

AM I A PHILOSOPHER?

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Note: Only the size and font have been changed to 12 Times New Roman. All content has been retained in original form to the best of the knowledge of Antonio Garcia, Chair of the International Žižek Studies Conference.

In his perspicuous review of the volume *Repeating Žižek*, dedicated to my work, Jamil Khader notes how some contributors interrogate “Žižek’s credentials as a philosopher, especially in relation to Badiou’s critique of Lacan’s anti-philosophical position. Hamza points out, in fact, that philosophers who are Žižekian are always reminded that compared to Žižek, ‘it is not a difficult task to be a follower of Badiou, or a Badiouian in philosophy, due to his very-well-structured system.’ To this extent, Noys cautiously reiterates Badiou’s claim that Žižek is ‘not exactly in the field of philosophy,’ only to propose that Žižek is a ‘reader of philosophy,’ someone who offers not a philosophy but a method. Bruno Bosteels makes this case against a Žižekian philosophy more forcefully. He claims that after his international career took off, Žižek has been struggling very hard to disassociate himself from the field of cultural studies, in which his work was initially received and ‘misrecognized,’ and to reclaim his name as a philosopher. Bosteels writes: ‘Thus, whereas Badiou after the completion of *Being and Event* speaks from within the bastion of a classically or neoclassically styled philosophy, waving the banner of Platonism with sufficient self-confidence to accept the challenge of an antiphilosopher such as Lacan, Žižek is still at pains to downplay the late Lacan’s anti-philosophical provocations for the sake of gaining respectability as a philosopher.’ For Bosteels, this seems to offer a seamless explanation of Žižek’s ‘proverbial nervousness.’ His tics simply betray an anxiety about being excluded from prestigious institutional apparatuses and departments of philosophy, whether in Slovenia, Britain or France. As such, he performs the role of the hysteric to the master’s discourse of a stoically unfazed Badiou.”

I find these critiques of my work problematic on more than one count, even if I discount the – to put it mildly – very problematic “grounding” of my bodily tics (incidentally, the result of an organic disease for which I am taking medicines!) in my anxiety about being excluded from academic apparatuses and not recognized as a “serious” philosopher. (Can one even imagine the Politically Correct outcry if another thinker – who is, say, a lesbian feminist - were to be “analyzed” at such a level?)

First, I DO propose a kind of “ontology”: my work is not just a deconstructive reflection on the inconsistencies of other philosophies, it DOES outline a certain “structure of reality.” Or, to put it in brutally-simplified Kantian terms: the last horizon of my work is not the multiple narrative of cognitive failures against the background of the inaccessible Real. The move “beyond the transcendental” is outlined in the first part of my *Absolute Recoil* where I deploy in detail the basic dialectical move, that of the reversal of epistemological obstacle into ontological impossibility that characterizes the Thing itself: the very failure of my effort to grasp the Thing has to be (re)conceived as a feature of the Thing, as an impossibility inscribed into the very heart of the Real. (Another move in this direction is my elaboration of the quasi-ontology of “less than nothing” in my reading of the ontological implications of quantum physics.)

But the heart of the problem lies elsewhere: in the application on philosophy of the opposition between the Master and the Hysteric – to cut a long story short, if we identify true philosophy with a stoically unfazed master’s discourse, then philosophers like Kant and Hegel are no longer philosophers. After Kant, “classically or neoclassically styled philosophy,” i.e., philosophy as a “world view,” as a great rendering of the basic structure of entire reality, is simply no longer possible. With Kant’s critical turn, thinking is “not exactly in the field of philosophy,” it offers “not a philosophy but a method”: philosophy turns self-reflexive, a discourse examining its own conditions of possibility – or, more precisely, of its own impossibility. Metaphysics (the description of the hierarchic rational structure of the universe) gets necessarily caught in antinomies, illusions are unavoidably needed to fill in the gaps in the structure – in short, with Kant, philosophy is no longer a Master’s discourse, its entire edifice gets traversed by a bar of immanent impossibility, failure, and inconsistency. With Hegel, things go even further: far from returning to pre-critical rational metaphysics (as Kantians accuse it), the whole of Hegelian dialectics is a kind of hysterical undermining of the Master (the reason Lacan called Hegel “the most sublime of all hysterics”), the immanent self-destruction and self-overcoming of every metaphysical claim. In short, Hegel’s “system” is nothing but a systematic tour through the failures of philosophical projects. In this sense, all of German Idealism is an exercise in “anti-philosophy”: already Kant’s critical thought is not directly philosophy but a prolegomena to future philosophy, a questioning of the conditions of (im)possibility of philosophy; Fichte no longer calls his thinking philosophy but *Wissenschaftslehre* (“the teaching on scientific knowledge”); and Hegel claims his thought is no longer a mere philosophy (love of wisdom) but true wisdom (knowledge) itself. This is why Hegel is “the most sublime of all hysterics”: one should bear in mind that, for Lacan, only hysteria produces new knowledge (in contrast to university discourse which just reproduces it).

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-- In his two great manuscripts published posthumously, *Initiation a la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* (1976) and *Etre marxiste en philosophie* (1978), Althusser (among other things) outlines a specific theory of philosophy which overlaps neither with his early “theoreticist” concept of philosophy as “Theory of theoretical practice” nor with his later notion of philosophy as “class struggle in theory”; while closer to the second notion, it serves as a kind of mediator between the two. Althusser’s starting point is the omni-presence of ideology, of ideological abstractions which always structure our approach to everyday life and reality; this ideology has two level, the “spontaneous” everyday texture of implicit meanings and the organized religion or mythology which organized a systematic system of these meanings. Then, in Ancient Greece, something new and unexpected happened: the rise of science in the guise of mathematics. Mathematics deals with pure abstract numbers deprived of all mythic reference, it is a game of axioms and rule in which no cosmic meaning resonates, there are no sacred, lucky or damned numbers. Precisely as such, mathematics is subversive, it threatens the homogeneity of the universe of cosmic meaning, its homogeneity and stability. A weird incident that happened on a departing AA flight from Philadelphia to Syracuse on May 7 2016 indicates that this fear of mathematics persists even today. An economics professor was solving a differential equation on a piece of paper, and a lady passenger seating at his side thought he might be a terrorist because of what he was writing, so she passed a note to a flight-attendant, claiming that she is too ill to take the flight. The plane returned to the gate, the lady was taken from the plane and voiced her suspicion to the ground personnel; security members then took off the plane the economics professor and questioned him...

The true break happens here, not between mythic ideology and philosophy but between the mythic universe and science – and the function of philosophy is precisely to contain this threat. Formally, philosophy also breaks with the mythic universe and obeys the rules of science (rational argumentation, thinking in abstract conceptual terms, etc.), but its function is to re-inscribe scientific procedure into the religious universe of cosmic meaning. To put it in mockingly-Hegelian terms, if science is a negation of religion, philosophy is a negation of negation, i.e., it endeavors to re-assert religious meaning within the space (and with the means of) rational argumentation:

“All of Plato – the theory of ideas, the opposition of knowledge and opinion, and so on – is based on the break that the first science’ represents. In a sense, this is because all of Plato is an attempt to control and in a way to ‘sublate’ this break, in a profoundly inventive but also profoundly reactive dialectic. Philosophy, in its idealist Platonist matrix, is thus a *reactive invention*: the displacement of (the ideological functions of) religion onto the plane of pure (abstract) rationality. It draws from these sciences its ‘form, the abstraction of its categories, and the demonstrativeness of its reasoning,’ as a pure reasoning directly carried out on ‘abstract’ objects,

but its *function* is an ideological one, a mandate and a service delegated, explicitly or otherwise, by the dominant class.”¹

Here is the link with Althusser’s second definition of philosophy as class struggle in theory: this pressure to contain the scientific threat, to re-assert the all-encompassing religious world-view, is not grounded in some kind of disembodied tendency for meaningful totalization of our experience but is a pressure exerted as part of the class struggle in order to guarantee the hegemony of the ruling class ideology. All great philosophers after Plato repeat this gesture of containment, from Descartes (who limits the domain of science to material world) and Kant (who limits the domain of science to phenomenal world in order to open up the space for religion and ethics) to today’s neo-Kantian theorists of communication who exempt communication from scientific rationality. Against this predominant idealist form of philosophy (Plato – Aristotle – Aquinas - Descartes – Kant – Hegel...), Althusser asserts the subterranean tradition of materialist counter-philosophy from early Greek materialist and Epicureans (who assert the material world of contingent encounters) through Spinoza and even Heidegger. Isn’t one of the great episodes in this struggle Cantor’s profoundly materialist re-conceptualization of the infinite? His basic premise is the multiplicity of infinities which cannot be totalized into an all-encompassing One. The great materialist breakthrough of Cantor concerns the status of infinite numbers (and it is precisely because this breakthrough was materialist that it caused so many psychic traumas to Cantor, a devout Catholic): prior to Cantor, the Infinite was linked to the One, the conceptual form of God in religion and metaphysics, while with Cantor, the Infinite enters the domain of the Multiple – it implies the actual existence of infinite multiplicities, as well as the infinite number of different infinities.

