmund Freud,
after Aristotle, cited in Roudinesco⁷

If at all, Freud's political interaction in his work is typically thought of as most pronouncedly spanning the triptych *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), and *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), in which theories of aggressive drives and selfish interests vying for prominence, and meeting productively necessary repressions and sublimations, are put forth.⁸ Yet, whilst these all

7 Ibid. p.81.

8 What must be kept in mind in these theoretical explorations – and what is often missed by subsequent psychoanalysts – is that there is no *purity* to aggression and hostility, or to Eros, for that matter; if such drives are within the human animal, they are always-already immixed with the others, making their codependency inextricable. It is not simply a case of one or the other, or, to rephrase this: civilisation is its discontents; and, as Freud and William C. Bullitt put it: “if man had been nothing but aggressive activity[,] the human race would have ceased to exist long before the dawn of history, since the men would have murdered one another to the last man.” See Sigmund Freud and William C. Bullitt, *Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study*, Abingdon: Routledge, [1932/1967] 2017, 47. For a further challenge to Freud's political theorisations in these works, see Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, Slavoj Žižek, Rodrigo Aguilera Hunt, José Cabrera Sánchez, Nicolás Pinochet-Mendoza, Jamadier Esteban Uribe Muñoz, Antonio Letelier Soto, “The Return of Freud's Group Psychology: A

touch on the idea of the psychology of the political, and/or politicised, subject, here we will turn our focus to other moments in Freud's oeuvre that were either addressed directly to political situations; were specifically political—in terms of psychoanalysis' social outreach, for example; or that made a political impact, through intentional or unintended ramifications.

Fundamentally, politics is there from first to last in Freud, with the pre-*Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) writings (and development of psychoanalysis) hinting often at the types of political conjuncture which contained the worlds of psychological and therapeutic practices and the categories of law that governed them, and the ethical questions and quandaries that separated them.⁹ Such range may be illustrated by two instances here, beginning with the imprint Freud's master Jean-Martin Charcot's words left on him when he stated: “*la théorie, c'est bon, mais ça n'empêche pas d'exister*” [“theory is good; but it doesn't prevent things from existing”] (quite the contrary of G. W. F. Hegel's wonderful rejoinder when it was highlighted to him that certain facts didn't fit his theory: “*um so*

Popular Chilean Revolt Approach,” *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 19th ser., 3 (2021).

9 Further to these instances, Dorotea Pospihalj nicely conjectures that an experience Freud recounts in a letter to his trusted friend and confidant Wilhelm Fliess on 14 April 1898 may have acted as something of a political spur in his configurations of psychoanalysis and the topography of the unconscious, and what populates it. Freud details how he had recently descended to the Dantean depths of the “the caves of Saint Cangian” in Divača (then part of the Austrian Empire, now Slovenia) and found himself down there with none other than the rightwing and antisemitic populist mayor of his home city of Vienna, “Herr Dr. Karl Lueger.” See Sigmund Freud, “Letter to Wilhelm Fliess, 14 April 1895,” in Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*, translated and edited by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985, 309. Pospihalj makes this link in an article titled “For a Communist Clinic,” which will appear in *Sublation Magazine*, and of which I have seen a draft.

schlimmer für die Fakten” [“so much worse for the facts”]).¹⁰ The “great impression” this phrase made on Freud would fund his work’s radicalism and flexibility, and challenge and politically expose more rigid approaches that could the more easily lend themselves to all manner of psychological policing and control, medically and institutionally.¹¹ Secondly, we might look to Freud’s emerging disquietude over the power of suggestion within the practice of hypnosis, out of which psychoanalysis grew. His critique, which was never wholesale rejection, was summed up in his later reflections on the history of the psychoanalytic movement, in which he states that, after his close work with Josef Breuer, he “decided to replace hypnosis by free association.”¹² The critique was important in highlighting power imbalances (if power is not in itself always an imbalance) in the therapeutic dyad and – due to diminishment of resistance, and by necessarily emotionally bonding the patient to the physician – the risk that suggestion would work oppressively rather than emancipatorily. In the end, Freud’s last major work, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), is the one in which he speaks the most frequently of politics, albeit of political and societal structuration as it was in Moses’ time.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* itself, of course, political emphasis is put on several of the major constructive forces of the dream-work: conditions of representability, condensation, and censorship. The unconscious is here likened to a “political writer who has disagreeable truths to tell” and must negotiate repressive apparatuses so as to be able to disclose – or smug-

10 See Sigmund Freud, “Charcot” [1893], SE, III, 13. Mladen Dolar also discusses both phrases in his “Hegel and Freud,” *e-flux*, 34 (2012).

11 Freud, “Charcot,” 13.

12 Sigmund Freud, “On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement” [1914], SE, XIV, 19.

gle into the conscious – its information.¹³ Such a conceptualisation endured through the period of Freud’s key psychoanalytic works on the formations of the unconscious and the clinical structures. After this period, with the coming of the war came political reflections and recommendations, in the momentous *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death* (1915) – and later a correspondence on the question with Albert Einstein, “Why War?” (1933) – and the contemporaneous move to establish the “war neuroses” (a forerunner of what is today labelled post-traumatic stress) was significant not only in its recognition of the traumatic effects of war on the psyche, but so too in its opposition to the discourses of “malingering” and “desertion” (and the employment of painful “electrical treatment”), which were being perpetuated by officers of higher rank and army psychiatrists, in the attempt to funnel soldiers back into their roles as fodder at the front, and which ignored the psychological grounding Freud and others were insistent on. As Freud put it: “only the smallest proportion of war neurotics, however, were malingerers,” but through the “expedien[cy of] treat[ing] the neurotic as a malingerer and [...] disregard[ing] the psychological distinction between conscious and unconscious intentions,” such soldiers could all the more the easily be reinserted into war by those they were subordinate to.¹⁴

At this time, Freud responded not only to the devastation of the war but also to the socio-economic ills of the capitalist world. In 1918 he presented a paper to the fifth International Psychoanalytical Congress in Budapest called “Lines of Advance in Psycho-Analytic Therapy”; in it, he called for a

13 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1899], SE, V, 142.

14 Sigmund Freud, “Memorandum on the Electrical Treatment of War Neurotics” [1955]: Appendix to ‘Introduction to *Psychoanalysis and the War Neuroses*’ [1919], SE, XVII, 213.

“psychotherapy for the people” that would be free of charge.¹⁵ This would launch the enterprise of the policlinics, free clinics managed across Europe and then the world by a great array of socially-oriented and -committed analysts, which were run with tremendous enthusiasm throughout the twenties and thirties, until these energies and efforts were sadly thwarted and dispersed by the looming shadows of Fascism and the Second World War.¹⁶

Amongst the few political subjects Freud would explicitly comment on in his published work were the Russian Revolution of 1917 – which he met with cautious ambivalence, stating: “the revolution in Russia – in spite of all its disagreeable details – seems none the less like a message of a better future,” whilst describing “theoretical Marxism, as realized in Russian Bolshevism” as having the “character of a *Weltanschauung*, but at the same time [bearing] an uncanny likeness to what it is fighting against” – and the American policy of Prohibition, which constitutionally banned the making and sale of alcoholic beverages from 1920 to 1933 in the USA, which he painted as a scheme for “depriv[ing] people of all stimulants, intoxicants, and other pleasure-producing substances, and instead, by way of compensation, [...] surfeiting them with piety.”¹⁷

Such scant reference and occasional allusion were all there was to go on in Freud’s writings in this field until the reemergence of the political psychobiography of US President

15 Sigmund Freud, “Lines of Advance in Psycho-Analytic Therapy” [1919], SE, XVII, 168

16 For an in-depth study of the policlinics, see Elizabeth Danto, *Freud’s Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis and Social Justice, 1918-1938*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

17 See Sigmund Freud, “Lecture XXXV: The Question of a *Weltanschauung*” [1933], SE, XXII, 81; 179-180, and Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* [1927], SE XXI, 49.

Woodrow Wilson that Freud wrote together with William C. Bullitt (1891-1967), the manuscript of which was completed in 1932. For various reasons – some of which Bullitt highlights in his foreword, and which have been conjectured on elsewhere – it did not see the light of day until 1967, and caused quite a scandal when it was released.¹⁸ If unceremoniously included in the Standard Edition it likely would have remained something of a curio amongst Freud’s other work; indeed, whilst it would certainly have appeared somewhat anomalous, it might yet have evaded the exceptional, and damnatory, status which it has since garnered by the circumstances of its publication history, and the reaction to it. That aside, the text is constructed in a joint effort – however weighted; but common consensus suggests it was with much more input from the latter – between Freud and Bullitt, who became a patient of Freud’s in 1930, after meeting him at the Tegel sanatorium in Berlin, where the latter was being treated for pneumonia at the time. An American diplomat and journalist, Bullitt was energised by the Russian Revolution and in 1919 was sent to the USSR to negotiate diplomatic relations with Vladimir Lenin, which in the end fell through, effectively due to Britain’s mistrust of Bolshevism, which emerged in Prime Minister David Lloyd George’s change of heart as a result of having his ear bent by the fervent anticommunist and then-Secretary of State for War and Air, Winston Churchill. After the failure of the establishment of these relations, Bullitt resigned from Wilson’s staff, and the peace commission, on 17 May 1919. He went on to become the first US ambassador to the Soviet Union, and in his later years a Republican, and fervent anticommunist (as well as throughout his life behaving rather unsavourily in his domestic affairs).

18 See William C. Bullitt, “Foreword” [1966], in Freud and Bullitt, *Woodrow Wilson*, v-vii, and Roazen, “Oedipus at Versailles.”

Their book's main thesis is that from conducting an applied psychoanalysis of Wilson's early and adolescent life its authors are then able to determine the trajectory that led him to the contradictory leadership decisions – underwritten, they suggest, by Christ identifications – that resulted in his ultimately seeking peace by way of a war that would cost the USA “thousands of lives and billions of wealth and in the end [establish] an outrageous peace which will condemn the world to another war worse than this one.”¹⁹ Prescient words.

Overall, however, the book ended up as very repetitive, and it operates in a manner that rigidifies psychoanalysis into a *psychology* (or a psychologising discourse or method). Curiously, it deploys quite fascinating usages of a concept of “accumulators,” which are conceived of as psychosomatic receptacles or stores of the libido, and which peculiarly presage the idea (of “orgone accumulators”) that the great Freudo-Marxist and psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich would become notoriously associated with in his later career. In a way, *Woodrow Wilson* is the work of Freud's (and of course not his alone) which feels closest methodologically to Reich's, although Reich had written his own, much more convincing, psychoanalytic appraisal of current affairs at around the same time, as *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933). Further, Freud and Bullitt's book is an extremely exceptionalising study, making out as if Wilson were the only libido-led subject amidst a familial, amatory, and political constellation of purely one-dimensional others; in this instance, too, Reich was much more adept at surveying the libidinal cathexes of the mass, and its psychology.

19 Freud and Bullitt, *Woodrow Wilson*, 194.

Freud with Politics

Just as Karl Marx was Marx and not a Marxist; Lacan Lacan and not a Lacanian; Freud, too, was Freud, and Freudianism would come to be determined – and endlessly redetermined – by contemporaries, successors, critics, lay audiences, and others, however much he may have wanted to keep its meaning under his control (and however much he rightly predicted repression of its main insights, often in the guise of their being taken up, C.G. Jung's desexualisation of the libido being one of the first and chief among these recidivisms).²⁰ And just as the phenomenon of the split between the Right (or Old) Hegelians and the Young (or Left) Hegelians arose from and within the legacies of the great philosopher's thought, and as we see happening in political Lacanianism (with its legacies resulting from the closeness of Lacanian groups to the teachings and circle of Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser (and, before him, Lacan's own reception of Marxist Hegelianism from the lectures of Alexandre Kojève); their envelopments in the revolutionary events in Paris of May 1968; or their study of the political leadership of Mao Zedong, the chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, and their subsequent fidelity to or retreat from these: Alain Badiou representing the former and Jacques-Alain Miller the latter of these tendencies), so too with Freudianism it has had consequences, and been pulled in all directions, across the political spectrum. Characteristic of rightwing responses, beyond reactionary rejections in toto, as quackery or fraud – are the disavowals of certain elements of the theory (no to the unconscious – which of course does not know “no” – or to the theory of infantile sexuality, etc.) whilst trying to retain “respectable” others, making often for pretty incoherent theo-

20 Perhaps, then, the truly Freudian insight is attunement to how, and why, Freudian insight is consistently evaded.

retical edifices such as Freud found and denounced in his day in Jung's and Alfred Adler's divergent schools, and as have become standard in so many strands of the psy-complex, in conservative therapeutic approaches (in the form of ego-psychologies that bolster ideological imaginaries stacked in the favour of the ruling classes or state-administered models such as cognitive behavioural therapies aimed at readapting lapsed workers to poor conditions and pay).

