

# The Obstinacy of the Singular: A Dialectical Materialist Critique of Social Science

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Dedicated to all revolutionaries

In the name of

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## Note on the Text

The first outline for this master's thesis was written in April 2020 to be submitted to Boğaziçi University Sociology Department, but it was unofficially rejected due to political and bureaucratic reasons. Consequently, I decided not to write it, and dropped out from the department because of the academic and political oppression. In late 2022, I returned to the department thanks to a student amnesty, and decided to write and submit this thesis to get it officially rejected, and publish it online afterwards, for everyone to be able to see that it was rejected because of ideological reasons.

The formatting of the text (in-text citations, page layout, font, page count etc.) mostly follows the mandatory requirements of the department that this thesis was submitted to, and the minimization of direct references to philosophical and psychoanalytical primary texts was a deliberate attempt of compromise with the department (to avoid their standard objections that it is too ambitious, or too theoretical/philosophical for a sociology thesis). I also want to note that since it was rejected right away by the department, the text has the quality of a manuscript. I apologize for any inconvenience or errors.

## Abstract

The aim of this work is to present an analysis that would enable us to specify the object of study of social and political sciences as social antagonism (class struggle) rather than as a positive entity, to demonstrate its *singular* status as ontological negativity (as opposed to *universal* or *particular*), and to examine the implications of this for the conduct of and status of knowledge in social and political sciences; following the dialectical materialist theory of the Ljubljana school which combines German Idealism, Marxism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The argument of this thesis follows a triadic structure: In Part I, on the level of logic and metaphysics, I introduce the category of the singular as ontological negativity through a brief re-reading of classical logic and metaphysics (Aristotle), the transcendental turn (Kant & Hegel) and psychoanalysis (Lacan) in the light of the interpretations of Ljubljana school. In Part II, I follow the implications of the ontological negativity as sexual difference in Lacanian psychoanalysis. First, I try to introduce a more formal understanding of the standard psychoanalytical concepts (like clinical structures) using Žižek's unified theory of four discourses and formulae of sexuation, and then, I discuss the implications of this view regarding ethics. Finally, in Part III, I follow the consequences of the deployment of ontological negativity in the social-political sphere, its implications regarding the scientific status of sociology (theory of partisan knowledge), and its relations with various revolutionary social movements (communism, feminism, queer, anticolonial).

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## 1. Introduction: On Formalization

The scientific status of a discourse hinges on the production of its object through formalization and mathematization. Through a reduction to the letter, scientific discourse creates a new reality which directly corresponds to its formulas; i.e., produces its object (Zupančič, 2017, p. 77). In this reduction to the letter, the letter doesn't represent but directly replaces nature (p. 80). For instance, it is in this sense that Lacan argues (in line with modern physics) that the concept of energy does not refer to a substantial entity but rather that it is merely a number: "Energy is not a substance..., it's a numerical constant that a physicist has to find in his calculations, so as to be able to work" (quoted in p. 77). One can argue that the pivot point of Lacan's late teaching (from the theory of four discourses to knot theory and topology) was this issue of "rectification" of the object through formalization and mathematization, going as far as a call for a "reduction of psychoanalysis to set theory" (Lacan, 2013b, p. 3). In the same vein, Lacan argued that "the only teaching is mathematical, the rest is a joke" (quoted in Urban, 2016, p. 81). The present work is explicitly committed to Lacan's late teaching in this sense, following the maxim that "mathematical formalization is our goal, our ideal" (quoted in Grigg, 2009, p. 89).

Firstly, we should demonstrate why formalization has a very important role both for science and psychoanalysis, and in what sense it rectifies the object. Since this is a sociology thesis, it should be noted in advance that concepts of formalization and mathematization do not imply quantitative analysis as practiced by many schools of sociology and social psychology, mostly amounting to some form of statistical analysis.

The proper dialectical materialist formula for understanding the scientific discourse in the sense of rigorous formalization comes from a much quoted remark from Lacan's 18<sup>th</sup> seminar:

“What is real is what opens up a hole in this semblant, in this articulated semblant which is the scientific discourse. The scientific discourse progresses without even worrying if it is a discourse of semblance or not. All that matters is that its network, its texture, its lattice, as one is used to say, makes the right holes appear at the right place. The only reference reached by its deductions is the impossible. This impossible is the real. In physics, we aim at something which is real with the help of the discursive apparatus which, in its crispness, encounters the limits of its consistency.” (quoted in Žižek, 2012, p. 779 and Zupančič, 2017, p. 81)

This means that formalization does not render the object positively (as assumed by positivist accounts of sociology and social psychology mentioned above) but negatively, i.e., as a limit to the consistency of formalization itself. So, rigorous formalization is pursued to the limit, not to saturate or cover the whole field, but to render visible the point it necessarily fails, hence “making the right holes appear at the right place.” In other words, this formalization is not the formalization of a given content, but the formalization of the impasse of formalization itself (Zupančič, 2017, p. 67). This is why Lacan defined logic as “making holes in writing” (quoted in Badiou & Cassin, 2017, p. 19). The category that emerges in this impasse of formalization is what Lacan calls the Real (Zupančič, 2017, p. 69). The Real is, in Žižek's brilliant formulation, the nothing out of which a Symbolic structure emerges, a nothing which can be specified (Žižek,



2020b, p. 33). In this sense, the “Real cannot be known; it must be demonstrated” through the impasse of formalization (Badiou & Cassin, 2017, p. 59).

To elucidate this concept of formalization of the impasse of formalization, we can give various examples from different fields, each of whom repeated this gesture in various forms in their respective fields: Cantor delinked the concept of infinity from the concept of the One, by demonstrating that there is no One all-encompassing Infinity (i.e. a “largest” infinity) but there is an infinite multiplicity of infinities, owing to the fact that a set always has more subsets than its elements, which is proven by a diagonal argument that shows the necessary existence of a set among the subsets of a set  $A$  which is not covered by any mapping from  $A$  to its subsets (which means the cardinality or “size” of the set of all subsets of a set  $A$  is always greater than the cardinality of  $A$ ) (Žižek, 2017a, p. 7; Žižek, 2012, pp. 227, 849). Gödel, with his incompleteness theorem, demonstrated the necessary incompleteness or inconsistency of an axiomatic system like mathematics, by showing the impossibility of formal provability within the axiomatic system itself. This was made possible by encoding all possible mathematical statements with their respective unique Gödel numbers, in other words, by formalizing or mathematizing mathematics itself to the limit. Turing repeated Gödel’s gesture in computer science, formalizing computation through his concept of Turing machines, he demonstrated what is known in computer science as the halting problem, which proves the impossibility of knowing beforehand whether an algorithm with a halting condition would halt (terminate) given a certain input. This means that, without actually running the algorithm and waiting for an answer, it is impossible for us to decide that that if an algorithm, given a certain input and a halting condition, will halt after a finite amount of

time or will it just keep on running ad infinitum. Turing demonstrated this impossibility with a *reductio ad absurdum* (just like Cantor and Gödel), by showing that the assumption that it is possible to know in advance if an algorithm will halt necessarily leads to contradictions. In the domain of physics, also, at least two remarkable examples can be given: first, Einstein's deduction of the existence of real singularities (i.e., black holes) from the singularities emerging in the mathematical formulas; and second, the trajectory of quantum physics from Copenhagen school and onwards, the ontological (rather than epistemological) status of Heisenberg's uncertainty which ultimately led to the abandonment of the axiom of realism (i.e., the assumption that real, determinate variables determine all physical phenomena; in other words there is no fundamental uncertainty in physical reality and there are hidden variables that determine everything, even if we cannot reach or measure them) altogether in contemporary quantum physics (e.g. Bell's theorem).

All these examples demonstrate the fact that the aim of formalization is not to render reality in a flat, non-contradictory way, but to render visible the truth that emerges from the impasses and contradictions of formalization itself. This is the point Lacan makes when he states that “no logical development, and this has been the case from before Socrates and from elsewhere than in our tradition, has ever derived from anything other than a kernel of paradoxes” in *L'Étourdit* (quoted in Badiou & Cassin, 2017, p. 15). A very good example of this “kernel of paradoxes” can be found in Frege's utilization of contradiction in *Foundations of Arithmetic*, defining the zero/empty set as the set of things that are not identical to themselves, hence founding a whole logical system upon a logical contradiction (Tupinambá, 2021, p. 32). What Lacan is

emphasizing is the fact that there isn't a fundamental difference between stumbling upon an undecidable contradiction and founding a new axiom. For instance, when we look at the emergence of complex numbers (which is an example also used by Lacan); the appearance of square roots of negative numbers in solutions of polynomials could easily be viewed as a trivial contradiction (and it usually was at first), just as it can be instituted as a new kind of number (imaginary number,  $i$ ), hence a new axiom (which happened eventually)<sup>1</sup> (Lacan, 2006, p. 694). The complex numbers are not unique in this sense, and the same example can be repeated for the discovery of other number systems, which emerge similarly by the investigation of the *closure* of a domain under certain operations defined in it and finding out that it is not closed under the operation, meaning that the result of the operation points to something beyond the original domain (e.g. natural numbers are closed under addition and multiplication but not under subtraction, hence integers emerge; but integers are not closed under division, hence rational numbers emerge, and so on until we reach complex numbers). The aim of all these examples is to show that, as Lacanian psychoanalysis argues, formalization does not touch the Real by positively rendering it, but rather by encountering the limits of its own symbolic consistency. That's why, in contrast to the traditional (and new age) understanding of Nature which is full of meaning; modern scientific Nature appears as senseless and contingent, reduced to "empty" formulas (Žižek, 2017a, p. 15). This is what Lacan emphasizes in *L'Étourdit* when he claims that the topology does not represent the

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the name "imaginary," which was coined by Descartes, was intentionally derogatory. Descartes meant to underline the trivial/unreal character of these numbers which was not widely accepted for another century, until Euler.

structure, but rather it is directly the structure itself: “Topology is not ‘designed to guide us’ in structure. It is this structure –as retroaction of the chain-like order in which language consists” (Lacan, 2010, p. 14).

Of course, regardless of the aspirations of formalization and mathematization, there is a very specific difference between psychoanalysis and science understood in a narrow positivist sense (which is a paradigm that revealed itself to be unfit for practice of sciences like physics also); and it is on account of this difference that this thesis argues that sociology cannot model itself after “positive sciences,” and that it is a science of the *singular* just like psychoanalysis. This specificity of psychoanalysis is well-known and recognized; for instance, Lacan states in his early work that psychoanalysis has a singular position among sciences, and it is more comparable to an “art” as in “seven liberal arts,”<sup>2</sup> because the analytic experience is not objectifiable (Lacan, 2006, p. 406). As Zupančič succinctly puts it: “psychoanalysis is not a science, or “scientific” in the usual sense of this term, because it insists on a dimension of truth which is irreducible to “accuracy” or to simple opposition true/false” (Zupančič, 2019, p. 437). Psychoanalysis owes this to the fact that it is a “conflictual science” in Althusser’s terms, dealing with the singular rather than the universal and the particular; a trait which it shares with Marxism (Althusser, 1996, pp. 105-124; Dolar, 2009, pp. 18-9; Vanheule, 2011, p. 154). To be a conflictual science implies that the theoretical discourse is directly implicated in the conflict it theorizes, which entails a self-referentiality that makes a neutral position impossible (Zupančič, 2017, p. 3). That’s why there is a

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<sup>2</sup> Grammar, logic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music.

“debasement of the universal” in psychoanalysis, not only in the sense of negation of positive universals but in the sense of affirmation of negative universals (viz. *singular*) (Tupinambá, 2021, p. 77). Marxism shows us that “one cannot see everything from everywhere,” a neutral-universal point of view always coincides with the point of view of the ruling class; hence there can be no neutral criterion for objectivity, the singular truth can only appear from a partisan-engaged point of view (e.g., a proletarian position) (Zupančič, 2017, p. 4). That’s why Althusser argued that conflictual sciences must regularly undergo cycles of “truth-revision-scission” (Tupinambá, 2021, p. 11).

To elucidate better this emphasis on singularity, we can follow Žižek’s analysis of Lacan’s application of Aristotle’s four causes to the category of truth: Material cause (cause as the matter or substance; e.g. for a table, wood), formal cause (cause as the idea; e.g. the idea/form of a table), final cause (cause as *telos*; e.g. the use of table) and efficient cause (cause as the productive activity; e.g. the work put into transforming the material into a table). Lacan argues that the domain of science is usually between truth as material cause, which corresponds to verifying the adequacy of a Notion to reality; and truth as formal cause, which corresponds to verifying the adequacy of reality to a Notion. Truth as final cause corresponds to religious discourse, which provides an all-encompassing *telos* to reality; and lastly truth as efficient cause properly designates the domain of psychoanalysis because it concerns the moment “symbolic falls into the Real,” the moment symbolization/formalization produces a Real effect in its limit, it “makes the right holes appear at the right place” (Žižek, 2022, p. 139). It is in this sense that the Real as the gap that separates the Universal from the Particular (or more correctly, the Universal from itself; which returns in the Particular), is *singular*, and can

only be touched upon by a failure of symbolization (Žižek, 2003, p. 129; Žižek, 2020b, p. 289). This failure of symbolization, in turn, hinges on the success of rigorous formalization, as argued above.

By introducing singularity into theory and openly admitting their conflictual status as sciences, psychoanalysis and Marxism introduce subjectivity into the domain of scientific discourse, they “resubjectivize the universe of science” (Žižek, 2017a, pp. 164-5). Lacan’s claim in *Science and Truth* that science started when Descartes “extracted the function of the subject from the strict relationship between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ ” can be read exactly in this way: The Real appears when we extract the singular from the relationship between the Particular and the Universal (quoted in Grigg, 2009, p. 136).

The present work takes its impetus from these two aforementioned issues (formalization, singularity) and has several aims: i) To provide a concise and formalized presentation of the dialectical materialism of Ljubljana School, which constitutes the philosophical backbone of the work; ii) to reexamine some classical psychoanalytical concepts (such as clinical structures and the question of their transitivity) in the light of new ways of thinking opened up by this theory; and deriving from these, iii) to demonstrate that the object of study of sociology (social antagonism) is singular, and therefore the only proper model for a scientific sociology is that of a conflictual science (instead of a positive science) which implies a partisan point of view exemplified by both the Marxist beginnings of sociology, and the later Marxist traditions that emerged in it, and lastly iv) to demonstrate the implications of this theory for revolutionary politics, and conversely, the type of practical engagement that the theory of

revolutionary act implies for sociology. As a beginning, in order to lay the foundations of the dialectical materialist understanding of singularity, I will briefly trace the trajectory of logic and metaphysics from antiquity to Lacan in the following Part I, in the light of Ljubljana school's interpretation.

# Part I: Impossibility of Zero – \$

## 2. Aristotelian Logic and Classical Metaphysics

For the brevity of this presentation, I will not include the excellent analyses that trace the division between idealism and materialism in the pre-Socratic tradition, undertaken by Žižek and many others; which demonstrate that the conflict between “ur-correlationism” (the assumption of a primal correlation of thinking and being) of Parmenides which primarily asserts that “the being is, and non-being is not”, and Democritus’ theory of *den* - which ultimately asserts that “non-being exists no less than being” ultimately corresponds to the conflict between idealism and materialism (Žižek, 2014, p. 385). Neither will I discuss Plato’s philosophy which can both be read in the traditional way as the standard example of idealist correlationalism, and it also can be read as a precursor of dialectical materialism, as Žižek and Badiou, among others, illustrate beautifully (see, for instance, Žižek’s reading of Plato’s *Parmenides* in *Less than Nothing*). Instead, I take classical Aristotelian metaphysics and logic as a starting point and observe its development into what we may call the Lacanian logic (formulae of sexualization).

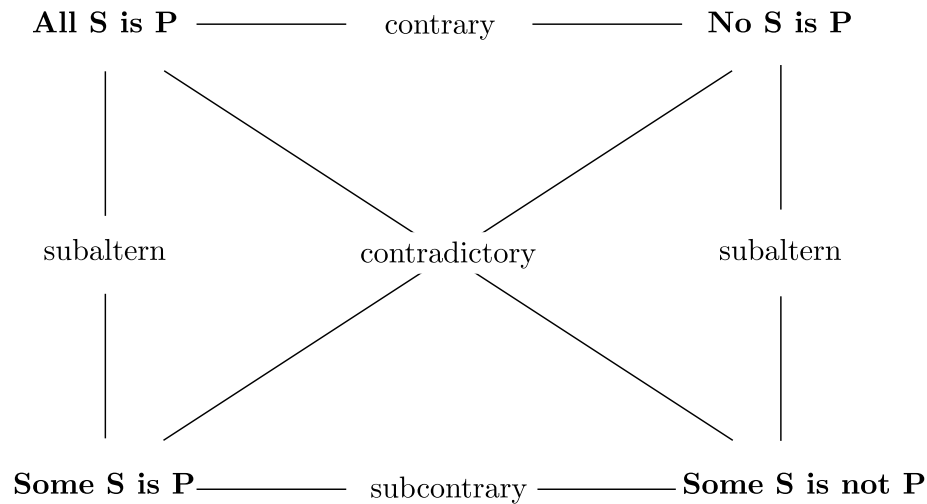
One of the most fundamental axioms of Aristotle’s logical and metaphysical system is the *principle of non-contradiction*, which states that “the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect,” in other words something cannot both be P and not-P at the same time (quoted in Badiou & Cassin, 2017, p. 7). What makes the principle of non-contradiction is its indemonstrable,



undebatable, and self-evident character, which is also openly stated by Aristotle himself who compares anyone that doubts this principle to a “mere plant” (quoted in p. 7). As we will see in the following argument, this commitment to the principle on non-contradiction, the “decision of sense” in Barbara Cassin’s terms, makes Aristotle conceive of the relationship between the Universal and the Particular (i.e. form and matter) as a harmonious one; which results in a “sexualized cosmology” that tries to present being as “the unity of form and hyle, of masculine and feminine, of active and passive” which in turn erases the singular, namely the conflict between the Universal and the Particular from the field (Žižek, 2012, p. 758).

Aristotle classifies logical propositions in the axes of quantity, which determines if a statement is Universal, Particular or singular, and quality, which determines if the proposition is affirmative or negative (Urban, 2016, p. 83). The Aristotelian logical square emerges from the combinations of the Universal and Particular (excluding the singular) in the axis of quantity with the affirmative and negative in the axis of quality (the *infinite* as the third quality didn’t exist in Aristotle’s system), as can be seen in the table below (Grigg, 2009, p. 89):

Aristotelian logical square:



Among these four types of logical statements, four different logical relations emerge: contradiction (which implies that if one is true the other one must be false) between the Universals of one quality with the Particulars of the opposite quality; contrariety (which means that both statements cannot be true) between Universals of opposite quality; subcontrariety (which means both statements cannot be false); and subalternation (which means that if the first proposition is true, second one has to be true – which also means that this relationship is unidirectional, from the Universal to the Particular) between the Universals and Particulars of the same quality. Whereas the relations of contradiction and contrariety were specified by Aristotle himself, the relations of subcontrariety and subalternation are later additions by the medieval logicians (Urban, 2016, pp. 83-6).

At first sight the Aristotelian logical square appears seamless: The propositions are neatly categorized with definite relations between them which follow almost automatically (which means that it excludes the subject in the Lacanian and Kantian

sense, as will be discussed below) (Urban, 2016, p. 86). But upon further examination, problems and ambiguities arise, especially with regard to the relation of subalternation and its unidirectionality, as was elaborated by Brunschwig in 1969 (p. 91). The conflict arises from the fact that the Particular statements can be interpreted in three ways which are not totally compatible to one another: i) Universal affirmation is equivalent to negation of the Particular negation ( $\text{All } S \text{ is } P \Leftrightarrow \neg \text{Some } S \text{ are not } P$ ); ii) Universal affirmation implies Particular affirmation ( $\text{All } S \text{ is } P \Rightarrow \text{Some } S \text{ is } P$ ); and iii) Two Particulars are equivalent ( $\text{Some } S \text{ is } P \Leftrightarrow \text{Some } S \text{ is not } P$ ). Brunschwig's argument shows that one must reject one of these three propositions in order to avoid contradiction; rejecting the third proposition results in a *minimal* interpretation of the Particular (in which the Particular is in agreement with the Universal), which was the solution preferred by Aristotle; whereas rejecting the second proposition results in a *maximal* interpretation (in which the Particular affirmation contradicts the Universal affirmation), which was adopted by Lacan in early 1970s (Grigg, 2009, pp. 90-3; Grigg, 2005; Urban, 2016, pp. 89-91). The implication of the *minimal* interpretation is that reality gets flattened out since the Particular is completely subordinated to the Universal, and becomes nothing more than a partial expression of the Universal. As argued above, this interpretation results in a harmonious understanding of the relationship between being and notion that reflects itself in a sexualized cosmology which obfuscates the conflict between the Universal and the Particular and erases the subject from the field. As to the implications of the *maximal* interpretation, they will become clear when we derive the formulae of sexuation later on. But before I can introduce Lacan's alternative logical square that follows the *maximal* interpretation, I have to briefly examine the

ontological developments that foreshadowed it and made it possible to construct, namely the emergence of the transcendental subject and the transcendental turn introduced by Kant and German Idealism.

### 3. Kant's Transcendental Turn and Hegel

As we have seen, Lacan states that it was Descartes who first extracted the subject, but the full implications of his discovery didn't emerge until Kant's transcendental critique; although Descartes at first recognized the *singularity* of *cogito* with all its "mad" implications, "introducing a crack in the ontologically consistent universe," he subsequently escaped these implications by reducing *cogito* to *res cogitans*, a "thinking thing" which corresponds to an ordinary object among other objects situated in a common reality (consistency of which is guaranteed by God) (Žižek, 2003, p. 12). It is only with Kant's critique of Descartes (and all previous metaphysics) and with his introduction of the concept of the transcendental I that a proper precursor of the subject in Lacanian terms emerge.

Kant regards Descartes' reduction of *cogito* to *res cogitans* as a fallacy, a "subreption of the hypostasized consciousness;" meaning that Descartes takes the *cogito* which is the pure form of thought that necessarily accompanies all representations/objects of thought (i.e., anything we think is *a priori* framed by *cogito*, "I think...") and illegitimately treats it as, or makes it into a representation/object in itself (Žižek, 2003, p. 13). According to Kant, the I of transcendental apperception, which is an *analytical* proposition regarding the logical subject of thought (*cogito*) is fundamentally separate from and irreconcilable with the I of empirical self-experience (*res cogitans*, person), which is a *synthetic* proposition regarding the phenomenal person as a thinking thing (pp. 12-3). Whereas the transcendental I relates to "existence qua logical construction" (*mathematical* domain, which will be detailed below), the

empirical I relates to “existence qua experiential reality” (*dynamical* domain) (p. 14).

This implies that the transcendental I, as the form that accompanies all concepts, itself cannot be a concept; because any treatment of it as a concept (viz. any judgment on it) would have to utilize the form of the transcendental I in the first place, hence leading to a paradoxical vicious cycle (in Hegelian terms, a *bad infinity* or *spurious infinity*); as Kant puts it in *Critique of Pure Reason* (Žižek, 2020b, p. 66; Žižek, 2012, p. 721):

“... we cannot even say that this is a concept, but only that it is a bare consciousness which accompanies all concepts. Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts = X. It is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever, but can only revolve in a perpetual circle, since any judgment upon it has always already made use of its representation.” (Kant, 1929, p. 331, A346/B404; also quoted in Žižek, 2012, p. 721)

This is the reason for Kant’s rejection of Descartes passage from *cogito* to *res cogitans* since it involves treating the a priori form of consciousness which is the ground of all phenomena as a phenomenon itself. As Kant shows, the transcendental I is definitely not phenomenal (i.e., it is not an appearance), therefore, as the form of phenomena it must be trans-phenomenal, but this trans-phenomenal character does not also mean that it is noumenal because as Žižek succinctly puts it, “appearance cannot appear to another appearance, but it also cannot appear to reality itself” (Žižek, 2012, p. 724). Hence, the transcendental I shows itself to be neither phenomenon nor noumenon, but the third element whose virtual presence supports the distinction between

phenomenon and noumenon, which functions as the “non-phenomenal support of appearance” (p. 724). If we translate this into Aristotelian terms, the virtual status of the transcendental I fits neither that of the Universal nor the Particular; and this, in turn, undermines any metaphysics that reduces being to a pure interplay between the Universal and the Particular. This is why the proper beginning of the subject in Lacanian terms (more precisely the subject of enunciation in contrast to the subject of the enunciated) is the transcendental I (in contrast to the empirical I) of Kant.