But is Platonism really a reaction to the subversive abstraction of mathematical science? Is it not also (or mainly) a reaction to other tendencies like sophist philosophers or pre-Platonic materialism? Moreover, did the ideological recuperation of mathematics not began prior to Plato, with Pythagoreans who imbued numbers with cosmic meaning? It is worth mentioning here the continuous dialogue between Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin which can be best characterized as the new version of the ancient dialogue between Plato and the sophists: the Platonist Badiou against Cassin's insistence on the irreducibility of the sophists' rupture. From the strict Hegelian standpoint, Cassin is right against Badiou in her insistence on the irreducible character of the sophist's position: the self-referential play of the symbolic process has no external support which would allow us to draw a line, within the language games, between truth and falsity. Sophists are the irreducible »vanishing mediators« between *mythos* and *logos*, between the traditional mythic universe and philosophical rationality and, as such, a permanent threat to philosophy – why? They broke down the mythic unity of words and things, playfully asserting the gap that separates

¹ Alberto Toscano, »The Detour of Abstraction,« in *Diacritics*, 2015, Vol. 43 (No 2): *Other Althusser*, p. 78,

words from things; and philosophy proper can only be understood as a reaction to the sophists, as an attempt to close the gap opened up by the sophists, to provide a foundation of truth for words, to return to mythos in the new conditions of rationality. This is where one should locate Plato: he first tried to provide this foundation by his teaching on *ideas*, and when, in *Parmenides*, he was forced to admit the fragility of this foundation, he engaged in a long struggle to re-assert a clear line of separation between sophistic and truth. (The opposition between sophists and Plato is also connoted by the opposition between democracy and corporate organic order: sophists are clearly democratic, teaching the art of seducing and convincing the crowd, while Plato outlines a hierarchic corporate order in which every individual is at his/her proper place, allowing for no position of singular universality.) The irony of the history of philosophy is that the line of philosophers who struggle against the sophists' temptation finishes with Hegel, the »last philosopher" who, in a way, is also the ultimate sophist, asserting self-referential play with no external support of its truth: for Hegel, there is truth, but it is immanent to the symbolic process – the truth is measured not by an external standard, but by the »pragmatic contradiction,« the inner (in)consistency of the discursive process, by the gap between the enunciated content and its position of enunciation.

Is the way Althusser relates to philosophy not one of the clearest cases of the gap that separates the position of enunciation from the enunciated (content)? At the level of the enunciated content, he is all modesty: he strongly opposes the idealist philosophical pretension to grasp the structure of the entire universe, to "know it all," to render the absolute truth (or the truth of the Absolute). Against this idealist pretension, he praises accepting limits, openness to contingent encounters, etc., which characterize the materialist undercurrent from Epicurus through Spinoza up to Heidegger (although one might add here that it is difficult to imagine a more "arrogant" philosopher than Spinoza whose *Ethics* claims to render the inner working of God-Nature – if nothing else, it can be shown that Spinoza is here much more "arrogant" than Hegel...).

"Idealist philosophers speak for everyone and in everyone's stead. They think, in fact, that they are in possession of the Truth about everything. Materialist philosophers are much less talkative: they know how to shut up and listen to people. They do not think that they are privy to the Truth about everything. They know that they can become philosophers only gradually, modestly, and that their philosophy will come to them *from outside*. So they shut up and listen."²

However, what Althusser effectively does when talking about philosophy, his "process of enunciation," his approach to philosophy, we can easily discern in it the exact opposite of what he characterizes as a materialist approach: brutally simplified universal statements which pretend to define the universal key features of philosophy, with no modest provisos. Philosophy as such is class struggle in theory, the eternal battle of two lines, "idealist" and "materialist"; it functions as an empty repetition of the line of demarcation idealism/materialism which produces nothing

² Quoted from *Diacritics*, 2015, Vol. 43 (No 2): *Other Althusser*, p. 85.

new; etc.etc. In short, Althusser acts as a supreme Judge imposing his Measure onto the wealth of philosophies. No wonder, then, that Althusser is so adamantly anti-Hegelian: Althusser's opposite is here Hegel whose enunciated (content) may appear "arrogant" ("absolute Knowing," etc.), but whose actual approach is much more radically "modest," "deconstructing" every pretense to directly reach the Absolute, demonstrating how each of such claims fails due to its immanent inconsistencies. The extreme case of this Althusser's "arrogance" is his treatment of digitalization/computerization of our lives which he brutally reduces to technocratic idealism: when bourgeoisie loses its ability to generate idealist philosophical systems that guarantee the hegemony of its ideology, it begins to rely on the apparently non-ideological "automatism of computers and technocrats," to the "neutral" expert knowledge to which our lives should be entrusted:

"In a time in which the bourgeoisie has even given up on producing its eternal philosophical systems, on the prospects and guarantees that ideas can provide it with, and in which it has entrusted its destiny to the automatism of computers and technocrats; in a time in which it is incapable of proposing a viable, conceivable future to the world, the proletariat can rise to the challenge; it can breathe new life into philosophy and, in order to liberate men and women from class domination, make it 'an arm for the revolution'."³

Sounds nice, although a bit naïve: today, when science seems fully incorporated into capitalism, the standard situation in which the task of philosophy is to contain the subversive potential of sciences seems almost inverted, so that philosophy itself becomes a tool against technocratic domination... However, the very conjunction "computers and technocrats" should immediately make us suspicious: as if the two are synonymous, as if there is no potential tension between the two, as if (as it should be abundantly clear from today's ferocious struggles for the control of cyberspace) cyberspace is not one of the privileged terrains of class struggle today when state apparatuses and corporations desperately try to contain the monster they themselves helped to unleash: "Althusser misunderstands the nature and transformative potential – the proletarianization, perhaps – of computation and computer science. In so doing he appears ignorant of the strength of the scientific tools for rethinking and resisting technocratic rule."⁴ In ignoring all these ambiguities and tensions, in brutally imposing a simple universal scheme, it is Althusser who acts like the worst idealist philosopher – consequently, it is Althusser who should have followed his materialist formula and "shut up and listen."

³ Quoted from op.cit., p. 93.

⁴ Jason Barker, »Are We (Still) Living in a Computer Simulation?«, in op.cit., p. 94.

--- Lacan begins the eleventh week of his seminar *Les non-dupes errent* (1973-4) with a straight question directed back at himself: »what was it that Lacan, who is here present, invented?« He answers the question »like that, to get things going: *objet a*.« So it's not »desire is the desire of the Other,« »the unconscious is structured like a language,« »there is no sexual relationship,« or another from the list of usual suspects: Lacan immediately emphasizes that his choice is not just one among the possible ones but THE choice. *Objet a* has a long history in Lacan's teaching, it precedes for decades Lacan's systematic references to the analysis of commodities in Marx's *Capital*. But it is undoubtedly this reference to Marx, especially to Marx's notion of surplus-value /*Mehrwert*/, that enabled Lacan to deploy his »mature« notion of *objet a* as surplus-enjoyment (*plus-de-jouir*, *Mehrlust*): the predominant motif which permeates all Lacan's references to Marx's analysis of commodities is the structural homology between Marx's surplus-value and what Lacan's baptized surplus-enjoyment, the phenomenon called by Freud *Lustgewinn*, a "gain of pleasure," which does not designate a simple stepping up of pleasure but the additional pleasure provided by the very formal detours in the subject's effort to attain pleasure. Think about Brecht's *Me Ti* which, in its retelling of the history of revolutionary movements in Europe, transposes them into an imaginary China (Trotsky becomes To-tsi, etc.): our re-translation of pseudo-Chinese names back into their European original ("Aha, To-tsi is Trotsky!") makes the text much more pleasurable – just imagine how much *Me-Ti* would have lost if it were to be written as a direct report on European history. Or – the most elementary example – how much a process of seduction gains with its intricate innuendos, false denials, etc.: these detours are not just cultural complications or sublimations circulating around some hardcore Real – this hardcore Real is retroactively constituted through secondary detours, "in itself" it remains a fiction.

