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Why Psychoanalysis? Three Interventions

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In “Why Psychoanalysis?” Alenka Zupančič outlines the relationship between the ontological, the ethical and the aesthetical spheres of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In three bold interventions she investigates the questions of Being, Freedom and Comedy. Taking her departure from issues of sex, cause, and horror Zupančič reinterprets Kant’s philosophical categories and outlines a unique theory of the subject. “Why Psychoanalysis?” continues her seminal work Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan from 2000 and links it with more recent work about comedy. “Why Psychoanalysis?” Is suitable for beginners as well as for more advanced readers.

INTRODUCTION

Since the time when Freud founded psychoanalysis, it has become well established in its field – or so it would seem. Yet, if we look at it more closely, this soon becomes less certain. It becomes less certain for one fundamental reason that is quite interesting in itself: the more we look at it, the less clear it becomes what exactly the field of psychoanalysis is. From its very beginnings, for example, psychoanalysis was surrounded by debate about whether its scope lay more in the realm of natural sciences or in the realm of philosophy and cultural sciences. Freud was frequently, and simultaneously, attacked from both sides: some objected to his 'biologism' and 'scientism,' whereas others attacked his 'cultural relativism' and speculations that went far beyond the clinical circumstances. And this debate is by no means over, or the issue settled. However, regardless of what was (or is) the pertinence of these criticisms in particular conceptual questions, one should never lose sight of the fact that a major dimension of Freud's discovery was precisely the overlapping of the two realms, defined as the physical and the mental. If there is any meaningful general way of describing the object of psychoanalysis, it might be precisely this: the object of psychoanalysis is the zone where the two realms overlap, i.e. where the biological or somatic is already mental or cultural and where, at the same time, culture springs from the very impasses of the somatic functions which it tries to resolve (yet, in doing so, it creates new ones). In other words – and this is perhaps the most important point – the overlapping in question is not simply an overlapping of two well-established entities ('body' and 'mind'), but an intersection which is generative of both sides that overlap in it. Freud saw very quickly not only to what considerable extent culture and mind were able to affect, even distort and physically change, human bodies, but also, and perhaps more significantly, that there must be something in the human body that makes this possible. And that this something is not a kind of inborn propensity for culture and spirituality, a germ of mind or soul deposited in our bodies, but something much closer to a biological dysfunction, which turned out to be strangely productive.

The problem of what exactly the psychoanalytic field proper is also extends well beyond these fundamental considerations, and concerns the way psychoanalysis often seems to 'move all over the place,' encroaching on all kinds of different fields or 'disciplines' (philosophy, religion, art, as well as

different branches of science). Which is why one of the frequent objections to psychoanalysis could be summed up as follows: If it only kept to its field! This is to say: If it only kept to its feud – to the part allocated to it in proportion to its social recognition! Or: If it only kept to the boundaries of its clinical, therapeutic practice! This last objection is especially frequent in the case of Jacques Lacan, who obstinately refused to keep to the supposedly psychoanalytic feud of therapeutic practice. He recognized in this kind of imperative an invitation for psychoanalysts to make themselves "the guarantors of the bourgeois dream," as he put it in his seminar on the *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Psychoanalysis, as he saw it, is not here to help us come to terms with 'our' problems (in relation to society, for example,) or to help us cultivate the ideal of our personal treasure and singularity. It has an intrinsically social, objective, and critical dimension. It is never simply about the individuals and their (more or less intimate) problems - these are inscribed, from the very outset, into the socio-symbolic field that Lacan calls 'the Other.' Lacanian psychoanalysis thus never resigned itself to the therapeutic purpose of enabling successful social adaptation. It has also largely resisted the post-modern version of social adaptation and conformism, which advances under the (supposedly opposite) sign of promoting everyone's exclusive, precious singularity and non-uniformity. Instead, it insisted that the theoretical scope of psychoanalysis justly included the development of its own theory of the subject, of knowledge, of truth, of social link(s), and so on. This was, and still is, in sharp contrast with the position of many psychoanalysts (and non-psychoanalysts) who believe that psychoanalytic theory can only be a theory of this or that particular subject, or case, and that any other, more universalistic conceptualisations can only lead to highly problematic metaphysical waters. Lacan never lost sight of the fact that any true conceptualisation is intrinsically universalistic, which is of course not to say that it is universally accepted. A conceptualisation may well be controversial, but this controversy should be confronted as such and its stakes fought for, instead of being by-passed by means of the parcelling of the field of science into a possibly infinite number of disciplines, which all have the right to make truth claims, provided that they stay within the boundaries of their parcels and do not interfere with the others.