This irreducibility of the transcendental I, the necessary gap between the Universal form and the Particular content means that Understanding (*Verstand*) is *discursive* in Kantian terms, and has very crucial implications for logic, ontology and their interrelation (Žižek, 2020b, p. 80). We encounter these implications when Kant introduces the *antinomies of pure reason* in the Transcendental Dialectic of his Critique of Pure Reason. The antinomies arise from propositions that involve judgments about the limits or totality of the field of experience itself, but the discursive nature of Understanding renders any decision on these judgements impossible, hence we get pairs of undecidable judgments (thesis and antithesis) that could be both true or both false. These antinomies are divided into two main categories, *mathematical antinomies* (that are related to intuition (*Anschauung*), which could be understood as relating to pure space and time) in which the thesis and the antithesis are both false; and *dynamical antinomies* (that are related to the Understanding (*Verstand*), which could be understood as relating to empirical reality and causality) in which the thesis and the antithesis are both true (Žižek, 2003, p. 55). (For the purposes of compactness I am quoting Kant’s presentation in the *Prolegomena*) (Kant, 2004, p. 91):

Dynamical	Mathematical
<p><i>Thesis:</i> There exist in the world causes through freedom.</p> <p><i>Antithesis:</i> There is no freedom, but everything is nature.</p>	<p><i>Thesis:</i> The world has, as to time and space, a beginning (a boundary).</p> <p><i>Antithesis:</i> The world is, as to time and space, infinite.</p>
<p><i>Thesis:</i> In the series of causes in the world there is a necessary being.</p> <p><i>Antithesis:</i> There is nothing necessary in this series, but in it everything is contingent.</p>	<p><i>Thesis:</i> Everything in the world is constituted out of the simple.</p> <p><i>Antithesis:</i> There is nothing simple, but everything is composite.</p>

The emergence of the antinomies is scandalous in the sense that they point towards an immanent limit/failure of Reason, the deployment of the concepts of the Understanding beyond their legitimate domain results in a dialectical illusion (hence the name Transcendental Dialectic), an “euthanasia of reason” as Copjec calls it (Copjec, 1994, p. 201). Whereas the mathematical antinomies are about the scope of reality, hence quantitative and constitutive; the dynamical antinomies are about exceptions to reality, hence they are qualitative and regulative (Žižek, 2020b, p. 109). The antinomies of pure reason demonstrate in a negative way, through contradiction, that “appearances cannot be the same as the In-itself, that they are necessarily mere appearances” (Žižek, 2017a, p. 51). This means that Kant “resolves” the antinomies by referring to the transcendental horizon as the ultimate limit of the Understanding, as any attempt to reach beyond the transcendental horizon to the Thing-in-itself produces contradictions. In this way, antinomies of pure reason signal the category of the *singular* as “return of the universal in the particular” (Žižek, 2020b, p. 289).



Žižek's analysis of the mathematical antinomy regarding the divisibility of matter lays this point very clearly: Both the thesis according to which matter is composed of simple particles that are indivisible and the antithesis that states that matter is infinitely divisible is false at the same time because the division between something (as matter/content) and nothing (as the form, the absence or place of inscription of matter) is internal to something: "what is indivisible in a thing is not any of its properties but the Oneness of a thing in distance to [its] properties" (p. 289).

The antinomies of pure reason repeat themselves in the domain of judgment as the experience of the sublime, in contrast to the experience of the beautiful, as elaborated by Kant in his Critique of Judgment. Just like the antinomies of pure reason, the sublime is also divided into the mathematical and the dynamical categories. The mathematical sublime occurs when we try to comprehend a figure of infinity and realize that it escapes the powers of our intuition (e.g. trying to think the totality of an infinite series, fractals, or surfaces/objects in higher dimensions than three), that it cannot be comprehended in a sensible form; whereas the dynamical sublime, the more widely known form, occurs when we encounter a phenomenon so terrifying or overwhelming that it appears to pose an exception to the ordinary causality which makes us feel insignificant (e.g. watching a natural disaster from a distance, the famous "starry skies above me") (Žižek, 2003, p. 53; Žižek, 2020b, p. 112). The mathematical sublime fragments reality by presenting an object which in a sense exists but cannot be intuited; in contrast, the dynamical sublime unifies and provides a coherence to reality through positing of an exception, a "beyond" of reality (Urban, 2016, p. 46). That's why the dynamical sublime regards the relationship between elements belonging to different series, in other words, the object of

the dynamical sublime is synthetic and heterogenous to the field of reality (i.e. an exception to universality); whereas the mathematical sublime regards the relationship between elements within the same series, which means that the object of the mathematical sublime is analytical and homogenous to the field of reality (i.e. “a multitude (*das Mannigfaltige*) accessible to sensible intuition” which nevertheless, cannot be grasped in its totality) (Žižek, 2003, pp. 54-5). This duality of mathematical and dynamical provides the basic matrix of couples like the logic of Being and the logic of Essence in Hegel, condensation and displacement in Freud, metaphor and metonymy in Jakobson, and ultimately the masculine logic and the feminine logic in the formulae of sexuation in Lacan, which is the destination of our argument (Žižek, 2020b, 136).

Having introduced the antinomies of pure reason and their relationship with the sublime, we can come back to their implication with regard to Kant’s philosophy. Although Kant states that the division into the Transcendental Analytic and the Transcendental Dialectic concerns the division between the logic of truth and logic of illusion, he also demonstrates that the logic of illusion cannot be dismissed or disregarded as trivial; but on the contrary, it is both unavoidable and has a crucial *regulative* role; hence, it amounts to a different logic of truth in Zupančič’s terms (Zupančič, 2000, p. 64). Kant argues that the Transcendental Dialectic as the logic of illusion is not arbitrary but the human mind systematically and necessarily produces the same transcendental ideas; namely the psychological idea of the soul as “the absolute unity of the thinking subject,” the cosmological idea of the world or universe as “the absolute unity of the series of conditions of appearance,” and the theological idea of God as “the absolute unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general” (Kant, 1929,

p. 323; Zupančič, 2000, pp. 65, 75; Urban, 2016, p. 157). Although these transcendental ideas are illusory in the sense of empty notions lacking an object (meaning they are a pure thing of thought, *Gedankending, ens rationis*), they guarantee the consistency of our knowledge as regulative ideas: for instance, as Žižek argues, *teleology* is not a *constitutive* category (i.e. there is no purpose in nature) but a purely *regulative* category that makes us possible to systematize our knowledge of nature (i.e. we treat nature as if it has purposiveness in order to comprehend it as meaningful) (Žižek, 2012, p. 171). A classic example for this is the theory of evolution: Although the mechanisms of mutation and natural selection are completely blind and contingent, lacking any foresight or *telos*; we usually tend to explain evolution in terms of a gene/organism/species having a “purpose” such as survival and self-replication, in order to render the process more easily comprehensible. Similarly, in Kant’s practical philosophy (which will come into play when we discuss ethics), the transcendental ideas of soul and God have a regulative role in establishing the postulate of the immortality of the soul and the postulate of the existence of God as the highest good, which are two postulates of practical reason<sup>3</sup> that cannot be demonstrated but nevertheless must be assumed in order for ethical activity to be possible (Zupančič, 2000, pp. 75-6).

Therefore, the dialectic illusion, far from being random and chaotic, follows a very definite structure which is succinctly defined by Zupančič in a twofold way: dialectic illusion is either the analytic truth with the addition of an object that cannot be an object

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<sup>3</sup> There are actually three postulates of practical reason, but the first postulate, namely the postulate of freedom, is in the first place a “fact of reason” as the “determining ground of the will;” so it is not really a postulate like the other two (Zupančič, 2000, pp. 75-6).

of experience, or it is the analytic truth with the object of experience subtracted from it (Zupančič, 2000, p. 66). One can add that the first definition echoes the logic of the dynamical sublime, whereas the second definition echoes the logic of the mathematical sublime. This understanding of the logic of illusion constitutes the Kantian precursor of what Lacan calls the semblance (*semblant*) (p. 67). The crucial point here is that although the transcendental ideas are false in the analytic sense (i.e. adequacy of a notion to its object) since they have no object, they are not completely non-sense: Kant's "formal criterion of truth" distinguishes statements that can be true or false from statements that cannot have a truth value at all, on the basis of not conformity to the statement its object but its self-conformity (p. 65). For instance, a proposition that states that the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter is a rational number is simply false, but a proposition involving a self-contradictory term like a triangle without vertices is not even false, because it involves a self-contradictory concept, which is a non-thing (*Unding*). The transcendental ideas are also nothing, but not in the sense of *Unding* like the triangle without vertices, but they are pure things of thought that have no objective correlate (*Gedankending*).

To understand this distinction better, we should take one more step back in the Critique of Pure Reason to the very end of the Transcendental Analytic where Kant distinguishes four kinds of nothing: First, *ens rationis*, "empty concept without object," which is, as we have seen, a pure thing of thought (*Gedankending*) that has no object, and it corresponds to the status of the *noumenon* and the transcendental ideas like the soul and God. Second, *nihil privativum*, "empty object of a concept," which is the nothing that remains from negation of something and can be exemplified by the cold as

absence of heat, the balance of force resulting from opposite forces cancelling out, waves destructively interfering with each other etc. Third, *ens imaginarium*, “empty intuition without object,” which is the nothing that remains when we subtract all content/substance from the field of experience, i.e. it is the pure form of intuition as pure space and pure time. And lastly, fourth, *nihil negativum*, “empty object without concept,” which is, as we stated above, a self-contradictory, impossible concept which cancels itself, like the example of the triangle without vertices, therefore it is considered a non-thing (*Unding*) (Kant, 1929, p. 295, A290/B346; Urban, 2016, pp. 144-6).

	Dynamical	Mathematical
Antinomy	<i>ens rationis</i>  Empty concept without object (Gedankending)  e.g. God, soul	<i>ens imaginarium</i>  Empty intuition without object  e.g. Pure space & Pure Time
Negation	<i>nihil privativum</i>  Empty object of a concept  e.g. Zero of opposites cancelling out	<i>nihil negativum</i>  Empty object without concept (Unding)  e.g. Triangle without vertices

As can be seen from the table, we can categorize the four kinds of nothings in two axes: First, on the axis of dynamical-mathematical; the *ens rationis* and *nihil privativum* are related to the dynamical domain, the former as the regulative idea (exception) that guarantees the consistency of empirical (dynamical) domain, latter as the absence that results from the opposition of empirical forces; whereas the *ens imaginarium* and *nihil negativum* are related to the mathematical domain, the former as constitutive of the

mathematical domain as such (space and time), and the latter as the nothing that results from a constitutive contradiction. Second, on the axis of negation-antinomy (*nihil-ens*); the *nihil privativum* and *nihil negativum* result from real negation and logical negation respectively, whereas the *ens rationis* and *ens imaginarium* are results of the dynamical antinomies and mathematical antinomies respectively (Žižek, 2003, pp. 108-9).<sup>4</sup> As we will later see, this quadripartite structure returns in Lacan's theory in various guises such as the four discourses and the formulae of sexualization.

But before we can introduce Lacan's framework, we have to mention Hegel's criticism against and radicalization of Kant's transcendental critique, which was already implicitly present in our argument all along, owing to the fact that the theory of the Ljubljana School which provides our framework reads Kant (and, pretty much everything else) from a Hegelian standpoint. We have already established the fact that unlike classical Aristotelian metaphysics or modern Cartesian philosophy, Kant didn't try to directly patch up the singularity that emerged from his theory: Whereas classical metaphysics resorted to a narrative of mythical cosmic balance (sexualized cosmology), and Descartes resorted to a reduction of *cogito* to *res cogitans* (which creates a mythical/paradoxical element as the intersection of the two: the pineal gland); Kant, for the first time, instead of trivializing the singularity, accepted it into his theory and studied its logic. As Žižek shows, the singular gap exists in all three critiques of Kant: in Critique of Pure Reason, it is the gap between the transcendental I (*cogito*) and the empirical I (*res cogitans*); in Critique of Practical reason, it is the gap between the pure

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<sup>4</sup> In his argument, Žižek states that *ens rationis* results from antinomies but omits discussing *ens imaginarium*; also he doesn't distinguish between mathematical and dynamical antinomies.

form of the *categorical imperative* and the illusory appearance (*Schein*) of the highest Good; and lastly, in Critique of Judgment, it is the gap between teleology taken as a regulative principle and teleology being misused as a constitutive principle (Žižek, 2003, pp. 171-2).

The Hegelian criticism against Kant argues that although, as summarized above, Kant revolutionized metaphysics, he didn't go as far to face the full implications of his theoretical innovation, that he shied away from some conclusions which are extremely scandalous even for an iconoclastic figure like Kant. The pivotal point of Hegel's criticism is that Kant's admittance of contradictions such as the antinomies remains at the merely epistemological level without full ontological implications, in other words, that Kant accepts the antinomies but attributes them to our misapplication of the categories of Understanding instead of the categories themselves, hence he "defuses his own antinomies" (Žižek, 2012, p. 268). While Kant's view still implies that antinomies point to a fundamental limit of our Understanding, its inability to grasp the thing-in-itself, hence provides in a negative way that the appearances cannot be in-itself; Hegel ontologizes Kant's antinomies and concludes that it is not that there exists a non-contradictory domain of things-in-themselves and that we simply cannot reach it; but rather that the in-itself is nothing but the impossibility/incompleteness/immanent limit of our Understanding which is signaled by the antinomies (Žižek, 2020b, p. 60). It is in this sense that the Ljubljana School argues that Hegel is "more Kantian than Kant himself," since where Kant draws back from the conclusions of his theory and cannot admit

contradiction to the domain of in-itself, Hegel goes all the way and assumes the full implications (Žižek, 2012, pp. 280-1).<sup>5</sup>

Before his famous Jena break, that is to say, before Hegel arrived at his mature philosophical system, he was more or less in line with the standard Kantian doctrine, relying on a distinction between logic and metaphysics, mechanism and organism, Understanding and Reason etc.; and his philosophical aim was a form of disalignment in the form of a return to the lost organic unity of the Greek polis (*Sittlichkeit*) (Žižek, 2012, p. 241). But after the Jena Break, Hegel realizes that the usual distinctions don't work, in other words that there is no metaphysics beyond logic, no organism beyond the mechanism, no Reason beyond Understanding; but in each case the higher moment is in fact the lower moment without the assumption of a transcendent beyond (Žižek, 2017a, 28-9). That's why, the usual understanding of metaphysics as being grounded in logic but transcending it is false; rather the case is that logic *is* already metaphysics, when it is exercised to the limit without any assumption of a beyond, as we have seen, for instance, in the ontological implications of logical decisions from Aristotle and onwards (Žižek, 2012, p. 50). Or to give another example, which also reflects the passage from Kant to Hegel; it is not that Understanding is fundamentally limited and Reason is something more than Understanding, it is rather that Reason is "the absolute Form beyond which there is no transcendent Content eluding its grasp" (Žižek, 2008, p. 158). In each case, the Hegelian move is to take the assumed transcendent content that lies beyond, and

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<sup>5</sup> One should of course mention Fichte and his theory of the *Anstoss* as a radicalization of Kant, which Žižek discusses at great detail in his *Less than Nothing*, but for the sake of brevity we directly skip to Hegel (see Žižek, 2012, chapter 3: "Fichte's Choice").



demonstrate how it is actually immanent to the field itself as its constitutive illusion. It is in this sense that passage from Understanding to Reason, or from Kant to Hegel, is an operation of subtraction: we reach the second moment when we subtract the constitutive illusion of the first (the beyond, the thing-in-itself) (Žižek, 2012, p. 276-7).

The question regarding the ambiguity of Kant's philosophy, if it is a precursor to proper metaphysics, then what would be proper metaphysics, can easily be answered from this Hegelian standpoint. Although Kant regards his philosophy always in a negative way, as critique, as prolegomena that would open the way for proper metaphysics etc., we can see that Kant leaves no space for future metaphysics in a positive sense in his system. That's where the Hegelian insight comes into play: Kant's philosophy is already metaphysics, if we abandon the assumption of a metaphysics as positive understanding of the beyond and see the beyond as a negativity immanent to the field. It is in this vein that Hegel calls the negative/analytic power of Understanding as the "greatest of all powers" in the famous quote from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

"The action of separating the elements is the exercise of the force of Understanding, the most astonishing and greatest of all powers, or rather the absolute power. The circle, which is self-enclosed and at rest, and, qua substance, holds its own moments, is an immediate relation, the immediate, continuous relation of elements with their unity, and hence arouses no sense of wonderment. But that an accident as such, when cut loose from its containing circumference, -that what is bound and held by something else and actual only by being connected with it, -should obtain an existence all its own, gain freedom and independence on its own account- this is the portentous

power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of pure Self.” (quoted in Žižek, 2012, p. 276, Žižek’s modified translation)

This is why it is only with Hegel that the implications of the singularity as irreducible negativity reach its full conclusion. As Žižek puts it clearly, “the mistake of Understanding is to perceive its own negative activity (of separating, tearing things apart) only in its negative aspect, ignoring its "positive" (productive) aspect;” hence in order to pass to Reason, we only need to recognize the productivity of this negativity inherent to Understanding, so that Reason would reveal itself to be nothing more than “Understanding itself in its productive aspect;” in other words, “Reason is what Understanding, in its activity, really does, in contrast to what it wants/means to do.” (Žižek, 2012, p. 277; Žižek, 2020b, p. 72). This also implies that the categories of Understanding and the transcendental ideas of Reason in fact have the same content, and their difference regards only a difference in the point of view from which we view them (Zupančič, 2000, p. 74). This shift in the point of view is described by Hegel in another very famous passage from *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the going behind the curtain of appearances (of Understanding):

“This curtain, therefore, hanging before the inner world is withdrawn, and we have here the inner being gazing into the inner realm—the vision of the undistinguished selfsame reality, which repels itself from itself, affirms itself as a divided and distinguished inner reality, but as one for which at the same time the two factors have immediately no distinction; what we have here is Self-Consciousness. It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain, which is to hide the inner world, there is nothing to be seen

unless we ourselves go behind there, as much in order that we may thereby see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen.” (quoted in Žižek, 2017a, p. 147)

A good example for this can be given regarding magic tricks: When we observe a magic trick from the proper point of view, it produces an effect (the illusion) which seems to be heterogenous to our field of experience (for instance it defies our expectations about natural causality). But when we “go behind the curtain” and see how the effect is produced, we do not encounter a magical, supernatural “beyond,” rather we see that the magic effect is obtained with the help of the very ordinary, mundane objects and principles. This makes us realize the fact that the front of the curtain and the behind of the curtain are in fact the same, and the magic effect occurs at the intersection of the two merely as a surface effect, in other words it doesn’t exist as a substantial entity. This is the properly materialist lesson of magic tricks, and it is not a coincidence that there is a tradition of openly and militantly materialist magicians (such as Penn and Teller, and James Randi, going back to Harry Houdini) who reveal and explain magic tricks as well as expose the charlatans who claim to have supernatural powers.

Thus, Hegel, by extending logic into metaphysics (giving full ontological status to antinomies rather than reserving for them merely an epistemological status) shows that the gap between our transcendently constituted reality and the things-in-themselves is internal to our reality, that the transcendental I’s impossibility of reaching the thing-in-itself is in fact the impossibility of thing-in-itself. That’s why Hegel’s formulation that

the Substance (in-itself) is Subject is the first proper admittance of singularity in full ontological sense:

“The disparity which exists in consciousness between the “I” and the Substance which is its object is the distinction between them, the *negative* in general. This can be regarded as the *defect* of both, though it is their soul, or that which moves them . . . . Now, although this negative appears at first as a disparity between the “I” and its object, it is just as much the disparity of the Substance with itself. Thus what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject” (Hegel, 2018, p. 21; quoted in Žižek, 2008, p. 106)

This makes Hegel both the “last philosopher” and the “ultimate sophist” at the same time, as Žižek argues (Žižek, 2017a, p. 8). Hegel is the last philosopher in the sense that he produced a very systematic discourse that has a claim to truth, but he is the ultimate sophist in the sense that he obliterates the fulcrum on which all prior philosophy gained its leverage, namely the idea of a non-contradictory in-itself that would guarantee the self-identical truth (even if it’s inaccessible as in Kant’s theory); so that with Hegel, truth is decoupled from the idea of an unchanging Substance and becomes totally immanent to its process of enunciation (as the failure of this enunciation, e.g. antinomies) (p. 8). This subtraction of the illusion of a substantial truth that would be guaranteed in any way, the full immanentization of truth is what Hegel calls Absolute Knowing: there is no place outside discourse that we can step out to or use as a reference

point to judge the validity of a discourse; truth is immanent to the discourse as its failure, without any beyond (Žižek, 2014, p. 244).

At last, we arrive at the point where the understanding of truth that we have reached corresponds to Lacan's understanding of Real as impasse of formalization, as that which "opens up a hole in the semblant" which was presented in the beginning of this work. What Hegel calls Absolute Knowing prefigures the ontological orientation of Lacan's theory best exemplified by his dictum that "there is no metalanguage," which states the impossibility/inexistence of the big Other as a figure that would guarantee the consistency of our knowledge (Žižek, 2014, p. 244). This will be the subject matter of the following chapter, as I will present Lacan's logical framework and introduce the proper psychoanalytical understanding of the subject, in light of what we have already established.

## 4. The Lacanian Subject

Lacan's work, taken as textual material, is famously very difficult to digest and systematize, not because of the "usual" reason which is his enigmatic style, but owing on the one hand to the fact that his teaching simply spans many decades during which Lacan altered his theory continuously, and on the other hand that to the fact that Lacan's teaching is fashioned as a seminar which makes it very fragmentary, without any complete systematic presentation of the theory. This separates Lacan from figures that were introduced before, like Kant and Hegel, who produced systematized and complete accounts of their theories. Although in any reading we necessarily pick and choose certain parts or adopt a certain reading of an oeuvre or a theory even if it is systematically presented as in Kant and Hegel; it is especially necessary when it comes to a figure like Lacan who radically changed the status of the concepts he used throughout his life to explicitly indicate under which framework we are reading him, and which Lacan (which stage of development of his thought) we are referring to. Otherwise, it becomes possible to read Lacan in a way that undermines the mainstays or the real achievements of his theory by citing Lacan himself from his earlier work, which is a prevalent attitude among more clinically oriented and Freudian readings of Lacan.

In a late short seminar in 1975, Lacan himself states his frustration with this orientation that treats his work as a canon in the sense of an accumulatively growing repository, in a passing remark: "as I've been teaching for an excessively long time, I don't even remember anymore what I said the first time round, some twenty-two years ago, which you will find reproduced in Seminar I" (Lacan, 2013a, p. 11). "The first time

round” is very important in the sense that Lacan’s theory doesn’t really change in the sense that it abandons its objects for the search of other objects, but it changes in the sense that it returns to the same objects/concepts over and over again, but with a change in status each time. So, rather than a progression following a linear trajectory, Lacan’s theory resembles more a loop that encircles the same objects repeatedly, albeit in different ways.

I have already stated that this work is committed to Ljubljana School’s reading of Lacan under the light of German Idealism, and I also have to add that I read Lacan from the point of view of his mature period, which begins with the shifting of the focus to the Real and the *matheme*, which corresponds minimally to after mid-1960’s and maximally to after 1970s. I will not go into a periodization of Lacan in detail, as this work doesn’t rely on primary sources as much as it relies on later systematizations of Lacan by the Ljubljana School and others; but as a quick summary, we can present Urban’s periodization of Lacan: The early phenomenological period between 1933-1950 is dubbed “imaginary Lacan,” owing to the emphasis on the process of imaginary identification and the mirror stage (which is unfortunately the most well-known work of Lacan); the middle structuralist period between 1950-1960s is dubbed “symbolic Lacan,” because the focus shifts to the linguistic structure of the symbolic order and its alienating effects; and finally, the late period between mid-1960s until his death in 1981 is dubbed “real Lacan,” because the category of the Real as impossibility/*impasse* of formalization (which is the way we have introduced it in this work) properly emerges in this mature period, with Lacan’s many different attempts for formalization (from *mathemes*, discourses, formulae of sexuation to set theory, topology and knot theory)

(Urban, 2016, p. 51). In terms of this periodization, this work is committed to the third period, thus I am not going to give a diachronic or chronological account of the emergence of Lacan's concepts and instead define them as they already are in the late period or even the later systematizations. It should also be noted that this work will not directly go into the domain of mathematics, both for the concerns of scope and brevity, so that the discussion of different topological surfaces and their relations with the theory presented in this work is left out.<sup>6</sup> One possible consequence of this is that further formalizations that might arise from a properly topological understanding of Lacan's late theory may make the formalization put forward in this work (and the works that inspired this) redundant. But that's for another day.