In the same way that, in libidinal economy, there is no "pure" pleasure principle undisturbed by the perversities of compulsion-to-repeat – perversities which cannot be accounted for in the terms of the pleasure principle -, in the sphere of the exchange of commodities, there is no direct closed circle of exchanging a commodity for money in order to buy another commodity, a circle not yet corroded by the perverse logic of buying and selling commodities in order to get more money, the logic in which money is no longer just a mediator in the exchange of commodities but becomes an end-in-itself. The only reality is the reality of spending money in order to get more money, and what Marx calls C-M-C, the closed exchange of a commodity for money in order to buy another commodity, is ultimately a fiction whose function it is to provide a "natural" foundation of the process of exchange ("It's not just about money and more money, the whole point of exchange is to satisfy concrete human needs!"). – The basic libidinal mechanism here is that of what Freud called *Lustgewinn*, the "gain of pleasure". The process of the "gain-of-pleasure" operates through repetition: one misses the goal and one repeats the movement, trying again and again, so that the true aim is no longer the intended goal but the repetitive movement of attempting to reach it itself. In can also put it in the terms of form and content where "form"

stands for the form, the mode, of approaching the desired content: while the desired content (object) promises to provide pleasure, a surplus-enjoyment is gained by the very form (procedure) of pursuing the goal. Here is the classic example of how oral drive function: while the goal of sucking a breast is to get fed by milk, the libidinal gain is provided by the repetitive movement of sucking which thus becomes an end-in-itself. Is something similar not going on in a (dubious) story about Robespierre often mentioned by the critics of Jacobinism? When one of Robespierre's allies was accused of acting in an illegitimate way, he demanded (to the surprise of those close to him) that the charges be taken seriously and proposed the immediate constitution of a special commission to examine the allegations; when one of his friends expressed his worry about the fate of the accused (what if he is found guilty? Will this not be bad news for the Jacobins?), Robespierre calmly smiled back: "Don't worry about that, somehow we'll save the accused... but now we have the commission!" The commission which will remain at the disposal of the Jacobins to purge their enemies - this was for Robespierre the true gain in what appeared as a concession to the enemies. Another figure of *Lustgewinn* is the reversal that characterizes hysteria: renunciation to pleasure reverts into pleasure of/in renunciation, repression of desire reverts into desire of repression, etc. In all these cases, gain occurs at a "performative" level: it is generated by the very performance of working towards a goal, not by reaching the goal.

We also encounter *Mehrgenuss* in the basic paradox of the PC assertion of identity: the more marginal and excluded one is, the more one is allowed to assert ethnic identity and exclusive way of life. This is how the Politically Correct landscape is structured: people far from the Western world are allowed to fully assert their particular ethnic identity without being proclaimed essentialist racist identitarians (native Americans, blacks...); the closer one gets to the notorious white heterosexual males, the more problematic this assertion is: Asians are still OK, Italians and Irish maybe, with Germans and Scandinavians it is already problematic... However, such a prohibition of asserting the particular identity of White Men (as the model of oppression of others), although it presents itself as the admission of their guilt, nonetheless confers on them a central position: this very prohibition to assert their particular identity makes them into the universal-neutral medium, the place from which the truth about the others' oppression is accessible. This central position is the *Mehrgenuss*, the pleasure generated by the renunciation to identity.

If we in the West really want to overcome racism, the first thing to do is to leave behind this Politically Correct process of endless self-culpabilization. Although Pascal Bruckner's critique of today's Left often approaches the ridicule, this doesn't prevent him from occasionally generating pertinent insights – one cannot but agree with him when he detects in the European Politically Correct self-flagellation the inverted clinging to one's superiority. Whenever the West is attacked, its first reaction is not aggressive defence but self-probing: what did we do to deserve it? We are ultimately to be blamed for the evils of the world, the Third World catastrophes and terrorist violence are merely reactions to our crimes... the positive form of the White Man's

Burden (responsibility for civilizing the colonized barbarians) is thus merely replaced by its negative form (the burden of white man's guilt): if we can no longer be the benevolent masters of the Third World, we can at least be the privileged source of evil, patronizingly depriving them of their responsibility for their fate (if a Third World country engages in terrible crimes, it is never their full responsibility, but always an after-effect of colonization: they merely imitate what the colonial masters were doing, etc.). This privilege is the *Mehrgenuss* earned by self-culpabilization.

One of the most deplorable by-products of the vague of refugees that entered Europe in the Winter of 2015-16 was the explosion of moralist outrage among many Left liberals: "Europe is betraying its legacy of universal freedom and solidarity! It lost its moral compass! It treats war refugees like infested intruders, preventing their entry with barbed wire, locking them up in concentration camps!" Such abstract empathy, combined with calls to open up the borders unconditionally, deserves the great Hegelian lesson of the Beautiful Soul: when someone is painting a picture of Europe's overall and utmost moral degeneration, the question to be raised is in what way such a stance is complicit in what it criticizes, in what way those who feel superior to the corrupted world secretly participating in it. No wonder that, with the exception of humanitarian appeals to compassion and solidarity, the effects of such compassionate self-flagellation are null... But what if the authors of such appeals knew very well that they contribute nothing to the terrible plight of the refugees, that the ultimate effect of their interventions is just to feed the anti-immigrant resentment? What if secretly they know very well that what they demand will never happen since it would trigger an instant populist revolt in Europe? Why, then, are they doing it? There is only one consistent answer: the true aim of their activity is not really to help the refugees but the *Lustgewinn* brought about by their accusations, the feeling of their own moral superiority over others – the more refugees are rejected, the more anti-immigrant populism grows, the more these Beautiful Souls feel vindicated: "You see, the horror goes on, we are right!"...

More precisely, one has to distinguish here between pleasure and enjoyment: what Lacan calls "enjoyment (jouissance)" is a deadly excess over pleasure, its place is beyond the pleasure-principle. In other words, the term plus-de-jouir (surplus- or excess-enjoyment) is a pleonasm, since enjoyment is in itself excessive, in contrast to pleasure which is by definition moderate, regulated by a proper measure. We thus have two extremes: on the one hand the enlightened hedonist who carefully calculates his pleasures to prolong his fun and avoid getting hurt, on the other hand the jouisseur proper ready to consummate his very existence in the deadly excess of enjoyment – or, in the terms of our society, on the one hand the consumerist calculating his pleasures, well-protected from all kinds of harassments and other health threats, on the other hand the drug addict (or smoker or...) bent on self-destruction. Enjoyment is what serves nothing, and the great effort of the contemporary hedonist-utilitarian "permissive" society is to incorporate this un(ac)countable excess into the field of (ac)counting. One should thus reject the

common sense opinion according to which in a hedonist-consumerist society we all enjoy: the basic strategy of enlightened consumerist hedonism is on the contrary to deprive enjoyment of its excessive dimension, of its disturbing surplus, of the fact that it serves nothing. Enjoyment is tolerated, solicited even, but on condition that it is healthy, that it doesn't threaten our psychic or biological stability: chocolate yes, but fat free, coke yes, but diet, coffee yes, but without caffeine, beer yes, but without alcohol, mayonnaise yes, but without cholesterol, sex yes, but safe sex... We are here in the domain of what Lacan calls the discourse of University, as opposed to the discourse of the Master: a Master goes to the end in his consummation, he is not constrained by petty utilitarian considerations (which is why there is a certain formal homology between the traditional aristocratic master and a drug-addict focused on his deadly enjoyment), while the consumerist's pleasures are regulated by scientific knowledge propagated by the university discourse. The decaffeinated enjoyment we thus obtain is a semblance of enjoyment, not its Real, and it is in this sense that Lacan talks about the imitation of enjoyment in the discourse of University. The prototype of this discourse is the multiplicity of reports in popular magazines which advocate sex as good for health: sexual act works like jogging, strengthens the heart, relaxes our tensions, even kissing is good for our health.

Now we can see clearly the link between *Lustgewinn* and surplus-value: with *Lustgewinn*, the aim of the process is not its official goal (satisfaction of a need), but the expanded self-reproduction of the process itself – say, the true aim of sucking the mother's breast is not to get fed by milk but the pleasure brought by the activity of sucking itself – and in an exactly homologous way, with surplus-value, the true aim of the process of exchange is not the appropriation of a commodity that would satisfy a need of mine but the expanded self-reproduction of the capital itself.

--- For Lacan, modern science is defined by two concomitant foreclosures: the foreclosure of subject and the foreclosure of truth as cause. A scientific text is enounced from a de-subjectivized “empty” location, it allows for no references to its subject of enunciation, it is supposed to deliver the impersonal truth which can be repeatedly demonstrated, “anyone can see and say it,” i.e., the truth should be in no way affected by its place of enunciation. We can already see the link with the Cartesian *cogito*: is the “empty” enunciator of scientific statements not the subject of thought reduced to a vanishing punctuality, deprived of all its properties? This same feature also accounts for the foreclosure of truth as cause: when I commit a slip of the tongue and say something other than what I wanted to say, and this other message tells the truth about me that I am often not ready to recognize, then one can also say that in my slips the truth itself spoke, subverting what I wanted to say. There is truth (a truth about my desire) in such slips even if they contain factual inexactitude — say, an extremely simple example, when the moderator of a debate, instead of saying “I am thereby opening the session!” says “I am thereby closing the session!” he obviously indicates that he is bored and considers the debate worthless... “Truth” (of my subjective position) is the cause of such slips; when it operates, the subject is directly inscribed into its speech, disturbing the smooth flow of “objective” knowledge.