It is precisely on account of his highly developed and structured conceptual proposals that Lacan is responsible for the fact that psychoanalysis has become massively involved in, and present on stage of contemporary philosophical debates. Despite his persistent claim that "psychoanalysis is not

philosophy," Lacan was constantly developing his theory through a dialogue with philosophy. The scope of the 'three interventions' presented here lies mostly in the realm of this dialogue. It aims at interrogating, analysing, and defending certain notions that psychoanalysis has introduced into the general conceptual space.

I chose the term 'interventions' because the three chapters touch upon three different fields that are rather immense in themselves: ontology (and its criticism), practical philosophy, and aesthetics, Given the vast landscape of each of these fields, the chapters that follow have no ambition to 'cover' them (from the perspective of psychoanalysis). They venture instead to intervene into them at precise and particular points. The first intervention thus posits and turns around two questions:

1. What exactly is the psychoanalytic theory of sexuality? Everybody seems to know the answer to this, and the matter seems to be clear enough, yet this is far from really being the case, and the question is well worth asking and reconsidering.

2. What (if any) are the implications of the psychoanalytic theory of sexuality for ontology and its contemporary theories? Moreover, what are possible political implications of this psychoanalytic stance?

The second intervention focuses on the psychoanalytic – and especially Lacanian – concept of the cause, and interrogates this concept in relationship to the notion of freedom. Although the two terms are often posited as antinomic, what follows from the Lacanian conceptualisations of cause is ultimately a far more intriguing constellation in which the notion of cause is closely related to that of freedom.

The third intervention deals with the peculiar relationship between two aesthetic (and affective) phenomena which, in their very different, even opposition, display a strange and interesting proximity: comedy and the uncanny ('das Unheimliche"). What they have in common, or so I argue, is a specific figure of Nothing (or void), which they configure in two different ways – through two different modalities of excess or surplus.

Sex, ontology, cause, freedom, comedy, horror – I am sure that this choice will easily lend itself to more criticism of the expansiveness of the psychoanalytic field in all directions, but all these are actually just different

ways of tackling the same basic problem.

Intervention I

SEXUALITY AND ONTOLOGY

The central place of sexuality in psychoanalysis has often been, and continues to be, a controversial issue. Especially when, with Jacques Lacan, psychoanalysis entered the stage of contemporary philosophy and has since become an important point of reference on this stage, this issue is often raised in debates concerning the relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis. It has been suggested, for example, that the insistence on the sexual 'particularizes' psychoanalysis, and hence deprives it of a more universal scope, which philosophy has. Is this really so?

The question of sexuality should indeed be brutally put on the table in any serious attempt at *associating* philosophy and psychoanalysis. Not only because it usually constitutes the 'hard core' of their *dissociation,* but also because not giving up on the matter of sexuality constitutes the *sine qua non* of any true psychoanalytic stance, which seems to make this dissociation all the more absolute or insurmountable.

The last point (the emphasis on sexuality as the *sine qua non* of any true psychoanalysis stance) is massively supported by the history of psychoanalysis, which, of course, has had its own attempts at relativising and playing down the role of the sexual, transposing it into an 'important issue' that has its place alongside other important issues that represent the whole of the human condition. While these attempts do sometimes seem to bring psychoanalysis closer to philosophy, they constitute, I believe, the worse kind of 'false friends.' They produce a 'psychologised philosophy.' A certain *Weltanschaung, which could be perhaps best described as 'human interest philosophy,'* philosophy that puts at its centre the investigation of the human animal and its soul.