However, to return to the Freud of the "Lines of Advance" paper in conclusion, there were, and remain, other prominent political legacies. In Freud's late period of working – the 1920s and 1930s – there arose the psychopolitical fusion that came to be known as Freudo-Marxism, which David Pavón-Cuéllar claims in this day and age "is not only up to date, but even more timely than in its time."²¹ In its time it gave rise to the foundation and management of the free clinics; to emphasis being laid on socio-economic factors that affected people's mental states and sexual health, and the theorisation and integration of these into the work; and to the launching of theoretical and critical insights that were to advance psychoanalysis itself and social and liberatory movements, through the dialectical – or unificatory/separatory – linking of these. As Pavón-Cuéllar puts it: "the tensions and contradictions that Marxists uncover in society are, in fact, the same ones that Freudians rediscover in the individual. This is something that no one could perceive as clearly as the Freudo-Marxists. We learn from them that our class struggles run through us and thus summon us to take a position within and not just outside ourselves."²² Those included among the Freudo-Marxists' number were thus traversers of truth procedures opened up by the founders of discursivity,

21 David Pavón-Cuéllar, "Twelve Lessons from Freudo-Marxism," translated by Ian Parker, *Analytic Agora* 1 (2022), 136.

22 Ibid., 133.

Marx and Freud; and by making their respective causes joint they did a great deal to advance them; both, and as one.²³

Freud himself was an internationalist, making links all over the world and creating psychoanalysis' own International (the International Psychoanalytical Association).²⁴ Free association remains in both Marxism and Freudianism a desired means and result of production and creation, subjectively and socially. The dialectical-materialist procedures of both methods not only aim at a form of combined singularisation and collectivisation, but find one within the other: the inextricable traces of the social in the individual and the ravelled interpellation of the individual in the social. Such deep insight was in effect unavoidable in the discourses that Marx and Freud founded, due to the incontrovertible rigour of these two thinkers' works and workings. In the end, whatever Freud's politics, Freud's interlacement with politics is as ever essential as it was always inevitable.

23 We take the liberty of reproducing Pavón-Cuéllar's list of important Freudo-Marxists here, in which he includes "the great Marxists Leon Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci and José Carlos Mariátegui, the Austro-German psychoanalysts Siegfried Bernfeld, Wilhelm Reich and Otto Fenichel, the Soviets Vera Schmidt and Aleksandr Luria, the Frankfurt-based Max Horkheimer and Erich Fromm, the surrealists André Breton, René Crevel and Tristan Tzara in France, Karel Teige in Czechoslovakia and Xavier Abril and Elias Piterbarg in Latin America, the Freudian critics of Marxism Henri De Man and Max Eastman, and some unclassifiable writers like the Brazilian Oswald de Andrade, the Hungarian Attila József and the French Jean Audard," see *ibid.* 124-125.

24 Mariano Plotkin's archaeology of Freud's internationalism in the Latin American context is of much interest here: see Mariano Plotkin, "Freud and the Latin Americans: A Forgotten Relationship," in *Psychoanalysis in the Barrios: Race, Class, and the Unconscious*, edited by Patricia Gherovici and Christopher Christian, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019, 22-37.

Political Jouissance and the Vicissitudes of Mistrust

ANDREA PERUNOVIĆ

Doubtlessly, the “concept of jouissance” is widely used in contemporary psychoanalytic theory. Moreover, writings on the subject matter are more than exhaustive, despite, or precisely, because of the multiple and equivocal meanings that the notion takes originally in Lacan’s œuvre. Thus, we encounter numerous definitions of different ‘types’ of jouissance, such as: the jouissance of the Other, the Other jouissance, the phallic jouissance, the feminine jouissance, the surplus jouissance (*plus-de-jouir*), the impossible jouissance, the discursive jouissance and moreover, the jouissance of meaning, of being, of life, of the body, of the body image – just to name a few. Yet, as Darian Leader rightfully observes, when the simple question ‘What is jouissance?’ arises, the answers tend to be often evasive and generalizing, rendering “amateur expositions of Aristotle on substance,” that are “along the lines of: well, Lacan said that jouissance is ‘the only substance.’”¹ Leader continues his argumentation by rightfully criticizing the attempts to make of jouissance an unified concept that “must somehow be indexing the same thing”² in all the forms that it takes, and remarks that “Although Lacan could say that if a ‘Lacanian field’ were to exist, it would be that of jouissance, this does not make of it a psychoanalytic concept, and its subsequent translation into a descriptive common-place is disappointing.”³

But what do we mean then when we use the term ‘political jouissance’? Do we fall thus in the trap of categorization and translation that Leader is pointing at, simply by coining such a term? In the following paragraphs, we will try to show why this is not the case, and why political jouissance shouldn’t be considered simply as one ‘type of jouissance’ amongst the

1 Darian Leader, *Jouissance. Sexuality, Suffering and Satisfaction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021. 6.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 7.

others, but rather as a metacategory that organizes an interplay of different types of jouissance, without ever essentializing it “as such.” Therefore, the task of this text will not consist in looking at the particular political behaviors or events through some presupposed conceptual lens of jouissance, but will rather undertake a consideration in which jouissance would appear as the core psychic mechanism that structures the libidinal economies of our contemporary political cultures. In Lacan’s words and seen the other way around: “the intrusion into the political can only be made by recognizing that the only discourse there is [...] is the discourse of jouissance.”⁴

This hypothesis proclaiming the centrality of jouissance for the political is even more accurate in our days of “living in the end times,” when “the global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point”⁵ and other economic systems like “techno-feudalism”⁶ seem to be on the rise; when the ‘traditional’ *trust* in consensual (neoliberal) politics has been substituted by a general mistrust that significantly strengthens extreme right political formations and gives rise to a widespread of conspiracy theories. Subsequently to this overthrow of trust and the overtake of *mistrust* that now already became the predominant trait of our contemporary political lives (think just of the omnipresence of formulations such as mistrust in democracy, in institutions, in media or in science), jouissance has taken the place of the pleasure principle, which was the central mechanism of libidinal economies of the political realm that used to be based on the “good” trust.

4 Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, New York: Norton, 2006, 78.

5 Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, London: Verso, 2010. x.

6 Yanis Varoufakis, “Techno-Feudalism Is Taking Over,” *Project Syndicate* (Jun 28, 2021), internet: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/techno-feudalism-replacing-market-capitalism-by-yanis-varoufakis-2021-06>.

In the above mentioned “end times,” when the monotone balancing between the pleasure and the reality principles is no longer desirable – nor possible, jouissance steps in as a psychic mechanism that will reshape the previous (obsessional) neurotic political structure of trust, into the (paranoid) psychotic structure of mistrust. In this psychotic paranoid political structure, one could claim that transgression, without which “there is no access to jouissance,”⁷ became more a subject of an order, than of the prohibition. By being forced to adopt mistrustful attitudes towards all kinds of phenomena that surround us, and specially the political ones, we are being called to transgress the old laws of political trust, not by ceasing to believe, but precisely by experiencing the paradoxical ‘pleasure in pain’ in supporting, and even creating, new, radically stronger, negative beliefs. Yet, we should not forget that “Transgression in the direction of jouissance only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law,”⁸ and the oppositional principle of this new political order based on mistrust consist precisely in the paradoxical stance according to which one is not allowed ‘not to transgress,’ and thus not allowed equally ‘not to enjoy’ in taking up the mistrustful attitude. The deadlock of this political situation becomes evident when we consider the basic paradox of jouissance, following which jouissance “is both impossible and unavoidable: it is never fully achieved, always missed, but, simultaneously, we never can get rid of it - every renunciation of enjoyment generates an enjoyment in renunciation, every obstacle to desire generates a desire for obstacle...”⁹

7 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, New York: Norton, 1997, 177.

8 Ibid.

9 Nicol Barria-Asenjo, Slavoj Žižek, Andrea Perunović, Brian Willems, Gonzalo Salas, and Ruben Botol, “The Cinematic Daydream as a Tool of Political

But do the political *jouissance* imply always the sheer transgression, or there are more subtle ways in which it is enacted? A careful observation of our political reality will show us that there is something in the very structure of ideology that is to be called, referencing Slavoj Žižek, the ‘inherent transgression’ (in which emergence and loss and/or excess and lack, coincide in a sort of parallax structure) – and that also produces political *jouissance* – yet a different one than does the sheer transgression. Also, if we go back to Lacan (specially to his later seminars), we will see equally that *jouissance* is possible without any transgression whatsoever. For the moment, it is important to bear in mind, that for Lacan, there is a whole spectrum of intensities covered by *jouissance*, that is nicely resumed in the following phrase describing it: “It begins with a tickle and ends up in a blaze of petrol.”¹⁰ Let’s try now to analyze some concrete political examples in order to grasp different manifestations of political *jouissance* – or different manifestations of *jouissance* in the political.

So, what could be the paradigmatic ways in which contemporary politics and *jouissance* relate to each other? Todd McGowan rightfully proposes that “Thinking about politics in terms of enjoyment first and foremost enables us to make sense of what seems counterintuitive through any other form of analysis – the phenomenon of individuals acting politically against their own self-interest, acting in ways that do them harm rather than benefiting them.”¹¹ One of the first phenom-

ena that comes to mind, given this auto-destructive feature of political *jouissance*, relates to our recent pandemic experience, and more precisely, to the anti-vax narratives that where fueling different conspiracy theories.

In adopting the anti-vax standpoint, one makes a political statement based on mistrust (in science, in institutions, etc.). This statement provokes political *jouissance* in different ways. Firstly, it is obvious that an anti-vax attitude is harmful for the individual adopting it, because one deliberately refuses protection from the viral disease, but also it restrains one’s possibilities of exerting everyday activities, etc. But what is enjoyable then in this action? We can claim that it is precisely the political dimension of it. Firstly, what one enjoys when becoming an anti-vaxxer is the appropriation of the *jouissance* of the Other that is found in the repetition of the narrative that he or she negates. The anti-vaxxer experiences *jouissance* as the *possession* and *usage* of the dominant narrative, of the knowledge of the Other (*il jouit du savoir de l’Autre*).¹² In mistrusting Other’s knowledge by repeating it in the form of negation which tends to unveil the lack in the Other (“The vaccines are not simply what they claim they are”) an anti-vaxxer adopts what Lacan calls the master’s discourse, thus becoming from a slave that he was, the master who “brings about this operation of the displacing, of the conveyancing of slave’s knowledge” and who as such “doesn’t desire to know anything at all – he desires that things work.”¹³ Secondly, the anti-vaxxer will experience yet another type of *jouissance* due to this enjoyable political statement – as its surplus. Namely, it will experience surplus *jouissance* in the proliferation and/or creation of new

Emancipation: *Plus-de-Jouir, Aufhebung* and the Parallax,” *Bajo Palabra Revista*, 2023, forthcoming.

10 Lacan, *The Other Side*, 72.

11 Todd McGowan, “The Lust to Power and the Logic of Enjoyment,” *Crisis and Critique* 6, No. 1 (2019), 206.

12 It is important to remind here that the verb “jouir” denotes also, as the Larousse dictionary stipulates, “a possession of a material or immaterial good” or “a benefit of moral or material advantage.”