One of the threads that connects our previous discussion of logic and metaphysics with Lacanian psychoanalysis is the Kantian discovery of the discursive nature of Understanding, understood as the impossibility to step outside of the form of discourse (i.e. the "I think"). This is reflected in Lacan's theory as the discovery of the linguistic nature of the unconscious, which Lacan claims to be already present in Freud's Interpretation of Dreams (Grigg, 2009, p. 151). Starting from his structuralist period and onwards, Lacan demonstrates that the mechanisms of the "primary process" uncovered by Freud as condensation and displacement, corresponds to the linguistic tropes of metaphor and metonymy, and more generally to the two aspects of language distinguished by Jakobson, respectively the paradigmatic (based on similarity) and the

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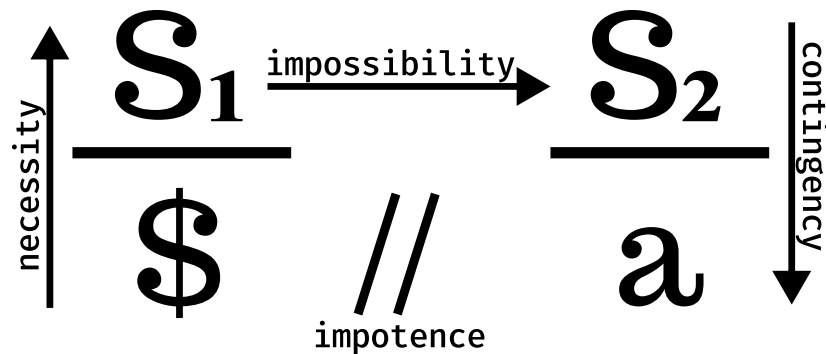
<sup>6</sup> Žižek, in *Sex and the Failed Absolute* and Urban in *Lacan and Meaning* try approaching the Lacan's teaching through topological concepts, but their approaches are nowhere as rigorous as to be considered mathematical; and to my knowledge, there isn't any rigorous formalization of late Lacan's topological teachings, which stands as a task in front of Lacanians.



syntagmatic aspects (based on contiguity) (pp. 151-2). Whereas metonymy or the syntagmatic relation involves a relationship within elements of a series (e.g. substitution of a word with another word which is contextually proximate to it); metaphor or paradigmatic relation involves a relationship between elements of different series (e.g. substitution of a word with another word with a similar function but a different context).

Although Lacan in his late period revised many of his thoughts from his structuralist middle period, the linguistic structure of the unconscious and the two fundamental relations that emerge from it remained as the basis of all of his later attempts at formalization, such as the four discourses and the formulae of sexuation. We can demonstrate this connection with the four discourses and at the same time introduce them through Lacan's famous definition of the signifier: a signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier, and in fact, for all other signifiers (Lacan, 1978, p. 207; Žižek, 2008, p. 24). The relation of representation between the subject and the signifier that represents it is that of a metaphor, which can be denoted in Lacan's mathemes as  $S_1/\$$ . Whereas the signifier that represents the subject is denoted as  $S_1$ , the Master-Signifier, the other signifiers (which are totalized through this operation) are denoted as  $S_2$ , the differential field of infinite signifiers, or knowledge. The Master-Signifier that represents the subject is in no way necessary, any signifier can take on this role owing to the purely differential nature of the Symbolic order. The introduction of the Master-Signifier as a metaphor halts the metonymical sliding of the differential signifiers and produces meaning. Yet this process never succeeds in symbolizing the subject, the signifying operation fails, and a leftover is produced either in the form of a surplus or in the form of a lack, which corresponds to what Lacan calls *objet petit a*, the

object-cause of desire. All of this process of (failure of) signification is captured by what Lacan calls the Master's Discourse, from his theory of the four discourses, introduced in his late period as the greatest formalization attempt to that date:



As can be seen, the Master's Discourse presents the fundamental matrix of signification put forward by Lacan, and it is in this sense that Žižek argues it is “the discourse as such” as it stages the establishment of the discursive link with the intervention of  $S_1$ , Master-Signifier; whereas the other three discourses are produced by its variations/rotations (Žižek, 2017a, p. 221). But before introducing the other discourses, we will first clarify the elements, places and relations that are implied by this framework. It has to be underlined again that the  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are purely differential, that they belong to exactly the same domain of signifiers; it is only through an arbitrary nomination that a  $S_1$  emerges as a “special” signifier. In fact, the difference between  $S_2$  and  $S_1$  is nothing but the difference between a signifier and its empty place of inscription; in other words, between the Particular content and the Universal form (e.g. in mathematical terms, the difference between an element of a set, and the empty set itself as the possible place of inscription of the element) (p. 72). One should note that this relationship echoes the solution of the mathematical antinomy regarding divisibility

which was discussed in Chapter 3, which also stated that the ultimate division of something entails a division between the thing in its oneness ( $S_1$ ) in compared to its properties ( $S_2$ ). In this sense, the  $S_1$  that represents the subject does not stand for any kind of a positive entity, but rather stands for a minimal difference (which Lacan calls the “unary trait”), which, as we have seen, is ultimately the difference between the presence of a signifier as opposed to its absence (its place of inscription); hence  $S_1$  represents for  $S_2$  ultimately their absence as such, which is the subject (p. 24). In other words, the case is not that there are ordinary signifiers which get totalized by an exceptional signifier; but  $S_1$  as an empty/zero signifier doesn’t have a counterpart that would be a one-signifier (or the second, “binary” signifier), so that in the place of  $S_2$  an infinite multiplicity of signifiers which are substantially no different than the  $S_1$  emerge.

This is exemplified by set theory very beautifully: To derive the natural numbers, we start with the empty set (the zero) as the only element (whose definition is another problem, as we remember from Chapter 1 that Frege defined it as the set of all things that are not identical to itself), and a successor function which takes an argument and produces a successor to it. There are many ways to define a successor function, but I won’t discuss those details here and for the purposes of ease of presentation we will define the successor function as such that its output is a set that contains the elements of its input in addition to the input itself (namely as  $S(X) = X \cup \{X\}$ , which is Von Neumann’s method). This gives us an infinite series that goes like this:

$\{\}$ ,  
 $\{\ \{\}\ \}$ ,  
 $\{\ \{\}, \{\{\}\}\ \}$ ,  
 $\{\ \{\}, \{\{\}\}, \{\{\}, \{\{\}\}\}\ \}$ ,  
 $\{\ \{\}, \{\{\}\}, \{\{\}, \{\{\}\}\}, \{\{\}, \{\{\}\}, \{\{\}, \{\{\}\}\}\}\ \}$ ,  
 ...

And you can notice that, in fact, we have produced the natural numbers (size of each successive set corresponds to a natural number) only using nothing (an empty set) and a function. And the numbers are, when we examine them closely, are nothing, which has been brought into a reflexive relationship with itself. This example illustrates beautifully how a signifier, which is by definition purely differential and in itself nothing, can prop up a field without itself having a substantial status. The passage from  $S_1$  to  $S_2$  exactly reflects the passage from 0 to 1; it is not that there is zero and then we pass to something that is substantially different from the zero (a One), but rather since there is no other element than the zero, the only way we reach to one is to count zero as One (to use Badiou's terms), by processing it through the successor function. What is counted as one is in fact zero, and no matter how much we iterate this function, we never reach anything that is not written in terms of zero (empty set). This corresponds to the notion of primordial repression (*Urverdrängung*) in Lacanian psychoanalysis: The One is primordially repressed, there is no other/binary signifier that would complement the  $S_1$ , and this absence is filled up with the infinite series produced by the counting as one ( $S_2$ ) (Žižek, 2012, pp. 587-8). The successor function, the operation of counting as one, in turn corresponds to the Phallic function ( $\Phi$ ) in Lacan's framework; which stands both

for the function that defines the symbolic order and the function of symbolic castration (since because of primordial repression, there is no reference point that would stabilize the function of signification).

Therefore, the relationship  $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$  reveals itself to be the impossible meaning-relation propped up by the Phallic function, that tries to represent the subject (\$) and fails, producing a remainder (objet a). This remainder directly embodies the limit of the Symbolic field, not as an external object but directly as the immanent curvature of the Symbolic order which both animates it and makes it inconsistent; another name of which is (surplus-) *jouissance* (Žižek, 2017a, p. 19). Thus, whereas the upper level of the Master's Discourse stages this meaning-relation, the lower level stages a different one: It stages the necessary support of the meaning-relation which is called fantasy is Lacanian psychoanalysis, as that which “provides the coordinates of the subject's entire universe of meaning,” notated by the matheme  $\$ \diamond a$  (which can be read as subject's any possible relation with the objet a, *jouissance*)<sup>7</sup> (Žižek, 2017a, p. 57). This “possible” relationship, however, is possible in an absolute sense that it is always “merely possible,” hence never actualized. It is in this sense that fantasy does not “realize a desire in a hallucinatory way; rather, it constitutes our desire, provides its coordinates” (p. 65).

The reason for the confinement of this fantasmatic relation to a mere possibility is not that the subject and objet a are so substantially or radically different that they are unable to encounter each other because of their difference; but on the contrary that they

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<sup>7</sup> It's a nice coincidence that the symbol Lacan uses ( $\diamond$ ) is actually the operator of possibility in formal logic.

are ultimately *the same* (just like  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ ) but viewed from different perspectives; which is beautifully demonstrated by Deleuze as the “object= $x$ ” that appears as an excessive element from the point of view of the series of elements (objet  $a$ ) but at the same time appears as an empty place lacking an element from the point of view of the series of places ( $\$$ ) (Žižek, 2017a, pp. 18-19, 222; Žižek, 2012, p. 664). This virtual element relates and differentiates the two series without belonging to neither of them; in Deleuze’s words, “if it is in excess in the one, it is so only as an empty square; and if it is lacking in the other, it is so only as a supernumerary pawn or an occupant without a compartment. It is both word and object at once: esoteric word and exoteric object,” or in psychoanalytical terms, the  $\$$  (that is to be represented) and the objet  $a$  (the contingent excremental object arising in its place) (Deleuze, 1990, p. 51). It is in this sense that Zupančič argues that “the speaking being is the real existence of an ontological impasse;” and its connection with Kant’s transcendental I and Hegel’s substance as subject becomes more evident (Zupančič, 2017, p. 93). The subject is the pure Notion that has come into existence, paraphrasing Hegel from Science of Logic; it is a surface effect which has no substantial being, and it corresponds to the pure schematism in Kant (Hegel, 2015; Žižek, 2017a, pp. 33-4; Žižek, 2012, p. 385).

At this point we should point to a very important consequence with regard to ontological status of Zero. As we have seen the Zero that is being counted as one through the  $S_1$  is an already processed zero, i.e. the empty set has to be defined as the zero level before being able to be counted as one (recall Frege’s paradoxical definition of the empty set). This means that the zero-level of the empty set (which can be thought as a pure vacuum state) is not the pre-ontological zero level, but an already localized

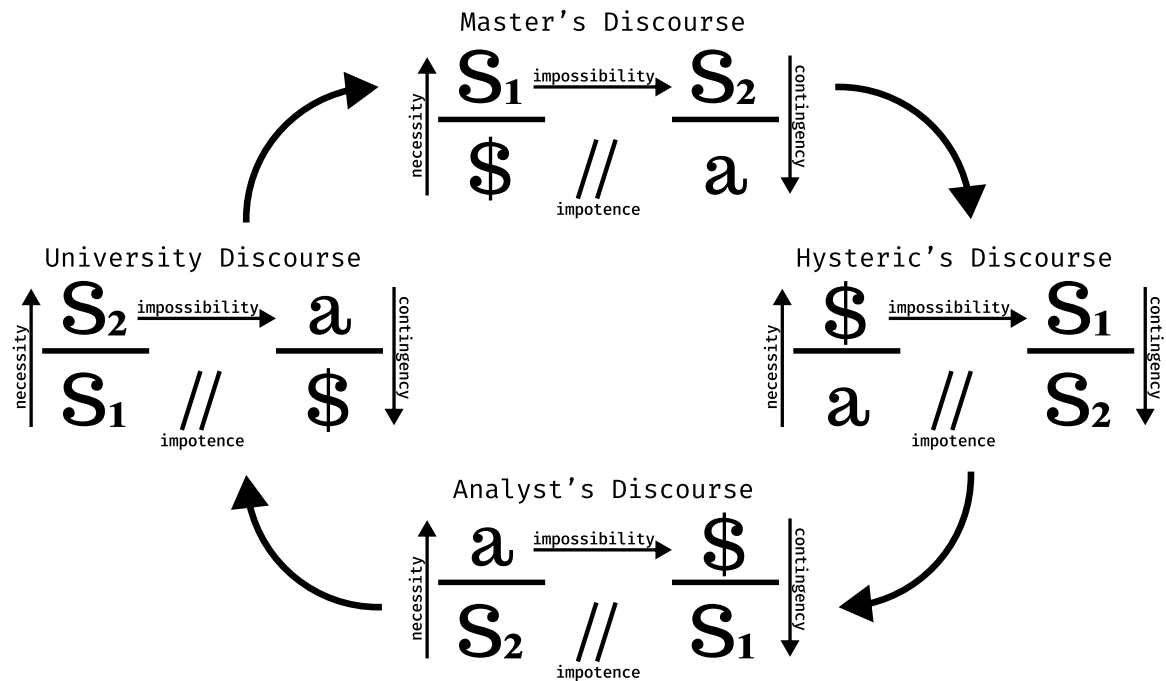
version of it. This Zero of the empty set is the Symbolic Zero, in contrast to the Real Zero of the “barred One,” the Void as the impossibility of the One which provides the “background” to this process, which is not a flat vacuum state like the Symbolic Zero, but it is the very distortion and impossibility of the field itself (e.g. Frege’s paradoxical definition) (Žižek, 2017a, p. 20). The psychoanalytical name for this primordial impossibility is death drive, understood as this immanent torsion of the Symbolic order which manifests itself as endless repetition (p. 20). In classical metaphysical terms, this demonstrates the impossibility of constructing a flat ontology that is reducible to the interplay between the Particular and the Universal ( $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ ), without employing the category of the Singular which corresponds to the underlying impossibility. Hence the “fundamental axiom of materialism,” as argued by Žižek, corresponds to the fact that Being is indistinguishable from the Void; whereas idealist metaphysics states that being is and the non-being is not, materialism states that the non-being is, as much as being (Žižek, 2012, p. 60).

Thus far, through the example of the Master’s Discourse, we have introduced all of the four elements that comprise a discourse (a, \$,  $S_1$ ,  $S_2$ ), and we also mentioned the relations that arise but didn’t name them or their places explicitly. The four places that can be occupied by an element are named Agent, Other, Product, and Truth starting from the top left, going clockwise. The relations that arise between these places can be listed as such: Necessity between the Truth and the Agent (exemplified by  $S_1/\$$  in the Master’s Discourse), impossibility between Agent and Other ( $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$  in the Master’s Discourse), contingency between the Other and the Product ( $S_2/a$  in the Master’s Discourse), and mere possibility (which is equivalent to impotence as we have argued) between the

Product and the Truth ( $\$/a$  or  $\$/\diamond a$  in Master's Discourse) (Urban, 2016, pp. 151-2).

Now we can add the other three discourses which are variations (rotations) of the

Master's Discourse, which together comprise the theory of the four discourses of Lacan:



A detailed discussion of the four discourses will take place when we introduce the unified theory of four discourses and the formulae of sexuation in the next chapter, but for now we can give a brief overview by looking at the meaning relation  $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$  in each of them and comparing the modalities this relationship takes in each discourse: As we have already seen, in the Master's Discourse, the status of the meaning-relation is impossible, making the process of signification of the subject fail and produce objet a as the objective correlate of this impossibility; in the University Discourse, the relationship is that of necessity, the knowledge necessarily follows from the notion, but price to be paid for this is the impossibility of capturing the object on the one hand, and the separation of the subject from the  $S_1$  on the other hand, which means that this discourse



erases the subject from the field in the guise of objectivity; in the Hysteric's Discourse the relationship is that of contingency, which means that the knowledge arises as a byproduct in the hysterical questioning of the Master, but this knowledge is separated from the objet a, it is the famous hysterical knowledge that "this is not it," that the Master is an impostor; and lastly, in the Analyst's Discourse, the relationship between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  is that of mere possibility or impotence, which means that this is the only discourse in which meaning-relation breaks down or suspended (Urban, 2016, pp. 154-6). And the operation of rotation that transforms one discourse to another can be conceptualized in terms of the psychoanalytical intervention that transforms a symptom (p. 156).

Shortly after the introduction of the four discourses, Lacan undertakes another great formalization attempt, namely the formulae of sexuation, this time as an explicit opposition to Aristotle's logical and metaphysical system. In a very similar degree of conviction to Aristotle who claims that anyone who doubts the principle of non-contradiction would be a "mere plant;" Lacan claims in his 19<sup>th</sup> seminar that Aristotle's metaphysics is blatantly "stupid" and anyone who could read would doubt it: "Read Aristotle's Metaphysics and I hope you'll feel, as I do, that it's incredibly stupid . . . Three or four centuries after Aristotle, people naturally began to express the most serious doubts about this text, because they still knew how to read" (quoted in Badiou & Cassin, 2017, p. 6). Lacan's primary criticism against Aristotle comes from the fact that Aristotle regards the relationship between being and jouissance as a harmonious one; as we have also seen before, he erases singularity from the (onto)logical field and posits a flat ontology based on a cosmological sexualized harmony in stark contrast to Lacan's

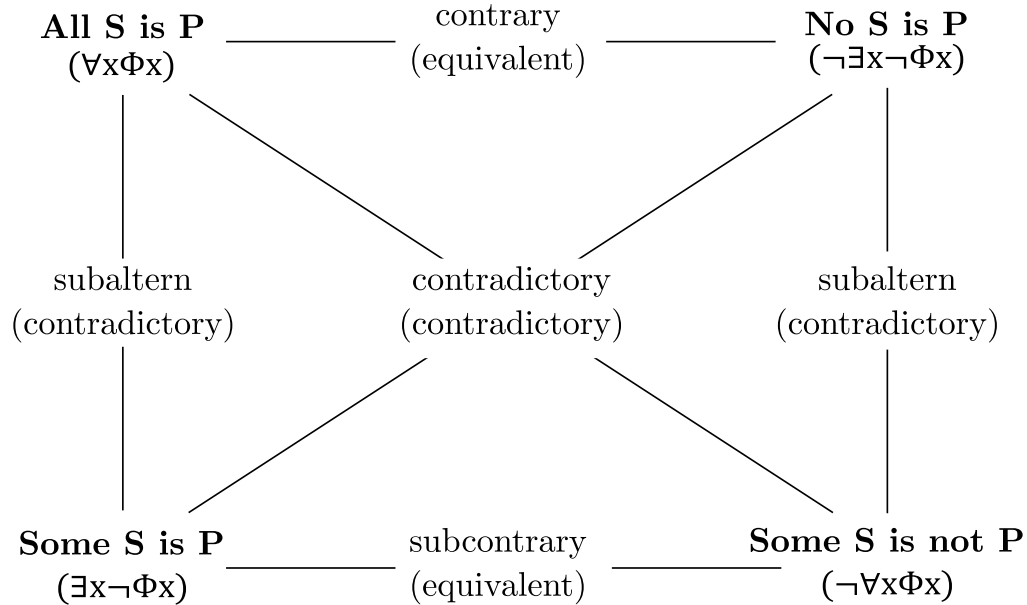
understanding which renders visible the gap and the fundamental imbalance which prevents a harmonious relationship between the Particular and the Universal (Schuster, 2016, pp. 105-6).

Up to this point we more or less used a verbose way to indicate logical propositions, but in order to be able to present Lacan's formulae of sexuation, we must introduce a couple of symbols from formal logic: the universal quantifier  $\forall$ , which can be read as "(for) all;" the existential quantifier  $\exists$  which can be read as "there exists (at least one);" and the operator of negation<sup>8</sup>  $\neg$ , which can be read as "not/non." The way Lacan writes logical propositions is non-standard but very close to usual notations: a subject in terms of a variable  $x$  which is followed by a predicate function that qualifies it; for instance, " $\forall x\Phi x$ " is read as "all  $x$  are submitted to the function  $\Phi$ " and which can be written in a more common form as " $\forall x, P(x)$ " (all  $x$  are members of the class  $P$ ) or in a more extended form, as Grigg provides: " $(\forall x)(A(x) \rightarrow P(x))$ " (for all  $x$ , if it is  $A$  then it is  $P$ ) (Grigg, 2009, p. 82). Now we can present the Aristotelian and Lacanian logical squares together and show how the Lacanian square can be derived from Aristotle's by comparing them (following the excellent arguments of Žižek and Urban):

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<sup>8</sup> Lacan uses the bar above the term to indicate negation, I use this symbol which is more generally recognized, and easier to insert into text.

### Aristotelian versus Lacanian logical square:



(Lacan's modifications are indicated in parentheses on the previously introduced Aristotelian logical square)

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the Aristotelian logical square leads to an ambiguity regarding the status of the Particular; resulting in conflicting maximal and minimal interpretations of the Particular. We have also indicated that whereas Aristotle and classical metaphysics prefers the minimal interpretation, Lacan adopted the maximal reading of the particular in the 1970s. Now let us look how this difference itself in the statements one by one: The Universal affirmation ( $\forall x\Phi x$ ) remains the same in Lacan as it was in Aristotle; but with a twist coming from C. S. Peirce's influence on Lacan, which states that the Universal quantifier doesn't imply existence, which means that  $\forall x\Phi x$  can be true even if no  $x$  exists (the famous example for it is the statement "all unicorns have one horn" which is true even though no unicorn exists; but the statement "some unicorns have one horn" is false without at least one unicorn existing) (Urban,

2016, p. 98). As for the status of the Particular affirmation, it undergoes a very radical change owing to the maximal interpretation: Since the maximal interpretation implies that the Particular affirmation contradicts the Universal affirmation (i.e. “some S are P” implies that “all S are P” is false), the statements  $\exists x\Phi x$  and  $\exists x\neg\Phi x$  becomes equivalent to each other and equally represent the Particular affirmation in the maximal sense, and Lacan prefers the negative form  $\exists x\neg\Phi x$  in order to emphasize his choice of the maximal reading. This means that the relation of subalternation between the Universal and the Particular of the same quality is replaced by contradiction. When we come to the Universal negation which would be  $\forall x\neg\Phi x$  or  $\neg\exists x\Phi x$  in Aristotle’s logic which is the contrary of  $\forall x\Phi x$ ; Lacan rewrites it as a double negation,  $\neg\exists x\neg\Phi x$  (“there is no x which is not submitted to the function”) and it becomes apparently equivalent to the Universal affirmation. And lastly, the Particular negation which would be  $\exists x\neg\Phi x$  is rewritten by Lacan as  $\neg\forall x\Phi x$  by displacing the negation from the predicate to the quantifier (hence it becomes “not-All x is submitted to the function”), implying that both  $\forall x\Phi x$  and  $\forall x\neg\Phi x$  are false, hence apparently equivalent to the Particular affirmation instead of being its subcontrary (Žižek, 2012, p. 759; Urban, 2016, p. 92; Grigg, 2009, p. 92).

In this way, we have a logical square whose two qualitative axes (affirmative and negative) of the same quantity are apparently equivalent instead of being contrary (or subcontrary) to each other; and whose quantitative axes (Universal and Particular) of the same quality are contradictory with each other instead of being related with subalternation. Hence, each qualitative axis appears to be contradictory within itself, and doesn’t present a relation to the opposite axis. These qualitative axes are what constitute the masculine logic (on the affirmative side) and the feminine logic (on the negative

side) in Lacan's formulae of sexuation. The case in the formulae of sexuation is not like that of Aristotle's logical square in which each side is fully constituted and complements/mirrors the other side, but on the contrary, both the masculine and feminine sides are contradictory within themselves, and they are indifferent to each other. The masculine side consists of the paradoxical relationship between the All and its exception (on which the All stands since the exception is the point from which the field is seen as All), whereas the feminine side stages the paradoxical relationship between the no-exception and the non-All (there is no exception, but precisely because of this the field cannot be totalized into a whole). And as we will explore in more detail later on, Lacan's division into the feminine and the masculine corresponds to the division between the mathematical and the dynamical in Kant.

Therefore, what Lacan names as sexual difference, is not the (symbolically constituted) difference between two positive terms, but it is the Real difference that cuts through the identity of each element; a difference that preexists the elements it differentiates, which corresponds to the category of the Singular as we have been exploring from the beginning of this work: It is the dimension of the death drive as pure difference, which finds its expression in Lacan's famous dictum that "there is no sexual relationship," which will be the subject matter of the next chapter before we discuss the unification of the four discourses and formulae of sexuation.