This is why it is by no means an accident that the two psychoanalysts who have had by far the most productive and consequential influence on contemporary philosophy, Freud and Lacan, were both absolutely unshakable when it came to the key role of sexuality in psychoanalysis. The examples of their influence in philosophy are abundant, but let me take just the prominent contemporary example of Alain Badiou, while utterly unyielding in his stance as regards refusing to associate subjectivity, in its emergence, with anything like 'sexuation,' Badiou's work is profoundly engaged, and on many levels, with

Freud and Lacan. One can by no means imagine Badiou lining up, for example, with the Jungian approach as an approach in which sexuality is fortunately put in its proper, 'secondary' place.

The situation is indeed a very interesting one. It is almost as if psychoanalysis and philosophy had their most engaging, productive, and powerful encounters when this central issue of dispute remained unresolved. We could also say: it is as if philosophy always got the most out of the psychoanalysis that remained unyielding as to the issue of sexuality, although it tended to leave this issue at the door. Or: it is as if the point that generates that which makes psychoanalysis truly interesting for philosophy is the very point that philosophy cannot accept. The sexuality thus seems to constitute a singular point of 'missed encounter' that only allows for any true encounter between philosophy and psychoanalysis (in their heterogeneity).

In what follows I will try to shed some light on the question of why this is so, and I will start by examining more closely what exactly is the status of sexuality in psychoanalysis.

Freud and *Three Essays*

Let us start out from a point that is so *obvious* that I am almost ashamed to make it, but which is also so crucial that one should perhaps never tire of repeating.

Freud discovered human sexuality as a problem (in need of explanation), and not as something with which one could eventually explain every (other) problem. He 'discovered' sexuality as intrinsically meaningless, and not as the ultimate horizon of all humanly produced meaning. *Three Essay on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) remains a major text in this respect. If one needed to sum up its argument in a single sentence, the following would come close enough to the mark: (human) sexuality is a paradox-ridden deviation from a norm that does not exist. [1]

Freud starts with the discussion of 'sexual aberrations' that were identified as such in the existing corpus of medical knowledge: homosexuality, sodomy, paedophilia, fetishism, voyeurism, sadism, masochism, and so on. In

discussing these ‘perversions’ and the mechanisms involved in them (basically the deviations in respect of the sexual object, which is supposed to be an adult person of the opposite sex, and deviations in respect of the sexual aim – supposedly reproduction) Freud’s argument simultaneously moves in two directions. On the one hand, he extensively demonstrates how the ‘aberrant’ mechanisms involved in these practices are very much present in what is considered to be ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ sexual behaviour. Insofar as they well integrated in what is considered to be ‘normal’ sexuality, they are not viewed as perversions. They are only considered as perverse aberrations if they become altogether independent of the ‘appropriate’ sexual object and of the supposed sexual aim, if they become autonomous in their fragmented, partial aims that serve no meaningful purpose. Freud would object, however, to the word ‘become’ – and this constitutes the second, crucial line of his argument. Drives are fragmented, partial, aimless and independent of their object *to start with*. They do not become such due to some ulterior deviation. The deviation of drives is a constitutive deviation. Freud writes that “the sexual drive is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be dues to its object’s attractions.” [2] This is why “from the point of view of psychoanalysis, the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature.” [3]

The discovery of this constitutive and original deviation of drives (which is precisely what distinguishes them from instincts) will gradually lead to one of the major conceptual inventions of psychoanalysis, the concept of the object small *a (objet petit a)*, as it was named by Lacan. To put it simply, object *a* will come to name the other (the real) object of the drive as “independent of its object.”

But let us look at the origin of this concept in Freud’s observations. One of Freud’s main examples is thumb-sucking, which he analyses as a manifestation of infantile sexuality (the existence of which was, for the first time, systematically pointed out by Freud, and which has met with strong resistance). In relation to the need for nourishment, to which it attaches itself at the outset, the oral drive pursues an object different from food: it pursues (and aims at repeating) the very sensation of satisfaction produced in the region of the mouth during the act of nutrition. Oral satisfaction, which arose as a by-product of the satisfying of the need for food, starts to function as an

autonomous object of the drive, it moves away from its first object and lets itself be led into series of substitute objects. In other words, the concept of the drive (and of its object) is not simply a concept of the deviation from a natural need, but something that casts a new and surprising light on the nature of human need as such: in human beings, all satisfaction of a need allows, in principle, for another satisfaction to occur, which tends to become independent and self-perpetuating in pursuing and reproducing itself. There is no natural need that would be absolutely pure, i.e. devoid of this surplus element which splits it from within. This split, this interval or void, this original non-convergence of two different versant of the satisfaction is, for Freud, the very site of ground of human sexuality.