13 Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side*, 24.

meanings that will come to contradict the dominant knowledge: “the vaccines contain micro-chips that allow authorities to track us,” “vaccines modify our DNA,” “vaccines cause sterility,” etc. These phantasmatic new meanings that provoke *jouissance* mark an “irruption, a falling into the field, of something not unlike *jouissance* – a surplus.”¹⁴ This is where it seems that things already stop to work for the ephemeral mistrustful anti-vax master, where the initial *jouissance* of the Other found in the negative repetition of the dominant discourse is brought about as its own squandering. With this surplus *jouissance*, “something is produced as a defect, as a failure.”¹⁵ So, the appearance of an affirmation as “vaccines contain micro-chips,” marks the presence of surplus *jouissance* and points straight to the *objet petit a* of the newly formed split subject that the anti-vaxer has become. Now, his or hers constitutive lack is at stake, and not the one of the big Other. This lack stands for the *objet petit a*, as that “which remains of the Thing after it has undergone the process of symbolization.”¹⁶ So, as we can already see, there is no sheer transgression in this example of political *jouissance* – no government ever proclaimed vaccines mandatory, so there is no infringement to the law in being anti-vax. What is occurring though is described by Lacan as ‘sneaking around the Thing’ and proliferating *objets petit a*, and “sneaking is not transgressing. Seeing a door half-open is not the same as going through it.”¹⁷ Thus, this modality of political *jouissance* introduces itself just as a “tickle” in the spectrum of intensities that political *jouissance* covers.

14 Ibid., 20.

15 Ibid., 46.

16 Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London; New York: Verso, 2008, 105.

17 Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side*, 19.

Other examples in which political *jouissance* appears so poignantly that it can hardly be missed, are to be seen in ideological phenomena such as racism, sexism, nationalism or other similar manifestations of right-wing politics – whether those are disguised or openly expressed. Likewise, when we hear the phrase that begins with: “I’m not a racist, but...,” we can rightfully expect that what follows will be utterly racist. This initial denial of racism isn’t simply cynicism. It is a declaration of solid belief in something that *is not* – namely in one’s own *non-racist* stance. The mistrustful narrative that follows will likewise become more trustworthy than an openly racist one, making its subject able to freely *enjoy*, to experience genuine political *jouissance* of his racist speech, without being judged by others or having to deal with self-reproaches. On the other hand, openly racist declarations invoke what Darian Leader defines as the “love to hate,” or the “collective enjoyment in *hating*.”¹⁸ The ‘love to hate’ is in its turn equally deprived of guilt and punishment, because there is a collective dimension to a concrete act of hatred. Enumerating examples of these practices on the right, whether they be racist, sexist or other, would be superfluous, because they are the very basis of any right-wing politics, thus self-evident. More importantly, Leader reminds us that the left is not immune either to this kind of political *jouissance* based on ‘loving to hate’ and recalls the collective enjoyment that was manifested in the hatred of figures such as Trump, Putin, Bolsonaro, etc., and which produced nothing else but anxiety, frustration and the experience of powerlessness.

Aside the explanation according to which the collectivity dissipates responsibility and guilt making way for political *jouissance* to flow freely, there is also a psychological explanation to this phenomenon. *Jouissance* is the central mechanism

18 Darian Leader, “Preface,” in *Modalities of Political Jouissance*, edited by Nicol Barria-Asenjo and Slavoj Žižek, London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming.

of the libidinal economies of psychotic political structures, and their 'normal pathology' is paranoia, in which disbelief (*Unglauben*) is the "primary symptom" that "permits the avoidance of self-reproach."¹⁹ Finally, with *Unglauben*, which is following Lacan the very basis of paranoia, the more extreme forms of political jouissance appear truly as a 'blaze of petrol.' A perfectly matching actual example of paranoid mistrust and its characteristic transgressive *jouissance* of *Unglauben* is Putin's aggression of Ukraine, alongside the discursive productions that justify it ('special operation,' 'denazification,' etc.). So, in *Unglauben* it is not "the not believing in it, but the absence of one of the terms of belief"²⁰ that is in question – the absence of the founding speech which marks the division of the subject is absent, leaving the subject depending only on the lying speech. Thus, in *Unglauben*, the subject supposed to know takes over the position of the divided subject, thus *forclosing* the Other. *Unglauben* represents the death-driven "moving force of paranoia [which] is essentially the rejection of a certain support in the symbolic order, of that specific support around which the division between the two sides of the relationship to das Ding operates."²¹ Without the mentioned support, the barriers on the path to the Thing (The Good, the Shame and the Beauty) fall, which opens the way to transgressive jouissance that can flow freely now through the mistrustful subject which has taken the form of the "Jar of Danaides." The jouissance that *Unglauben* brings "might be described as the testing of a faceless fate or as a risk that, once it has been survived by

the subject, somehow guarantees him of his power."²² Finally, this enjoyable "acceptance of death"²³ indicates that our primary hypothesis that mistrust is a transgressive category, finds its justification in paranoiac disbelief, where the trust/mistrust dialectics reach their final (although failed) *Aufhebung*, making mistrust appear simply as *blind faith*.

19 Sigmund Freud "May 30, 1986," in *The Complete Letter of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fleiss 1887-1904*, Cambridge (MA), London (UK): The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986, 167.

20 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, New York: Norton, 1998, 238.

21 Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side*, 54.

22 Ibid., p. 195.

23 Ibid., p. 198.

For Politics and Psychoanalysis: Imperialist Eroticism, Nation, and Emancipatory Struggle

FERNANDO A. T. XIMENES

Introduction: For Politics and Psychoanalysis

During the popular revolution and war of resistance against Indonesian neocolonial invasion and occupation armed by Western (US) imperialism, Nicolau Lobato, Marxist intellectual and revolutionary leader of Timor-Leste, carried out and socialized a decision of the Central Committee of FRETILIN in 1978, still known and remembered by the surviving former revolutionary cadre and masses since Timor-Leste regained independence in 2002, as they recalled, “*if only one last Timorese man or woman existed, Timor will gain its liberation.*” It could then be said that, even though Timor as a political nation has been distilled, forced by imperialist arms to submit to total elimination, one man/woman can found a newborn popular nation of formerly oppressed people. By contrast, despite this anatomical identification of sexuality (not to say they tended to naturalize the meaning of sexual difference or affirm the sexual binary traversing their indifference), this reminds us of three central questions regarding the relationship between politics and psychoanalysis.

First, when Nicolau Lobato said “woman or man” is a critical decision, and for comparison, the ‘or’ has a similar role with the special role of ‘and’ in the *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou’s magnum opus work. Nicolau Lobato speech led to what Jacques Lacan formulates as “there is no sexual relation.” It all manifests the communist politics in opposing the ‘singular’ monotonousness that envisages the sexes in terms of biological determination but also the false bourgeoisie formula of gender equality. The examples set are not simply reduced to a politics of recognition or redistribution, but to the ‘emptied content’ of a sexual binary and difference – a discriminative culture that ensure the entities of woman to be a sub-class identity, a submissive being. This differs from the contempo-

rary liberal democracy discourse of “me too” or “women can.” These aim at recognition, at inclusion within antagonistic classes that also contains a certain exclusion, an integration with separation, as well as the redistribution of wealth that comes with class redistribution, all of which fill the new, different content of what constitutes woman, which ends up being an empty idealization of equality. As Lobato has announced, this is not simply a radical vision of the equal possession of property, it is more radical than that – new ‘coordinates’ of a social link has emerged from historical practice, as Alain Badiou’s reformulation of truth as ‘something new’ emerged from the event, on the basis of what is most “generic, invisible and localizable.”¹ Therefore, a key example by Lobato is the radical desolation of women as submissive entities, as a mere complement to men, which is actually a politically description when it comes to the historical role of the global south in relation to the imperialist North, which exist in polarized, antagonized, and uneven asymmetrical relations.

Secondly, Nicolau Lobato proclaimed this was a product of the specific historical conditions of the Timorese struggle for national liberation and resistance against Indonesian’s war of neo-colonial expansion. During the revolution, FRETILIN adopted a ‘durable and prolonged war,’ ‘counting on our own proper forces’ as a resistance strategy. Doesn’t this Maoist slogan, implemented in one of the ‘tenaciously difficult colonial revolutions’ of the twenty-century, really tell us about Lacan’s presence in our twenty-first century world of the frenzied immediate pleasures of individualism, market efficiency and the smartness ideology of neoliberalism, or generalized monopoly capitalism and neoconservatism? – Like the modern economy, bourgeois psychology trained the patient to adopt and to

1 See Reinhard’s introduction in Alain Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-Philosophy* 3, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

consume medical pills in a mechanical way that can give an immediate cure and pleasure. It is how the capitalist state acts in an immediate way to manage the crisis, its ‘long depression,’ by protecting the 1% rich and the financial sector while transferring the crisis and socializing the misery to the popular class. The state’s Neo-Keynesianism and neoliberal-austerity solutions, like bourgeois psychology, is not a medical pill to cure, but part of the problem, especially to us in left organizations and the popular class all around the world. Therefore, Nicolau Lobato’s proclamation corresponds to Mao’s ‘right to rebel’ and what Lacan said, ‘not give up your desire,’ where all serve the ultimate maxim: ‘the point is to change it.’ Struggle toward a transformation and liberation is long and durable task – it is where the social and political role of psychoanalysis is opposed to the bourgeoisie clinical practices.

Third, Nicolau Lobato’s historical proclamation represents the sense of the personal in politics – which is, many have said, not a domain of politics, since the latter is associated with the masses, people, and the multiplicity, while the former is a singular domain, in which psychoanalysis deals with the private patient in the backyard of the public space of politics.

In addition, when the popular base of the revolutionary government of Timor collapsed after the intense war of encirclement and annihilation launched by the Indonesia military during 1977-1978, with full US media propaganda, ideological support, diplomatic covert operations, economic assistance, and military hardware, the Central Committee of FRETILIN announced a general orientation in order to anticipate the approaching counter-insurgency of Indonesia and described how to sustain the so-called a ‘prolonged and durable war’ – FRETILIN directed that, “your body stays with the enemies, your thought (otherwise meaning *conscious, spirit*) stays with us,” as a method of popular struggle against the counter-insurgency strategy of the Indonesian military that was targeting

the minds and hearts of Timorese people captured and reintegrated into the military-run concentration camps and artificial resettlement villages. This reminds us that Freud's discovery of the unconscious and invention of psychoanalysis has revolutionized the logic of psychic life. The body and mind have been in a conflictual relation since the beginning of his work. Freud's invention has displaced the science of exteriority to interiority, while it does not lead to this end, it decenters the interior by eliminating the private, until it finds that there is no such thing as the private. The unconscious or sexuality is all social and political because both of them were the exteriority of the interiority (the "inner exteriority") of a subject. It is from this point that politics and psychoanalysis intersected, allied, contradicted, split, opposed, and constituted a mutuality for their common radical project: moving beyond an exploitative, oppressive arrangement and liberation of the people.

On Fascism, Imperialism, and Our Urgent Tasks

In his later years, Freud became growingly preoccupied with political economy, social decadence, and the rise of European Fascism. Our return to Marx-Lenin, or Freud-Lacan, shall also remind us to take the same position, that it is better to engage in a struggle against fascism than be trapped in the opportunistic defeatism of the most puritan left. The 20th century provided us in the global south with popular and socialist experimentation and achievements, and we have witnessed that the crises of our 21st century do not offer us the emergence of any strong and long-lasting popular and socialist projects of the South, but a more socialized fascistic culture and institution globally, a more far-right turn that will ensure inequality.

Modern fascism has been restructured unconsciously, within Western thought, and become manifest in its national form and universal regime. It is imperative for us to recognize why fascism was not born in Europe but only returned to Europe from the colonies, as Aimé Césaire has said² – Fascism, like neurosis, is not only a symptom of today's malaise and decadence, but also the core inheritance of capitalism since its beginning, its expansion. The disorders of our time are not a surprising reality or spontaneous process, in which the manager of a crisis like liberal democrats and far-right wingers would like to be their traumatic consequences – are in fact the condensation of long-accumulated social neurosis of our economic organizations at the global scale. That is why we need to move beyond the normal and pathological time of capitalism. Our response must be the same, to move beyond the dichotomies of theory and practice, but as a mass collective praxis founded on the particular-universal dialectical simultaneity and differentiality.