## Part II: Impossibility of One – Objet a

### 5. Sexual Difference as Real Difference

As can be seen in the manner we arrived at formulae of sexualization, without ever having a recourse to sexuality understood in the usual sense (sexual practices, genders etc.). What is indicated by the term sexual in psychoanalysis doesn't have anything to do with these things in particular, but it rather indicates a fundamental and purely formal impossibility. It is in this sense that sexuality is not ontic or substantial, but it is a formal distortion of being, which we first encountered in the form of the antinomies of pure reason, the ontological implications of which Kant couldn't accept (Žižek, 2012, pp. 739-40). The concept of the sexual difference as Real in Lacanian terms, designates the fundamental impasse of being, the impossibility of rendering it in terms of a flat harmonious ontology; or more exactly, the curvature of the Symbolic itself, which prevents it from being totalized, which results, for instance, in the four discourses as different ways to deal with this impossibility (Zupančič, 2017, p. 22). This means that there is no fundamental link between sexual difference understood in the Lacanian sense and the usual understanding of sexuality, genders, sexual practices; their connection is purely external and contingent in the sense that sexual difference is the main impossibility and the different practices, identities etc. proliferate against this impossible background<sup>9</sup> (Žižek, 2020b, p. 110; Zupančič, 2017, p. 6). In other words, it is because

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<sup>9</sup> One should note that it is not only that "sexual" identities and practices follow from this impossibility, but also that there are no symbolic phenomena which does not follow from the Real of sexual difference; therefore the implications of ontological impossibility can be extended into other fields,

there is no sexual relationship that many forms of sexuality, sexual identities, sexual practices emerge in the place of this missing element (recall the primordial repression, the lack of a binary complement to  $S_1$  which results in the proliferation of  $S_2$ ); as Zupančič puts it “it is only the inexistence of the relation that opens up the space for relationships and ties as we know them” (Zupančič, 2017, p. 24). In other words, since “sexuality as such is queer” as Žižek puts it, which means that sexuality in-itself doesn’t exist, there is nothing that cannot be sexualized, which is exemplified very beautifully by the 4chan<sup>10</sup> wisdom called “rule 34” which states that “if it exists, there is porn of it” (Žižek, 2022, p. 157). We can extend this by stating that there is porn of everything but there is no pure porn as the thing itself, even the most “normal” or “ordinary” sex implies a fantasmatic frame.

It is in this sense that sexual difference, understood as ontological incompleteness, the absence of a harmonious relationship, reveals itself not to be sexual at all when considered in itself. This is confirmed by the fact that objet a, the object-cause of desire which is also the stumbling block of the relationship as jouissance, in other words, the embodiment of the impossibility of sexual relation, is in fact asexual, or more properly non-sexual (Zupančič, 2017, p. 24). This fundamental impossibility is what gets repeated in every attempt of positivization in the form of a symbolic identity or relationship; and

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which is one of the main tenets of the Ljubljana School’s reading. This will come into play especially in Part III when we examine the political and the sociological implications of this theory.

<sup>10</sup> 4chan.org is an anonymous imageboard that nurtured a distinct culture which is the source of most internet memes as well as the “meme culture” itself.

the proper Lacanian name of this repetition of the impossibility that sets in motion the process of symbolization is death drive.

At this point it is necessary to clarify the status of the concept of death drive and define it formally, in order to prevent any kind of misunderstanding that would regard it as a substantial entity, just as we did regarding sexual difference. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, in a similar way to the decoupling of the sexual from the usual understanding of sexuality, death drive has no connection to “real” death (which actually has an imaginary status in Lacanian psychoanalysis), nor does it imply a destructive instinct as it would suggest at first sight, although we should note that in Freud it indeed originated as a counterpart to the life-drives (Thanatos against Eros). The proper Lacanian concept of death drive is purely formal, understood as the self-repetition of ontological negativity (the singular), which corresponds to pure repetition, not as repetition of something, but repetition in an absolute sense, the repetition of negativity/impossibility itself (Zupančič, 2017, p. 117). Any particular drive is an embodiment of this pure repetition, all partial drives (as well as desire) are in a sense driven by death drive as their immanent split; for instance, a partial drive that repeats the surplus-satisfaction derived from the autoerotic relation to an erogenous zone (e.g. sucking) in fact repeats negativity itself, namely the impossibility of a “successful” repetition materialized as the objet a as the object of drive (p. 103). That’s why Lacan states that “every drive is virtually a death drive,” and as Zupančič shows, this can be reconciled with Freud’s conviction that all drives are sexual: There is no sexual drive as such (i.e. in a full genital sense), and all partial drives are “sexual” in the sense that they all repeat this negativity/impossibility; in other words what is sexual in them is not their



content (there is no sexual content as such) but their form that is constituted in relation to this negativity which makes them sexualized (Zupančič, 2017 pp. 101, 104).

It is in this sense that the concept of primal repression (*Urverdrängung*) is also to be understood: It is true that ordinary (secondary) repressions presuppose a primal repression; but it is not the case that primal repression occurs “before” the secondary repressions in a developmental sense (for instance in the sense of an original trauma), it is rather that every secondary repression presupposes a fundamental impossibility that initiates the process of repression, they already emerge against the background of ontological negativity (which in a sense means that original trauma is the fundamental ontological impossibility itself, which is not a developmental/diachronic phenomenon) (Schuster, 2016, p. 66).

What the formulae of sexuation inscribes is the two ways this ontological deadlock (the ontological minus One in Zupančič’s terms, as the impossibility of the One) is inscribed in the Symbolic order, the ways it manifests itself in subjectivity (Zupančič, 2017 p. 50; Žižek, 2012, p. 745). This means that sexual difference is Real and impossible, not in the sense that there is an ideal or norm that is unreachable, but in the sense that the ideal/norm itself is contradictory (Žižek, 2012, p. 748). That’s why the formulae of sexuation, far from being a substantialization of the traditional masculine and feminine principles (as in the sexualized cosmology of classical metaphysics), undermine every form of stable gender identity from within (Žižek, 2017a, p. 55). Contrary to the traditional principle of two opposing cosmic forces (corresponding to the masculine and feminine), the psychoanalytical understanding of sexuation states that

there is only one sex and its impossibility which appears as the other sex; in other words, the two sexes do not add up to a Two, their matrix is that of the One (man) plus its impossibility (woman), which can be written as  $1+a$  (Žižek, 2012, p. 769). It is in this sense, revising the famous Lacanian dictum that the Woman doesn't exist, Žižek claims that "it is not just that woman doesn't exist, woman is the nonexistence of man" (Žižek, 2017a, p. 66).

Consequently, the subject's fundamental orientation towards objectivity, which designates its relationship to the big Other understood both in the sense of the Symbolic order and that which guarantees its consistency, is determined by its position in the formulae of sexuation: Whereas the masculine position regards the big Other as the exception which guarantees the consistency of the field ( $\exists x \neg \Phi x, \forall x \Phi x$ ), in the feminine position the impossibility of the Other to totalize itself is inscribed into the Other in the form of the non-All, although (or precisely because) there are no exceptions to it ( $\neg \exists x \neg \Phi x, \neg \forall x \Phi x$ ) (Zupančič, 2017, p. 53). That's why the masculine relation to the Other involves a constitutive exception whereas the feminine relation involves a constitutive deception, hence the essence of femininity is masquerade (p. 54). We can see this in the different modalities of the adoption of a symbolic title: Whereas the masculine way is to retain a minimal distance between the symbolic title and the presumed "real person" behind "the mask"; in the feminine side there is no exception, hence there is nothing which is not a mask, which means there is nothing behind the mask, the nothing which is the subject in its pure state (Žižek, 2017a, p. 88).

This is the reason why the masculine belief is in fact cynical whereas the feminine pretension is ultimately authentic (Zupančič, 2017, p. 57). Žižek demonstrates this beautifully by showing that whereas men believe to be merely pretending to be men, women pretend to believe that they are women; resulting in the situation that masculine belief to pretend gets caught up in its own game and actually serves to maintain the belief in the guise that it's mere pretension, whereas the feminine pretension to believe results in an authentic engagement with the belief and its possible undermining because there is no gap that would separate the subject from its engagement (Žižek, 2017a, p. 66). This can be further exemplified by the couple of religion and science: Whereas religious practice consists in a pretension to believe (e.g. assuming that there is a knowledge that transcends the believer, and acting as if it is true without encountering it or its proof directly), the scientific practice consists of a belief to pretend (e.g. assuming that certain hypotheses are true and testing them in order to falsify them). This results in a difference in the status of the surplus-knowledge in the masculine and feminine logics, namely the difference between knowledge as religious *gnosis* and knowledge as the endless self-overcoming of science (p. 161).

In order to explicate this duality of two logics further, we can look at how anxiety manifests itself in its masculine and feminine forms: Whereas the masculine anxiety consists in a traditional understanding of “castration anxiety,” as the anxiety of losing the thing that matters (traditionally, phallus), without ever threatening the being of man (because man believes that he exists); the feminine anxiety consists in the anxiety of being nothing, because the feminine side is the side of the subject in its pure state (which

is nothing), hence it can be argued that the true anxiety is in fact feminine (Zupančič, 2017, p. 56).

Overall, the masculine logic is the logic of totalization through the positing of an exceptional “highest” element, which can be seen in the transcendental idea of God in Kant, the figure of the Monarch who totalizes the state by embodying it in Hegel, or the notion of money as the general equivalent which totalizes the field of commodities as a commodity which directly embodies value (whose use value is its exchange value) in Marx; whereas the feminine logic is the logic of the impossibility of totalization which doesn’t posit an exception but a non-All that reveals itself in the paradoxical “lowest” element embodying the impossibility of the field itself, as can be seen in Hegel as Rabble (Pöbel), the class of pauperized people that emerges as the unavoidable outcome of modern society, which later develops into the proletariat in Marx, as those that do not own the means of production and have nothing to sell but their labour-power, or again in Marx, labour-power as a paradoxical “lowest” commodity whose use value is to generate value (Marx, 1976; Žižek, 2014, p. 362). To give a mathematical example, the masculine exception is like an asymptote (an example which Lacan also uses), which is not a part of the function but delineates the limit of the function as a positive entity, it can be represented positively as separate from the function; whereas the feminine non-All is like the “borders” of a fractal, which also in a sense delineates the fractal, but at the same time it is the fractal itself, which cannot be represented positively or as separate from the fractal. In the case of the masculine logic, what it stages is the “pure signifier”  $S_1$  that is the exceptional element which totalizes the field; and in the case of feminine

logic, what it stages is the contingent/excremental object which is the objet a embodying the impossibility of the field itself (p. 368).

This discussion at last brings us to the unification of the four discourses and the formulae of sexuation, first undertaken by Žižek in *Less than Nothing*, and excellently systematized and elaborated by Urban in *Lacan and Meaning*, both of which are constant references of this work. We have already touched upon numerous conclusions that point to the connection between the two in this work, and now we can present the table of the unified theory of four discourses and the formulae of sexuation as following (Žižek, 2012, p. 794; Urban, 2016, pp. 144-8; Žižek, 2003, p. 274):

Masculine / Dynamical / Regulative	Feminine / Mathematical / Constitutive
$\forall X \Phi X$ (masculine All) University Discourse: $\begin{array}{ccc} \uparrow \text{necessity} & \frac{S_2}{S_1} \xrightarrow{\text{impossibility}} \frac{a}{\$} & \downarrow \text{contingency} \\ & // & \\ & \text{impotence} & \end{array}$ Consistent - Inauthentic ens rationis ( $S_2/S_1$ )	$\neg \exists X \neg \Phi X$ (feminine no-exception) Hysteric's Discourse: $\begin{array}{ccc} \uparrow \text{necessity} & \frac{\$}{a} \xrightarrow{\text{impossibility}} \frac{S_1}{S_2} & \downarrow \text{contingency} \\ & // & \\ & \text{impotence} & \end{array}$ Inconsistent - Authentic ens imaginarium ( $\$/a$ )
$\exists X \neg \Phi X$ (masculine exception) Master's Discourse: $\begin{array}{ccc} \uparrow \text{necessity} & \frac{S_1}{\$} \xrightarrow{\text{impossibility}} \frac{S_2}{a} & \downarrow \text{contingency} \\ & // & \\ & \text{impotence} & \end{array}$ Inconsistent - Inauthentic nihil privativum ( $S_1/\$$ )	$\neg \forall X \Phi X$ (feminine non-All) Analyst's Discourse: $\begin{array}{ccc} \uparrow \text{necessity} & \frac{a}{S_2} \xrightarrow{\text{impossibility}} \frac{\$}{S_1} & \downarrow \text{contingency} \\ & // & \\ & \text{impotence} & \end{array}$ Consistent - Authentic nihil negativum ( $a/S_2$ )

Now, let us summarize the results: Masculine universality corresponds to the University discourse, in which knowledge ( $S_2$ ), in the guise of pursuit of objectivity ( $a$ ) that always remains beyond reach, actually serves the empty/contingent Master ( $S_1$ ), and this process results in the production of the subject as absent, erased from the field ( $S_1//\$$ ). Since it renders the meaning-relation between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  as necessary and totalizes the field ( $\forall x \Phi x$ ), it implies that the University discourse is a discourse in which

subject (which can be thought as the lack of the field) does not take place; which means that this discourse cannot produce anything new, and can only repeat itself in the framework given to it by the Master ( $S_1$ ). Which means that its truth is the Master, and that's why the University discourse is self-consistent but inauthentic. This is characterized by an attitude of false neutrality-objectivity which states that since  $S_2$  follows necessarily from  $S_1$ , the subject is not involved in the scenario. This discourse can be observed in various examples; obviously it is a main tenet of its namesake, the university with its claim to impartial knowledge, but it can be also observed in different contexts such as discourses of technocracy or rational administration (which were analyzed by Foucault as the power-knowledge complex). One should also add that this is the discourse of the university but it is not properly the discourse of science: It is true that there is an overwhelming amount of "scientific" discourse that basically make a claim to objectivity and operate in a pre-delineated zone in a dogmatic way; but this is not the properly scientific mode of operation as the point where science overcomes itself (examples of which were given in the first chapter), rather it is the result of the later neutralization/normalization of the properly scientific breakthrough as University discourse. And lastly, with regard to Kant's classification of four nothings, the masculine universal corresponds to the *ens rationis* (the concept without object) as  $S_1/S_2$ , which designates a pure thing of thought (*Gedankending*) like God or soul.

Second, the masculine exception corresponds to the Master's discourse which we already discussed in more detail earlier; the  $\exists x \neg \Phi x$  stands for the arbitrary intervention of the Master ( $S_1$ ) which inaugurates or terminates the field (hence opening up a new one), it is the gesture upon which the masculine universality of the University discourse

stands (hence the  $S_2/S_1$  of the University discourse can also be written as  $\forall x\Phi x/\exists x\neg\Phi x$ ). But as we have seen, this discourse also fails to stabilize itself because the gesture of the master is empty, arbitrary, it stands on nothing ( $S_1/\$$ ), in other words, every Master is necessarily an impostor; which makes the meaning-relation between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  impossible, and produces the contingent objet a as the embodiment of its impasse. This is why the masculine exception or the Master's discourse is both inconsistent and inauthentic. What is known in computer science as the halting condition, which is the point where an algorithm "finds" its result and terminates, is a good example of the contingent status of the masculine exception ( $\exists x\neg\Phi x$ ): As Turing's halting problem shows, although an algorithm has a halting condition logically (for instance, we can check that it is really programmed to stop when it finds the solution), we cannot know if this algorithm will halt in a finite amount of time or go into an infinite loop when executed, without actually waiting for it to halt. This means that we can know that an algorithm halts when it actually terminates, but we cannot know the inverse; namely if an algorithm doesn't terminate, we cannot know if it will go on ad infinitum or maybe finally halt after running for 1 googol years. The status of the relationship between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  (halting condition and the algorithm) is undecidable in this discourse and the only way to "decide" is to wait for a contingent output (a). This example also connects us to the status of masculine exception in Kant's four nothings as *nihil privativum* as  $S_1/\$$ , which as we have seen designates a point in which the content of the field cancels itself (e.g. destructive interference of the waves), and this also corresponds perfectly to the halting condition understood as the point where the algorithm terminates itself.



Passing to the feminine side, the third logic is that of the feminine no-exception which corresponds to the Hysteric's discourse. This discourse is best understood in contrast to the Master's discourse, because the Hysteric's discourse is in a sense a response to the Master's discourse, as it stages the truth of the Master's discourse, which is the fact that the Master is not really exceptional, but it is only an impostor. Hence the no-exception ( $\neg \exists x \neg \Phi x$ ) of this logic states that there is no one (Master) that is not submitted to the function (that is not castrated). The hysterical subject (\$) represents the necessary lack (a) to the Master ( $S_1$ ) which reveals its impossibility, its status as an impostor and in turn results in the negative knowledge which states that "that's not it" ( $a/S_2$ ). It is in this sense that the feminine no-exception of the Hysteric's discourse is authentic but inconsistent, it reveals the Master's falsity in an authentic gesture, but the status of knowledge is contingent upon the Master, so it cannot be made it into a closed system. In addition to the well-known hysterical provocation, this logic also exemplifies the proper mode of operation of science (in contrast to the University discourse which is its normalization), in which the radically new emerges not from adherence to a framework but from the ceaseless questioning and the undermining of the prevalent doxa. This is valid for science in the most general sense of the term, including proper philosophy and theory; which is exemplified by Lacan's statement that "hysterics produce knowledge" as they "force signifying matter to confess," regarding Socrates' employment of the Hysteric's discourse (as well as his hysterical symptoms such as catatonia), or his presentation of Hegel as "the most sublime of all hysterics" (Lacan, 2013c, p. 5; Žižek, 2017a, p. 4). But, as we have seen, although this discourse exposes the falsity of the Master through its provocations, it is unable to persist without a Master

which functions as its Other. This means that although this discourse is necessary to break out from the prevailing doxa of the Master, it is not enough by itself since it cannot sustain itself without a Master; which, in turn, indicates that this is not all of the logic of science and philosophy, that there is a further discourse that must be taken into account.<sup>11</sup> But before continuing into the last discourse, we should locate the feminine no-exception or the Hysteric's discourse in Kant's four nothings: As the pure form of subject considered in the absence of a positive form of identification (the famous "*che vuoi*"), the feminine no-exception stands for the *ens imaginarium* (the pure form of intuition, viz. pure space and pure time) indicated as  $\$/a$ .

Lastly, the feminine non-All ( $\neg\forall x\Phi x$ ), the logic which informs the entirety of this field, the ground on which these logics of sexuation and the four discourses are played out; corresponds to the Analyst's discourse (which means that the representations of these fields are in no sense neutral/impartial/objective: on the contrary, the field of sexuation appears as such only from the perspective of the non-All, or similarly, the ground of the analysis of the four discourses is already the Analyst's discourse). The non-All is the truth of the feminine no-exception in the sense that it takes the impossibility which was uncovered in a negative form by the Hysteric's discourse, and turns into a positive form, affirms the ontological negativity directly; this results in the proposition that it is the field itself which is inconsistent. In this discourse, the embodied

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<sup>11</sup> Lacan also notes this by stating that Socrates was not purely a hysteric but he was a "subtle master," a term that corresponds to the Analyst, as clarified by the following remarks that state that Socrates wasn't a "bad analyst" (Lacan, 2013c, p. 5). It is in this sense that we can understand the difference between the masculine false Master and the feminine true Master: Whereas the masculine Master keeps its followers in a state of permanent tutelage; the true Master, namely the Analyst ultimately tries to undermine the relationship of tutelage, it is a figure that makes the follower encounter the fact that there is no need for a Master, and "forces" them to be autonomous.

or objectified knowledge ( $a/S_2$ , e.g. analyst as a subject supposed to know) reveals itself to be impossible to the subject, which results in the contingent production of the Master-Signifier as separated from the chain of ordinary signifiers ( $S_2//S_1$ ), as a meaningless empty term; thus this discourse abolishes the meaning-relation between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  by isolating the  $S_1$  and showing its status as arbitrary. As such it is both authentic and consistent (not in the usual sense, but through its admittance of the field being non-All). This discourse is the point where the impossibility of the field is inscribed into the system itself, and as such it is the proper moment of scientific, theoretical, as well as political (as we will see later) revolution; examples of which we gave such as Cantor, Gödel, Einstein and Copenhagen School, to which we can add Hegel with his radicalization of Kant through the ontologization of the antinomies in philosophy, Marx's discovery of the immanent impossibility of capitalism in the domain of political economy, and of course, Lacan's theory with its successors such as Ljubljana school that make possible this very reading. Lastly, the nothing that the non-All or the Analyst's discourse corresponds to is the *nihil negativum* (as the empty object without notion, which is a self-cancelling non-thing, *Unding*) denoted as  $a/S_2$ , which corresponds beautifully to the self-cancelling of the Analyst as the subject supposed to know through the liquidation of transference.

Now we can clearly see that the masculine side stages the tension between the All (University discourse) and its exception (Master's discourse), which can be thought in terms of the discord between the Universal and the Particular; the feminine side stages the tension between the no-exception (Hysteric's discourse) and non-All (Analyst's discourse), which can be understood as the relationship between the singular in a

negative sense and the singular in an affirmative sense (denying a predicate versus affirming a non-predicate). In Hegelian terminology, whereas the masculine side involves the conflict of logics of Being and Essence, the feminine side involves the conflict of logic of Notion. One is even tempted to construct a dialectical sequence following the four moments of Hegel's "triad" of logic of reflection: First, Master's discourse as the *positing reflection*; then its renormalization/externalization through the University discourse which is the moment of *external reflection*; afterwards, the "solution" of the conflict between the first two moments in the no-exception of the Hysteric's discourse which is the moment of *determinate reflection* as the vanishing mediator (\$); and lastly, the non-All of the Analyst's discourse which transforms the impossibility into a positive term, objet a, as the *reflexive determination*. This quadripartite structure of the four discourses and the formulae of sexuation presents a very succinct matrix of formalization of Lacanian psychoanalysis. And as such, it allows us to reevaluate and systematize the psychoanalytical clinical concepts in its light, as well as providing us with a theoretical framework to understand various social and political phenomena. In the following chapters, I will first delve into the issue of clinical categorization and symptomal structures with its relation to ethics, and afterwards in the Part III of the work, I will examine the overall implication of our discussion regarding politics and sociology.

## 6. Clinical Structures Revisited

This is definitely not a clinical or clinically oriented work, neither does it directly consider implications for clinical practice, but rather, the application and discussion of the clinical concepts serve only the purpose of demonstrating the role of the unified theory for understanding symptomatic structures and the theory of the psychoanalytical act, which are concepts that help us transition to the application and the consequences of this theory in the social and political domain. That's why we will only consider some major division points regarding the fundamental status of clinical entities, such as the status of psychosis, the relation of clinical structures with sexualization, and the question of transitivity between different clinical structures; all of which have important consequences regarding the discussion of ethics and politics that will come afterwards.

We can start out by giving a brief overview of the clinical structures as they are generally understood in the Lacanian psychoanalytical clinic (which has its basis mostly in the early and middle periods of Lacan): The main division is usually located in between neuroses (obsessional neurosis and hysteria) which are based on the mechanism of repression (*Verdrängung*) and psychosis which is based on the mechanism of foreclosure (*Verwerfung*); but this division is complicated with perversion as the additional “more problematic and less secure” third category, defined by Verhaeghe as “unquestionably one of the most difficult of the clinical categories,” which is based on the mechanism of disavowal (*Verleugnung*) (Grigg, 2009, p. 3; Verhaeghe, 2008, p. 397). In this view, neurosis is characterized by (“secondary”) repression (*Verdrängung*) in which a disturbing signifier is excluded from the signifying chain (i.e. in Freudian

terms, a disturbing memory or idea is banished from consciousness), but the repressed signifier returns as a symptomal formation; whereas psychosis is characterized by foreclosure (*Verwerfung*) which indicates that a special signifier (Name-of-the-Father, which can more or less be thought as  $S_1$  or  $\Phi$ , although it is a very early conceptualization, so it is not directly compatible with Lacan's later theorizations of  $S_1$  and  $\Phi$ ) is not installed and the Symbolic order becomes absolutized without leaving a space for the subject's desire to be articulated (which is a model based on norm and deficit as we will see later); and lastly perversion is characterized by disavowal which means that although the disturbing element is admitted into the consciousness, its symbolic efficiency is cancelled out (disavowed) which makes the pervert consciousness to be able to hold contradictory ideas simultaneously (to give a classic Freudian example: "I know that women do not have penises but nevertheless I believe that my mother has one," (Fink, 2003, pp. 52, 62).

What makes this traditional conceptualization of the Lacanian clinic problematic is twofold: On the one hand, the three (or two plus one) clinical structures are characterized so separately that any question of a structural relationship between them is abolished, and furthermore when we closely examine it, we see that the clinic is in fact only or predominantly concerned with neuroses, and its attitude towards psychosis and perversion at best takes the form of a therapeutic approach aiming to alleviate suffering rather than a full-blown psychoanalytical intervention, and at worst it takes the form of a conviction that psychotics and/or perverts are unanalyzable, they are partially or completely out of the scope of psychoanalysis (which also has very dire ethical implications). This amounts to saying that psychoanalytical clinic is in fact only a clinic

of neurosis, and psychoanalysis is ultimately a theory of neuroses; which is no different than arguing that “we” neurotics are curably mad but “them” psychotics are “really” mad (which in turn justifies psychiatric institutionalization, medication and other forms of administration of the “really mad;” which is another main point discussed in depth by Foucault) (Foucault, 1961). And, on the other hand, this approach, perhaps because it is primarily concerned with practice or practicability of psychoanalysis in a clinical context, usually prefers Lacan’s earlier periods, or the Freudian and developmental readings of his work, which in turn renders the late theory of Lacan and his later formalizations either completely irrelevant, or, at most, relevant insofar as they are compatible with the already established doxa of a given clinical practice. It goes without saying that this work takes the exact opposite side in this discussion: I argue that Lacanian framework and his formalizations aim at a general theory that includes all possible clinical structures, not only neuroses, and his later formalizations provide a key to understanding these structures in interrelationship.