How, then, can Lacan claim that the subject of psychoanalysis – the divided subject, the subject traversed by negativity - is the subject of modern science (and the Cartesian *cogito*)? Is it not that, by way of foreclosing truth and subject, modern science also ignores negativity? Is science not a radical attempt to construct a (literally) truth-less discourse of knowledge? Modern science breaks with the traditional universe held together by a deeper meaning (like a harmony of cosmic principles – yin-yang, etc.), a universe which forms a teleologically-ordered Whole of a multiplicity of hierarchically ordered spheres, a Whole in which everything serves a higher purpose. In philosophical tradition, the big vestige of the traditional view is Aristotle: the Aristotelian Reason is organic-teleological, in clear contrast to the radical contingency of modern science. No wonder today’s Catholic Church attacks Darwinism as “irrational” on behalf of the Aristotelian notion of Reason: the “reason” of which Church speaks is a Reason for which Darwin’s theory of evolution (and, ultimately, modern science itself, for which the assertion of the contingency of the universe, the break with the Aristotelian teleology, is a constitutive axiom) is “irrational.” universe as a harmonious Whole in which everything serves a higher purpose.

Freud’s arch-opponent Jung is on the side of this traditional universe: his approach to psychic phenomena is effectively that of “depth-psychology,” his vision is the one of a closed world sustained by deeper archetypal meanings, a world permeated by spiritual forces which operate at a level “deeper” than that of “mechanical” sciences, a level at which there are no contingencies, where ordinary occurrences partake in a profound spiritual meaning to be unearthed by self-exploration - life has a spiritual purpose beyond material goals, and our task is to discover and

fulfill our deep innate potential by way of engaging in a journey of inner transformation which brings us in contact with the mystical heart of all religions, a journey to meet the self and at the same time to meet the divine. Rejecting (what he perceived as) Freud's scientific objectivism, Jung thus advocates a version of pantheism which identifies individual human life with the universe as a whole.

In clear contrast to Jung, Freud emphasizes the lack of any harmony between a human being and its environs, any correspondence between human microcosm and natural macrocosm, accepting without any reserve the fact of a contingent meaningless universe. Therein resides Freud's achievement: psychoanalysis is not a return to a new kind of premodern hermeneutics in search of the unknown deep layers of meaning which regulate the apparently meaningless flow of our lives, it is not a new version of the ancient interpretation of dreams searching for deeper messages hidden in them; our psychic life is thoroughly open to unexpected traumatic encounters, its unconscious processes are a domain of contingent signifying displacements; there is no inner truth in the core of our being, only a cobweb of *proton pseudos*, primordial lies called "fundamental fantasies"; the task of psychoanalytic process is not to reconcile ourselves with the fantasmatic core of our being but to "traverse" it, to acquire a distance towards it... This brief description makes it clear how psychoanalysis relates to modern science: it tries to re/subjectivize the universe of science, to discern the contours of a subject that fits modern science, a subject that fully participates in the contingent and meaningless "grey world" of sciences.

--- Although capitalism is intimately linked to the rise of modern science, its ideologico-political and economic organization (liberal egotist individuals pursuing their interests, their messy interaction secretly regulated by the big Other of the Market) signals a return to premodern universe... Was Kant's goal not to do exactly this? He wanted to elaborate an ethico-political edifice that would be at the level of modern science? But did Kant effectively achieve this, but his theoretical edifice was a compromise. Did he not openly said that his goal is to limit knowledge in order to make space for belief? And are Habermasians not doing the same when they exempt intersubjectivity from the domain of objective science? Which, then, is the ethico-political space that fits modern science, Kant's or a new one to be invented (for example, the one proposed by brain scientists like Patricia and Paul Churchland)? What if the two are necessarily non-synchronous, i.e., what if modernity itself *needs* a pre-modern ethico-political foundation, what if it cannot stand on its own, what if the fully actualized modernity is an exemplary ideological myth?

--- Nature itself is today in disorder, not because it overwhelms our cognitive capacities but primarily because we are not able to master the effects of our own interventions into its course – who knows what the ultimate consequences of our biogenetic engineering or of global warming will be? The surprise comes from ourselves, it concerns the opacity of how we ourselves fit into the picture: the impenetrable stain in the picture is not some cosmic mystery like a mysterious explosion of a supernova, the stain are we ourselves, our collective activity. It is against this background that one should understand Jacques-Alain Miller's thesis: "*Il y'a un grand desordre dans le reel.*"⁵ "There is a great disorder in the real." That's how Miller characterizes the way reality appears to us in our time in which we experience the full impact of two fundamental agents, modern science and capitalism. Nature as the real in which everything, from stars to the sun, always returns to its proper place, as the realm of large reliable cycles and of stable laws regulating them, is being replaced by a thoroughly contingent real, real outside the Law, real that is permanently revolutionizing its own rules, real that resists any inclusion into a totalized World (universe of meaning), which is why Badiou characterized capitalism as the first world-less civilization.

How should we react to this constellation? Should we assume a defensive approach and search for a new limit, a return to (or, rather, the invention of) some new balance? This is what bioethics endeavors to do with regard to biotechnology, this is why the two form a couple: biotechnology pursues new possibilities of scientific interventions (genetic manipulations, cloning...), and bioethics endeavors to impose moral limitations on what biotechnology enables us to do. As such, bioethics is not immanent to scientific practice: it intervenes into this practice from outside, imposing external morality onto it. But is bioethics not precisely the betrayal of the ethics immanent to scientific endeavor, the ethics of "do not compromise your scientific desire, follow inexorably its path"? A new limit is also what the slogan of the Porto Allegro protesters "a new world is possible" basically amounts to, and even ecology offers itself at this point as the provider of a new limit ("we cannot go further in our exploitation of nature, nature will not tolerate it, it will collapse..."). Or should we follow the above-mentioned opposite path (of Deleuze and Negri, among others) and posit that capitalist disorder is still too much order, obeying the capitalist law of the surplus-value appropriation, so that the task is not to limit it but to push it beyond its limitation? In other words, should we risk here also a paraphrase of Mao's well-known motto: there is disorder in the real, so the situation is excellent? Perhaps, the path to follow is this one, although not in exactly the sense advocated by Deleuze and Negri in their celebration of de-territorialization? Miller claims that the pure lawless Real resists symbolic

⁵ Jaques-Alain Miller, »Un reel pour le XXI^e siecle,« in *Un reel pour le XXI^e siecle*, Paris: Scilicet 2013. English translation available at http://www.congresamp2014.com/en/template.php?file=Textos/Presentation-du-theme_Jacques-Alain-Miller.html.

grasp, so that we should always be aware that our attempts to conceptualize it are mere semblances, defensive elubrations - but what if there is still an underlying *order* that generates this disorder, a matrix that provides its coordinates? This is what also accounts for the repetitive sameness of the capitalist dynamics: more than things change, more everything remains the same. And this is also why the obverse of the breath-taking capitalist dynamics is a clearly recognizable order of hierarchic domination.

“This is something indicated by Lacan’s examples to illustrate the return of the real in the same place. His examples are the annual return of the seasons, the spectacle of the skies and the heavenly bodies. You could say... based on examples from all antiquity: Chinese rituals of course used mathematical calculations of the position of the heavenly bodies, etc. You could say that in this epoch the real as nature had the function of the Other of the Other, that is, that the real was itself the guarantee of the symbolic order. The agitation, the rhetorical agitation of the signifier in human speech was framed by a weft of signifiers fixed like the heavenly bodies. Nature – this is its very definition – is defined by being ordered, that is, by the conduct of the symbolic and the real, to such an extent that according to the most ancient traditions all human order should imitate natural order. /.../

The real invented by Lacan is not the real of science, it is a contingent real, random, in as much as the natural law of the relation between the sexes is lacking. It is a hole in the knowledge included in the real. Lacan made use of the language of mathematics – the best support for science. In the formulas of sexuation, for example, he tried to grasp the dead-ends of sexuality in a weft of mathematical logic. This was like a heroic attempt to make psychoanalysis into a science of the real in the way that logic is. But that can’t be done without imprisoning *jouissance* in the phallic function, in a symbol; it implies a symbolization of the real, it implies referring to the binary man-woman as if living beings could be partitioned so neatly, when we already see in the real of the 21st century a growing disorder of sexuation. This is already a secondary construction that intervenes after the initial impact of the body and *lalangue*, which constitutes a real without law, without logical rule. Logic is only introduced afterwards, with the elucubration, the fantasy, the subject supposed to know, and with psychoanalysis.

Until now, under the inspiration of the 20th century, our clinical cases as we recount them have been logical-clinical constructions under transference. But the cause-effect relation is a scientific prejudice supported by the subject supposed to know. The cause-effect relation is not valid at the level of the real without law, it is not valid except with a rupture between cause and effect. Lacan said it as a joke: if one understands how an interpretation works, it is not an analytic interpretation. In psychoanalysis as Lacan invites us to practice it, we experience the rupture of the cause-effect link, the opacity of the link, and this is why we speak of the unconscious. I am going to say it in another way: psychoanalysis takes place at the level of the repressed and of the interpretation of the repressed thanks to the subject supposed to know.