The condensation of the structural crisis led toward the structural impasse of capitalism as well as an emancipatory collective politics. The populism-fascism in the contemporary 21st century arises from the decades of condensation of crisis and impasse. As Alenka Zupančič said, politics is about the articulation of communal passion, an organized and strategic passion.³ The previously mentioned case of Nicolau Lobato in Timor-Leste, devoted his trust to individual men/women as the subjectivization of collective will; the sovereignty of the masses can realize independence. The history of the East Timor liberation struggle led by FRETILIN is not only about the ex-

2 See Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.

3 A. Hamza and F. Ruda, "Interview with Alenka Zupančič: Philosophy or Psychoanalysis? Yes, Please!" *Crisis & Critique* 6, No. 1 (2009).

traordinary leadership of the FRETILIN central committee, but the courage of the people, an uncompromised struggle toward an 'authentic liberation.' After a serious radical turnaround, and many rehearsals, the historical tendency of the masses marched into a rightist, fascistic turn, as well as to a left that has completely responded to the pressing calls for rethinking the question of organization (Žižek), strategy (Bensaid),⁴ and a new international (Samir Amin);⁵ the time ahead is on our side, it is our time again, to trust in the people – here, people are the name of history, with the subject and politics featuring an absolute difference of elements, and which constitutes a possible universal project of emancipation.

We insist on the following point. Our task today, of revitalizing the preexisting radicalness of psychoanalysis, is to respond to our most pressing demands toward the political struggle against Western global imperialism centered in Washington. We need to apply theoretical critique and praxis psychoanalysis along with Marxist revolutionary praxis to oppose the imperialist political economy as the 'way of life of capitalism'⁶ – this means including the knowledge and situation that have become the new Master today. When Magdoff said that imperialism is the way of life, that does not mean that imperialism was the superficial naked form of capitalism. Capitalism as the historical dominant system emerged as such with the constant forces of imperialism, and continues its hegemony so long as imperialism exists. We must not divide both

4 D. Bensaid, D., "The Return of Strategy," in *The Movements of Movements: What Makes Us Move? (Part I)*, edited by J. Sen, Oakland; New Delhi: PM Press and OpenWord, 2017.

5 See Valentine M. Moghadam, "On Samir Amin's Call for a Fifth International," *Globalizations* 16, No. 7 (2019), 998-1005

6 Harry Magdoff, *Age of Imperialism*, New York; London: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1969, 26.

into a mutually independent historical process that emerged dialectically in the historical phase of capitalist development, as if they knew nothing about one another in a pre-imperialist world, and only now they encounter each other in the new qualitative stages of capitalism. Imperialism was that primary constant force of capitalism helped emerge and superseded the dominant pre-capitalism of the tributary world system.

Here is the situation. Psychoanalysis and Marxism placed the alienation, exploitation, crisis, and class struggle of resistance in society and personal as its central concern. Thus, they were less engaged in the 'materiality of nation.'⁷ Since the imperialism of finance monopolies is the last stage, and its globalized neoliberalization and financialization as the newest stages of it, this not only reinforced the crisis and exploitation centered on the individual, the society in general, as well as on the worker, but it focused on the collective group of a popular class from different nations – where the monopoly of the North not only subjugated the capitalist periphery and socialism of the South, but it has completely redefined the arrangement of the global division of labor, extracting mass value from the global chain commodity, money, and rent, and having complete control of the entire labour process of the nations of the world. Rather than simply reducing capitalism through production and exchange, our aims shall be directed at attacking capitalism as a global system of imperialism centered in the US, rather than seeing the surplus value and surplus-enjoyment, or the super-ego injection and collective 'boredom' under the mode of capitalist production, in a closed way.

We know that production for the sake of production is useless for social needs and humanity. And money capital for its own sake is useless for the real economy – as was the case

7 See Radhika Desai, "Marx, List, and the Materiality of Nations," *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* 24, No. 1 (2012), 47-67.

for fictitious capital, or the so-called speculative financial capitalism. The future promise of happiness or the pleasure-image of the countries of the Global South are imposed by the imperialist powers – a continuing exploitation and super-ego injunction that would perpetuate economic submission, and hence lead to cynical consumption and exhaustion. The historical mission of the North imperialist center will not create the South in its 'own image,' but establish a totality of unevenness and complementarity. The South, becoming an outer world, complements the need of the center. The imperialist generalized exploitation and oppression of the world does not simply lead to the disappearance of the Other, not even to unification, as a homogenous progress but rather an outer otherness with a clear boundary of separation and exclusion, of constant generalized exploitation, oppression, and alienation.

To this end, Marxism and psychoanalysis need realignment today to abolish the exploitation and oppression in class society. However, Marxism is not simply a tool of analysis and a guide for revolutionary action, but also a science of creative methods of handling the contradiction. Marxism and psychoanalysis are not promising a happy-ending post-capitalist world of immediate authentic freedom, sexuality, love, drives, being, and so on. It is with this, that the Marxism and psychoanalysis procedure is far more than a science of critique and struggle to overthrow class society and oppressive 'culture,' but also a continuing critique and struggle in the post-capitalist classless world. In our world of realistic sophism, we need politics and psychoanalysis more than ever.

Our final vision is freedom and difference. But for now, we need to look generally at the need for psychoanalysis and politics in the current primary contradiction and polarization between the imperialist North and the capitalist-socialist South, in the question of war, in planetary extinction, and specifically in revitalizing the struggle of the construction of the early

stages of socialism, a period of transition and the need for the conscious transformation of humanity, because it is not about another world being possible, but a new humanity as well.

Comrades, what we need today is multipolarity and internationalism.

Hermeneutics and Politics: Rereading The Political Unconscious¹

ROBERT T. TALLY

¹ The first version of this work was prepared for the Special Dossier edited by Slavoj Žižek and Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, in the framework of the project of the *Guillermo de Ockham Journal* of the University of Cali, Colombia: R.T. Tally Jr, "Hermeneutics and Politics: Rereading the Political Unconscious," *Revista Guillermo De Ockham*, 20, No. 2 (2022), internet <https://doi.org/10.21500/22563202.5848> (Original work published July 29, 2022).

As Karl Marx famously put it in the eleventh of his "Theses on Feuerbach," "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."² The urgency as well as the truth of this statement is undoubtedly as powerful today as when Marx first wrote it, but as a popular slogan frequently cited by radical thinkers and activists, Thesis 11 unfortunately has been rendered into a relatively simplistic dismissal of theory in favor of a somewhat anti-intellectual vision of praxis. Such is the danger of wisdom so phrased that it can fit on a bumper-sticker, a fate Marx himself likely never imagined for this trenchant observation. Marxism, after all, involves the dialectical unity of theory and practice, and Marx himself, of course, spent his life engaged in the critical analysis or interpretation of modern capitalist societies while also remaining committed to the movement devoted to changing the world. The crux of Thesis 11, in fact, lies not so much in the opposition between theory and practice, as in the connection Marx makes between interpreting the world and changing it. Interpretation, while not an end in itself, is absolutely critical to any project for imagining alternatives to and transforming the *status quo*. In this situation, hermeneutics inevitably takes on political and critical import. Arguably, it always bore such weight, but it has become more pressing in our time, perhaps, that the very act of interpretation is itself also a political act, one that is intimately connected to the project of critique.

The idea of the *political unconscious* ties in closely with the spirit animating Marx's Thesis 11, for both interpreting the world and changing it are implied within the concept. Not surprisingly, in his coining of the term and his elaboration of the notion in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Fredric Jameson begins with a lengthy chapter

² Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., edited by Robert C. Tucker, New York: W.W. Norton, 1978, 145.

titled "On Interpretation," before delineating the ways in which a properly dialectical, Marxist hermeneutic is employed to understand social and literary texts, focusing on key genres of romance, realism, naturalism, and modernism in order to illustrate how it all operates.³ The political unconscious very much about the question of interpretation.

In *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism*, I have suggested that Jameson's entire career could be imagined as a cultural cartography of the world system, an attempt to map figuratively the totality of social relations as they may be disclosed through a variety of forms of narrative.⁴ Jameson's work has involved "a continuous and lifelong meditation on narrative, on its basic structures, its relationship to the reality it expresses, and its epistemological value when compared with other, more abstract and philosophical modes of understanding," which is actually how Jameson characterized the career of Georg Lukács in *Marxism and Form*.⁵ Across more than twenty-five books and hundreds of articles, Jameson has been remarkably consistent, maintaining his particular project of dialectical, Marxist criticism while continually assessing ever new cultural, intellectual, and social phenomena. The result is a curious mixture of the absolutely avant-garde and the seemingly old-fashioned. Jameson has found himself near the center of the most current cultural and critical controversies of the day, moving with remarkable agility through the theoretical thickets of existentialism, structuralism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and globalization. Yet, throughout all of these

3 See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981, especially 17-102.

4 See Robert T. Tally Jr., *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism*, London: Pluto Press, 2014.

5 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, 163.

post-contemporary interventions, Jameson has been among the more resolutely traditional Marxist theorists and critics.

While engaging in inquiries ranging from narrative fiction and critical theory to film and television, architecture and art history, music, philosophy, and so on ("nothing cultural is alien to him," as Colin MacCabe once put it),⁶ Jameson has maintained that Marxism is not just the most effective, but indeed the *only* theoretical and critical practice capable of adequately comprehending the narratives by which we make sense of, or give form to, the world. Jameson's dialectical criticism analyzes and evaluates the cultural landscape with an almost up-to-the-minute calibration, while always situating these interventions in a consistent yet flexible and complex system through which may be glimpsed that totality that ultimately gives meaning to each discrete element within it. In this way, Jameson seems to be a hip, ultra-contemporary postmodern theorist and a traditional, almost nineteenth-century thinker, all at the same time.

Additionally, Jameson has remained committed to a properly literary critical project, even when he ventures into other disciplinary fields. In a somewhat post-literary age, with media theory and cultural studies usurping the roles previously played by literary criticism and literary history, Jameson's criticism and theory, especially in its attention to narrative, form, genre, and tropes, appear to represent an almost perversely Luddite perspective. Even when he has ventured into architecture, film, visual arts, or media criticism, Jameson has always done so as a literary critic, paying closest attention to the forms and functions normally associated with narrative fiction. Despite his remarkable breadth of cultural inquiry, Jameson in some respects remains the student of Erich Auerbach, one of

6 Colin MacCabe, "Preface," in Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press and the British Film Institute, 1992, ix.

his teachers in graduate school at Yale University in the 1950s, and of the great philological tradition of the early twentieth century. From his earliest writings to his most recent, Jameson has been concerned above all with the ways in which individual expressions—sentences, in fact – relate to forms, which in turn derive their force and significance from the totality of social, political, and economic relations at work in a given mode of production. For Jameson, the critical perspective peculiar to literary criticism enables a properly Marxist critique of the world system.

In this, Jameson has at times been criticized, as some have justifiably wondered how an innovative analysis of a nineteenth-century French novel or the articulation of a hermeneutic theory can possibly further a Marxist agenda. But this literariness, in fact, comports with Jameson's Marxism and his overall project of dialectical criticism. In Jameson's view, the existential condition of personal and social life in societies organized under the capitalist mode of production necessarily requires a form of interpretative or allegorical activity, which ultimately means that the task of making sense of one's world falls into the traditional bailiwick of literary criticism. Literary texts come to the reader as already constructed objects, situated in a complex literary and social history, and therefore cannot necessarily be read "literally" even if that is the preferred approach, since even a "literal" reading will involve some forms of interpretation. Just so, our interpretation of the social text—that is, the world in which we live – will also require a kind of metacommentary, to invoke another famous Jamesonian concept. As Jameson explains in *The Political Unconscious*,

no society has ever been quite so mystified in quite so many ways as our own, saturated as it is with messages and information, the very vehicles of mystification (language, as Talleyrand put it, having been given us in order to

conceal our thoughts). If everything were transparent, then no ideology would be possible, and no domination either: evidently that is not our case. But above and beyond the sheer fact of mystification, we must point to the supplementary problem involved in the study of cultural or literary texts, or on other words, essentially, of narratives: for even if discursive language were to be taken literally, there is always, and constitutively, a problem about the "meaning" of narratives as such; and the problem about the assessment and the subsequent formulation of the "meaning" of this or that narrative is the hermeneutic question.⁷

Because narratives are form-giving forms by which individual and collective subjects make sense of the world, the project of the literary critic coincides with that of other sense-making systems, such as religion, philosophy, and science. Yet, as Jameson's own dialectical criticism makes clear, the literary critic is professionally attuned to the presumption of mystification or, to put it differently, to the need for interpretation, in advance. This is where the notion of the *political unconscious* becomes so critical as well.