This is a crucial point when it comes to understanding another important emphasis of Freud's conceptualisation of sexuality: 'sexual' is not to be confused with 'genital'. [4] The 'genital sexual organization' is far from being primordial or 'natural': it is a result, a product of several stages of development, involving both the physiological maturation of the reproductive organs and cultural-symbolic parameters. It involves a unification of the originally heterogeneous, dispersed, always-already *compound* sexual drive, composed of different partial drives, such as looking, touching, licking, and so on. ("Since the original disposition is necessarily a complex one, the sexual drive itself must be something put together from various factors." [5]). The unification bears two major characteristics. Firstly, it is always a somehow force and artificial unification (it cannot be viewed simply as a natural teleological result of reproductive maturations). And secondly, it is never really fully achieved or accomplished, which is to say that it never transforms the sexual drive into an organic Unity, with all its components ultimately serving one and the same Purpose. The 'normal,' 'healthy' human sexuality is thus paradoxical artificial naturalization of the originally de-naturalised drives (de-naturalized in the sense of their departing from the 'natural' aims of self-preservation and/or the logic of a pure need as unaffected by another, supplementary satisfaction). One could even say that human sexuality is 'sexual' (and not simply 'reproduction ') precisely insofar as the unification at stake, the tying of all the drives to one single Purpose, never really works, but allow for different partial drives to continue their circular, self-perpetuating activity.

Freud introduced the concept of libido to refer to the quantum of energy at work in the specific, 'declinational' path of the drives, libido names the

'energy' involved in the processes of supplementary satisfaction, for instance – to pursue the previous example – thumb-sucking, or consuming food beyond the biological needs of the body, for the sheer pleasure of exciting the mucous membrane. Freud insists that this energy/excitation is sexual, although "this sexual excitation is derived not from the so-called sexual parts alone, but from all the bodily organs." [6] This point is absolutely crucial, for it allows us to see in what sense Freud actually *discovered* (human) sexuality, and not simply emphasize it or 'reduced' everything to it. It is not that thumb-sucking or gourmandising are sexual against the background of their supposed relationship to the excitation involved in sexual intercourse, on the contrary, if anything, they are sexual *per se*, and it is sexual intercourse which is properly sexual on account of being composed of different partial drives such as these (looking, touching, licking, and so on).

It is in relation to this Freudian stance that one can measure the significance of the stakes involved in his break with Carl Gustav Jung, as well as the genuine philosophical implications of Freud's radical conceptual move, Jung adopted the Freudian notion of the libido and, with a seemingly small modification, gave it an entirely different meaning, with Jung, libido becomes a psychical expression of a 'vital energy,' the origin of which is not solely sexual. In this perspective, libido is a general name for psychic energy, which is sexual only in certain segments. Freud immediately saw how following this Jungian move would entail sacrificing "all that we have gained hitherto from psychoanalytic observation." [7] With the term 'libido' Freud designates an original and irreducible unbalance of human nature. Every satisfaction of a need brings with it the possibility of a supplementary satisfaction, deviating from the object and aim of a given demand while pursuing its own goal, thus constituting a seemingly dysfunctional detour. It is this detour, or the space which it opens up, that constitutes not only the field of the catalogued 'sexual aberrations,'; but also the ground, as well as the energy source, for what is generally referred to as human culture in its highest accomplishments. The generative source of culture is sexual in this precise sense of belonging to the supplementary satisfaction that serves no immediate function and satisfies no immediate need. The image of human nature that follows from these Freudian conceptualisations is that of a split (and conflictual) nature, whereby 'sexual' refers to this very split. If Freud uses the term 'libido' to refer to a certain field of 'energy,' it is to refer to it as a *surplus* energy, and not to any kind of general energetic level involved in our lives. It cannot designate the whole of energy (as Jung suggested), since it is

precisely what makes this whole 'not-whole.'