But in the 21st Century it is a question of psychoanalysis exploring another dimension, that of the defence against the real without law and without meaning. Lacan indicates this direction with his notion of the real, as Freud does with his mythological concept of the drive. The Lacanian unconscious, that of the latest Lacan, is at the level of the real, let us say for convenience, below the Freudian unconscious. Therefore, in order to enter into the 21st century, our clinic will have to be centred on dismantling the defence, disordering the defence against the real. The transferential unconscious in analysis is already a defence against the real. And in the transferential unconscious there is still an intention, a *wanting to say*, a *wanting you to tell me*. When in fact the real unconscious is not intentional: it is encountered under the modality of ‘that’s it’, which you could say is like our ‘amen’.

Various questions will be opened up for us at the next Congress: the redefinition of the desire of the analyst, which is not a pure desire, as Lacan says, not a pure infinity of metonymy but – this is how it appears to us - the desire to reach the real, to reduce the other to its real, and to liberate it of meaning. I would add that Lacan invented a way of representing the real with the Borromean knot. We will ask ourselves how valid this representation is, of what use it is to us now. Lacan made use of the knot to arrive at this irremediable zone of existence where one can go no further with two. The passion for the Borromean knot led Lacan to the same zone as Oedipus at Colonus, where one finds the absolute absence of charity, of fraternity, of any human sentiment: this is where the search for the real stripped of meaning leads us.”

Many things are very problematic in the quoted passages. Problems begin with the notion of Real as Nature in its regularity, as that which always returns at its place – as it was noted by Lacan, already for ancient Aztecs and other civilizations of Sacrifice, the natural Real was not simply a regularity that nothing can perturb. Ancient Aztecs organized human sacrifices to guarantee - what? Not a special favor of Gods but the very regularity of Nature at its most elementary: human lives have to be sacrificed so that Nature will rotate in its regular way, so that sun will raise in the morning, etc. In short, the Real of the natural Order where “everything returns at its own place” needs a symbolic intervention, it has to be guaranteed by rituals. There is a key passage from this Real sustained by symbolic sacrifice to the Real of modern science, the Newtonian real of natural laws, of the network of causes and effects – it is only THIS Real that functions in itself, without the help of any symbolic intervention:

»With the infinite universe of mathematical physics nature disappears; it becomes solely a moral instance. With the philosophers of the 18th Century, with the infinite universe nature disappears and the real begins to be unveiled. / Fine, but I have been asking myself about the formula *there is a knowledge in the real*. It would be a temptation to say that the unconscious is at this level. On the contrary, the supposition of a knowledge in the real appears to me to be an ultimate veil that needs to be lifted. If there is a knowledge in the real there is a regularity, and scientific knowledge allows prediction, it is so proud of prediction, in so far as this demonstrates the

existence of laws. And it does not require a divine utterance of these laws for them to remain valid. It is by way of this idea of laws that the old idea of nature has been preserved in the very expression *the laws of nature*.«

Miller proceeds here all too fast: the break between traditional Nature and Nature of modern science is more radical. In contrast to traditional Nature whose regular rhythm is supposed to point towards a deeper cosmic sexualized meaning (day and night as the regular exchange of masculine and feminine principles, etc.), scientific laws of nature are themselves contingent, there is no deeper meaningful necessity sustaining them, they are, to quote Miller, discovered precisely “under the modality of ‘that’s it’, which you could say is like our ‘amen’”.

Furthermore, Miller’s search for the “pure” Real outside the Symbolic, a Real not yet stained by it, that he attributes to Lacan has to be abandoned as a Deleuzian blind alley – in a very Deleuzian way (repeating literally a formula from *Anti-Oedipus*), Miller speaks of the “true” pre-Oedipal Unconscious “beneath” the Freudian one, as if we first have the “pure” pre-Oedipal movement of drives, the direct interpenetration of signifying material and *jouissance* baptized by Lacan *lalangue*, and it is only in a (logical, if not temporary) afterward that this flux is “ordained” by symbolic elucubrations, forced into the symbolic straitjacket of binary logic, of paternal Law and castration that sustain sexual difference as the normative structure of two sexual identities, masculine and feminine. According to Miller, even Lacan’s “formulas of sexuation” fall into this category of symbolic elucubrations that obfuscate the “pure” Real outside the Law. Today, however, things are changing, we “see in the real of the 21st century a growing disorder of sexuation,” new forms of sexuality are emerging which undermine “the binary man-woman as if living beings could be partitioned so neatly”...

From a strict Lacanian standpoint, something is terribly wrong with this line of reasoning: Miller passes directly from the Real as Nature (which follows its regular rhythm or its laws) to the pure lawless Real - what goes missing here is the Lacanian Real itself, the Real which is *nothing but* a deadlock of symbolization or formalization (“Le reel est un impasse de formalization,” as Lacan put it in his *Seminar XX*), the Real which is an immanent impossibility of the symbolic, a purely formal obstacle that thwarts/distorts the symbolic from within, the Real of an antagonism inscribed into the heart of the symbolic, the self-limitation of symbolic. This impasse is not caused by an external real, as Miller implies when he qualifies Lacan’s formulas of sexuation as elucubration on the real: symbolic interpretations of sexual difference are such elucubrations, but not the Real of the difference itself. Sexual difference is not binary/differential, it is an antagonism that binary symbolic difference try to “normalize” by way of translating it into symbolic oppositions. (And, in a strictly homologous way, class antagonism is not a symbolic elucubration on the lawless real of social life but the name of the antagonism obfuscated by ideologico-political formations. In equating capitalism with the Real outside the Law (outside castration), Miller takes capitalism at its own ideology, ignoring Lacan who saw clearly the

antagonism masked by capitalist perversion. The vision of today's society as a capitalist Real outside symbolic law is a disavowal of antagonism, not a primary fact.)

--- Deleuze often varies the motif of how, in becoming posthuman, we should learn to practice “a perception as it was before men (or after). . . released from their human coordinates”:⁶ those who fully endorse the Nietzschean “return of the same” are strong enough to sustain the vision of the “iridescent chaos of a world before man.”⁷ The standard realist approach aims at describing the world, reality, the way it exists out there, independently of us, observing subjects. But we, subjects, are ourselves part of the world, so the consequent realism should include us in the reality we are describing, so that our realist approach should include describing ourselves “from the outside,” *independently of ourselves*, as if we are observing ourselves through inhuman eyes. What this inclusion-of-ourselves amounts to is not naive realism but something much more uncanny, a radical shift in the subjective attitude by means of which we become strangers to ourselves.

Although Deleuze here resorts openly to Kant’s language, talking about the direct access to “things (the way they are) in themselves,” his point is precisely that one should subtract the opposition between phenomena and things-in-themselves, between the phenomenal and the noumenal level, from its Kantian functioning, where noumena are transcendent things that forever elude our grasp. What Deleuze refers to as “things in themselves” is in a way *even more phenomenal* than our shared phenomenal reality: it is the impossible phenomenon, the phenomenon that is excluded from our symbolically constituted reality. The gap that separates us from noumena is thus primarily not epistemological, but practico-ethical and libidinal: there is no “true reality” behind or beneath phenomena, noumena are phenomenal things which are “too strong,” too intens(iv)e, for our perceptual apparatus attuned to constituted reality—epistemological failure is a secondary effect of libidinal terror; that is, the underlying logic is a reversal of Kant’s “You can, because you must!”: “You cannot (know noumena), because you must not!” Imagine someone being forced to witness a terrifying torture: in a way, the monstrosity of what he saw would make this an experience of the noumenal impossible-real that would shatter the coordinates of our common reality. (The same holds for witnessing an intense sexual activity.) In this sense, if we were to discover films shot in a concentration camp among the *Musulmannen*, showing scenes from their daily life, how they are systematically mistreated and deprived of all dignity, we would have “seen too much,” the prohibited, we would have entered a forbidden territory of what should have remained unseen. (One can well understand Claude Lanzmann, who said that if he were to stumble upon such a film, he would destroy it immediately.) This is also what makes it so unbearable to witness the last moments of people who know they are shortly going to die and are in this sense already living-dead—again, imagine that we would have discovered,

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *L’image-mouvement* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), 122.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

among the ruins of the Twin Towers, a video camera which magically survived the crash intact and is full of shots of what went on among the passengers of the plane in the minutes before it crashed into one of the towers. In all these cases, it is that, effectively, we would have seen things as they are “in themselves,” outside human coordinates, outside our human reality—we would have seen the world with inhuman eyes. (Maybe the US authorities do possess such shots and, for understandable reasons, are keeping them secret.) The lesson is here profoundly Hegelian: the difference between the phenomenal and the noumenal has to be reflected/transposed back into the phenomenal, as the split between the “gentrified” normal phenomenon and the “impossible” phenomenon.