In the famous opening words of its preface – "Always historicize!" – The *Political Unconscious* announces a crucial aspect of its project, but the thoroughgoing historicism of Jameson's dialectical criticism is not easily reducible to the interpretive methods sometimes associated with the term *historicism*. For one thing, Jameson seldom allows one to rest easy in the assumption that placing a given author or text in its historical context will, by itself, yield the desired results. He is also extremely wary of the various historicist methods, including the so-called "New Historicism" then gaining currency in the United States, which he feels are insufficiently dialectical

7 Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 61.

or Marxist. Above all, Jameson finds the historical investigation of a particular cultural artifact without regard to its inevitable situation within a supra-individual frame of reference, a larger social structure or system such as the mode of production, to be at best rather limited and incomplete, and at worst misleadingly false or ideologically suspect. So, while “always historicize” is the “one absolute and we may even say ‘transhistorical’ imperative of all dialectical thought,” and while it “will unsurprisingly turn out to be the moral of *The Political Unconscious*,”⁸ Jameson’s more pressing argument in this study will involve the categories by which such a historicist project is possible or even conceivable.

Not unexpectedly, Marxism will offer the key to solving the theoretical and methodological problem facing the committed historicist. “Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long-forgotten message in surroundings utterly alien to it.”⁹ In this way, the Marxist hermeneutic outlined in *The Political Unconscious* will not only counter other interpretive models and oppose the putatively anti-interpretive theories associated with poststructuralism or deconstruction, but it will also propose a model by which texts can be read in their comprehensive historical and cultural contexts, as well as in our own. Thus, the very possibility of interpretation, as well as the interpretive act itself, is the real focus of *The Political Unconscious*.

Interpretation, therefore, cannot be understood as a process through which the meaning is simply read off the surface of, or even “found” deep within, the text in question, as if

the phenomenological *Ding-an-sich* could be perceived by the astute observer. For texts are themselves historical and cultural objects that contain within them, as it were, the perceptions and interpretations of them throughout their history. Following his earlier argument first made in his 1971 article “Metacommentary,”¹⁰ Jameson explains that

we never fully confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or – if a text is brand-new – through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions.¹¹

Interpretation is thus never an isolated act performed by a reader upon a text, “but takes place on a Homeric battlefield, on which a host of interpretive options are either openly or implicitly in conflict.”¹² One does not so much interpret a text as translate it into an interpretive code, in order to reveal or construct a meaning that is itself situated within a semantic battleground of different, sometimes opposed, meanings.

Hence, in Jameson’s view, interpretation is a fundamentally allegorical act, by which one must translate from one code into another, along different registers and according to a particular master code. Such “master codes” may ultimately refer to the various methods or “schools” of criticism. Marxist criticism, which for Jameson is marked by its dialectical and

8 Ibid., 9.

9 Ibid., 19.

10 See Jameson, “Metacommentary,” in *The Ideologies of Theory*, London: Verso, 2008, 5-19.

11 Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 9.

12 Ibid., 13.

totalizing vision, can reveal the limitations of these partial or local methods, identifying the “strategies of containment” by which texts and interpretations foster the illusion of completeness while suppressing the historical (and, therefore, also social and political) content. In this sense, Jameson’s theory of interpretation may be viewed as a properly literary version of the older practice of ideology critique, in which the false consciousness of a given class is exposed and the “scientific” analysis of the total system discloses the social relations hidden beneath the visible surfaces of things, much like Marx’s own revelatory investigation into alienated labor or the fetishism of the commodity in *Capital*. However, Jameson does not maintain that Marxist interpretation stands free of ideology, since all thought is necessarily ideological. Rather, he views Marxism as the practice that can reflexively recognize its own ideological position and, in wrestling with itself in this way, open up the possibility of transcending ideology.

Thus, the essentially polemical argument in *The Political Unconscious* is directed against those who would segregate the “political” from other areas of human experience and, in so doing, deny or occlude the historical as well. Obviously, this includes non-Marxist approaches to literature, but Jameson’s argument ultimately confronts something like false consciousness in societies organized under the capitalist mode of production as a whole. The theory of a “political unconscious,” then, is formulated as a means of apprehending and making visible the repressed narrative of history, which, following Marx, Jameson understands as the history of class struggle and, therefore, as essentially political. Those critics or thinkers who would distinguish cultural texts that are social and political from those that are not are, in Jameson’s view, not merely in error, but are (perhaps unintentionally) apologists for and reinforcers of “the reification and privatization of contemporary life.” As Jameson continues,

To imagine that, sheltered from the omnipresence of history and the implacable influence of the social, there already exists a realm of freedom – whether it be that of the microscopic experience of words in a text or the ecstasies and intensities of the various private religions – is only to strengthen the grip of Necessity over all such blind zones in which the individual subject seeks refuge, in pursuit of a purely individual, merely psychological, project of salvation. The only effective liberation from such constraint begins with the recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical – indeed, that everything is “in the last analysis” political.¹³

In this manner, we may see that Jameson is not advocating for a political interpretation, as distinct from psychoanalytic, religious, linguistic, or other hermeneutic methods, but rather is arguing for a Marxist and dialectical criticism capable of making visible the unseen but all-too-real social totality of which all texts are ultimately a part.¹⁴

As far as methodology goes, Jameson insists that the insights of Marxist criticism offer “an ultimate *semantic* precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts,” and that the “semantic enrichment and enlargement of the inert givens and materials of a particular text” takes place within three overlapping or “concentric” frames of reference. That is, the text would be situated first in its own time or political history (in a narrow sense of the event placed in its own chronological

13 Ibid., 20.

14 See also Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, 195. Eagleton’s conclusion to *Literary Theory* insists that his use of the term “political criticism” is not intended as an alternative to other types of criticism, but is meant to underscore the fact that all literary theory is political.

sequence), then in its society as a whole (a somewhat more synchronic system), and finally in history itself, “now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession or destiny of the various human social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us.”¹⁵

It may be worth noting that Jameson’s as yet unfinished six-volume project, *The Poetics of Social Forms*, for which *The Political Unconscious* can in retrospect be understood as the Introduction, seems to be an attempt to survey the temporal terrain outlined in this third phase of interpretation, History itself. The historical trajectory of cultural forms and poetic modes of production would proceed from the primitive myth-making of the ancients in a forthcoming volume – perhaps this is itself part of the convolutions of the dialectic, but the “last” volume to appear in print will actually be Volume 1 of *The Poetics of Social Forms* – and thence to the romantic allegories of a pre-modern and pre-capitalist epoch developing into new forms with the advent of modernity and postmodernity in *Allegory and Ideology*, and finally spanning the realist, modernist, and post-modernist cultural modes, themselves associated with Ernest Mandel’s stages of capital (i.e., market, monopoly, and late- or multinational capitalism) and addressed in Jameson’s *Antinomies of Realism, A Singular Modernity* (supplemented by *The Modernist Papers*), and *Postmodernism*, or, the *Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, respectively. Finally, these modes of cultural production invite us to consider a future scarcely imaginable outside of the realms of utopia and science fiction, as Jameson has explored in the sixth and final volume, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*.

In practice, to return to *The Political Unconscious*, these phases of reading will mainly move in an ever-widening gyre

15 Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 75.

from the individual text itself to the social order of which it is a part, and thence to a broader view of the text in history. But Jameson makes clear that these are all understood in Marxist terms, so that even the first, more discretely textual analysis, which might appear similar to the traditional form of an *explication de texte*, will necessarily understand the work as a “socially symbolic act” (as Jameson’s subtitle would have it). At the social level, Jameson’s analysis would extend deeper into or beyond the text to examine the *ideologeme* or “the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes.” And at the horizon of history, the text and its ideologemes may be seen in terms of what Jameson calls “the ideology of form,” in which the mode of production may be somehow discerned in the organization of the forms themselves.¹⁶ In *The Political Unconscious*, the central chapters, nominally on genre criticism, and then novels by Honoré de Balzac, George Gissing, and Joseph Conrad, respectively, explore these three horizons of interpretation.

Lingering on this last “horizon” for a moment, Jameson indicates that at this point the form itself is recognized as content, thus marking a dialectical reversal in which a formal analysis can reveal the heterogeneous processes of a given cultural text and ascertain a social “content of the form.” That is, it has become possible “to grasp such formal processes as sedimented content in their own right, distinct from the manifest content of the works.”¹⁷ Jameson endeavors to demonstrate this by examining genre, a primarily formal category that he shows to contain sociopolitical content in its own right. His lengthy chapter on “the dialectical use of genre criticism,” which engages productively with a compelling non-Marxist lit-

16 Ibid., 76.

17 Ibid., 99.

erary theory (i.e., that of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*), draws out social implications of that theory while demonstrating Jameson's provocative notion of the ideology of form. Jameson's idea of "generic discontinuities" – that is, the presence of multiple genres within a given literary text (even, or especially, a text already placed in a recognizable genre, such as a romance) – stages at a level of literary history the sort of textual heteroglossia that Mikhail Bakhtin has considered so fundamental to the form of the novel.¹⁸ Using "a kind of x-ray technique," the reader may reveal "the layered and marbled structure of the text," thereby showing that the novel is "not so much an organic unity as a symbolic act that must reunite or harmonize heterogeneous narrative paradigms which have their own specific and contradictory ideological meaning," such as the social versus the psychological, for example.¹⁹ In this sense even the seemingly apolitical and ahistorical characteristics of a given generic form are revealed to be imbued with social and political content.

The aim of this theory of a political unconscious is ultimately to disclose the unseen or repressed historical dimension of both lived experience and the representations of reality in literary and cultural texts. But, as Jameson makes clear, history cannot be experienced and understood in itself, as a thing or even as a story, but may only be uncovered through the processes of narrative, which, famously, Jameson takes to be "the central function or instance of the human mind."²⁰ Drawing upon Louis Althusser's conception, itself derived from Spinoza, of the "absent cause," Jameson proposes that

history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious.²¹

Working through the aforementioned phases or horizons of textual interpretation, from the timely symbolic act to broader social system and on to the vast spatiotemporal territory of human history, the hermeneutic process of *The Political Unconscious* arrives at "a space in which History itself becomes the ultimate ground as well as the untranscendable limit of our understanding in general and our textual interpretations in particular."²²

Moreover, for a properly Marxist analytic, history in this sense must be understood as "the experience of Necessity," no longer in terms of its content (as in an older discourse of "needs," such as food and shelter) but as "the inexorable *form* of events." As Jameson notoriously puts it, "History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its 'ruses' turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intentions."²³ Understood in this way, then, the methodological and hermeneutic program of *The Political Unconscious* to uncover the historical dimension that had been obscured or repressed in cultural texts themselves, as in other interpretive practices, may be seen as a critique of ideology or false consciousness, however much Jameson, perhaps rightly, wishes to avoid the implications of these older slogans in other respects. In disclosing the

18 See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982, 259-442.

19 Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 144.

20 Ibid., 13.

21 Ibid., 35.

22 Ibid., 100.

23 Ibid., 102.

narrative of history, as Jameson will make clear in the study's conclusion, the critic may also orient his or her vision toward a utopian alternative.

In that concluding chapter, revealingly titled "The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology," Jameson discusses how this innovative conception of a political unconscious is also very much a part of the "classical" Marxian *Ideologiekritik* and points toward a more comprehensive sense of class consciousness than prior iterations of Marxist theory might have envisioned. Jameson's position expands and refines this project. He proposes that "all class consciousness," including that of the ruling class, is fundamentally utopian, insofar as it expresses "the unity of a collectivity" in an allegorical or figurative manner.²⁴ It becomes clear that even the reactionary or conservative political positions of a class (and, of course, of the narratives produced by members of that class) maintain a utopian kernel that cannot be ignored by a properly dialectical criticism.