In order to demonstrate this point and prepare the ground for our subsequent discussion of psychosis, introducing Vanheule’s overview of Lacan’s different eras regarding his understanding of psychosis could be very helpful: In his excellent work titled *The Subject of Psychosis*, Vanheule demonstrates through a detailed reading that the status of psychosis had undergone major changes throughout Lacan’s life, and these different conceptualizations are not fully compatible with one another. Lacan started to work on psychosis very early on; he wrote his doctoral thesis on Aimée and her psychosis while he was still a psychiatrist during the 1930s (the period which we called “imaginary Lacan” following Urban before). After he properly commenced his

psychoanalytic teaching, in the 1950s (the structuralist period of “symbolic Lacan”), Lacan gave one of his very earlier seminars (3<sup>rd</sup> seminar) on psychosis, in which he elaborated the theory of the Name-of-the-Father and its foreclosure in psychosis which still forms the reference point of many clinically oriented Lacanians. But the development of his understanding of psychosis didn’t stop there (although there is a large gap between these two periods when Lacan doesn’t really speak about psychosis), and in the 1960s (the beginning of “real Lacan”), with the shift of focus to the Real and the establishment of the objet a as impossible-real jouissance, Lacan started to understand psychosis in terms of the non-separation of the objet a from the subject, and with his increasing efforts of formalization during 1960s and 1970s (four discourses, formulae of sexuation, topology, knot theory) Lacan reached to his last conceptualization of psychosis in his 23<sup>rd</sup> seminar on James Joyce, which states that different clinical structures are not substantially different, they are just different ways of knotting the Real, Symbolic, and the Imaginary; so that the Name-of-the-Father is revealed to be not a fundamental signifier but simply a neurotic symptom (Vanheule, 2011, pp. 3-4). This view overturns the idea of absolute separation of psychosis and neurosis, namely that neurotics have access to the Name-of-the-Father whereas psychotics foreclose it and cannot make use it (which is a deficit model based on the norm of the Name-of-the-Father), and instead shows us that there is no Name-of-the-Father as such, that foreclosure in a sense comes first, and the neurotic symptom called the Name-of-the-Father is just one way amongst many to try to deal with the fundamental ontological impossibility of knotting the RSI together. We will further elaborate on this later when we discuss the transitivity of the structures; but it has to be



noted in advance that this late understanding in no way entails a continuum between different structures or a denial of the fact that there are different structures; it rather questions and tries to show how these very different and heterogeneous structures arise from the same impossibility.

Thus, at one side, we have the more traditionally oriented clinic which views the different clinical structures as more or less exclusive categories and limits itself to dealing with neuroses, and on the other side we have the theories that follow Lacan's insights from his later periods that try to account for all symptomatic structures. The most important effect of this division for this work regards the status of the four discourses and the formulae of sexualization: Verhaeghe, who is in the first group, openly claims that the "psychotic remains outside the discourses, that is to say, outside the social bonds as determined by the four discourses," that none of the discourses function in psychosis (Verhaeghe, 2008, p. 435). In the light of what we have established in this work, starting from Aristotelian contradictions and tracing them in philosophy until we reached Lacan and the continuation of his theory, we can see that claims like Verhaeghe's claim amount not only to an exclusion of psychotics from the limited scope of psychoanalytical clinical intervention, but to a denial of status of psychotics as proper subjects (at most, they are considered a deficient mode of neuroses), and thusly, their exclusion from logic and metaphysics (and as we will argue later, from ethics) altogether. Besides the scandalous implications regarding the status of madness (and the types of intervention that it legitimizes), this view also makes the Lacanian theory very minimal and modest: clinic can intervene properly only to neuroses, the four discourses apply only to neurotics etc. This makes one wonder, what would they say regarding the

status of sexuation of psychotics: Would they argue that psychotics are not sexuated or better yet, “free” from sexual difference? Because as we have seen in the unified theory, if they are not submitted to the four discourses, they are not submitted to the formulae of sexuation. But then, this makes them also not submitted to castration as such, because the formulae of sexuation (as well as the four discourses) inscribe the way that castration is manifested in the Symbolic order. I know that there are those who really go as far as claiming that the psychotic subject is not castrated or not divided. Luckily for our argument, Lacan made plenty of remarks throughout all his life that reasserted the fact that he is not one of those who see psychosis and neurosis as substantially different, and he is in fact trying to produce a theory of the subject as such, not this type or that type of subject; exemplified beautifully by the anecdote in which when he was questioned by Jacques-Alain Miller regarding the subjective status of the psychotics, he simply repeated his formula of the signifier for the “standard” subject, indicating that there is no difference at that level: “In paranoia the signifier represents a subject for another signifier” (Vanheule, 2011, pp. 47-8). Lacan, in various points in his teaching, but especially in his later period when he revisited psychosis, asserted that neurosis is not the sole concern and psychoanalysis should not back away from psychosis (Grigg, 2009, p. 5). Furthermore, during his last teachings in the mid-1970s, he reached the point where language as such appears as a generalized form of madness: “it is from language that we hold this madness that there is being” (Vanheule, 2011, p. 42; Lacan, 2013a, p. 14).

The present work follows this premise and aims to locate psychosis (as well as other clinical structures) within the coordinates provided by the unified theory of four

discourses and formulae of sexuation. In order to do this, first we will discuss psychosis with regard to Lacan's late period and the conceptualizations that emerged from it, such as the category of ordinary psychosis. After that we will discuss the possible sexuation of the clinical structures and try to locate them within the unified theory.

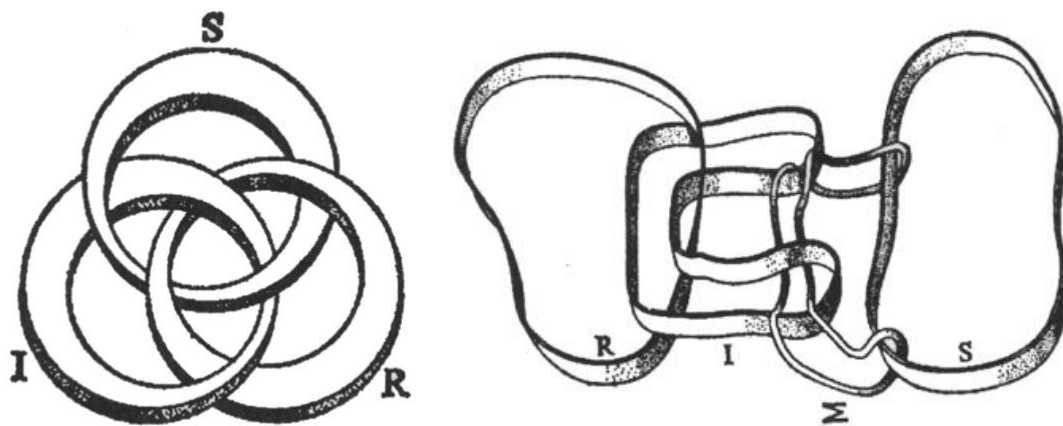
The generalized madness that Lacan mentions is not exactly a new idea; Hegel already states that insanity (the famous "night of the world") has logical priority over normality, that madness is fundamentally constitutive of the human mind: "insanity must be discussed before the healthy, intellectual consciousness, although it has that consciousness for its presupposition" (Žižek, 2020b, p. 346; Žižek, 2012, p. 349). Žižek lays out the Lacanian theoretical justification for this generalization of foreclosure succinctly by demonstrating the coincidence of *Verwerfung* (foreclosure) with the *Bejahung* (opposite of foreclosure, the "normal" affirmation of the Name-of-the-Father) through the concept of *Ausstosung* (the expulsion/primal repression that founds the Symbolic): It is not that there is a proper functioning of the Symbolic order and the subject either accepts (*Bejahung*) and becomes neurotic, or rejects (*Verwerfung*) and becomes a psychotic; it is rather that even at the zero-level of the Symbolic order there is a fundamental rejection, the *Ausstosung* as the fundamental impossibility of the Symbolic, which is not at all distinguishable from *Verwerfung* (Žižek, 2012, pp. 859-60). This can be formulated in a Hegelian way: *Ausstosung* is the speculative identity of *Bejahung* and *Verwerfung*. This means that there is no pure *Bejahung*, in other words, there is no *Ausstosung* without *Verwerfung*, which is a consequence of the Lacanian principle that "there is no Other of the Other" (if pure *Bejahung* or the true Name-of-the-Father existed, it would function as an Other of the Other, the guarantee of the Other's

consistency). It is in this sense that Žižek concludes that “as the late Lacan knew very well, this implies that, at a certain most basic level, we are all psychotics” (p. 863).

To explore this issue further, we will look at the change in the status of psychosis in Lacan’s teaching. Since the early days, Lacan understood psychosis through the “as if” phenomena he took from Deutsch, and uses the concept of suppletion (*suppléance*) to characterize the psychotic symptom, although his understanding of suppletion undergoes radical changes. As Grigg argues, suppletion takes three forms in Lacan: First, imaginary suppletion, defined as the substitution of an imaginary identification for the absence of the signifier; later, the delusional metaphor, as the installation of a delusion (a la Schreber) that stabilizes the psychotic’s symbolic universe; and lastly, symbolic suppletion, seen in the figures like Joyce and Cantor, that establishes the social bond (discourse) in the form of artistic, theoretical, or scientific work (Grigg, 2009, pp. 16-7, 22). Especially after his 22<sup>nd</sup> seminar RSI and his 23<sup>rd</sup> seminar on Joyce and the sinthome, Lacan is pretty explicit in the point that he is developing a general theory of the symptom, both of neurosis and psychosis; and the generalization of foreclosure means that it is not that neurosis is the normal state and foreclosure comes after, but on the contrary that foreclosure is primordial and neurosis with its symptom as the Name-of-the-Father comes afterwards. In other words, neurosis and psychosis are nothing but different answers to generalized foreclosure as “the universal condition of the symptom,” which is primordial repression as the fundamental ontological impasse (pp. 19-20, 24). This change shows itself in Lacan’s abandonment the model of the pure Borromean knot as the linking of the RSI (in which foreclosure appears as the failure of Borromean linking of RSI), and his introduction of the sinthome ( $\Sigma$ ) as the fourth ring to

in addition to the R, S and I, hence making the four-ring structure default (Grigg, 2009, p. 20; Vanheule, 2011, pp. 161, 165-6; Svolos, 2017, p. 149). This addition of the fourth ring indicates that the Name-of-the-Father is nothing but a specific form of the sinthome, that psychotics can invent other forms of knotting than the Name-of-the-Father.

Therefore, its status as the primary diagnostic criterion is abolished; in Vanheule's words, this means that "neurosis is not the standard, but an exception in relation to what [Lacan] considers as more common, that is, a mode of subjectivity in which the Name-of-the-Father does not play a centrally organizing role, meaning psychosis" (Vanheule, 2011, pp. 161, 162-3). In his late years Lacan goes as far as claiming to be psychotic by stating that "psychosis is an attempt at rigor. In that sense, I would say that I am psychotic. I am psychotic for the sole reason that I always tried to be rigorous;" and when he was further questioned by those who were scandalized by this statement, he replied that "if I were more psychotic, I would probably be a better analyst" (p. 163).



(The impossible "pure" Borromean knotting of the ISR on the left (Lacan, 2013a), and an example of a four-ring structure with  $\Sigma$  added on the right (Lacan, 2013c).)

The post-Lacanian clinical invention of the category of ordinary psychosis (as different from “extraordinary” psychoses exemplified by schizophrenia, mania, melancholia and paranoia), which was introduced by Jacques-Alain Miller in 1997, presents a very good example for understanding the generalization of foreclosure; ordinary psychosis is characterized as “a psychic structure that may resemble nothing other than a neurosis,” except the fact that it can find ways of organizing reality without employing the Name-of-the-Father as its structuring principle (Grigg, 2013, p. 88; Svolos, 2017, pp. 145-6). Miller states the connection of the theory of ordinary psychosis to late Lacan’s theory that the symbolic order as such is delusional in following way: “It’s a perspective in accordance with ‘everyone is mad’, with ‘everyone is delusional in his own way’, and Lacan wrote this in 1978” (Miller, 2009, pp. 152, 161). Contrary to early Lacan’s understanding of the Name-of-the-Father that functions as the Other as the Other, this view states that since there is no Other of the Other both in neurosis and psychosis, Name-of-the-Father reveals itself to be nothing but an “especially stable form of knotting” (Vanheule, 2011, p. 135; Svolos, 2017, p. 254). Skriabine formulates it succinctly: “The Name of the Father’s failure is structural. There is no “innate” common link, no mythical “normality” able to link together Real, Symbolic and Imaginary thanks to a successful knotting. Briefly stated, foreclosure is the rule, we all are feeble-minded, debility is generalized” which means that each subject must invent its own suppletion (*suppléance*) (Skriabine, 2009, p. 46-7).

Overall, we can see that there is a shift from an exclusionary/exceptional status of psychosis that is based on deficit, which displays the masculine logic as Svolos observes (normal neurosis which corresponds to  $\forall x \Phi x$  and exceptional psychosis which

corresponds to  $\exists x \neg \Phi x$ ), to feminine logic which states that the field itself is non-All, the deficiency, if there is one, is inherent to the Name-of-the-Father (i.e. “pure” Borromean knotting as the true Name-of-the-Father is structurally impossible), not the psychotic subject (Vanheule, 2011, p. 137; Svolos, 2016, p. 3; Skriabine, 2009, pp. 49-50).

Consequently, the expulsion of psychosis from the field of sexuation and the four discourses reveals itself not to be justified at all, and the late theory of Lacan also points in this direction. In light of these, and contrary to the clinically oriented theorists like Verhaeghe who also reject the sexuation of clinical structures in addition to their exclusion of psychosis from four discourses,<sup>12</sup> or Swales who states that formulae of sexuation apply only to neurotics; I will argue that psychosis, as well as other clinical structures, are explainable in terms of sexuation and the four discourses, following Žižek’s claim that clinical structures are not simply clinically relevant categorizations but they are fundamental ontological positions, that they stand for different “orientations of thought towards objectivity” (Swales, 2012, p. 78; Verhaeghe, 2008; Žižek, 2003, p. 69).

Before trying to relate the clinical structures to discourses specifically, we can begin by recounting the already well-known relations of clinical structures with masculinity and femininity: With regard to neuroses, it is a commonplace to state that hysteria is paradigmatically feminine whereas obsessional neurosis is masculine, which has its roots already in Freud: “there is no doubt that hysteria has a strong affinity with

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<sup>12</sup> For every structure, Verhaeghe rejects the association with masculinity or femininity in the corresponding chapters.

femininity, just as obsessional neurosis has with masculinity, it appears probable that, as a determinant of anxiety, loss of love plays much the same part in hysteria as the threat of castration does in phobias and fear of the super-ego in obsessional neurosis” (Freud, 1981, p. 143). This conception is also held by Lacan, as can be seen in a passing remark he makes: “Leaving the lady [dame] there now, I will return to the masculine as regards the subject of the obsessive strategy” (Lacan, 2006, p. 378). With regard to perversion, it is also clear that it is a masculine symptom, expressed by Fink as “perversion is virtually an exclusively male diagnosis,” which Lacan also notes (Fink, 2003, p. 46; Swales, 2012, p. xvi). But there is a much more fundamental connection between obsessional neurosis and perversion, beyond both of them being masculine symptomatic structures, which is demonstrated in Lacan’s proposition that Sade (as the paradigmatic pervert) is the truth of Kant (the paradigmatic obsessional neurotic), which is developed in his *Kant avec Sade* (Kant with Sade), which we will explore next before inserting the clinical structures into the unified theory.

As Žižek states, the logic of obsessional neurosis can be summarized as “I am insofar as I doubt,” as obsessional neurosis is a permanent “neither-nor” situation (no wonder, Kant, with his endless Prolegomena and postponing of the encounter with the thing-in-itself, not to mention his daily habits, is considered an obsessional neurotic) (Žižek, 2003, pp. 69-70). Whereas the obsessional subject clings to this “neither-nor,” this permanent doubt, and displays constant self-hindering; Sadeian perversion stages its truth by reversing the “neither-nor” into a “both(-this-and-that),” the doubt into a certainty, and it transforms the self-hindering into self-instrumentalization, making the subject an instrument of the Other’s will (pp. 70-1). In Lacan’s words, the sadist



executioner's "presence is reduced to being no more than the instrument" (Lacan, 2006, p. 652). That's why the obsessional is troubled with its symptom but the pervert can openly enjoy its symptom (Žižek, 2003, p. 253, note 31). It is in this sense that Lacan claims that Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, which was published 8 years after the *Critique of Practical Reason*, "yields the truth of Critique" (Lacan, 2006, p. 646). We should also add that, in developmental terms, there is a coincidence of obsessional neurosis and perversion. Namely, both of them are related to the anal phase (which can be formalized by referring to the category of Other's demand in Lacan), and furthermore, both Freud and Lacan use the term "anal-sadistic" to refer to this developmental phase (Freud, 1981, p. 115; Lacan, 2006, p. 664; Žižek, 2003, p. 72).

Both obsessional neurosis and perversion are characterized by a preoccupation of the Law as the demand of the Other (in contrast to the desire of the Other, which implies a lacking other since desire is coterminous with lack), trying to neutralize the lack in the Other by translating it into a positive set of rules. The main difference consists in the fact that in obsessional neurosis, law is experienced as external whereas in perversion it is experienced as internal, that the pervert substitutes its own law for the law of the Other, so much that perversion appears to be "in-between" neurosis and psychosis to the clinical perspective (Verhaeghe, 2008, pp. 413, 421-2). This division of law into external and internal is rendered by the Lacanian separation of Law into Ego-Ideal (as the pure, ideal, and neutral aspect of the Law) and the superego (as the "obscene" obverse of any Law, stained with jouissance) (Žižek, 1992, p. 225). Whereas obsessional neurosis is dominated by the Ego-Ideal as the unobtainable "objective gaze;" its obverse, perversion, is dominated by the superego as the "gaze of object" itself (p. 249). It is in

this sense that superego is a “law that enjoys,” that manifests itself in the cracks (or the extreme) of the Ego-Ideal as an impossible injunction to enjoy (Žižek, 2003, p. 50; Tupinambá, 2021, p. 147; Žižek, 2008, p. 237). It should be underlined that just like obsessional neurosis and perversion; Law as Ego-Ideal and Law as superego cannot be completely separated, but rather they exist in a relationship of mutual reinforcement. As Žižek observes, law qua Ego-Ideal corresponds to the notion of the beautiful in Kant, whereas the law qua superego corresponds to the dynamical sublime (Žižek, 2003, p. 47). Thus, we can expound the duality “neither-nor” and the “both(-this-and-that)” that we referred to earlier more precisely now: In obsessional neurosis, the problem is that the subject neither can reach the pure Law (it is impossible to escape from jouissance) nor it can enjoy freely (it is impossible to reach jouissance); conversely, in perversion, the subject equates Law with jouissance, it obeys a very strict Law in the service of enjoyment (e.g. the very strict fantasy scenarios of the pervert which impose themselves, which can be found aplenty in Sade’s books). To paraphrase the common saying, we can state that whereas the obsessional is troubled by the fact that it cannot have its cake and eat it too, the pervert claims to be able to both have its cake and eat it too.

In both cases, it is an attempt to cover the lack of the Other, to make it into a full Other; in obsessional neurosis, through endless giving or sacrificing of the objects to satisfy the Other’s demand, and in perversion, through presenting the subject itself as an object-instrument, which is the logical extreme of the obsessional sacrifice (both are in contrast to the feminine logic of the hysteric’s sacrifice in which the hysteric sacrifices not an object, or itself as an object, but its very being as such – that’s why the hysteric fantasizes about dying, whereas the obsessional fantasizes about the Other’s death, so

that at last it can live freely etc.) (Zupančič, 2021, p. 3; Verhaeghe, 2008, pp. 388-9). Consequently, the Sadeian perversion emerges as the truth of Kant's obsessional avoidance of the thing, it signals Kant's betrayal of the full implications of his own theory, namely the ontological negativity of the death drive (Žižek, 2012, p. 817). Sadeian perverse superego arises as a response to this compromise, exemplified in Kant's endless postponement (which is also the case in his moral theory which Hegel criticizes as desiring its own failure to secure its continuity), which Comay dubs the "perverse core" of the obsessional's endless postponement of the duty: "Like the fetishist who engages in endless foreplay so as to defer the traumatic encounter with castration, the moral agent renounces gratification in the name of a consummation that must remain forever outstanding" (Žižek, 2014, p. 56; Comay, 2011, pp. 98-9). As Zupančič shows in her seminal work *Ethics of the Real*, the acceptance of Kant's moral theory directly comes with the "Sadeian trap" which amounts to perverse self-instrumentalization, in other words, the attribution to the Other the subject's own enjoyment, or "hiding behind the law;" and the only way to avoid this trap is to read Kant's theory of the categorical imperative in such a way that subject becomes fully responsible for the law, that it cannot use duty as an excuse (which we will discuss in the chapter on ethics) (Zupančič, 2000, p. 58). For now, our discussion is not about Kant's theory as such but the relationship between obsessional neurosis and perversion. What can be certainly said is that it is the dimension of the death drive as the fundamental ontological negativity that gets obfuscated or translated into a positivity in both cases: It manifests itself as an irrational guilt that increases the more the subject obeys the demands of the Law in obsessional neurosis; and when taken to its extreme in

perversion, as the impossible superego injunction to enjoy, which reduces the death drive into a pure issue of satisfaction, hence erasing the subject by reducing it to the instrument of this satisfaction (Zupančič, 2017, p. 104; Žižek, 2012, p. 830).

The connection between these structures, obsessional neurosis and perversion, also shows itself in the figure of the Other that these structures imply: For Kant, as we have already seen, the Other is the God as a regulative transcendental idea (which makes the highest Good at least potentially possible); and as for Sade, although he claims to be a militant atheist, the Other exists in not in the form of the good God but as its exact opposite, what Lacan calls the “supremely-evil-being” of “supreme-being-of-evil” which “impels [Sade] to an oblique acceptance of the Law” so that “the Supreme Being is restored in Evil Action” (Lacan, 2006, p. 667). This means that the Sadeian executioner knows very well that God doesn’t exist, but configures all of its conduct in order to break the laws of the same God (effectively acting as if it believes in an anti-God that demands the exact opposite things (Žižek, 1992, pp. 213-4; Žižek, 2012, pp. 126-7). Thus, both Kantian “moral” ethics and Sadeian “immoral” ethics rely on a figure of the inaccessible big Other that guarantees the consistency of the actions of the subject; in other words, they both operate through a pure thing of thought (*ens rationis*, *Gedankending*), they both try to economize the excess of enjoyment through converting it into the Other’s demand or Law; which is, as Žižek argues, the characteristic of the masculine logic of the All, or, in other words, the University discourse in its attempt to economize the excess of Master’s discourse (Žižek, 2017a, p. 97).

This brings us to our first conclusion regarding the sexuation of clinical structures: The structures of obsessional neurosis and perversion are both masculine and correspond to the logic of the All of the University discourse. In both cases the impossible enjoyment (a) is approached through a *Gedankending* ( $S_2/S_1$ ) which erases the subject from the field, though in different ways: whereas in obsessional neurosis the main aim is to separate enjoyment from the Law, to prevent the Other's enjoyment in order to solve the conflict of the masculine All ( $\forall x\Phi x$ , as the Law) and its exception ( $\exists x\neg\Phi x$ , as jouissance) in an exclusive "neither-nor" mode; the same conflict is solved in perversion by the logic of "both(-this-and-that)", by reducing Law to enjoyment (hence the famous formula of fetishistic disavowal: "I know very well but...") (Žižek, 2017a, p. 204). In both cases, what we are left with is the Law (be it the obsessional neurotic's rituals or the pervert's scenarios) that is All, that obfuscates the Other's lack, therefore not leaving a place for the subject. This correspondence to the University discourse is further confirmed by Miller's observation that superego is on the side of  $S_2$ , which Žižek develops into the theory of Stalinism as displaying the structure of University discourse with its perverse self-instrumentalization (Žižek, 2022, pp. 116, 354 note 34; Tupinambá, 2021, p. xiv; Žižek, 2003, p. 193). It is also a good coincidence that Badiou names his version of the University discourse as the "Pervert's discourse" (Žižek, 2008, p. lxxxvii).