The gap between \$ and life-enjoyment (whose most elementary form is the circular movement of drives) implies that subject stands for death in life, that it stands at a distance towards life, for its denaturalization, and what this denaturalization of life means is that the will to live is not, as a long line of thinkers from Aristotle to Spinoza presumed, a spontaneous natural impetus (or *conatus*) but something towards which the subject already entertains a minimal distance: subject and its life do not form an organic unity. Instead this innermost drive is felt as an external compulsion, as a foreign element in which one has become entangled. Which is why it can appear as a terrible bother and a drudgery, a series of chores to be carried out: thinking, speaking, traveling, working, copulating, and so on—I’d rather not. Life does not immediately identify with itself, but is something separated from the subject that is compelled to live it. . . . For the human being, life does not present itself as a self-evident inner power but as a commandment and a duty. Freud writes, “To tolerate life remains, after all, the first duty of all living beings.” This should be read literally: to live is not a natural and spontaneous *energeia* but a duty, a superego imperative, even the most fundamental one. Vitalism is the formula of the superego. (Schuster, *Trouble with Pleasure*)

Insofar as to live means to follow a superego injunction, and insofar as superego is an agency which operates beyond the pleasure principle (even if we understand superego in Lacan’s sense, as the imperative “Enjoy!,” enjoyment is to be opposed here to pleasure), life itself functions beyond the pleasure principle—but how, precisely? In Lacanese, the Freudian pleasure principle is “non-All”: there is nothing outside it, no external limits, and yet it is not all, it can break down. Deleuze drew the ultimate consequence of this notion of death drive: death drive is “the transcendental conditions of the pleasure principle,” it accounts for “how the psyche is constituted such that it can be ruled by pleasure and unpleasure (with the twist in the story being that what makes possible the pleasure principle’s reign also undermines it from within)”:

The death drive is “beyond” the pleasure principle, but again this does not mean that it is located somewhere else. The death drive is not a separate power that fights against or opposes life, but rather what de-naturalizes or de-vitalizes the flux of life. It takes away the self-evidence of that powerful compass of

nature, the orientation provided by feelings of pleasure and pain. If the unconscious is the distortion, the glitch, the deviation of consciousness, the death drive is the skew of Eros, the twist that makes of life not a direct expression of vital forces but the deviation of the negative: instead of a perseverance in being a “failing not to be.”

So it is not that subject is secretly dominated by some perverse tendency to sabotage its pleasures; the point is that, in order for the subject to search for pleasures and avoid unpleasures, it already has to stand at a certain distance towards life, and this distance itself has to be inscribed into the functioning of the pleasure principle as its incompleteness, as its inconsistency. Nowhere is this immanent inconsistency of the pleasure principle more clearly displayed than in the work of Marquis de Sade in which full pleasure in life overlaps with the most rigorous Kantian ethics. The greatness of Sade is that, on behalf of the full assertion of earthly pleasures, he not only rejects any metaphysical moralism but also fully acknowledges the price one has to pay for it: the radical intellectualization-instrumentalization-regimentation of the (sexual) activity intended to bring pleasure. Here we encounter the content later baptized by Marcuse “repressive desublimation”: after all the barriers of sublimation, of cultural transformation of sexual activity, are abolished, what we get is not raw, brutal, passionate, satisfying animal sex, but, on the contrary, a fully regimented, intellectualized activity comparable to a well-planned sporting match. The Sadean hero is not a brute animal beast, but a pale, cold-blooded intellectual much more alienated from the true pleasure of the flesh than is the prudish, inhibited lover, a man of reason enslaved to the *amor intellectualis diaboli*—what gives pleasure to him (or her) is not sexuality as such but the activity of outstripping rational civilization by its own means, i.e., by way of thinking (and practicing) to the end the consequences of its logic. So, far from being an entity of full, earthly passion, the Sadean hero is fundamentally apathetic, reducing sexuality to a mechanical planned procedure deprived of the last vestiges of spontaneous pleasure or sentimentality. What Sade heroically takes into account is that pure bodily sensual pleasure and spiritual love are not simply opposed, but dialectically intertwined: there is something deeply “spiritual,” spectral, sublime, about a really passionate sensual lust, and vice versa (as the mystical experience teaches us), so that the thorough “desublimation” of sexuality also thoroughly intellectualizes it, changing an intense pathetic bodily experience into a cold, apathetic mechanical exercise.

Sade thus consequently deployed the inherent potential of the Kantian philosophical revolution—but how, precisely? The first association here is, of course: what’s all the fuss about? Today, in our postidealist Freudian era, doesn’t everybody know what the point of the “with” in “Kant with Sade” is—the truth of Kant’s ethical rigorism is the sadism of the Law, i.e., the Kantian Law is a superego agency that sadistically enjoys the subject’s deadlock, his inability to meet its inexorable demands, like the proverbial teacher who

tortures pupils with impossible tasks and secretly savors their failings? Lacan's point, however, is the exact opposite of this first association: it is not Kant who was a closet sadist, it is Sade who is a closet Kantian. That is to say, what one should bear in mind is that the focus of Lacan is always Kant, not Sade: what he is interested in are the ultimate consequences and disavowed premises of the Kantian ethical revolution. In other words, Lacan does not try to make the usual "reductionist" point that every ethical act, as pure and disinterested as it may appear, is always grounded in some "pathological" motivation (the agent's own long-term interest, the admiration of his peers, up to the "negative" satisfaction provided by the suffering and extortion often demanded by ethical acts); the focus of Lacan's interest rather resides in the paradoxical reversal by means of which desire itself (i.e., acting upon one's desire, not compromising it) can no longer be grounded in any "pathological" interests or motivations and thus meets the criteria of the Kantian ethical act, so that "following one's desire" overlaps with "doing one's duty." Suffice it to recall Kant's own famous example from his *Critique of Practical Reason*:

Suppose someone asserts of his lustful inclination that, when the desired object and opportunity are present, it is quite irresistible to him; ask him whether, if a gallows were erected in front of the house where he finds this opportunity and he would be hanged on it immediately after gratifying his lust, he would not then control his inclination. One need not conjecture very long what he would reply.

Lacan's counterargument here is that we certainly *do* have to guess what his answer may be: what if we encounter a subject (as we regularly do in psychoanalysis) who can only fully enjoy a night of passion if some form of "gallows" is threatening him, i.e., if, by doing it, he is violating some prohibition? Mario Monicelli's *Casanova '70* (1965) with Virna Lisi and Marcello Mastroianni hinges on this very point: the hero can only retain his sexual potency if doing "it" involves some kind of danger. At the film's end, when he is on the verge of marrying his beloved, he wants at least to violate the prohibition of premarital sex by sleeping with her the night before the wedding—however, his bride unknowingly spoils even this minimal pleasure by arranging with the priest for special permission for the two of them to sleep together the night before, so that the act is deprived of its transgressive sting. What can he do now? In the last shot of the film, we see him crawling on the narrow porch on the outside of the high-rise building, giving himself the difficult task of entering the girl's bedroom in the most dangerous way, in a desperate attempt to link sexual gratification to mortal danger. . . . So, Lacan's point is that if gratifying sexual passion involves the suspension of even the most elementary "egotistic" interests, if this gratification is clearly located "beyond the pleasure principle," then, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, we are dealing with an ethical act, and his "passion" is *stricto sensu* ethical.

The crucial clue that allows us to discern the contours of "Sade in Kant" is the way Kant conceptualizes the relationship between sentiments (feelings) and the

moral law. Although Kant insists on the absolute gap between pathological sentiments and the pure form of moral law, there is one a priori sentiment that the subject necessarily experiences when confronted with the injunction of the moral law, the pain of humiliation (because of man's hurt pride, due to the "radical evil" of human nature); for Lacan, this Kantian privileging of pain as the only a priori sentiment is strictly correlative to Sade's notion of pain (torturing and humiliating the other, being tortured and humiliated by him) as the privileged way of access to sexual jouissance (Sade's argument, of course, is that pain is to be given priority over pleasure on account of its greater longevity—pleasures are passing, while pain can last almost indefinitely). Why does cliterodectomy cause such consternation? Because it provides a clear case of how even the most brutal deprivation of the means of pleasure (cutting of clitoris) can function as a means of generating specific jouissance. What is so disturbing about cliterodectomy is not the extremely brutal nature of this operation and its obvious role as an instrument of male domination; nor is it the fact that some women at least value their social acceptance so much that they are ready to accept cliterodectomy as a moment of their full entrance into society. The truly disturbing thing is that they may enjoy it.

A recent publicity spot for upper-class eco-friendly tourism proposes that what we should be doing is "exploring ways of blending luxury and sustainability," and it clearly designates its addressees: "For hedonists with a conscience." There is nothing truly paradoxical in this link between apparent opposites: "hedonist with a conscience" is one of the most succinct definitions of the predominant type of subjectivity we are interpellated into today. In this type, pleasure principle and reality principle are harmoniously blended, and what is excluded from this space of "hedonism with conscience" is not only jouissance itself in its excessive character, but also the ethical dimension proper, duty in its Kantian, unconditional sense. In short, what is excluded is the domain designated by Lacan's formula *Kant avec Sade*, the uncanny domain in which desire and law coincide, in which the ultimate categorical imperative is "do not compromise your desire."