Opposing the insufferable, if often understandable, moralizing to be found in so many radical philosophies and methods, Jameson avers that "[s]uch a view dictates an enlarged perspective for any Marxist analysis of culture, which can no longer be content with its demystifying vocation to unmask and to demonstrate the ways in which a cultural artifact fulfills a specific ideological mission," but must seek "to project" a cultural object's "simultaneously Utopian power."²⁵ Hence, he implies a "bad faith" on the part of Marxists or other critics who neglect that ultimate lesson of the dialectic, that is, the dialectical reversal, in which the negative and the positive may be combined in the unity of opposites. Arguably, Jameson's retreat here from the simplistic conception of "false

24 Ibid., 289; 291.

25 Ibid., 291.

consciousness" is itself an affirmation of a more complex, robust version of the same, since he is suggesting a kind of false consciousness on behalf of critics unable or unwilling to see the utopian elements of ideological forms. In apprehending the coexistence of both positive and negative, utopian and ideological, one also concedes that the work, as well as the interpreter, is situated within the nightmare of history. Jameson's political unconscious may be seen as another means by which we orient ourselves within and attempt to map this totality.²⁶

Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach – "the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" – is a well-taken caveat to those who would rest easy in merely reading the present, without adequately striving to understand the past or to project alternative visions for the future. However, none knew better than Marx the value of critique, which necessarily involves analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Indeed, even before his "Theses on Feuerbach" and decades before he refused to provide recipes for the cook-shops of the future, Marx explained to Arnold Ruge that "constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair"; rather, "it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to *ruthless criticism* of all that exists, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be."²⁷ Within the cultural sphere, broadly conceived, this "ruthless criticism" has been and is the ongoing project of Jameson's career.

26 See, e.g., my "On Always Historicizing: The Dialect of Utopia and Ideology Today," *PMLA* 137, No. 3 (May 2022), forthcoming.

27 See Karl Marx, "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 13.

Jameson's utopianism is directly tied to this literary critical project in what he referred to as the dialectic of utopia and ideology, since any future-oriented utopian project must necessarily confront the mystified or reified social relations of the present. In the end, the old tension within Marxism between voluntarism and determinism, between the activity of the class struggle and the structural form of the mode of production, or perhaps more simply between politics and history, likely must remain in some sort of productive tension in the labors of the Marxist critic. Any attempt to formulate a radically different future must first and always come to terms with the scarcely representable system in which we find ourselves. Jameson summarizes the problem and its constantly evolving solution in *Valences of the Dialectic*, where he demonstrates the utopian impulse animating the critical endeavor itself:

A Marxist politics is a Utopian project or program for transforming the world, and replacing a capitalist mode of production with a radically different one. But it is also a conception of historical dynamics in which it is posited that the whole new world is also objectively in emergence all around us, without our necessarily at once perceiving it; so that alongside our conscious praxis and our strategies for producing change, we may also take a more receptive and interpretive stance in which, with the proper instruments and registering apparatus, we may detect the allegorical stirrings of a different state of things, the imperceptible and even immemorial ripenings of the seeds of time, the subliminal and subcutaneous eruptions of whole new forms of life and social relations.²⁸

28 Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, London: Verso, 2009, 416.

The project of dialectical criticism, therefore, involves the patient, meticulous, and attentive *reading* of the situation in which we find ourselves, but in this analytic and interpretive activity also lie the revolutionary forces of current and future struggles.

Cultural theory cannot replace revolutionary theorizing any more than cultural practices could replace revolutionary praxis. *The Political Unconscious* does not conflate interpreting the world with changing it. Just as theory cannot replace practice, reading cannot replace action. But it is also true that practice worthy of the effort cannot dispense with theory entirely, and direct action cannot happen outside of a context which itself must be understood in order for such action to be effective. Thus, bearing in mind the lessons of Marx and of Marxism, and in keeping with the concept of the political unconscious, we may recast the emphasis of the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach thusly: The philosophers have heretofore *only* interpreted the world; the point, however, is to change it. That is, we must be able to interpret the world *in order to* change it. Hermeneutics thus always involves politics, and vice versa.

The political unconscious thus brings into view another thesis: If we have any hope of changing the world for the better, we must be able to find new and better ways of interpreting it.

Is There a Political Unconscious in Technology?¹

JENS SCHRÖTER

1 The first version of this work was prepared for the Special Dossier edited by Slavoj Žižek and Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, in the framework of the project of the *Guillermo de Ockham Journal* of the University of Cali, Colombia: J. Schröter, "Is There a Political Unconscious in Technology?" *Guillermo De Ockham Journal* 20, No. 2 (2022).

*Technology is not neutral. We're inside of what we make,
and it's inside of us. We're living in a world of
connections
– and it matters which ones get made and unmade.*

– Donna Haraway²

The question if there is a political unconscious can be understood in two ways. First it could be the question if our unconscious (in a Freudian or Lacanian way) is political. Secondly the question could mean: Are there political (social, economic...) structures, institutions, processes that are unconscious, in the sense that we 'normally' (whatever that exactly means) do not perceive and reflect on them? I want to focus on this second meaning and especially discuss the question if "technology is society made durable."³ To put it differently: Is technology a form of the political unconscious?

When we ask the question, if there are institutions, structures etc. that are unconscious or have at least an unconscious component, we have to accept that this idea is quite old. Already Marx formulated in *Capital*, Vol. 1 explicitly about the people involved in the process of exchanging commodities: "They do this without being aware of it."⁴ That is to say: the process has at least an unconscious component. Marx's analysis

2 H. Kunzru, "You Are Cyborg. [A Conversation with Donna Haraway]," *Wired* (Jan 2, 1997), internet: <https://www.wired.com/1997/02/ffharaway/>.

3 B. Latour, "Technology is Society Made Durable," in *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, edited by J. Law, London: Routledge, 1991, 103-132.

4 K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Hammondswoth: Penguin, 1976, 166-7.

reveals a normally unconscious economic reality. One could even radicalize this argument and underline that every political, social, economical, etc. theory has to do so, otherwise it would be superfluous. If everything were consciously known and transparent, why then (social) science at all? This is even true for sociological approaches that try to “follow the actors,” e.g. actor-network-theory. One of its proponents, Michel Callon, admits that unwillingly: After having written “that social scientists don’t have special access to a truth that would be inaccessible to actors themselves,” some lines later he states: “The role of the anthropology of (the) econom(y)ics is, I believe, to make these anthropological struggles explainable in their theoretical and practical dimensions, by *identifying and revealing the forces* that, in a more or less articulated way, challenge the dominant models and their grip on real markets.”⁵ Here, the social scientist or anthropologist “reveals” (and “identifies”) something, meaning that it has been hidden to the actors involved and misunderstood by them (a similarity to the notion of the unconscious). Obviously, scientists also in Callon need access “to a truth that would be inaccessible to actors themselves” (like a psychoanalyst) – otherwise they simply would be no scientists and couldn’t “explain” anything.

Unconscious structures, institutions, processes are anywhere – if only for the reason that total presence and transparency would be unbearable. To reduce complexity means to produce an unconscious, like subjects that ‘forget’ unpleasant events. The memory of the unpleasant event is no longer there, but it has left a trace in the unconscious that can have effects later on. An unconscious has to have a place, so the task

5 M. Callon, M. “Why Virtualism Paves the Way to Political Impotence. Callon replies to Miller,” *Economic Sociology: European Electronic Newsletter* 6, No. 2 (2005), 12 (emphasis mine), internet: <http://econsoc.mpifg.de/archive/es-feb05.pdf>.

should be to “relocate[e] it in the object” as Jameson⁶ put it. And since it is to be suspected that a political unconscious is to be found in artificial objects with higher probability than in, say, stones lying around in a forest, one should focus on technology, since every man-made object can be called technology. Every artificial object has a certain form to fulfill a certain purpose and insofar certain historical decisions are sedimented in that form and certain paths were taken (and others not). In that sense we could say that every technological object has political implications. But especially when technology works without disturbance or malfunction (I’ll come back to that), we seldomly think about the question if the technology could be otherwise and what this implies. But do we have to call this a “political unconscious”?

There is a wide and multifaceted discussion on the political implications of technology, that is to say, the non-neutrality of a given technology. It’s impossible and also unnecessary to review it here in full. I just want to emphasize some points according to the topic of leading question for the ‘political unconscious.’ Neutrality of technology means that technology can be used in (politically) different ways – a simple example: A knife can be used to cut vegetables and so help to nourish children, but it can also be used to kill. It’s potential to cut does not dictate *what* will be cut. But without a knife cutting as such is impossible (or at least far more difficult) – and of course this changes things: A world with cutting is different from one without. Another example for this: Photography doesn’t determine which photos will be taken, but with photography the option to make photographs with all its implications and consequences comes into the world.

6 F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981, 34.

These very simple examples already show firstly that there is a *tension between the change a technology makes by introducing a new option (otherwise it wouldn't be invented and used) and is therefore political, without thereby determining concrete cases how to use the technology*. Note that this is not exactly the same tension as those between (technical structure) and practical use of technology. My argument is not that technology has a structure (a "script," as Akrich puts it)⁷ and to pose the question if and to which degree this structure determines actual use and if there are dissident forms of use etc. Technologies do not determine their exact use, obviously, but nevertheless they open up a new field of possible uses – and this field is political in the sense that it introduces possibilities and also barriers that didn't exist before. That the field of uses is potentially open is shown by the fact that there exist paratexts of technologies, e.g. manuals or tutorials,⁸ that try to tell potential users how and in which ways a technology should be used.

Secondly, it might be that the question if technology is neutral or not homogenizes technology in a problematic way – *there might be technologies that are more or less neutral than others*. As Winner put it in his much-debated paper: "First are instances in which the invention, design, or arrangement of a specific technical device or system becomes a way of settling an issue in a particular community. Seen in the proper light, examples of this kind are fairly straightforward and easily understood. Second are cases of what can be called inher-

ently political technologies, man-made systems that appear to require, or to be strongly compatible with, particular kinds of political relationships."⁹ For the first case he gives the example of bridges in New York leading to Jones Beach that exclude because of its low height buses and therefore the poorer – and black – part of the people. It is of no importance here that this particular analysis has been criticized¹⁰ – the example just reminds us that some technologies might be designed in a way to produce certain political effects. For the second case he gives the example of nuclear energy – this highly dangerous technology requires at least partially authoritarian structures simply to safeguard the reactors and, for example, to get back plutonium in case it was stolen. The first case, the bridges, could have *different* political implications, it could be 'more neutral.' The second case enforces a certain political structure and is therefore less neutral. To sum up:

(a) A given technology contains a "whole nest of possibilities that determine future directions for the socius,"¹¹ without determining concrete uses in the strict sense (Heidegger's notion of "enframing" might also point to this – a certain field is unveiled without determining concrete practices).¹² This implies the question if all actual uses can be (in principle) predicted from the virtual 'nest of possibilities' or if it is possible, that at least one concrete, unexpected use appears that was unforeseeable and therefore (in a sense) un-implied by the

7 M. Akrich, "The De-scription of Technical Objects," In *Shaping Technology/ Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, edited by W.E. Bijker and J. Law, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997, 205-224.

8 M. Akrich and D. Boullier, "Le mode d'emploi: genese, forme et usage," in *Savoir faire et pouvoir transmettre*, edited by D. Chevallier, Aubervilliers: Editions de l'EHESS, 1996, 112-131.

9 L. Winner, "Do Artefacts Have Politics?" *Daedalus* 109, No. 1 (1980), 123.

10 B. Joerges, "Do Politics Have Artefacts?" *Social Studies of Science* 29, No. 3 (1999), 411-431.

11 D. Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, 5.

12 M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1977.

development of the technology. If so, does it make sense to speak of a “nest of possibilities” at all?

(b) We have to be aware that the tension between the nest of possibilities and concrete uses might be differently structured in different cases of technology.

Now following up on these differentiations we have to ask: How does this relate to the questions of the unconscious? In the cases Winner mentions, the structuring decisions seem quite voluntary and conscious. It is – regardless for now, as I said, if the story is really true – consciously decided to block poorer people. We could perhaps say that this conscious decision is not explicitly communicated and therefore unknown to the later users of the bridges. The conscious, political decision seems to be materialized, naturalized and therefore becomes invisible. This is similar to the notion of ideology as naturalization. An example: Today there are many discussions on computing, machine learning and so on that exactly address this point: There might be racist and sexist biases in these systems, either consciously inscribed or, more likely, because the datasets given are formed by a racist history.¹³ This fact can also help to illuminate point (b) above: While it seems plausible that a complex software and its big data sets can be biased, in case of a much simpler technology like a hammer this is not so easy to see: Can a hammer be racially biased? But even in case of the biases in modern software, can we call these biases ‘unconscious’? In the sense that they are normally unknown and are perhaps not intentionally (consciously) inscribed but the result of a forgotten history that might sound convincing (since our personal unconscious is also normally unknown and the result of a history). But is the bias not closer to a notion of ideology as naturalization (as Katz 2020 explicitly

13 S.U. Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, New York: New York University Press, 2018.

puts it)? Some authors use the notion of ‘technological unconscious,’¹⁴ but use that notion in a way that is very close to the notion of ideology. This leads into the very depth of the difficult discussion of the relation between ideology and the unconscious (one starting point would be Althusser).¹⁵

In Winner’s second case, the decision to have a nuclear power plant is quite conscious and perhaps it is known from the beginning that this implies authoritarian political structures. And even if this is not known from the beginning, it might become very clear very soon that one needs authoritarian police structures for example to guarantee the security of the plant. Another famous example: Already in Marx, who intensively discussed technology, we can find the idea that technology has political implications: “It would be possible to write a whole history of the inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working-class revolt.”¹⁶ But does this formulation say that

(i) technology is inherently – and therefore ‘unconscious’ – capitalist, or does this

(ii) mean that it is neutral and used by capitalists for class war?