Secondly, the masculine exception of the Master's discourse, which is both the "discourse as such," the fundamental matrix of signification, and at the same time the fundamental matrix of primordial repression, what Hegel detects as the madness inherent to normality: We have established that this discourse ultimately presents an

impossibility which is later “solved” in various ways by the other discourses, which is to say that it corresponds to the primal state of generalized foreclosure (*Verwerfung*) including “extraordinary” psychoses as well as ordinary psychoses. It is the logic of what Lacan calls generalized madness characterized mechanism of suppletion (be it in the “delusional” form or in the form of a symbolic suppletion like Joyce), or in Hegelian terms the imposition of the “law of the heart” ( $S_1/\$$ ) to the world. This correspondence with the Master’s discourse gives an explanation to the early Lacanian understanding of the psychotic as bearing witness to the externality of the Symbolic order, being spoken rather than speaking, which also reveals itself to be a fundamental feature of the subject as such, as well as the idea of actualization of the objet a (voice and gaze) in psychosis as hallucinations (the product of the Master’s discourse is objet a) (Schuster, 2016, p. 31; Žižek, 2012, pp. 667-8). Moreover, the psychotic act, called *passage à l’acte* (passage to the act), is a moment in which the act seems to perfectly coincide with the symbolic mandate or its notion (a “wholly successful act” in Žižek’s words), which destructively suspends the Other with the imposition of the “law of the heart,” and whose ultimate paradigm is suicide (Žižek, 2008, p. 156; Žižek, 2012, pp. 209-10, 298, 701; Žižek, 2003, pp. 31-2, 267). This destructive nature of the psychotic act points to the fact that psychosis corresponds to the *nihil privativum* (empty object of a notion, the zero of opposite forces cancelling out,  $S_1/\$$ ) in Kant’s table of four nothings.

As to the third discourse and the corresponding logic, namely the Hysteric’s discourse and feminine no-exception, it is not difficult to see that the clinical structure that corresponds to it is hysteria (since it is named explicitly after it), with its insistence that “there is no X that is really it” ( $\neg \exists x \neg \Phi x$ , e.g. there is no Master that has “it”, there is

no one who is not castrated). This shows itself in the hysteric's preoccupation with the Other's desire (which is equal to Other's lack), ceaselessly trying to locate it or make it visible, in contrast, for instance, to the obsessional neurotic who feels guilty for the lack of the Other and tries to neutralize it by transforming it into a demand (Žižek, 2017a, p. 95). That's why the act in hysteria corresponds to the "acting out" which takes the form of a provocation that aims to bring forward the Other as desiring/lacking, thus revealing its split and its status as an impostor (Žižek, 2012, p. 701). That's why the nothing in Kant's four nothings that corresponds to hysteria is the *ens imaginarium* (empty intuition without notion, the absence of all content,  $\$/a$ ) which stands for the pure subject without any positive identification, the subject as the empty place or the vanishing mediator.

And lastly, the Analyst's discourse or the non-All, doesn't correspond to any symptomatic structure but rather stands for the moment of the undoing from within of every discourse as the subjective destitution that results from the traversal of the fantasy, which is the concluding moment of the Lacanian psychoanalytical process (which will be explored in more detail later), in which the subject emerges as a being of pure drive (as identified with the death drive as objet a), in other words, the feminine subject "beyond hysteria" (Žižek, 2017a, p. 104-5). Lacan explains this special status of the Analyst's discourse in a late short seminar by stating that every discourse other than the Analyst's discourse thinks it is the truth whereas the Analyst's discourse teaches nothing and hence it "excludes domination," and because of this it is non-universalizable and it cannot be directly taught (Lacan, 2013b, p. 3). That's why the act that corresponds to the non-All of the Analyst's discourse is the psychoanalytical act (or the ethical act)

understood as the traversal of the fantasy, which also explains the fact that the nothing that corresponds to it is *nihil negativum* (object without a notion, *Unding*, a/S<sub>2</sub>) as the self-cancelling of a contradictory notion.

Therefore, we have reached a point where all of the major clinical symptomal structures are understood in terms of the unified theory of the four discourses and formulae of sexuation, which can be laid out as follows:

Masculine / Dynamical / Regulative	Feminine / Mathematical / Constitutive
$\forall x \Phi x$ (masculine All)  University Discourse  Obsessional Neurosis & Perversion Self-hindering & Self-instrumentalization	$\neg \exists x \neg \Phi x$ (feminine no-exception)  Hysteric's Discourse  Hysteria Acting out
$\exists x \neg \Phi x$ (masculine exception)  Master's Discourse  Psychosis Passage à l'acte	$\neg \forall x \Phi x$ (feminine non-All)  Analyst's Discourse  Subjective destitution Traversal of the fantasy (psychoanalytical act)

Now, what is left for us is to return to the definition of discourse as “social bond,” as a fundamental orientation of thought towards objectivity, and examine the issue of transitivity through the concept of the psychoanalytical act, as well as the relation of discourses to various social and political structures in the next chapters. Against the



traditional rejection of the transitivity of structures exemplified by Verhaeghe who openly states that “across the three structures themselves no transition is possible” so that “curing a psychosis, for example, by transforming it into a neurosis, is impossible,” we will argue for the possible undoing of a discursive structure and a transitivity (but not a continuum) between different structures, as the theory of the four discourses explicitly includes (Verhaeghe, 2008, pp. 460, 462). As we will see, the rejection of the transitivity of the symptomal structures and giving them an eternal status amounts to claiming that the unconscious is a substance, hence implying that there is an Other of the Other (the clinical structure), and it also invalidates ethics. This is to say that if we accepted this logic, we could think of an extreme case of self-reflexive perversion which is legitimate: “I’m sorry that I am a pervert, but you see, the clinical structures are unchangeable, so there is nothing I can do, I am not responsible for being a pervert,” which is brilliantly executed by Eminem in the song “Ass Like That” which actually tells the story of a self-reflexive pervert (Triumph the puppet dog) who is aware that he is a puppet, and pleads to cops that bust him “on the act” in various perverse ways, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

“Police saying "freeze," (Oh), d-doing, doing, doing  
What do you mean, freeze?  
Please, I'm a human being, I have needs  
I'm not done, not 'til I'm finished peeing  
I am not resisting arrest, I am agreeing  
Mr. Officer, I'm already on my knees  
I can't get on the ground any further, it's impossible for me  
And do not treat me like a murderer, I just like to pee

Pee, pee, yes, I make R&B  
 I sing song, it go ring-a-chong, a-ching-chong-chong-chong-ching  
 Psych, I joke, I joke, I kid, I kid  
 If I offend, I'm sorry, please, please, forgive  
 For I am Triumph the Puppet Dog, I am a mere puppet  
 I can get away with anything I say and you will love it  
 (...)

What do you mean, freeze? Geez, I just got my seat  
 I have ticket, look, I put it away, my zipper's zipped  
 Please do not remove me from this movie theater, please  
 I did not even get to see Mary-Kate shower scene  
 I didn't mean to be obscene or make a great, big scene  
 And don't treat me like I'm Pee-wee Herman, this movie's PG  
 Mr. Officer, I demand to see my attorney  
 I will simply plead innocent, cop a plea, and be free  
 Free, yes, free, right back on the streets  
 What do you mean my lawyer's with Michael, he's too busy?  
 I am Triumph, Britney Spears has shoulders like a man  
 And I can say that and you'll laugh 'cause there's a puppet on my hand”

Of course, one cannot take this position of complete passivity, and this fact sustains the dimension of ethics, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter. Arguing against this view of substantialization/non-transitivity of the clinical structures, I will not put forward a rejection of the “eternal” character of the unconscious, rather I will argue that even though our symptomal structure is eternal in the sense that we do not choose it as a temporal event, it is nevertheless still a choice (which we will see that it is the unconscious and atemporal choice of our disposition, *Gesinnung*) and that it is possible

to change it through the intervention of the psychoanalytical act. This is what Lacan means when he claims that the status of the unconscious is not ontological but ethical (Zupančič, 2019, p. 443).

## 7. Ethics and the Act

In the previous chapter, we discussed Kant solely through the standard reading provided by Lacan's Kant avec Sade; now, it's time to redeem his theory. The Sadeian trap really exists in Kantian philosophy, and Kant himself actually comes very close to a perverse/superegoical interpretation of his moral philosophy, not in the Critique of Practical reason but in the Metaphysics of Morals in which the agency of moral conscience (*Gewissen*) emerges as an "internal judge" (Zupančič, 2000, pp. 158-9). However, Kant's philosophy also allows us to interpret it according to the feminine logic (rather than the masculine logic, as we were doing up until now), which is what Zupančič did in Ethics of the Real, opening up a new and liberatory way to read Kant's moral philosophy through the concept of the psychoanalytical act. This reading takes into consideration the fact that the categorical imperative, as conceptualized by Kant, is formally indeterminate; its only two criteria are universalizability and duty, which means that it only dictates that the subject should act according to duty and only for the sake of duty (without any empirical/pathological motivations). The task of translating this purely formal abstract imperative to a concrete duty is delegated solely to the subject, which means that the subject cannot refer to its duty as an excuse (e.g. "I'm sorry I have to do this because this is my duty"), but it is directly responsible for what its duty is (Grigg, 2009, p. 95; Žižek, 2012, pp. 127-8; Žižek, 2017a, p. 238). This is actually a restatement of the idea that we introduced before according to which freedom, as one of the postulates of practical reason, is not a postulate at all because of its status as a "fact of reason," which can also be seen from the dynamic antinomy of causality and freedom. To state it in psychoanalytical terms: freedom is Real and abyssal, it

cannot be schematized, which is to say that it is equivalent to the death drive in its pure state (Žižek, 2012, pp. 265-6). Hence, the famous “*du kannst, denn du sollst*” (you can because you ought to) of the categorical imperative is not a superego injunction, but the statement of this fundamental fact of freedom: as per Kant’s “incorporation thesis,” the subject is affected by “external” causes insofar as it allows them to affect it; which Žižek puts as “every external impossibility (to which the excuse “I know I must, but I cannot, it is impossible . . .” refers) relies on a disavowed self-limitation” (Žižek, 2012, p. 169). This distinction between actions that merely conform to duty (*pflichtmäßig*, legality) and those undertaken exclusively for duty (*aus Pflicht*, morality) makes the perverse reading impossible (Zupančič, 2000, p. 12).

Since Kant’s Sollen prohibits any reference to external necessity as well as to duty itself as an excuse, the subject cannot fall back to its disposition (*Gesinnung*) or its symptomatic structure as an alibi. Yes, the *Gesinnung* (disposition) is unconscious, but this doesn’t mean that it is not chosen, i.e. that it is outside the responsibility of the subject; on the contrary, *Gesinnung* is ultimately “chosen” by the subject, albeit unconsciously, through a transcendental/timeless act (Zupančič, 2000, p. 35; Žižek, 2003, p. 218). This is also demonstrated by the fact that the subject cannot ever completely eliminate the pathological, but neither can it be completely heteronomous, like a puppet (Zupančič, 2000, p. 38). That’s why Kant argues in multiple places that there is no gradual path to ethical conduct and that it cannot be brought about through a reformation but the change of *Gesinnung* can only be effected through a revolution, a creation *ex nihilo* (p. 11):

"If a man is to become not merely legally, but morally, a good man . . . , this cannot be brought about through gradual reformation so long as the basis of the maxims remains impure, but must be effected through a revolution in the man's disposition . . . He can become a new man only by a kind of rebirth, as it were [through] a new creation." (quoted in Zupančič, 2000, p. 10)

"Wanting to become a better person in a fragmentary way is a futile endeavor, since one impression dies out while one works on another; the grounding of character, however, is absolute unity of the inner principle of conduct as such." (quoted in Comay, 2011, p. 169 note 50)

This means that whatever the “objective,” “necessary,” or “universal” conditions are, the subject is ultimately responsible for them, because the positing of the Universal (*Gesinnung*) is already an act of the subject (Zupančič, 2000, p. 94). In simpler terms, the subject is ultimately responsible for its nature, which makes perversion completely invalid in this framework. In addition to being a Kantian postulate, as Zupančič shows, this is also the “psychoanalytic postulate of freedom,” the possibility that the fundamental choice can be repeated, which is the precondition for psychoanalysis, and implies that the structures are transitive (p. 35). It is evident from this fact that the subject is ultimately responsible for its fantasy, how it enjoys; because even though clinical structures are unconscious, they still imply a fundamental choice. The name for this “repetition” or modification of the fundamental choice of *Gesinnung* is the psychoanalytical or ethical act, and it is the central concept around which Lacanian ethics of the Real revolves.

The purely formal character of the ethical act makes it so that it becomes inseparable from what Kant calls “diabolical evil” as the ultimate form of evil which is exercised without any pathological motivations (which Kant deems impossible): Since diabolical evil is characterized by the same four criteria as the ethical act, namely it being purely formal, provoking a moral rather than an aesthetic horror, arising from a maxim rather than a pathological input, and lastly, the fact that it is inexplicable within the coordinates of the existing reality (i.e. it cannot be located in a linear line of causes and effects), it is an act of freedom; it becomes inseparable from the ethical act as such (Zupančič, 2000, p. 85). This is to say that the purely formal opposition to the moral law, the elevation of it to a status of a maxim, turns out to be moral law itself, as Zupančič puts it, “nothing can oppose itself to the moral law on principle - that is, for nonpathological reasons - without itself becoming a moral law,” so that there is no way to separate diabolical evil and the highest good (p. 90-1).

In psychoanalytical terms, the logic of fantasy serves to maintain non-action (as we have seen in the symptomal forms of non-action such as self-hindering, self-instrumentalization, etc. in the previous chapter), whereas diabolical evil as the ethical act stands for the non-All of the Analyst’s discourse that transforms the Other by inscribing its impossibility into it and interrupts the functioning of fantasy (Zupančič, 2000, p. 86). It is in this sense that Lacan’s maxim of the ethics of psychoanalysis, “do not compromise your desire” (*ne pas céder sur son désir*), is to be understood: As Žižek states, “the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire” since desire stands in the place of the Real as the fundamental ontological negativity, and compromising it means escaping its impossible-Real core and translating

it into a demand or desire of the Other through a fantasy (Žižek, 2012, p. 121). This means that the psychoanalytical/ethical act that arises through the fidelity to pure desire (or more accurately, death drive as the conflictual zero-level of desire) is extremely disturbing and traumatic; it is neither compatible with the pleasure principle nor its extension in the reality principle, but rather, ethical duty and pure desire are both “beyond the pleasure principle” (p. 123).

Thus, the aim of psychoanalysis is to “render the screen useless” through the traversal of the fantasy, echoing the logic of Substance as Subject that we discussed in the section on Hegel, understood as subject’s going “behind the curtain” in pursuit of the substantial in-itself, only to find nothing, a nothing which is the subject itself (Zupančič, 2017, p. 8). So, the traversal of fantasy is an intervention to the Real (as the immanent point of impossibility of the Symbolic) by using the Symbolic (Žižek, 2012, p. 477). As Žižek argues, this does not mean that that traversal bypasses or completely abolishes the fantasy (which would mean the complete destruction of the Symbolic order), neither does it mean that subject finally gets rid of the troubling jouissance; but rather it means that the subject is able to gain a “minimal distance” from the fantasmatic frame which structures its reality and organizes its jouissance, hence unhooking jouissance from the fantasy frame (or, as we will see later, subtraction of objet a from  $S_1$ ) (p. 686). Therefore the traversal is not going outside the illusory reality but accepting its fundamental ontological impasse, that it is not-All: This means that, paradoxically, in the ordinary functioning of fantasy, it is elided by the subject, it remains invisible and repressed, inaccessible to the subject’s consciousness, which makes it work; whereas in traversal,



the subject fully identifies with the Real core of the fantasy by going right through it, rendering it visible as to suspend the symbolic efficacy of the fantasy (p. 689).

There is another “Ver-,” the notion of *Versagung* (frustration), designating the subject’s act of renunciation of its fantasmatic core, which emerged through Lacan’s analysis of the character named Sygne de Coûfontaine in Paul Claudel’s 1911 play titled *The Hostage* (*L’Otage*), which presents an example to the traversal of the fantasy as the psychoanalytical/ethical act (Žižek, 2014, p. 388, note 7). Žižek defines *Versagung* as an infinite resignation, as “the radical (self-relating) loss/renunciation of the very fantasmatic core of our being: first, I sacrifice all I have for the Cause-Thing which is for me more than my life; what I then get in exchange for this sacrifice is the loss of this Cause-Thing itself” and concludes that “only a passage through this zero-point of “infinite resignation,” of utter hopelessness, can ground a materialist ethics” (Žižek, 2017a, pp. 284, 286). In contrast to the standard masculine logic of sacrifice which sacrifices all in exchange for an exceptional element (the “negation with a filling” in Žižek’s terms, exemplified by Antigone<sup>13</sup>); the logic of *Versagung* displays the feminine logic of sacrifice in which the subject gets nothing in exchange (the “negation without a filling,” exemplified by Sygne), which means that the fantasmatic status of the objet a is suspended (the screen is rendered useless) and the “nothing” that the subject gets in exchange for its sacrifice emerges as the pure desire (or more properly, death drive)

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, we should note that there are many different readings of Antigone in Lacanian psychoanalysis, ranging from interpreting her act to be the paradigm of the ethical act (without comparing her against Sygne), to reducing her to an embodiment of a law that conflicts with Creon’s law etc. I am following Zupančič’s interpretation which excellently lays out the exact structure of Antigone’s act in comparison to Sygne’s act.

beyond fantasy (Žižek, 2012, pp. 324-6). As Zupančič argues, both Antigone and Sygne realize the infinite: Antigone, by her blind insistence on the burial of her brother Polyneices, and Sygne with her “no,” her refusal to make her ultimate sacrifice meaningful. However, the infinite realized by Antigone reveals itself to be strictly different from the infinite realized by the “abyssal realization” of Sygne (Zupančič, 2000, pp. 228, 259).

Let us compare the two examples, the two logics of sacrifice, and lay out their structural difference following Zupančič’s analysis. In the case of Antigone, the three logical moments go as such: In the beginning, she has a thing that she cannot sacrifice, so that she decides that she is ready to sacrifice everything for “it”, and consequently, goes on to sacrifice everything for “it,” which displays the masculine logic of all (the everything that Antigone sacrifices) and is constituted by reference to an exceptional element (“it”). In contrast, in the case of Sygne, the three moments play out as following: In the beginning, she also has a thing that she cannot sacrifice, so that she too decides to sacrifice everything for “it” (and she actually makes great sacrifices), but at the third moment, things take another turn, and rather than sacrificing everything for “it,” Sygne sacrifices “it” directly, sacrifices its status as an exception (by refusing to convey on her previous “sacrifices” a meaning, and this refusal gets embodied as a meaningless facial tic signaling her nonconformity, Sygne’s “no” as the objet a); and therefore this logic, in contrast to Antigone’s masculine sacrifice, displays the non-All of the feminine logic, and hence it is equivalent to the Lacanian understanding of the traversal of the fantasy, the psychoanalytical/ethical act (Zupančič, 2000, p. 259). This difference in the two logics of sacrifice makes it so that Antigone appears as a sublime

figure in her glorious sacrifice (so she stands for  $S_1$ ), whereas Sygne appears as a wretched figure, an abomination that cannot be integrated into a meaningful narrative (which means that she stands for objet a as subtracted from  $S_1$ , as the singular, immanent impossibility of the field) (p. 259).

By connecting these examples to the unified theory, we can see that they correspond to the two “larger than life” discourses in the four discourses in Žižek’s terms (Master, and Analyst, which Žižek calls “pure drive”), in contrast to two “everyday” or ordinary discourses (University, and Hysteric) (Žižek, 2017a, p. 104): Antigone’s act corresponds to the psychotic imposition of the what Hegel calls the “law of the heart” to the world, what is called *the passage à l’acte* (passage to the act), and that’s why it displays the structure of the masculine exception of Master’s discourse; whereas Sygne’s act, as we have already stated, exemplifies the ethical or psychoanalytical act as the traversal of fantasy, which employs the logic of the non-All of the Analyst’s discourse (Hegel, 2018, p. 213). So, on one side we have  $S_1$  as the establishment of the Symbolic link, and on the other side we have the objet a as separated from  $S_1$  as the undoing of the Symbolic link (which is also evident in that the meaning relation is suspended only in the Analyst’s discourse,  $S_1//S_2$ ). In other words, Antigone as the masculine exception stands for the dimension of the Symbolic Event as the establishment of an  $S_1$ , whereas Sygne as the feminine non-All stands for the Real Event as the subtraction of objet a from  $S_1$ , the revelation of the status of the Master-Signifier as meaningless and arbitrary, which denotes the signifier of the lack-in-the-Other (written as  $s(\mathcal{A})$ ) (Žižek, 2014, pp. 411-2). Therefore, another formulation for the traversal of fantasy as the ethical act reveals itself as the production of  $s(\mathcal{A})$  that “stops

the compulsive repetition of the established form of enjoyment;” to which Žižek gives the example of an “intervention which makes it impossible for [a] bad joke to go on” by somehow “spoiling” it (Žižek, 2017a, p. 75). Stated more formally, the ethical/psychoanalytical act can be defined as the formalization of the fundamental impossibility of a field in a signifier which is  $s(A)$ , which locates the impossibility of the field not as an exception but as part of the default state, hence making the current state unsustainable (Žižek, 2017a, p. 78; Žižek, 2014, p. 398).

This formal definition of the traversal of the fantasy as the production of the signifier of the lack-in-the-Other also provides the ultimate connection with the first part of this work in which we discussed truth as the emergence of the immanent impossibility of a field (recall Lacan’s definition of science as “making right holes appear at right places”) as well as the emergence of the category of the singular (which, as we have seen, stands for the death drive) in philosophy. This connection is rendered in a witty way by Schuster when he states that “philosophy has a perfectly good term for what Freud called the drive: namely, philosophy” (Schuster, 2016, p. 109). What this argument asserts is the fact that the truth discovered by psychoanalysis is exclusive neither to psychoanalysis as a theory nor is it to the context of psychoanalytical clinic, but that philosophy is also a way to traverse the fantasy, which Žižek eloquently formulates:

“Authentic philosophy is a kind of “theoretical psychoanalysis”: it is not a species of university discourse but an existential decision, the enactment of what Lacan defines

as the final mutation of the analytic treatment (traversing the fantasy) by means of theory” (Žižek, 2020b, p. 99)

Since we have defined the traversal of the fantasy formally, there is no longer a reason for us to confine it to the borders of the psychoanalytical clinic, we may deploy it in virtually any field from science to politics and sociology (and it can be argued that this is the philosophical project of the Ljubljana School). This principle, in addition to informing the overall logic and fundamental premises of the present work, plays a very important role in the next part in which we will deploy it in the political and social domain.

Before we continue to Part III in which we will discuss the social and political implications of the theory we have thus far demonstrated, let us recapitulate the main points in order to facilitate a better transition. Upon introducing the unified theory, we have shown that different clinical structures deploy different logics or discourses, as different fundamental orientations towards reality. Later, we showed that all symptomatic structures can be understood in terms of their specific mode of non-action (as the repetition of the same fundamental fantasmatic structure, the same form of enjoyment) whereas the logic of the non-All of the Analyst’s discourse stands for the psychoanalytical/ethical act (as the undoing of a fantasmatic structure), the production of the signifier of the lack-in-the-Other as the Real Event. We also saw that this last logic grounds the dimension of the ethical as well as the transitivity of the clinical structures since there is no purely external necessity (like *Gesinnung* or nature) that subject can refer to as an excuse. Connecting this fundamental freedom which allows the transitivity

of the structures with Lacan's definition of the four discourses not as pure speech but as forms of social bond which try to deal with the impossible jouissance, we can see that (not only that discourses are already social but) social structures and movements are discursive, not only in the narrower Foucauldian sense but in the full Lacanian sense, that they display the logics of the discourses and sexuation (Zupančič, 2021, p. 14; Lacan, 2013a, p. 9). This in turn implies that both psychoanalysis and the traversal of the fantasy as the ethical act also have sociopolitical counterparts, which are critique of ideology and the revolutionary act, the subject matters of the next part.

## Part III: Impossibility of the Field – s(Å)

### 8. There is a non-relationship

In the previous part, we have discussed the Real of sexual difference, expressed by the Lacanian formula “there is no sexual relationship,” and we have seen that this impossibility of the sexual relation is embodied in the objet a. But as Žižek argues, the formula “there is no sexual relationship” is not exactly adequate for capturing the Real of sexual difference, because it allows for a reading that is merely negative and in conformity to the principle of non-contradiction, which falls back to a kind of sexualized cosmology and asserts the eternal separation of two sexes (Žižek, 2012, p. 797). That’s why there is a subtle yet crucial alteration to be made to the formula which transforms it from being a negative judgment (that merely denies a predicate) to an infinite judgment (that affirms a non-predicate), so it takes the form of “there is a non-relationship” (Žižek, 2014, p. 370, Žižek, 2012, p. 796). This means that the case is not that there are two incommensurably different poles that make the sexual relationship impossible, but rather that, as we have argued throughout this work, there is a singular fundamental impossibility which gets expressed in different forms. And Lacan’s statement that “*y a de l’Un*” (there is something of a One) expresses precisely this singularity as the barred One, as fundamental ontological impossibility<sup>14</sup> (Žižek, 2017a, p. 63). Since the difference precedes the terms it differentiates, the categorization always results in a

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<sup>14</sup> Many different terms are used to designate this singularity, and Comay gives a good list which we can include here for cross reference and SEO purposes: constitutive trauma of castration, primal repression, class struggle, political antagonism, existential finitude, ethical alterity, sexual difference, ontological difference (Comay, 2011, p. 130).

series of elements in which one of them stands for the impossibility/incompleteness of categorization as such, as its oppositional determination (*gegensätzliche Bestimmung*) in Hegelian terms (Žižek, 2012, p. 469). We have already seen it in the example of sexuation, in which the structure is not a dyadic structure of 1 + 1 (man and woman), but 1 + a (man and woman as man's impossibility). This 1 + a structure also repeats itself in the Hegelian understanding of couples like identity and difference, necessity and contingency, essence and appearance; and, in all of them, rather than the division being balanced, the second term is primary and stands for the self-split of the first (p. 469).