This link can be further substantiated by what Lacan calls the Sadean fundamental fantasy: the fantasy of another, ethereal body of the victim, which can be tortured indefinitely and nonetheless magically retains its beauty (see the standard Sadean figure of a young girl sustaining endless humiliations and mutilations from her deprived torturer and somehow mysteriously surviving it all intact, in the same way Tom and Jerry and other cartoon heroes survive all their ridiculous ordeals intact). Doesn't this fantasy provide the libidinal foundation of the Kantian postulate of the immortality of the soul endlessly striving to achieve ethical perfection, i.e., is not the fantasmatic "truth" of the immortality of the soul its exact opposite, the immortality of the body, its ability to sustain endless pain and humiliation? Judith Butler pointed out that the Foucauldian "body" as the site of resistance is none other than the Freudian

“psyche”: paradoxically, “body” is Foucault’s name for the psychic apparatus insofar as it resists the soul’s domination. That is to say, when, in his well-known definition of the soul as the “prison of the body,” Foucault turns around the standard Platonic-Christian definition of the body as the “prison of the soul,” what he calls “body” is not simply the biological body, but is effectively already caught in some kind of presubjective psychic apparatus.⁸ Consequently, don’t we encounter in Kant a secret homologous inversion, only in the opposite direction, of the relationship between body and soul: what Kant calls “immortality of the soul” is effectively the immortality of the other, ethereal, “undead” body?

This redoubling of the body into the common mortal body and the ethereal undead body brings us to the crux of the matter: the distinction between the two deaths, the biological death of the common mortal body and the death of the other “undead” body: it is clear that what Sade aims at in his notion of a radical Crime is the murder of this second body. Sade deploys this distinction in the long philosophical dissertation delivered to Juliette by Pope Pius VI, part of book 5 of *Juliette*:

there is nothing wrong with rape, torture, murder, and so on, since these conform to the violence that is the way of the universe. To act in accordance with nature means to actively take part in its orgy of destruction. The trouble is that man’s capacity for crime is highly limited, and his atrocities no matter how debauched ultimately outrage nothing. This is a depressing thought for the libertine. The human being, along with all organic life and even inorganic matter, is caught in an endless cycle of death and rebirth, generation and corruption, so that “there is indeed no real death,” only a permanent transformation and recycling of matter according to the immanent laws of “the three kingdoms,” animal, vegetable, and mineral. Destruction may accelerate this process, but it cannot stop it. The true crime would be the one that no longer operates within the three kingdoms but annihilates them altogether, that puts a stop to the eternal cycle of generation and corruption and by doing so returns to Nature her absolute privilege of contingent creation, of casting the dice anew.

What, then, at a strict theoretical level, is wrong with this dream of the “second death” as a radical pure negation which puts a stop to the life-cycle itself? In a superb display of his genius, Lacan provides a simple answer: “It is just that, being a psychoanalyst, I can see that the second death is prior to the first, and not after, as de Sade dreams it.” (The only problematic part of this statement is the qualification “being a psychoanalyst”—a Hegelian philosopher can also see this quite clearly.) In what precise sense are we to understand this priority of the second death—the radical annihilation of the entire life-cycle of generation and corruption—over the first death which remains a moment of this cycle? Schuster points the way: “Sade believes that there exists a well-

⁸ See Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 28–29.

established second nature that operates according to immanent laws. Against this ontologically consistent realm he can only dream of an absolute Crime that would abolish the three kingdoms and attain the pure disorder of primary nature.” In short, what Sade doesn’t see is that there is no big Other, no Nature as an ontologically consistent realm—nature is already in itself inconsistent, unbalanced, destabilized by antagonisms. The total negation imagined by Sade thus doesn’t come at the end, as a threat or prospect of radical destruction, it comes at the beginning, it always-already happened, it stands for the zero-level starting point out of which the fragile/inconsistent reality emerges. In other words, what is missing in the notion of Nature as a body regulated by fixed laws is simply *subject itself*: in Hegelese, the Sadean Nature remains a Substance, Sade continues to grasp reality only as Substance and not also as Subject, where “subject” does not stand for another ontological level different from Substance but for the immanent incompleteness-inconsistency-antagonism of Substance itself. And, insofar as the Freudian name for this radical negativity is death drive, Schuster is right to point out how, paradoxically, what Sade misses in his celebration of the ultimate Crime of radical destruction of all life is precisely the death drive:

for all its wantonness and havoc the Sadeian will-to-extinction is premised on a fetishistic denial of the death drive. The sadist makes himself into the servant of universal extinction precisely in order to avoid the deadlock of subjectivity, the “virtual extinction” that splits the life of the subject from within. The Sadeian libertine expels this negativity outside himself in order to be able to slavishly devote himself to it; the apocalyptic vision of an absolute Crime thus functions as a screen against a more intractable internal split. What the florid imagination of the sadist masks is the fact that the Other is barred, inconsistent, lacking, that it cannot be served for it presents no law to obey, not even the wild law of its accelerating auto-destruction. There is no nature to be followed, rivaled or outdone, and it is this void or lack, the non-existence of the Other, that is incomparably more violent than even the most destructive fantasm of the death drive. Or as Lacan argues, Sade is right if we just turn around his evil thought: subjectivity is the catastrophe it fantasizes about, the death beyond death, the “second death.” While the sadist dreams of violently forcing a cataclysm that will wipe the slate clean, what he does not want to know is that this unprecedented calamity has already taken place. Every subject is the end of the world, or rather this impossibly explosive end that is equally a “fresh start,” the unabolishable chance of the dice throw.(Schuster)

It was already Kant who had characterized free autonomous act as an act which cannot be accounted for in the terms of natural causality, of the texture of causes and effects: a free act occurs as its own cause, it opens up a new causal chain from its zero-point. So insofar as “second death” is the interruption of the natural life-cycle of generation and corruption, no radical annihilation of the entire natural order is needed for this—an autonomous free act already

suspends natural causality, and subject as \$ already is this cut in the natural circuit, the self-sabotage of natural goals. The mystical name for this end of the world is "night of the world," and the philosophical name, radical negativity as the core of subjectivity. And, to quote Mallarmé, a throw of the dice will never abolish the hazard, i.e., the abyss of negativity remains forever the unsublatable background of subjective creativity. We may even risk here an ironic version of Gandhi's famous motto "be yourself the change you want to see in the world": the subject is itself the catastrophe it fears and tries to avoid. And is the lesson of Hegel's analysis of the French revolutionary terror not exactly the same (which is why the parallel between Sade's absolute crime and revolutionary terror is well grounded)? Individuals threatened by the Terror have to grasp that this external threat of annihilation is nothing but the externalized/fetishized image of the radical negativity of self-consciousness—once they grasp this, they pass from revolutionary Terror to the inner force of the moral Law.

So when Malabou claims that the post-traumatic subject cannot be accounted for in the Freudian terms of the repetition of a past trauma (since the traumatic shock erases all traces of the past), she remains all too fixed on the traumatic content and forgets to include in the series of past traumatic memories the very erasure of the substantial content, the very subtraction of the empty form from its content. In other words, precisely insofar as it erases the entire substantial content, the traumatic shock *repeats* the past, i.e., the past traumatic loss of substance which is constitutive of the very dimension of subjectivity. *What is repeated here is not some ancient content, but the very gesture of erasing all substantial content.* This is why, when one submits a human subject to a traumatic intrusion, the outcome is the empty form of the "living-dead" subject, but when one does the same to an animal, the result is simply total devastation: what remains after the violent traumatic intrusion onto a human subject which erases all its substantial content is the pure form of subjectivity, the form which already must have been there. It is in this precise sense that subjectivity and mortality are closely linked, although in a sense that totally differs from the standard Heideggerian topic of finitude. In his rejection of the thought of finitude, Badiou asserted that death is something that *happens to you*; it is not the immanent unfolding of some linear programme. Even if we say that human life cannot go beyond a hundred and twenty years, for biological, genetic etc. reasons, death as death is always something that *happens to you*. One great thinker on death is La Palice. A truth we get from La Palice is that "a quarter an hour before his death, he was still alive." That isn't at all absurd or naïve. It means that "a quarter an hour before death" he wasn't what Heidegger sees as "a quarter hour before death"—he wasn't "a-being-toward-death" ever since his birth. "A quarter of an hour before his death" he was alive, and death *happens* to him. And I would maintain that death always comes from the outside. Spinoza said something excellent on that score: "Nothing can be destroyed except by an external cause." . . . This means that death is in a position of radical exteriority: we would not even say that a human reality, a

Dasein, is mortal. Because “mortal” means to say that it contains the virtuality of death in an immanent fashion. In truth, all that is is generically immortal, and then death intervenes.⁹

Crucial here is the mention of Spinoza, and here one should oppose Spinoza to Hegel: while for Spinoza, every destruction comes from outside, thwarting every organism’s immanent tendency to reproduce and expand its life power, for Hegel, negation is immanent, inscribed into the innermost identity of every living being, so that every destruction is ultimately self-destruction. To avoid misunderstanding, Hegel would have agreed that there is no deeper meaning in death, that death comes as a radically external meaningless contingency—but it is precisely as such that it corrodes from within the very core of human identity and its universe of meaning. Furthermore, like Badiou, Hegel asserts infinity/immortality, but for him, immortality emerges precisely through “tarrying with the negative,” through its immanent overcoming: only a being which is not constrained by its mortality can relate to its death “as such.” This overcoming is paradoxically a form of “death in life”: a human being overcomes its mortality through gaining a distance towards its life-substance (for example, through its readiness to risk its life for some spiritual cause). Hegel’s name for this dimension is negativity, and Freud’s name is death-drive. Immortality is death in life, a deadly force that acquires control over the living substance, or, as Paul would have put it, Spirit is the death of flesh.