(iii) But, as a comment to (i): Since a technology does not

14 N. Thrift, “Remembering the Technological Unconscious by Foregrounding Knowledges of Position,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22 (2004): 175-190; J. Beller, *The World Computer: Derivative Conditions of Racial Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2021, esp. Ch 1, on the “computational unconscious.”

15 L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

16 K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Hammondsouth: Penguin, 1976.

grow on trees, but is manmade, the 'inherently capitalist' character of a technology would mean that it's made to have 'capitalist effects' (whatever that exactly means). 'Unconscious' could then mean: It is structured for a certain effect, but this is forgotten in normal use (like in Winner's bridges or the biased computing systems).

(iv) But, as a comment to (ii), (ii) means that even a technology, which is not made to have such effects, could be used to do so, what also implies that a technology, which is made to have such effects can be used not to have them. But if so, if all depends finally on the use, do we need the concept of a political unconscious sedimented in technology at all? Or has the use only a certain space in the virtual nest of possibilities?

This complicated situation can be found in many places in the Marxist theoretical tradition. In some parts (e. g. in Marxism-Leninism) the dominant view is that technology is neutral and can be used for better or worse. In some newer Marxist approaches this is decidedly doubted, e.g. Giest,¹⁷ who insists on a rereading of Marx's notion of real subsumption, which describes how technologies are not only used by capital, but are formed by capital from the very beginning (he gives also a useful overview on the discussion on technology in Marxism in general). But as he shows in detail this discussion is not very developed and especially the detailed analysis of concrete technologies is missing. Kurz¹⁸ does not address

17 J. Giest, "Zur Frage nach der 'kapitalistischen Technik.' Für eine neue Debatte über die reelle Subsumtion der Produktion unter das Kapital," *Zeitschrift für kritische Sozialtheorie und Philosophie* 3, No. 1 (2016): 26-50.

18 R. Kurz, *Blutige Vernunft. Essays zur emanzipatorischen Kritik der kapitalistischen Moderne und ihrer westlichen Werte*, Unkel: Horlemann, 2004,

the question 'capitalist technology' in the detailed theoretical way as Giest does, but he discusses from the perspective of revolutionary and emancipatory politics how the 'artefacts from history' should be filtered and selected for use in a post-capitalist society. He thereby uses the interesting notion of "Formvergiftung" (poisoned form)¹⁹ to demonstrate how things developed and produced in capitalism are contaminated by the principles and goals of capitalism – therefore containing a kind of political unconscious (see in a similar way Freundinnen und Freunde der klassenlosen Gesellschaft: "So it is not just a matter of abolishing the title of ownership, but of (re)gaining social control over technology, which would also mean a profound transformation of the existing machinery, geared to the needs of the people").²⁰ There are many more interesting discussions of these problems using Marxist theory.²¹ But these discussions operate without the notion of the unconscious – although as was mentioned above – there seems to be a trace of a prä-Freudian unconscious in the work of Marx (one exception from film theory, which moreover draws on Lacan, is Baudry,²² who again prefers the notion of ideology).

112-121.

19 Ibid., 117; 118; 119.

20 Freundinnen und Freunde der klassenlosen Gesellschaft, "Umriss der Weltkommune," *Kosmoprolet* (2018), internet: <https://kosmoprolet.org/de/umrisse-der-weltkommune>.

21 See R. Panzieri, "Über die kapitalistische Anwendung der Maschinerie im Spätkapitalismus," In *Spätkapitalismus und Klassenkampf. Eine Auswahl aus den Quadern Rosso*, edited by C. Pozzoli, Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1972, 14-32; and of course, C. Castoriadis, *Les carrefours du labyrinthe*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978.

22 J.L. Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28, No. 2 (1974/75), 39-47.

The famous chapter on the fetish character of the commodity argues that the relation between men (and women) is represented as a “fantastic form of a relation between things.”²³ Isn't that somewhat similar to the idea in Winner (regardless of whether the story is really true) that a racist relation between men is realized in the form of things, that is the bridges? Or is there a difference, since in Marx's example the real relation is misrecognized as a relation of things, while in Winner's example the real relation is prolonged in a material arrangement? But this could also be a way of misreading Marx, since his argument seems not to be that a real relationship between men (and women) is only misrecognized as a relation between things – but it is really the case that there, where a relationship between men (and women) should be, there is a relationship between things (commodities, money) that is perceived as the natural way things are. This points to the difficulties of relating different positions on the (hidden, 'unconscious') implications of technology.

Anyway, I want to underline that there is a passage in *Capital*, Vol. 3 that could be read as pointing to a kind of technological unconscious: “The development of the productive forces of social labour is capital's historic mission and justification. For that very reason, it unwittingly creates the material conditions for a higher form of production.”²⁴ In the German original, “unwittingly” is “*unbewußt*”²⁵ – the unconscious! This passage is about Marx's argument that the “productive forces” – technology – is more and more developed by capitalism and thereby “unwittingly” – unconsciously – creates the “material conditions for a higher form of production”. We can sense

23 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 165.

24 K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1981, 368.

25 K. Marx, *Das Kapital. Dritter Band*, MEW 25, Berlin: Dietz, 1988, 269.

here another meaning of a political unconscious of technology: Coming back to my discussion above (i-iv), there might be a further case:

(v) A technology that is made to have capitalist effects (regardless for a moment if used to really have them or not) could also exhibit unexpected collateral side effects. In Marx's words: although the productive forces are made to accelerate and expand the capitalist mode of production, they also lead to the destruction of that mode, even if they are by used capitalist to accelerate and expand that mode (I ignore for the moment the question, if Marx's argument is historically and empirically valid or not).

It is obvious that this connects back to point (a) made above. It seems that an important meaning for the notion of a political unconscious in or as technology is precisely the case where technology exhibits disruptive and unexpected side effects, *neither intended by design nor by use*. This would be similar in a way to the Freudian unconscious in the sense that the unexpected effect of a technology might be compared to the slips, which show that consciousness is disrupted by the unconscious.

As this somewhat complicated discussion shows: While it has on the one hand a certain plausibility that technology is not just a neutral tool, its political implications are on the other hand, not easy to tackle. The idea that a technological “script,” as Akrich²⁶ calls it, can clearly determine use and effects, does not work – that's why Akrich recommends in her analysis, first to analyze the scripts but then secondly to observe actual uses by fieldwork. But if the effects were *only* determined by use, the analysis of the technological form,

26 Akrich, “The De-scription.”

its scripts or even “Formvergiftung” would be superfluous. Moreover, scripts as well as forms of use can have completely unintended effects. And finally, it might be a question of the perspective of the scientific observer, if one sees

- (1) effects of scripts
- (2) effects of uses or
- (3) unintended effects.

For each of these perspectives we can describe a different political unconscious in technology:

- (1) it can be a certain script or even “Formvergiftung” as the virtual nest of possibilities that structures technology but is forgotten or made invisible;
- (2) a given technology is used - in relation to the (1) script, which is either followed or transformed – to produce certain effects, even when this is not communicated;
- (3) The conflicts between (1) and (2), and the relation to unknown external conditions can result in completely unforeseen effects that disrupt either (1) or (2) or both like a Freudian slip.

This complexity shows on why it is so difficult to precisely predict the political effects of certain technologies. *This complex opacity of technology is its political unconscious in the last instance.* It follows that it will not be an easy task for an emancipatory perspective to decide – as discussed e. g. in Kurz²⁷ – how technologies have to be ‘filtered’ and ‘selected’ to fit a new societal structure. New social perspectives cannot simply do with the old technologies, but inventing new ones or transforming the old ones is a very difficult task. On the ques-

27 Kurz, *Blutige Vernunft*.

tion of what technology will be like in a “*société post-révolutionnaire*,” Castoriadis first writes:

Ainsi, dans le domaine fondamental du travail, une transformation consciente de la technologie afin que le procès de travail cesse d’être une mutilation de l’homme et devienne terrain d’exercice de la libre créativité des individus et des groupes présuppose la coopération étroite des travailleurs-utilisateurs des instruments et des techniciens, leur intégration dans de nouveaux ensembles dominant la production, par conséquent la suppression de la bureaucratie dirigeante, privée ou publique, et la gestion ouvrière avec tout ce que celle-ci implique par ailleurs.²⁸

But at the end there is a certain skeptical tone: “Mais de cette musique d’un avenir lointain nous devons renoncer à rien entendre aujourd’hui, sous peine de la confondre avec les hallucinations auditives que pourrait faire naître notre désir.”²⁹

28 Castoriadis, *Les carrefours*, 246.

29 Ibid., 248.

Afterword: Literature and Politics

BRIAN WILLEMS

In the many texts of this volume, different strategies for addressing the world to create change have been developed. Literature might seem to be too frivolous of a topic to add to this group, yet literature, at least in the narrow sense of political literature defined here, could perhaps be of assistance.

For Sartre, the difference between *littérature autonome* and *littérature engagée* is clear. When a *littérature engagée* writer speaks, “he fires. He may be silent, but since he has chosen to fire, he must do it like a man, by aiming at targets, and not like a child, at random, by shutting his eyes and firing merely for the pleasure of hearing the shot go off.”¹ Along with the overt chauvinism of this quote,² Sartre differentiates between the aesthetic writer, who merely loves to hear their own voice, and the committed, engaged writer, who weaponizes their words in order to attack targets of their own choosing.

Yet the belief in the ability of committed writing to change the world has fallen flat. This loss of belief, at least in part, is

1 Jean-Paul Sartre, “What Is Literature?” and *Other Essays*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, 38.

2 Cf. Julien Murphy, “Introduction,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre*, edited by Julien Murphy, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, 7-8; Christine Daigle, “Where Influence Fails: Embodiment in Beauvoir and Sartre,” in *Beauvoir and Sartre: The Riddle of Influence*, edited by Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, 30-48.

because for the committed writer, “words are action,”³ which means that “to reveal is to change.”⁴ However, many of the ills of the world have been revealed, including racism, sexism, and ecological collapse, and yet they persist. So, revealing no longer ensures change (if it ever did). One of the problems of change-through-revealing is that such literature, in the words of Juliana Spahr, is “on its own and in isolation”⁵ from the political institutions it aims to affect. Thus, a reformulation of the political writer is needed, one that is not just about revealing, but about real change. Here, “real change” means actual change to a system, for example, a country’s political and legal system, rather than just changes in hearts and minds, no matter how important and necessary that may be.

Thus, a rather narrow definition of political literature will be developed here: literature that has actually changed politics, in the sense that a text was written with a change in legislature in mind, and that change was made. This quite narrow definition of “political literature” will help to define what literature can and cannot do. At the same time, the definition does not mean that we need to abandon Sartre’s thought wholesale, since there is another important aspect to his argument that I have not yet taken into consideration. Committed literature is not literature written “at random,” but rather literature deliberately aimed at a specific target. This intentional aspect of Sartre’s definition is important because it allows us to exclude certain perverse uses of literature from our discussion and focus on literature that has engendered real-world political change.

3 Sartre, “What Is Literature?,” 37.

4 Ibid.

5 Jos Charles, “Interview with Juliana Spahr,” *Entropy* (Dec 11, 2015), internet: <https://entropymag.org/interview-with-juliana-spahr/>.