When translated into the social sphere, the non-existence of the sexual relationship takes the form of the non-existence of political/class relationship (the non-existence of society as a totality), which is called class struggle or social antagonism, and the symptomal object that embodies it in the political sphere reveals itself as the proletariat in classical Marxist terminology or the part-of-no-part (those who are in the field but not counted, the supernumerary element) as Rancière generalizes it (Žižek, 2012, p. 797; Žižek, 2020b, p. 129; Rancière, 2010, pp. 32-33). This means that the social sphere is sexuated, that there is no way to see it all or to render it in a flat relationship between society as the Universal and various classes etc. as the Particulars. The singular always returns in the guise of an element which lacks its proper place in the social edifice and stands for the impossibility of the given social structure. This impossibility means that, just as symptomal structures, social structures are ways a community organizes its shared substance of *jouissance*, exemplified in the idea of "our way of life" (which is by default threatened by the others) (Žižek, 2003, p. 201). That's why Žižek argues that "a nation exists only as long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialized in a set



of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices,” and defines nationalism as an eruption of enjoyment in the social field (p. 202).

This eruption is exemplified by the racist chauvinism that perceives the other to be a threat to “our way of life” and accuses them of being a thief of enjoyment (“they take our jobs”) and having access to a secret enjoyment (“they don’t work and live luxuriously”), which of course conceals the fact that the stolen enjoyment never existed: the harmonious “our way of life” of nationalism is a fantasy (p. 201). This point is aptly demonstrated by the rising racist chauvinism in Turkey after the Syrian civil war and the subsequent influx of refugees: In addition to the standard “they don’t work but they take our jobs” argument, there is an increasing association of refugees with sexual harassment and violence both in conventional and social media, which functions to conceal the fact that forms of sexual violence are already rampant and accepted or tolerated in the patriarchically dominated culture of Turkey (a recent reflection of which can be seen in the presidential decree of withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention<sup>15</sup> in 2021) (Amnesty International, 2021).

Another example from Turkey that displays this paradoxical logic is the almost ubiquitous fear of catastrophically losing the authentic culture and the homeland (in Turkish, “vatan/millet elden gidecek”), the fear of “outsiders” (usually Greeks or Armenians) coming and taking over, assimilating, or even eradicating the local population and culture. What this fear covers up is the fact that exactly this has already

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<sup>15</sup> Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence

happened in Turkey; culminating in the Armenian Genocide but not being limited to it, with many other instances of systematic extermination and assimilation of the non-Muslim and non-Turkish populations with the goal of Turkification; a stance which is still officially upheld by the Turkish state with its denialist policies. So, what this irrational nationalist fear hides is the fact that these people are already the ones who have lost their culture and history (they are the outcomes of the assimilation and genocide, living in places names and histories of which are all erased), who have been Turkified in the making of the Turkish nation, to such a degree that they identify excessively with denialist policies and genocidal identity.

Therefore, just like the organization of subject's enjoyment through a fantasmatic frame, the organization of social enjoyment (which can also be thought as the forms of systemic violence inherent to social structures) also takes the form of a discourse. Žižek exemplifies this through the emergence of different modalities of power in modernity: First, we have the absolute monarchy as the Master's discourse (the power structure as such, similar to Foucault's understanding of sovereign power to kill or let live); then its impossibility leads to three possible outcomes: First, the atomized capitalist individualism undermining the traditional social forms which displays the structure of the Hysteric's discourse, exemplified by Marx's famous phrase "all that is solid melts into air" (this shows that the "that's not it" of the hysteric is not necessarily subversive for capitalism, since it can perfectly be utilized by the ideology of consumerism as its driving force, as that which makes the subject endlessly pursue new commodities) (Marx & Engels, 1969). Second, total technocratic or bureaucratic administration and control as the University discourse (which has both disciplinary and governmental aspects in

Foucault's categorization exemplified by so-called "totalitarianism" as well as "democratic capitalist" societies with their mechanisms of collective control) (Foucault, 1978, pp. 135-159). And third, the emergence of a revolutionary subject and the moment of revolution as the Analyst's discourse, which stands for the undoing of the current organization of the systemic violence with the explosion of revolutionary violence directed against the system itself (Žižek, 2017a, pp. 217-8). This third possible outcome stands for the political act, which is the emergence in the social domain of the dimension of *Versagung*, the traversal of the fantasy as the ethical act; and it is in this sense that revolution as the political act can be considered as a traversal of the social fantasy, in which communist, feminist, queer, anticolonial revolutionary politics makes the "bad jokes" such as capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism, nationalism, colonialism etc. impossible to continue.

As can be seen from the example, capitalism cannot be strictly reduced to any one of the discourses but deploys itself through different logics: Whereas the unquestionable fundamental mechanism of capital as the self-deployment of a concept, namely the endless production of surplus-value only for its own sake exemplified in the M-C-M cycle, which gives Capital the character of an "automatic subject" in Marx's terms, presents the structure of the Master's discourse; its renormalization takes the forms of University discourse as obsessional and perverse practices of social control, and the Hysteric's discourse as atomized individualism, as we have seen. It should be noted that although capitalism deploys itself in all of these three discourses, not all of these equally carry the potential of subversion (Marx, 1976, p. 255; Žižek, 2012, p. 250). As we have seen, the University discourse is a discourse that erases the subject, and it is in this sense

that Zupančič defines it as “the social link in which discourse has no consequences” (Zupančič, 2017, p. 79). This means that the subject of the University discourse is fundamentally unable to make a gesture that is not already pre-defined and given to it by the Master (think of academics’ obsession with plagiarism and citation, their inability to make a claim without referring it to a figure of authority), which makes the masculine All of the University discourse inherently reactionary, unable to support a revolutionary act (Žižek, 2017a, p. 293 note 13). The University discourse is condemned to repeat the endless calculation of pros and cons in the field of the possible given by the Master (which is why also “hedonism” in the sense of calculating and maximizing one’s pleasure is false, it is an escape from the Real of jouissance by merely imitating it; or why “utilitarianism” in the sense of social maximization of pleasure is a slave ideology since it results in the reduction of pleasure to “sheer animal survival,” exemplified by biopolitics) (Žižek, 2017a, p. 201; Comay, 2011, p. 67). And just like obsessional neurosis which is fueled by the self-perpetuating cycle of guilt that obsessional subject feels for the lack of the Other, the social structures that implement the University discourse are animated by the guilt and indebtedness that it creates in its subjects (Lazzarato, 2012). That’s also why, in these structures of apparently “neutral” bureaucracy, there is always an obscene underside of superegoical unwritten rules (which indicate the conditions under which written rules can be broken) which display the perverse obverse of obsessional neurosis and makes the social mechanism (e.g. bureaucracy or academia) “enjoy” (Žižek, 2008, p. xcix, note 45).s

In contrast to this fundamentally reactionary character of the University discourse, the Hysteric’s discourse always carries within it the potential of a real subversion of the

Master, which indicates the moment that feminine no-exception of the Hysteric's discourse transforms into the non-All of the Analyst's discourse; in other words, the sporadic and spontaneous uprisings of masses transform into a properly revolutionary movement, such as the Leninist Party (but not limited to it). We can exemplify this dynamic from many contexts, but one example imposes itself by virtue of the sociopolitical context in which this work is written, which is the example of the birth of the Kurdish Freedom Movement: Although Kurds were always historically oppressed and they staged various rebellions throughout history (including but not limited to Bedir Khan Beg rebellion, Sheikh Ubeydullah rebellion, Koçgiri rebellion, Sheikh Said rebellion, the Republic of Ararat, and Dersim rebellion which resulted in the Dersim Massacre), they emerged as a revolutionary subject only after 1978, which marks the foundation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). As we have stated, Kurds were already historically oppressed so that they already occupied a symptomatic status in the Middle-East (especially after WWI, with the nation being divided between four nation-states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria), but it is with the moment of emergence of the Kurdish Freedom Movement the Kurds became a properly revolutionary force in the geography, transforming the whole political landscape in the four parts of Kurdistan, and most importantly radically transforming the revolutionary subject (Kurds) themselves, who today stand as the only progressive force in the geography (with their rejection of patriarchy and the nation-state as well as their call for a "democratic confederalism") (Öcalan, 2011). The great impact of the Kurdish Freedom Movement on the region can be exemplified by phenomena such as the Rojava Revolution, the transformation of the political landscape of Turkey (and HDP becoming third largest party), and the rebellions

led by women ongoing in Iran just as this thesis is being written (epitomized by the iconic slogan of Kurdish Freedom Movement: “Woman, Life, Freedom”); all despite the fact that the leader of the movement Abdullah Öcalan being a prisoner of war in the hands of the Turkish state since 1999. This transformation of Kurds exemplifies the passage from the symptomatic point as the simple embodiment of the lack-in-the-Other ( $A$ ) to the signifier of the lack-in-the-Other ( $s(A)$ ) as the inscription of the impossibility into the Other itself, as the emergence of the revolutionary subject.

The fundamental implication of this structure for the conduct of social or political science is one we have been claiming from the outset, namely that the political/social sciences are conflictual sciences as in Althusser’s term, that their object of study has a singular status, which means that what they ultimately study is social antagonism or class struggle as the impossibility of society. Due to this singular status, there can be no universal or neutral point of view from which one can exercise these sciences and the truth of society only appears from a particular position (just as the truth of sexuation is revealed in the feminine side, or the truth of four discourses is embodied in the Analyst’s discourse), which is the point of view of the part-of-no-part. This theory of partisan knowledge will be the subject matter of the next chapter.

## 9. Partisan Knowledge

As should have been demonstrated sufficiently until this point, the false neutrality of the University discourse is unable produce knowledge that touches the Real of society. This shows itself vividly in the hypocrisy of the so-called “academic left” which cannot take the risk of assuming a partisan point of view, and instead falls back to stating “universal” demands from its privileged position knowing well that this “activity” will not change anything; as Žižek lays it out, they say “let us be realists: we, the academic Left, want to appear critical, while fully enjoying the privileges the system is offering us. So let us bombard the system with impossible demands: we all know that these demands will not be met, so we can be sure that nothing will really change, and we will maintain our privileged status quo” (Žižek, 2017a, p. 77). So, the standard “pragmatism” of the academic left only results in the maintenance of the current state, since pragmatism by default operates within a given field and cannot make a revolutionary move. Every conformist thinks that they are a clever pragmatist whereas in reality they just reproduce the predominant ideological structures; in other words, “pragmatism is good enough for theory, but not good enough for practice” (p. 183). This is the Foucauldian lesson: if one always follows the most rational option, one can never break out of the cycle of power; a subversive act, by definition, appears as irrational or even mad considered from the standards of the status quo.

Ironically, a fitting example of this falsity of the pragmatism of the academic left comes from Boğaziçi University, the very university this thesis will be submitted to. To cut a long story short, in 2016, an appointee (*kayyum*) rector named Mehmed Özkan

(who has close ties with both capital and the ruling party AKP) was installed by the president, Erdoğan, overruling the elected rector; to which the academics reacted with their pragmatism (i.e. accepting the appointee rector because he was from inside the faculty rather than being an “outsider”), sidelining student resistance and remaining silent about the countless violations of rights, so that they gradually lost all their ground, and ultimately the university was completely ceded to the administration of the central government.<sup>16</sup> Incidentally, during the same period, in addition to the imprisonment of many high-ranking members Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP, the third largest political party, which is the legal political party associated with the Kurdish Freedom Movement in Turkey) including the co-chairs Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş, the mayors of the Kurdish provinces who were elected from HDP were deposed by presidential decree and were replaced by state-appointed appointees, who were called *kayyum/kayyım* -‘appointee’- and this was the term used by the Kurdish opposition to designate them. It is precisely because of this, to avoid being associated with the anti-*kayyum* struggle of Kurds, that the faculty of the Boğaziçi University didn’t adopt the term *kayyum* and instead used terms like *atanmış* (which is a different word that also means appointee, but it doesn’t have any political connotations like *kayyum*) despite the obvious parallel between the two struggles and the fact that the student movement was not hesitant to use the word *kayyum* or to explicitly declare the common point between

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<sup>16</sup> The details of this event can be read from this short blog post which documents the developments of the appointee rector period: <https://medium.com/@kargayerde/can-the-subaltern-speak-please-3841b954f96e>



the struggle for autonomy in the university and the struggle for autonomy in Kurdish provinces.

Against this false impartiality in which one cannot risk “dirtying one’s own hands,” in which one assumes that they can take an objective distance with regard to the situation with the help of the cynical wisdom which states that those who struggle are idiots who really believe in these ideals, Žižek states that “the only truly universalistic stance is to be ready to dirty one’s own hands;” that “in order to be fully engaged ethico-politically, it is necessary to exit the “inner peace” of one’s subjective authenticity” (Žižek, 2012, pp. 128, 135). This is the lesson of Lacan’s *les non-dupes errent* (“the non-duped err”): It is true that the object of desire is illusory, but this doesn’t change the fact that it occupies the place of the Real, that one cannot simply bypass fantasy or take an objective distance from it, but rather one can only traverse it, not by avoiding it but going directly through it, to its limit; as Žižek states, “there is more truth in the unconditional fidelity to one’s desire than in the resigned insight into the vanity of one’s striving” (p. 133). This means that revolutionary theory and practice changes its subject, that class struggle constitutes its own agent, hence the truth appears only from a particular point of view (of the symptomal element) and the knowledge regarding the sociopolitical<sup>17</sup> can only be a partisan knowledge, expressed in Žižek’s dictum that “we

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<sup>17</sup> Although it falls outside the scope of this thesis, we should also note that the partisan status of knowledge also manifests itself in modern physics: One can think of the debate between Einstein who was a proponent of realism (expressed famously by his dictum that “God does not play dice”) and Bohr (and the Copenhagen School) who rejected realism (expressed in Bohr’s reply to Einstein: “Don’t tell god what to do”) as an example of the partisan status of scientific knowledge (Žižek, n.d.). Although today the latter position (abandonment of realism) is prevalent in modern physics, as a testimony to the conflictual status of the knowledge, there are still some proponents of the realist interpretation that advocate for a quantum realism.

are “universal beings” only in our full partial engagements” (Žižek, 2020b, pp. 44, 244; Žižek, 2017a, p. 113). This principle of the conflictual sciences makes it so that no meaningful distinction can be made between revolutionary science and revolutionary ideology (e.g. no difference between Marxist science and Marxist ideology), that a conflictual science already implies a subjectively engaged position (e.g. that of the proletariat) (Žižek, 2022, p. 142). This follows directly from the principle of oppositional determination that we have introduced before: there is no pure Universal (which can be successfully categorized into Particulars without remainder), so that a particular element always appears as the embodiment of the impossibility of the Universal itself, which, as its oppositional determination (*gegensätzliche Bestimmung*), stands for Universality as such in the domain of the Particular (i.e. it is the singular) (Žižek, 2020b, pp. 380-1). That’s why Žižek makes a crucially important point when he states that “Today, more than ever, one should emphasize that a true ethical position combines the assertion of universalism with a militant, divisive position of one engaged in a struggle: true universalists are not those who preach global tolerance of differences and all-encompassing unity, but those who engage in a passionate fight for the assertion of the Truth that engages them” (pp. 404-5).

The implication is that there is no pure social revolution as well as that there is no pure class struggle, the “radical antagonism can only be represented in a distorted way, through particular differences internal to the system” (Žižek, 2017a, pp. 240-1; Žižek, 2012, p. 357). This leads us to the conclusion that the universality of revolutionary politics is not the hegemonic universality of “all of us,” but the supernumerary universality of the excremental/symptomal element as the part-of-no-part (Žižek, 2017a,

pp. 23, 244). In Hegelian terms, the difference between these two universalities is that whereas the former stands for (masculine) abstract universality (as the relation between the Universal and its Particulars), the latter stands for (feminine) concrete universality (as the self-split of the Universal that returns in the Particular), in which the “specific difference overlaps with generic difference,” which means that “Universality becomes “for itself” only in those individuals who lack a proper place in it” or in other words “within a given social order, a universal claim can be made only by a group that is prevented from realizing its particular identity” (Žižek, 2012, pp. 359, 361-2). Thus, the definition of radical revolutionary politics amounts to the occupation of the hegemonic place by the part-of-no-part (Žižek, 2017a, p. 245). That’s why the proper scientific precursor of sociology is Marxism as a conflictual science with its militant knowledge (the idea of unity of theory and practice), rather than the “objective” or “impartial” sociologies of the state which try to erase the singular from the social field and render the social field as a flat, non-conflictual field, amounting to nothing more than a theodicy of the status quo.

To explain this singular impossibility of capitalism as its oppositional determination, which was discovered by Marx, we can recount the paradox of labour-power as a commodity: As Žižek puts it “the proletarian who sells his labor-power is doubly inscribed: he is a subject, a free agent, and at the same time a “thing,” a commodity sold on the market;” those who have nothing to sell but their labour-power emerge as a paradoxical element in the presumed “equivalent exchange” of the free market (Žižek, 2017a, p. 173). The paradox is that labour-power is not a simple commodity, but it is a commodity whose use-value is to generate surplus-value, in other

words, it is by definition worth more than what it is sold for in the market (1+a); but you need to already possess capital in order to be able to utilize its power (Žižek, 2017a, p. 195; Zupančič, 2021, p. 15). This example exposes the fundamental asymmetry of buying and selling in capitalism: Whereas for the capital owner (the one who bears money) the marketplace is a place full of different opportunities; for the commodity-seller (the one who bears commodity, in the extreme case, their labour-power), the same marketplace appears as a highly competitive space (Tupinambá, 2021, pp. 100-1). That's why the truth of the field cannot be rendered in a neutral way, but already emerges through assuming a partisan position; in this case, the point of view of the proletariat as the symptomal point of the capitalist system.

This theory of partisan knowledge also has implications regarding our polemic against the confinement of psychoanalysis to the clinical domain. Lacan, in his seminar on ethics, argues that psychoanalysis leaves us at the door of moral action, that it circumscribes the place of the political without engaging it (Dolar, 2009, p. 29). This permits two opposite readings: Either we accept that that there cannot be a psychoanalytical politics (the liberal understanding of Lacan, *a la* Miller), or, as Dolar argues, we see that this circumscribing of the political is the political gesture par excellence, that it leads to the militant politics of the communist hypothesis and the proletariat (the revolutionary interpretation of Lacan, which is the path Ljubljana School takes) (Dolar, 2009, p. 29; Žižek, 2017a, p. 166; Žižek, 2012, p. 991). Whereas the liberal interpretation stops at simply “accepting the contradiction,” the revolutionary interpretation goes on to take its place in the contradiction, it takes the “position of Truth” (Zupančič, 2017, p. 72). Tupinambá makes an excellent case against this liberal

understanding of psychoanalysis confined to the clinic, and demonstrates in his work titled *The Desire of Psychoanalysis* that the psychoanalytical clinic is an artificial context which relies on an enclosure that only money can provide, which already shows that there is a class dimension even in the “pure” clinic (Tupinambá, 2021, p. 121). Whereas the usual liberal clinic interprets the analysand’s lack of money merely as a resistance to the analytic intervention; this view states that the lack of money is usually external, that it cannot be reduced to the internal dynamics of the clinic, hence introducing the class dimension into the clinical space (to which I can relate as I am a third-world citizen who doesn’t have access to clinical psychoanalysis, but only to theory) (Žižek, 2022, pp. 119-20; Tupinambá, 2021, pp. xvi-xvii). And as Tupinambá shows, even if we introduce “free analysis” as a social service (as it is done in countries like Brazil), this doesn’t eliminate the class dimension since it creates two types of analysands: those who can afford to pay for themselves, so they have the privilege to go to the end of the analytic process and become analysts themselves; and those who cannot afford to pay so that they can only remain analysands (Tupinambá, 2021, p. 20). Against this substantialization of the status of the psychoanalytical clinic and the analyst, which takes the forms of unilateral contribution of psychoanalysis to other fields (Master’s discourse), the correlation between it and other fields (University discourse), the absolute separation of it from other fields (Hysterics’s discourse); Tupinambá argues for the fourth option, the compossibility of psychoanalysis with other fields such as politics (Analyst’s discourse) (pp. 19-20). After all, neither the proper analyst nor the proper analytic context exists (neither of them have substantial status); Lacan states that “the psychoanalyst derives his authorization only from himself,” which disqualifies any

attempt to ground psychoanalytical practice in an external guarantee, an attitude that Žižek mocks by stating that “a madman is also an analyst who thinks he is an analyst,” and explains the non-substantial status of the analyst as following:

“Are there analysts at all? Is an analyst not a subject/analysand who, within the analytic clinical setting, acts as if he is an analyst or even plays the role of an analyst? The moment we substantialize the analyst, the moment we conceive him as a subject who is an analyst in itself, outside of the clinical setting, analysts become a new group of people of a special mold, made of special stuff (as Stalin put it apropos Bolsheviks), and all the deadlocks of how to deal with a Master reappear.” (Žižek, 2022, pp. 112-3).

## 10. Political Act: Communism, Feminism, Queer, Anticolonialism

In this last chapter, I will examine the conclusions to be drawn from this theoretical framework with regard to revolutionary social movements and their interrelationship. As we have seen, the non-relation, the fundamental ontological impossibility, manifests itself in every symbolic field; albeit in different forms that imply different forms of organization of this fundamental impossibility (enjoyment), as per the four discourses. It is in this sense Zupančič argues that the power relations in society (such as exploitation, domination, or discrimination) can be defined as “forms of exploitation of the non-relation” (Zupančič, 2017, p. 30). Power structures exploit the non-relation by “presenting a given form of social antagonism (non-relation) as the ultimate Relation,” so that they appropriate the non-relation and make it into a narrative of a higher relation, which Zupančič calls the “privatization of the negative,” the abstract exploitation that makes the concrete forms of exploitation possible (p. 31). This fantasmatic transformation of the non-relation into a higher relation is best exemplified by Adam Smith’s idea of the “free” market with its “invisible hand:” When we look at it in actuality, every economic crisis and the social and ecological consequences of capitalism shows us that the invisible hand doesn’t actually do what it’s supposed to do (provide the higher relation), but rather starts to masturbate when it is left alone, which Zupančič calls “the invisible handjob of the market” (p. 32).

It is not very difficult to generalize this into the other forms of ideological “higher relations” that are presumed to exist, such as the patriarchal ideology of the family (and the man as the patriarch) and the binary understanding of gender, or the nationalist

ideology of the harmonious unity of the nation-state. In each case, the non-relation is presented as a higher unity, which in turn gets embodied in a symptomal element which marks its impossibility: The impossibility of capitalism (class struggle) is embodied in the proletariat, the non-existence of man is embodied in the woman (which can be represented as M+, man and its impossibility), the impossibility of the binary classification of gender is embodied in the figure of the queer (i.e. when both the identities of man and woman are positivized, the impossibility takes the form of MF+), or the non-existence of the nation is embodied in the figure of the external enemy or the internal traitor (as the Jew in anti-Semitism, or the Armenian, Kurd etc. in the context of Turkey). That's why the issue of class (understood not as a positively existing entity but in the sense of social antagonism which expresses itself in a class structure) connects revolutionary movements like communist, feminist, queer, and anticolonial movements (Zupančič, 2019, p. 445). All revolutionary movements share the characteristic that they do not affirm a positive identity, but rather identify with the negativity inherent to the structure: that's why Zupančič argues that revolutionary politics is not an affirmation but a "loss of identity," all authentic revolutionary movements ultimately aim to abolish themselves (e.g. the proletariat struggles not to assert itself as fully proletarian, but ultimately to abolish itself, hence abolishing class society as such) (Zupančič, 2017, p. 36). That's why, for instance, feminism is not an affirmation of womanhood or feminine identity, which, as already recognized by patriarchy, functions as a part of the system of domination itself (that's why the rejection of even the "good" parts of feminine identity is a feminist gesture: refusing the "crumbs of enjoyment offered by patriarchy" as Žižek



calls them, such as praise of motherhood, or the offers of “gallantry” etc.) (Žižek, 2012, p. 999).