One should strictly oppose here subjectivity and the soul of living beings: “The Notion is not merely *soul*, but free subjective Notion that is for itself and therefore possesses *personality*—the practical, objective Notion determined in and for itself which, as person, is impenetrable atomic subjectivity. . . . It contains *all* determinateness within it.”¹⁰ The distinction between Soul and Subject is crucial here: Soul is the Aristotelian immanent ideal form/principle of an organism, the immaterial “life force” that keeps it alive and united, while subject is antisoul, the point of negative self-relating which reduces the individual to the abyss of a singularity at a distance from the living substance that sustains it. That’s why, for Hegel, a notion comes to exist as such, “for itself,” in its opposition to its empirical instantiations, only insofar as it is located in an “impenetrable atomic subjectivity.” His point here is not a commonsense vulgarity according to which in order for universal thoughts to exist, there has to be an empirical subject that does the thinking (therein resides the endlessly boring motif of the critics of Hegel from young Marx onwards: “thoughts don’t think themselves, only concrete living subjects can think. . .”). While Hegel is fully aware of this dependence of thoughts on a thinking subject, his point is a more precise one: what kind of subject can do

⁹ Alain Badiou, “Badiou: Down with Death!,” Verso Books blog, August 18, 2015, <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2176-badiou-down-with-death>.

¹⁰ Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, 824.

this “abstract” thinking (in the common sense of the term: thinking of formal thoughts purified of their empirical wealth—say, thinking of a “horse” in abstraction from the wealth of content of empirical horses)? His answer is: a subject which is itself “abstract,” deprived of the wealth of empirical features, reduced to its “impenetrable atomic” singularity. This may sound weird and counterintuitive: is Notion in its universality not the very opposite of atomic impenetrability? However, “abstraction” can be performed in two ways (or, rather, in two directions): erasure of all particular features in order to obtain the abstract form (say, the universal “horse” as such), and erasure of all particular features (qualities) in order to obtain the pure singularity of the thing in question (a pure “this” or X without properties), and Hegel’s point is that subjectivity emerges when such singularity becomes “for itself”: a subject is for itself the abyss of a pure X at a distance from all its properties. Both “abstractions” are strictly correlative: universal form can emerge as such only in an entity which is for itself reduced to the impenetrable abyss of pure singularity. More precisely, the impenetrable atomic singularity is not something external to the Notion, it is Notion itself in its “oppositional determination,” Notion as actually existing singularity—in this sense Hegel wrote that Self is a pure Notion. The Cartesian name for this singularity is *cogito*: the Self reduced to the evanescent punctuality of the act of thinking.

When Badiou opposes the life of a human animal oriented towards “servicing of the goods” and the life defined by the fidelity to an Event, one should raise the key question: how should animal life be transformed so that it can sustain the consequences of an Event, i.e., what happens to a human animal when it turns into a subject? The Hegelo-Lacanian reply is here: death drive, i.e., human animal has to integrate the dimension of death, it has to become a “living dead,” at a distance from life. In other words, the eventual level does not simply add itself to animal life as another dimension, its arrival distorts, transforms animal life at its innermost. —At this point, one has to make a choice between idealism and materialism: is the distortion of the human animal the effect of an Event, the way an Event inscribes itself into the order of animal life (idealist version), or does the distortion of the human animal come first, opening up the space for the possible emergence of an Event (materialist version)?

The axiom of the philosophy of finitude is that one cannot escape finitude/mortality as the unsurpassable horizon of our existence; Lacan’s axiom is that, no matter how much one tries, one cannot escape immortality. But what if this choice is false—what if finitude and immortality, like lack and excess, also form a parallax couple, what if they are the same from a different point of view? What if immortality is an object that is a remainder/excess over finitude, what if finitude is an attempt to escape from the excess of immortality? What if Kierkegaard was right here, but for the wrong reason, when he also understood the claim that we, humans, are just mortal beings who disappear after their biological death as an easy way to escape the ethical responsibility that comes with the immortal soul? He was right for the wrong reason insofar as he equated immortality with the divine and ethical part of a human being—but there is

another immortality. What Cantor did for infinity, we should do for immortality, and assert the multiplicity of immortalities: the Badiouian noble immortality/infinity of the deployment of an Event (as opposed to the finitude of a human animal) comes after a more basic form of immortality which resides in what Lacan calls the Sadean fundamental fantasy: the fantasy of another, ethereal body of the victim, which can be tortured indefinitely and nonetheless magically retains its beauty (recall the Sadean figure of the young girl sustaining endless humiliations and mutilations from her depraved torturer and somehow mysteriously surviving it all intact, in the same way Tom and Jerry and other cartoon heroes survive all their ridiculous ordeals intact). In this form, the comical and the disgustingly-terrifying (recall different versions of the “undead”—zombies, vampires, etc.—in popular culture) are inextricably connected. The same immortality underlies the intuition of something indestructible in a truly radical Evil. In the classic German poem about two naughty children, Wilhelm Busch’s “Max und Moritz” (first published in 1865), the two children are constantly acting in a disgraceful way against respected authorities, until, finally, they both fall into a wheat mill and come out cut into tiny grains—but when these grains fall on the floor, they form a shape of the two boys: “Rickeracke! Rickeracke! / Geht die Mühle mit Geknacke. / Hier kann man sie noch erblicken, / Fein geschroten und in Stücken.” In the original illustration, their shapes are obscenely sneering, persisting in their evil even after their death. . . Adorno was right when he wrote that when one encounters a truly evil person, it is difficult to imagine that this person can die. We are of course not immortal, we all (will) die—the “immortality” of the death drive is not a biological fact but a psychic stance of “persisting beyond life and death,” of a readiness to go on beyond the limits of life, of a perverted life-force which bears witness to a “deranged relationship towards life.” Lacan’s name for this derangement is, of course, *jouissance*, excessive enjoyment, whose pursuit can make us neglect or even self-sabotage our vital needs and interests. At this precise point, Lacan radically differs from the thinkers of finitude for whom a human being is a being-towards-death, relating to its own finitude and unavoidable death: it is only through the intervention of *jouissance* that a human animal becomes properly mortal, relating to the prospect of its own extinction. Lacan notes apropos of the “life and death dialogue” how “it only acquires the character of a drama from the moment when enjoyment [*jouissance*] intervenes. The vital point. . . is the deranged relationship to one’s own body called enjoyment”:¹¹

If an animal is eating [stuffing itself: *bouffe*] regularly, it is clear that this happens because it doesn’t know the enjoyment of hunger. The one who speaks—this is what psychoanalysis teaches us—colors with enjoyment all its [vital] needs, that is to say, that by means of which it defends itself against death.¹²

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XIX: . . . ou pire* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 43.

¹² *Ibid.*, 54.

One should take here “enjoyment of hunger” quite literally: what if, as part of a complex ritual, hunger itself becomes libidinally invested? What if, in a typical reversal, preparation to eat provides more pleasure than the act of eating itself? Robert Brandom uses the same example of hunger to illustrate the structure of what he calls “erotic awareness”:

Erotic awareness has a tripartite structure, epitomized by the relations between *hunger*, *eating*, and *food*. Hunger is a desire, a kind of *attitude*. It immediately impels hungry animals to respond to some objects by treating them *as* food, that is, by *eating* them. *Food* is accordingly a *significance* that objects can have to animals capable of hunger. It is something things can be *for* desiring animals. *Eating* is the activity of taking or treating something *as* food. It is what one must *do* in order in practice to be attributing to it the desire-relative erotic significance of *food*.¹³

But does this structure really deserve to be called “erotic”? Doesn’t eroticism proper emerge only when the aim of our activity doesn’t directly overlap with its goal—in the case of hunger, when postponing the act of eating itself brings pleasure? To put it another way, when Brandom writes: “That practical identification, through risk and sacrifice, with one element of what he is for himself at once expresses and constitutes the Master as in himself a *geistig*, normative being, and not just a desiring, natural one,” should we not raise the obvious question: but what if this “element” is (an object of) desire itself? What if someone is ready to risk and sacrifice everything for his/her desire, including all his/her natural interests? Therein resides the point of Lacan’s “*Kant avec Sade*.”

¹³ Brandom, “A Spirit of Trust,” quoted from http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/spirit_of_trust_2014.html.