Kurt Vonnegut’s short story “Harrison Bergeron” (1961) is a piece of literature that has found its way into the courtroom in the exact opposite manner intended by its author. Set in 2081, the story begins by citing amendments to the US constitution which guarantee an extreme state of equality: “They weren’t only equal before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General.”⁶ This hyperbolic take on enforced equality means that everyone must be reduced to the lowest common denominator, so that anyone smarter, stronger, or more beautiful than someone else must be limited or handicapped in order not to create any kind of inequality. Of course in this satirical story 14-year old Harrison Bergeron is taken away from his family because he is shown to be extraordinary, and when he finally breaks free from his literal chains, he dances with a likewise freed and extraordinarily beautiful ballerina so that, “neutralizing gravity with love and pure will, they remained suspended in air inches below the ceiling, and they kissed each other for a long, long time,”⁷ before being quickly shot and killed by the authorities, with Harrison’s parents too dumbed down to understand what has happened to their son.

This is a story that at first seems to fit into Sartre’s classic definition of engaged literature because it is clearly aimed at a target freely chosen by the author. Additionally, the story also seems to fit into my new definition of political literature, since the story was included in a 2005 Kansas Supreme Court

6 Kurt Vonnegut, *Welcome to the Monkey House*, London: Vintage Classics, 2021, 7.

7 Ibid., 13.

hearing on education. However, the way the story was used in court shows the need for the second part of Sartre's definition, about the intentionality of the author, since the story was included in a case to argue *for* the unequal funding of public schools (using Vonnegut's story to argue that if equal access to education is provided, then everyone would be dumbed down to the level of the working class). When Vonnegut heard of this he was appalled, stating that "Kansas is apparently handicapping schoolchildren, no matter how gifted and talented, with lousy educations if their parents are poor,"⁸ which is far from the point of his story.

Political literature, therefore, is not just literature which ends up being used in court to change policy, but rather literature which is used in the manner intended by the author. Putting concerns about the death of the author and authorial fallacy aside, for the sake of argument we can, just as Vonnegut does above, simply advocate against the obvious misuse of literature for nefarious gains.

Perhaps what first comes to mind in connection to literature changing laws are the obscenity trials for the publication of the unexpurgated edition of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) in 1960, as well as the 1962 trial of the publication of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934). Yet these examples also "fail" Sartre's definition of committed literature, although in a different way, because they were not specifically aimed at existing laws in order to change them. For, at least in the case of Lawrence,

As a novelist, I feel it is the change inside the individual, which is my real concern. The great social change inter-

8 Scott Rothschild, "Famous Author Drawn into Debate Over School Finance," *Lawrence Journal-World* (May 5, 2005), internet: https://www2.ljworld.com/news/2005/may/05/vonnegut_lawyers_could/.

ests me and troubles me, but it is not my field. I know a change is coming – and I know we must have a more generous, more human system based on the life values and not on the money values.⁹

Thus, Sartre's original definition of committed literature is starting to seem more robust than at first, although applied in a more stringent manner: to literature which has been part of the process of changing a policy that it specifically targeted.

In North American literature, a number of novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) are seen to have direct consequences on legislation.¹⁰ Yet the figure who is even more directly related to the narrow definition of political literature being developed here is Upton Sinclair. Writing mainly in the first half of the 20th century, Sinclair is famously known as a "muckraker," a kind of early investigative journalist aimed at exposing injustices wherever they were

9 D.H. Lawrence, *Selected Essays*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1950, 99. Miller's own court case was decided in favor of publication with the court stating that "as a whole it had a serious purpose and literary significance, did not have a predominantly prurient appeal to the average adult, and could not be classified as mere 'hard core' pornography," "Attorney General vs. The Book Named 'Tropic of Cancer,'" *Massachusetts Cases* (1962), internet: <http://masscases.com/cases/sjc/345/345mass11.html>. However, Miller, writing in the early 1930s on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (hence during the time of the writing of *Tropic of Cancer*), seems to be already attacking, almost three decades into the future, the justification the court would make for his own work: "The book is obscene and there is no justification for it. Because it requires none. And the miracles of Jesus are obscene. Because there is no justification for them either. Life is miraculous and obscene, and neither is there any justification for life. ... If *Lady Chatterley's Lover* represents another of Lawrence's 'failures' it does so only because of its impurity, its compromise. And by that I mean that only wherein it is obscene is it magnificent," Henry Miller, *Sunday After the War*, New York: New Directions, 1944, 235.

10 Richard Posner, *Law and Literature*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, 458.

found. Many of Sinclair's fiction has muckraking tendencies, including his *Manassas: A Novel of War* (1904), targeting wage slavery, but it was not until the publication of *The Jungle* (1906) that the kind of connection between literature and politics that I am looking for was formed.

The Jungle was specifically aimed at changing the laws governing working conditions, especially in the meat packing industry. Taking place in Chicago, the novel tells the story of Lithuanian immigrant Jurgis Rudkus, who gets a job in a meat packing plant. However, after injury due to the devastating working conditions, falling pay, and the rape of his wife by her boss, Jurgis falls into a life of alcoholism, violence, and crime, as his wife Ona becomes a sex worker in order to support her children. The novel ends in a very non-novelistic fashion, with Jurgis falling in with a number of immigrant socialists, who eventually convert Jurgis, though many passionate speeches, to their cause.

Yet what makes the book a key example of political literature, as defined here, is a combination of its aim (labor laws) and its effect (actual policy change). After the publication of the novel, Sinclair sent it to then President Theodore Roosevelt. One of the current targets of Roosevelt's politics were trusts, such as the Beef Trust, which kept the prices farmers sold their cattle for low, while the prices consumers paid for their meat high.¹¹ Roosevelt responded to Sinclair's novel, ordering the Department of Agriculture to investigate whether these charges made in a socialist novel were actually true. During the inspection, Sinclair sent hundreds of letters and telegrams to the president, warning him that the Department of Agriculture

11 James Harvey Young, "The Pig that Fell into the Privy: Upton Sinclair's 'The Jungle' and the Meat Inspection Amendments of 1906," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59, No. 4 (Winter 1985), 468.

was part of the problem, not the solution.¹² However, despite the meat packing plant owners having plenty of forewarning of the inspections, as well as the inspectors' own whitewashing of the actual conditions, the reports that did find their way back to Roosevelt were enough to be considered "revolting,"¹³ resulting in the unanimous passing of the Pure Food and Drug Act, as well as the Meat Inspection Act, the forerunners of today's Food and Drug Administration, in 1906.

Thus, *The Jungle* falls into the strict definition of political literature offered here: a text intentionally directed at a specific law, and then becoming a strong factor in the passing of that law.¹⁴ And Sinclair did not stop there. He took the proceedings from the sale of the novel to construct the socialist village of Helicon Home Colony, and then, as part of his 1933 campaign for governor of California, he released the utopian novel *I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future* (1933).¹⁵

In the South American context, the connection between politics and literature is given even greater force by Brazilian author Jorge Amado. Despite his continued claims that "I am only a storyteller,"¹⁶ Amado quickly rose to great public acclaim with his early, social-realist novels dealing with the lives of the

12 Ibid., 469.

13 Ibid., 470.

14 Even if, years later, Roosevelt wrote Sinclair's publisher to "Tell Sinclair to go home and let me run the country for a while," Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The American Left: Its Impact on Politics and Society Since 1900*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2013, 30.

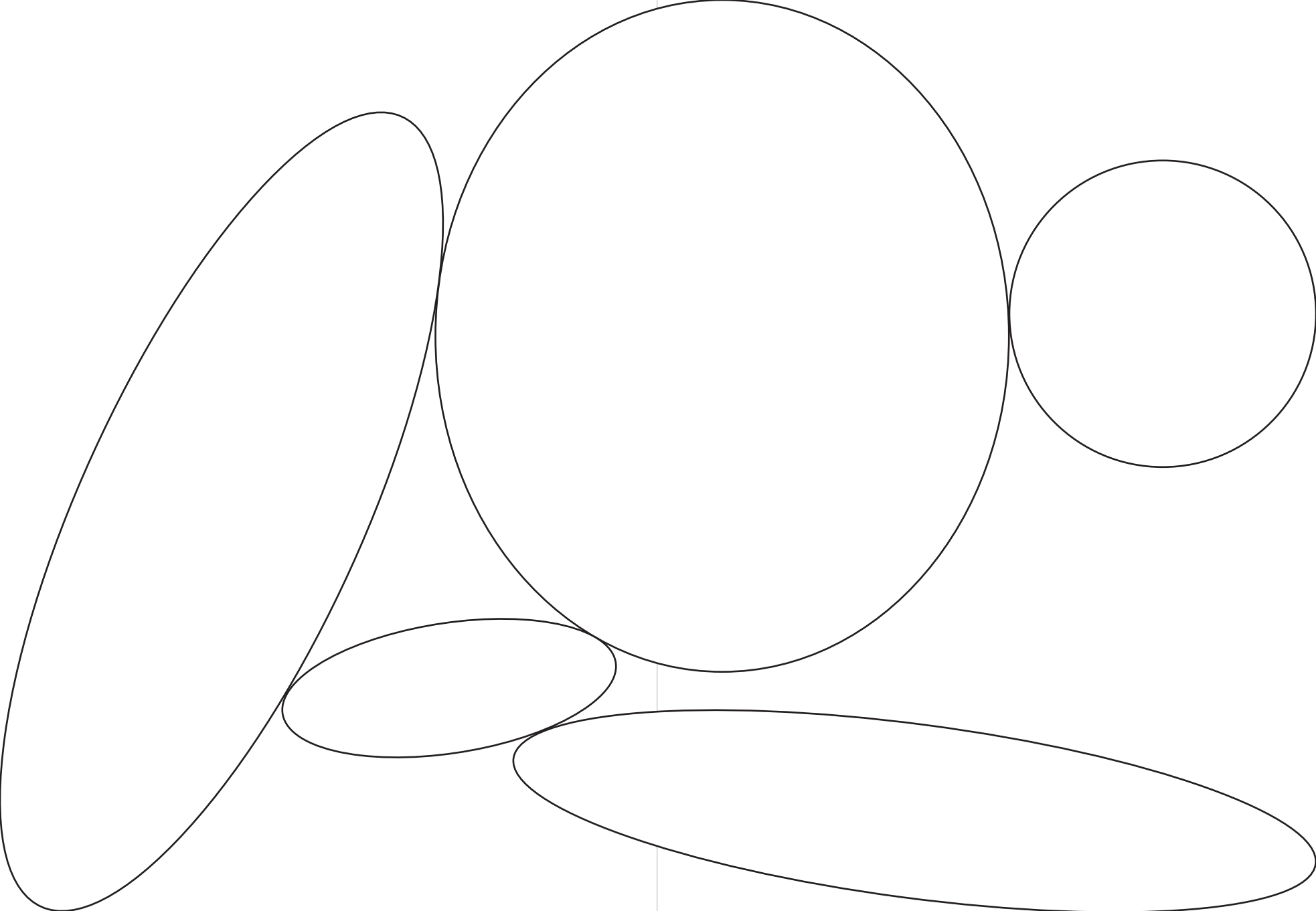
15 Fay Blake and H. Morton Newman, "Upton Sinclair's Epic Campaign," *California History* 63, No. 2 (Fall 1984), 305.

16 Eduardo de Assis Duarte, "Jorge Amado: Exile and Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies* 49, No. 3 (2012), 383.

cocoa workers in his native state of Bahia. The author's life-long militancy in the Brazilian Communist Party also resulted in numerous periods of imprisonment and exile.¹⁷ Yet despite being "only a storyteller," a direct influence of literature on politics can be seen, for example, in the manner that the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé is treated in his novel *Sea of Death* (1936), and then, after being elected to the Brazilian National Assembly in 1946, the author's own successful "sponsoring of legislation calling for freedom of religion in Brazil."¹⁸ Thus, we have an author writing about religious freedom in a novel, and then, upon entering politics himself (at least for the two years he was in the Assembly before being forced into exile in France), developing policy to enforce the liberation his own work proposes. This is the epitome of what this narrow definition of literature and politics implies. A direct line between intention and policy. It is not the only kind of change, and perhaps not even the most important, but it is a key tool for thinking through the various ways that literature can change the world.

17 David Kohut and Olga Vilella, *Historical Dictionary of the Dirty Wars*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017, 26.

18 Ibid.



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