From this, we can easily see the falsity of the position of the so-called TERFs, those who call themselves “radical feminists” while trying to exclude trans women from the feminist struggle in the name of womanhood (by positively defining what a woman is): When the categorization of genders becomes a binary structure so that it is expressed MF+ (binary of male-female and its impossibility), it is not the term “F” (as the positivized female identity) that stands for the “woman” in this equation but the “+” as the queer/trans term that doesn’t fit into the hegemonic binary categorization (which is the same “+” in LGBTI+ that does not stand for a “different identity” but for difference as such as the stumbling point of all categorization; in Zupančič’s words, the fact that “sexual identity” is a contradiction in terms) (Zupančič, 2017, p. 116; Zupančič, 2019, p. 449; Žižek, 2020b, p. 134). So, what the so-called TERFs effectively do is to uphold the masculine couple MF against the feminine element +, whereas it is the excluded trans women who embody the feminine element here (Žižek, 2022, pp. 146-7). It is in this vein Žižek argues that woman is the first figure of queer/trans in history (Žižek, 2020b, pp. 140-1, 253-6).

The conclusion to be drawn is that sexual difference is a form of class antagonism, and vice versa, that class antagonism is sexuated; and this is the singular point where all authentic revolutionary movements touch each other (Žižek, 2017a, p. 87; Žižek, 2012, pp. 746-7, 779). Leonard Cohen renders this sublimely in his song called “There is a War,” in which he lists the particular struggles (“there is a war” between woman and

man, poor and rich, black and white, left and right, odd and even) but also gives the self-reflexive formula that lays out the ultimate matrix of antagonism, inscribing the very song into the class struggle, which at the same time reveals that neutrality is impossible, the field is antagonistic: “There is a war between the ones who say that there is a war and the ones who say that there isn’t.” This is the ultimate division between the feminine logic of materialism which claims that Being is conflictual, that big Other (god, society, family, nation, genders etc.) doesn’t exist, that there is a non-relationship; and the masculine logic of idealism which claims that Being is noncontradictory and tries to make the big Other exist.

The non-existence of the Other, the impossibility of taking the objective/neutral standpoint, means that there is no way to define a revolution as a pre-determined “strategic activity;” that there can be no “guarantee of revolution” as Lenin argues, neither in the form of social necessity (assumption of which results in endless waiting for the conditions to mature), nor in the form of a democratic legitimacy (which amounts to the “majority” to be on the revolution’s side, which never happens) (Žižek, 2012, p. 120; Žižek, 2017a, p. 249; Žižek, 2017b, p. 56; Comay, 2011, p. 7). As Žižek puts it, “revolutions always, by definition, occur at the wrong time and place, they are always ‘out of place’” (Žižek, 2012, p. 438). That’s why revolutionary politics implies what Žižek calls “political separation” as the separation of the goal from itself, “the full acceptance of the fact that, in the process of its actualization, the goal itself changes” (Žižek, 2017a, p. 248). This means that the revolutionary act cannot begin by directly making the right choice, but rather, the “art of politics” is to “make the right mistake” (Žižek, 2017a, pp. 252-3; Žižek, 2017b, p. 55). Only after the first mistake that the space

for the right act emerges. This is the Lacanian logic of “father or worse” (*père ou pire*) which states that the ethical choice never arises between the good and the bad, but initially appears as a choice between the presumed balance/peace of the existing situation (“father”) or the uncertainty of “irrational” revolutionary terror (which always appears as the “worse”); and Lacan (as well as Hegel) states that the only way for the possibility of the choice of the good to emerge is by choosing the “worse,” the uncertainty of the revolutionary rupture which is by definition without guarantee (Žižek, 2012, pp. 69-70). Just like the analyst who derives its authorization from nothing but itself, the revolution also deploys itself without any dependence on an external guarantee, it doesn’t need permission from the big Other (Žižek, 2012, pp. 118, 963; Žižek, 2017b, p. 18). This explains why the idea of choosing the “lesser evil” (as a variant of the University discourse) is actually choosing the greatest evil: If one always chooses the lesser evil (father), one can never break out of the current situation, can never arrive at the point where the choice of good arises. So, in the ethical/revolutionary act there are actually two choices: First, the choice between the old order and violent revolutionary rupture, and only after we choose the rupture we get the second choice which is between persisting in the abstract universality of rupture (refusal to make the revolution into a positivity, which usually results in a catastrophe) and concrete universality (which positively establishes a new field) (Žižek, 2012, p. 290).

As Žižek notes, this passage from the first to the second choice is the passage from revolutionary Terror to the Kantian autonomous free subject: only after we identify with the revolutionary Terror completely can we recognize in the negativity of Terror the core of pure subject as ontological negativity (hence Heine’s remark that Kant surpassed

Robespierre in intellectual terrorism) (Žižek, 2012, p. 196; Comay, 2011, p. 20). That's why Hegel saw Jacobin revolutionary Terror not as an excessive moment that could have been avoided but as a necessary precondition for the revolution itself, since as we have seen, one cannot pass into the concrete directly without going through the abstract negativity of Terror (Žižek, 2012, pp. 205-6). Žižek summarizes this concisely: "violence does not work, renouncing it works even less," because renouncing violence is nothing but the acceptance of the current systemic violence (p. 299).

The exercise of revolutionary Terror as abstract negativity shows itself beautifully in the trial of Louis XVI and the discussions regarding his status. Whereas some argued that the king should be judged as an ordinary citizen according to the law with all the rights of a citizen, Robespierre famously argued that Louis XVI committed an ultimate crime by being a king and separating himself from the people, so that accepting him as a citizen means acquitting him from the crime of being a king, that the fact of revolution already means that the king is guilty, and he stated, in line with Saint-Just's "no man can reign innocently," that "peoples do not judge in the same way as courts of law; they do not hand down sentences, they throw thunderbolts; they do not condemn kings, they drop them back into the void; and this justice is worth just as much as that of the courts." (Comay, 2011, pp. 40-1; Žižek, 2017b, p. 17; Robespierre, 2007, p. 59). Similarly, he argued against those who pleaded for a majority vote to decide the fate of the former king, stating that truth is irreducible to numbers or counting, that it can be experienced even in solitude; which exemplifies the logic of the non-All, the part-of-no-part, as the Particular position from which the Universal truth emerges (Žižek, 2017b, pp. 17-9). Robespierre stated this as the eternal right of the minority: "Minority has everywhere an

eternal right: to render audible the voice of truth” (quoted in p. 17). In contrast, the majority constituted by democratic elections does not reflect the truth but reproduce the “predominant doxa determined by the hegemonic ideology” (p. 19).

The authenticity of revolutionary Terror comes from the non-existence of any guarantee of the process; as Žižek exemplifies apropos Robespierre, the answer to the question “how could Robespierre know that the revolution wouldn’t eat him too,” is simply that he didn’t know, he simply accepted the consequences even if it meant that the revolution ate him (which it did), that he was simply not afraid to die: “The reason he is so serene, unafraid of his fate, is not that Danton was a traitor while he is pure, a direct embodiment of the people’s Will; it is that he, Robespierre, is not afraid to die” (Žižek, 2017b, p. 31). That’s why Robespierre can be so relentless in his revolutionary politics, that he can reject all “realistic compromises” in order to “break the yoke of habit,” and he can insist on the revolutionary change here and right now (p. 32). This means that revolutionary self-destitution (as the Analyst’s discourse) implies the “courage to die;” because death is ultimately imaginary, it represents a non-event as an event, which is expressed by Epicurus’ materialist argument against fear of death<sup>18</sup> (Žižek, 2022, p. 286; Žižek, 2012, p. 153). In Žižek’s words, through subjective destitution, the revolutionary overcomes mortality and enters undeadness (not as “life after death” of idealism, but as “death-in-life” of materialism), “obliterates his personality, inclusive of the fear of death, so that revolution lives through him” (Žižek, 2022, p. 291). This absence of guarantee separates authentic revolutionary politics from

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<sup>18</sup> Since death is defined as the absence of experience, it cannot be experienced.

religious, nationalist or other kinds of fundamentalism: Whereas revolutionaries assume the non-existence of the Other which means not only the acceptance that they might die, but the acceptance that their death may be in vain (recall Benjamin's "not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious"), that the revolution might catastrophically fail; the idealist logic of fundamentalism always operates through a guarantee provided by a figure of big Other (god, nation etc.), which means that a fundamentalist is sure that their death will be meaningful (Benjamin, 2003, p. 391). In this sense fundamentalism is always based on a given tradition which is guaranteed by a figure of big Other, whereas revolutionary politics always deals with invented (and the invention of) tradition which means that there can be no guarantee, that this is fundamentally an experimental process. In Badiou's theory of ethics, this difference corresponds to the difference between the truth Event based on the Void as ontological impossibility, which corresponds to "the naming of the Void" (he gives the example of Marx's naming of the impossibility of capitalism as the proletariat); and the simulacrum of an Event as a form of evil, which takes a plenitude as its reference point instead of a negativity (to which Badiou gives the example of Nazism) (Badiou, 2001, pp. 69, 72). It is in this sense that Žižek argues that only a true atheist (who assumes the non-existence of the Other) is capable of the authentic ethical/political act, because the act is defined precisely by the fact that it is not covered by the big Other (Žižek, 2020b, p. 411; Žižek, 2017a, p. 280; Žižek, 2012, p. 116).

This difference marks a definitive line of separation between revolutionary politics and any kind of identity politics, independent of its content or context. This means that originally revolutionary ideas can also be transformed into identity politics. We have

already given the example of so-called TERFs who exclude trans women by defining a positive identity of womanhood or femininity under the name of “feminism,” but this can be seen in many liberal or reactionary reappropriations of revolutionary ideas such as “pure” socialists that reject or relativize other forms of class structures such as patriarchy, liberal feminist and queer movements that accept capitalist class society and reduce the issue to a democratic recognition of particular rights or ecological movements that try to address the ecological crisis within the logic of the market (e.g. by changing consumption habits etc.). Conversely, this line of separation also enables to see that traditionalist, reactionary, or fundamentalist groups that occupy an anticolonial position purely by virtue of circumstance are not revolutionary. That’s why, for instance, Žižek rejects populist leftist moves such as the direct equation of “the struggle against Islamophobia” with “the struggle for women’s rights,” because they can work against each other with radically different results: On one hand, as the struggle of women against Islam’s oppression of women, which is a revolutionary outcome; and on the other hand, as Islamist anti-colonial struggle that dismisses feminism and woman’s rights as maladies of the Western culture, which is a reactionary outcome (Žižek, 2020b, p. 353). The revolutionary attitude with regard to this situation is neither the complete dismissal of movements that display reactionary trends (which would amount to the rejection of social action as such), nor is it the liberal leftist PC (“politically correct”) move of complete acceptance of (or tolerance towards) these reactionary elements as legitimate differences. As Žižek gives through the example of “Palestinian veiled women” and “Israeli lesbians” marching side by side in Jerusalem, without a radical change in both sides (e.g. Palestinian women dropping the reactionary/oppressive

elements of their traditional culture, Israeli lesbians rejecting their colonial and class privileges), this kind of an event will only be a rare miracle, without any real social consequences (Žižek, 2017a, p. 251). It is in this sense that the revolutionary act transforms, or better yet, abolishes its subject: The only way for different revolutionary movements to come together is neither the erasure of their particularities nor the acceptance of all particularities as they are; it is rather through the recognition of their common negativity, the social antagonism, the class struggle, the non-relationship which already implies the impossibility of identity, and points towards abolition of any given identity. Only with the passage through this zero-point can the radically New emerge.

The implication of this discussion of revolutionary movements, as well as the previous discussion of the partisan knowledge, for the status of the sociology and sociological knowledge should be obvious by now: There can be no social or political science which is not directly situated within the antagonistic field it tries to model; the only difference is that whereas the idealist forms of social science (which are species of the University discourse or the masculine All) disavow this antagonism, and hence they are actually on the side of the status quo; materialist social science explicitly takes its place in the antagonism, which means that the place from which the model arises is already defined within the model, exemplified by the point of view of the proletariat which informs Marxist theory, or the Analyst's discourse of the feminine non-All which constitutes the Lacanian field. This is to say that there can be no authentic (social) science which is not in itself a form of revolutionary activity, and the rest are nothing but species of University discourse.



To further specify this in the domain of sociology we can deploy the four discourses with regard to different academic approaches to social sciences: Traditionally, in the place of the Master is the positive sciences, as the impossible/ideal point which serves as a constitutive exception. The impossibility of social sciences (in fact, all sciences underwent this in the 20<sup>th</sup> ce) to occupy this place results in the split between the quantitative, statistical, model-based theories of sociology as the University discourse (preoccupied with empty Universals) and the qualitative theories of anthropology which symptomatically avoid all kinds of generalizations and insist on the incommensurability of different particularities, inadequacy of “armchair sociology” with its general theories etc. as the Hysteric’s discourse. But as we now know, the University discourse and Hysteric’s discourse are not equally subversive or revolutionary, and this also reflects itself in this split: Whereas the first group, “American” sociology, the sociology of the state (of state-istics), is inherently reactionary and conformist, always available to be co-opted by the existing power structures; the second group, the anthropologically or qualitatively oriented understanding, carries with it a possibility of an inversion to the non-All of the Analyst’s discourse. It is not from the denial of the Particular in the name of a pure Universal that truth arises, but rather that after seeing the absolute separation of the Particular from the Universal, one can take one step further and see that this absolute difference is nothing but the self-split of the non-All.

This is what Lacan means when he claims that there is an “antipathy” between the University and Analyst’s discourses, to which we might add that there is also a kind of sympathy between the Hysteric’s and Analyst’s discourses (Lacan, 2013b, p. 3). What this implies for the status of social sciences within the confines of the university is

rendered by Lacan, apropos of his involvement with the University of Vincennes, as following: “The experiment will therefore continue. At Vincennes, so long as it has the freedom to do so. If ever it gets restricted, then out of the university!” (p. 3) Today, the task of every social scientist is to consider the status of their practice and the knowledge they produce with regard to the revolutionary movements and revolutionary action, and consider whether the time has come for us to finally declare: “out of the university!”

## 11. Ersatz-Conclusion: Out of the University... to the Cyberspace

The call to get “out of the university” should be understood in the most general sense, in a way that includes many different incarnations of the University discourse that appear in different guises. Besides the obvious implication for the academic institutions which function as the loci of the production of “neutral” expert knowledge, namely that we need radically new forms of organization in order to facilitate production of partisan knowledge; it also becomes apparent that this exodus cannot be thought of without also rejecting the current for-profit academic publishing regime based on intellectual property and restriction of knowledge. Aaron Swartz describes the situation succinctly, and advocates for a struggle for unconditional open access in Guerilla Open Access Manifesto:

“Information is power. But like all power, there are those who want to keep it for themselves. The world’s entire scientific and cultural heritage, published over centuries in books and journals, is increasingly being digitized and locked up by a handful of private corporations.

(...)

There is no justice in following unjust laws. It’s time to come into the light and, in the grand tradition of civil disobedience, declare our opposition to this private theft of public culture.

We need to take information, wherever it is stored, make our copies and share them with the world. We need to take stuff that’s out of copyright and add it to the archive. We need to buy secret databases and put them on the Web. We need to

download scientific journals and upload them to file sharing networks. We need to fight for Guerilla Open Access.” (Swartz, 2008)

This ridiculousness of both the academic bureaucracy and academic publishing is very well-known to anyone that is remotely familiar with these fields. An obvious example is that I wouldn’t be able to reach almost any proper source, which means this work would not have been written, if not for people like Alexandra Elbakyan (the founder of Sci-Hub, a website that facilitates access to paywalled articles), pirate book sharing sites like Library Genesis, and a legion of anonymous pirates that make knowledge publicly available on the internet. Yet, although everyone is aware of the situation, (as a tenet of the University discourse) the academia are unable to “break the yoke of habit” and insist on revolutionary change right here and right now, even on an issue this simple.

The fundamental problem behind this situation is ethico-political as we have argued throughout this work; but a materialist knows very well that “ideology has a material existence,” so one cannot simply expect to dismantle the existing structures without relying on a material basis that would enable the invention of new revolutionary habits and traditions (Althusser, 1970). Today, in addition to forms and fields of revolutionary activity transmitted to us by the tradition, there emerged a novel field which both creates new forms of control and provides possibilities of radically new forms of social organization; namely, the internet. Žižek is spot on when he designates the cyberspace as a terrain of class struggle (Žižek, 2017a, p. 9): As a new form of commons, the internet is undergoing a struggle of subsumption today: On one hand, we

have the trend of privatization which tries to reduce it to an advertisement machine that enables digital surveillance and control (dubbed “surveillance capitalism” by Shoshana Zuboff); but on the other hand, we have the trend of open source, decentralization, encryption, and piracy that facilitates sharing of knowledge in an unprecedented scale as well as the formation of previously impossible organizations (Zuboff, 2014).

Although it is the former trend that is usually seen as the prominent one, exaggerated as an omen of inescapable total digital control awaiting us in the future; every hacker and every speedrunner knows that there is no system that cannot be exploited, no game that cannot be glitched, which corresponds to the psychoanalytical truth that big Other doesn’t exist, and as Žižek exhaustively demonstrates in his recent work *Hegel in a Wired Brain*, even in the presence of direct brain-computer interface, the lack-in-the-Other would prevent a total alienation of the subject in the digital big Other, that the Real as the absolute difference, as the fundamental ontological negativity, would appear in the form of bugs, glitches and exploits that would provide a minimal separation/freedom as well as a basis for ethical activity (Žižek, 2020a, Žižek, 2017a, p. 132).

It is this impossibility which makes the internet a field of class struggle, and the second trend draws its strength from it. This second trend is best exemplified by the *cyberpunk* movement with its emphasis on cryptography, privacy, anonymity and open-source; and the developments that resulted from these principles such as PGP encryption, torrent and other peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing networks, P2P privacy networks like TOR, free software/open-source movements like the GNU project (which

made open-source operating systems like Linux possible), and last but not least, the blockchain technology. These technologies which are inspired by the cypherpunk principles, in turn, made it possible to create all kinds of informational networks that can produce common knowledge even if it conflicts with state or capital interests, exemplified by organizations like WikiLeaks (whose founder Julian Assange is currently imprisoned in England, waiting to be extradited to the US) which make confidential information obtained by whistleblowers (like Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning) and hackers available to the common public. Eric Hughes, one of the pioneers of the cypherpunk movement, defines the general principles of the cypherpunk movement in *A Cypherpunk's Manifesto* as follows:

“We cannot expect governments, corporations, or other large, faceless organizations to grant us privacy out of their beneficence. It is to their advantage to speak of us, and we should expect that they will speak.

(...)

We must defend our own privacy if we expect to have any. We must come together and create systems which allow anonymous transactions to take place. People have been defending their own privacy for centuries with whispers, darkness, envelopes, closed doors, secret handshakes, and couriers. The technologies of the past did not allow for strong privacy, but electronic technologies do.

We the Cypherpunks are dedicated to building anonymous systems. We are defending our privacy with cryptography, with anonymous mail forwarding systems, with digital signatures, and with electronic money.

Cypherpunks write code. We know that someone has to write software to defend privacy, and since we can't get privacy unless we all do, we're going to write it. We publish our code so that our fellow Cypherpunks may practice and play with it. Our code is free for all to use, worldwide. We don't much care if you don't approve of the software we write. We know that software can't be destroyed and that a widely dispersed system can't be shut down.” (Hughes, 2019)

These words were written in 1993. Today, almost 30 years later, many people know the name of the most influential and famous cypherpunk, Satoshi Nakamoto, the anonymous creator of the first public blockchain, the Bitcoin network. In addition to the previous developments in encryption and networking recounted above, the invention of the blockchain technology opened up radically new ways of organization and political intervention which were simply impossible before: Even “pure” blockchains (like Bitcoin) which are simply publicly distributed censorship-resistant ledgers that keep records of balances and transactions are revolutionary in the sense that for the first time in history there is a type of money that is neither created nor controllable by states (or central banks), and consequently a “monetary policy” independent of states (which can be governed by the algorithm, or the users of the blockchain). More advanced blockchains like Ethereum, which are not only simple ledgers but distributed virtual machines that are able to execute programs (“smart contracts”), make possible the formation of *decentralized autonomous organizations* (DAO) which is a form of organization distinct from both states and corporations. DAOs can be thought of organizations whose “constitution” and assets exist on the blockchain, and the “constitution” (which is a smart contract, a piece of code) executes itself, instead of

relying on individuals to execute it (which can in principle replace almost all “middlemen” from banks to governments themselves). The “constitution,” in turn, is created and modified by the members of the DAO, usually through a democratic process. But what gives it a twist and keeps it from being another form of liberal democratic organization is that since the “constitution” (smart contract) or even the code of the blockchain on which the smart-contract resides is by definition open-source, anyone can copy an existing smart contract’s or blockchain’s source code, modify it, and deploy a new DAO or a new blockchain, which is a process called forking. The crucial point is that forking doesn’t require any authorization from a majority and inscribes the possibility of political separation into the political system itself. Thus, in addition to and more importantly than inventing a new consensus mechanism, the blockchain technology introduces a new “dissensus” mechanism (in Jacques Rancière’s terms) that enables the “part-of-no-part” to inscribe itself into the political field (Rancière, 2010).

These developments which were made possible by the internet, especially blockchain technology and the forms of organization that it enables like the DAOs, provide a twofold advancement over the traditional forms of organization: On one hand, they provide an alternative to bureaucratic forms of organizations like party and union (as well as capitalist forms like nation-state or corporation), as well as creating new ways of democratic control over collective capital (for instance, the blockchain makes possible what is called “social slashing,” a political decision taken by the majority to expropriate the assets of the actors that exploit the commons in various ways) (Wall, 2022). On the other hand, through the mechanism of forking, they provide the minority to subtract itself from the democratic-hegemonic process, which means that any



minority can rewrite the law and deploy it as another DAO without the requirement of any kind of permission or authorization from the majority. This twofold advantage of the DAO form, combined with the fact that it provides a way to store common capital safe from state or corporate intervention as well as its universal accessibility owing to the fact that it resides in the internet, creates a considerable alternative to both the chronic dysfunctionality of the grassroots, bottom-up, non-alienated etc. forms of organization (which are usually very localized and unable to sustain a large-scale organization or action) as well as the all the obscenity that results from bureaucratic-centralized forms of organization (which both display a Kafkaesque-superegoical underside, which is a feature of the University discourse, and they also result in standard struggles of the centralized power structures). The alternative that DAO form provides to these two deadlocks make it a very viable tool to build truly international and common organizations, which are needed more than ever today in the face of both the atrocities of global capitalism and the nation-state system, and the ecological crisis which is getting more dire every day. As Žižek frequently argues, neither of the traditional forms can provide a basis for a true international, a global-scale organization of people (the grassroots-type gets stuck in small-scale reaction, the bureaucratic-type turns into yet another power structure), and I argue that it is the internet, with all these new forms of organization it makes possible, that provides a way for the revolutionary politics to subtract itself from this hegemonic duality of self-hindering and self-instrumentalization of the bureaucratic-type organizations, and the acting out of the grassroots-type organizations.

Consequently, when combined with the aforementioned developments in privacy and networking, blockchain technology and the DAO form present a new opening for an organization outside the bureaucratic logic of the University. Of course, this is not to state that these developments are in themselves revolutionary, on the contrary, they can be and to a certain extent are internalized by the dynamics of capitalism as can be seen in subsumption of cryptocurrencies by the market. In the case of cryptocurrencies, it suffices to recall Žižek's observation apropos of virtualization of money that a fetish is strongest when it is immaterial. But this also should not make us overlook their novelty and revolutionary potential, which Žižek also notes by stating that this dematerialization can result in self-negation (Žižek, 2017a, pp. 182-3; Žižek, 2012, p. 246). Today, blockchains and DAOs stand as the most promising form of collective control of capital (which follows the feminine logic: there is no exceptions to the code, the code is non-All) against the bureaucratic and statist forms of public control, or the direct privatized control.

It is in this sense that internet provides a crucial platform for class struggle today; and these newly available forms of organization emerge as supplements or alternatives to traditional ways of organizing which are generally more prone to state and market intervention. If we return to the beginning of our discussion, to the issue of getting out of the university in a narrower academic sense; it becomes apparent that these new forms of organization provide the perfect ground for creation of dispositifs of partisan knowledge. Instead of the institutions like universities, publishers and NGOs which are either directly tied to or indirectly managed by state and/or capital, we should explore new forms of organizations like blockchains and DAOs which carry with them a small

but real potential of subversion. This is not to state that the situation is hopeful, on the contrary, especially in the context in which this thesis is written, today the situation appears to be more hopeless than ever. But as Lenin states, this hopelessness is also what stimulates our efforts in our struggle for the radically New: “What if the complete hopelessness of the situation, by stimulating the efforts of the workers and peasants tenfold, offered us the opportunity to create the fundamental requisites of civilization in a different way from that of the West European countries?” (Lenin, 1966 p. 478)

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