Sexual 'energy' is not an element that has its place within the whole of human life; the central point of Freud's discovery was precisely that there is no 'natural' or pre-established place of human sexuality, that the latter is constitutively out-of-its-place, fragmented and dispersed, that it only exists in deviations from 'itself' or its supposed natural object, and that sexuality is nothing other than this 'out-of-placeness' of its constitutive satisfaction. In other words, Freud's fundamental move was to de-substantialise sexuality: the sexual is not a substance to be properly described and circumscribed; it is the very impossibility of its own circumscription or delimitation. It can neither be completely separated from biological, organic needs and functions (since it originates within their realm, it starts off by inhabiting them), nor can it be simple reduced to them. Sexual is not a separate domain of human activity or life, and this why it can inhabit all the domains of human life.

What was, and still is, disturbing about the Freudian discovery is not simple the emphasis on sexuality – this kind of resistance, indignant at psychoanalytical 'obsession with dirty matters,' was never the strongest one and was soon marginalized by the progressive liberalism of morals. Much more disturbing was the thesis concerning the always problematic and uncertain character of sexuality itself. Thus, even more powerful resistance (and the more dangerous form of revisionism) came from liberalism itself, promoting sexuality as a 'natural activity,' as something balanced, harmonic in itself, but thrown out of balance by an act of 'necessary' or 'unnecessary' repression (depending on how liberal on pretends to be). If anything, this image of sexuality as something obvious and non-problematic in itself is directly opposed to the Freudian fundamental lesson which, put in Lacanian terms, could be formulated as follows: the Sexual does not exist. There is only the sexual that insist/persists as a constitutive imbalance of the human being. Let me rest my case with one last quote from Freud: "It is my belief that, however strange it may sound, we must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual drive itself is unfavourable to the realization of complete satisfaction." [8]

Lacan and the 'lamella'

The arguments presented above should be enough to support the following thesis, which I would now like to propose in relation to the initial question: What exactly is the status of the sexual in psychoanalysis and how does this relate to philosophy? Psychoanalysis does, of course, start out from the vicissitudes of human beings, on which it focuses its investigations. What keeps it from becoming a kind of 'psychologised' human-interest philosophy, however, is precisely its discovery of, and insistence on the sexual as a factor of radical disorientation, a factor that keeps bringing into question all our representations of the entity called 'human being.' In Freudian theory, the sexual (in the sense of constitutively deviational partial drive, also named 'libido') is not the ultimate horizon of the animal called 'human,' it is not the anchor-point of irreducible humanity in psychoanalytic theory, on the contrary, it is the *operator of the inhuman,* the operator of de-humanisation or 'de-anthropomorphisation.' This is what sweeps the ground for a possible theory of the subject as something other than simply another name for an individual or a 'person,' which is to say, for a universal theory of the subject that is not a neutral abstraction from all the particularities of the human but singular, concretely-universal point of their inherent contradiction. In other words, it is precisely the sexual as the operator of the inhuman that opens the path of the universal, which psychoanalysis is often accused of missing because of its insistence on the sexual.

What Freud calls the sexual is thus not that which makes us human in any received meaning of this term, it is rather that which makes us subjects, or perhaps more precisely, it is coextensive with the emerging of the subject. And this inhuman aspect is precisely what Lacan emphasise most strongly with his own 'mythological' contribution to the issue of human sexuality: his invention of the 'lamella.' In his *Seminar XI,* when discussing the concept of the drive as one of the 'four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis,' Lacan famously introduces his myth of the lamella in order to illustrate what is at stake in the notion of the libido. The conception of the latter in terms of 'energy' is rather misleading and largely mystifying [9], one should rather think of it, he suggests, in terms on an organ. More precisely, in terms of an 'unreal *organ*' *(organe irréel)*. Let me recall Lacan's famous description:

> **The lamella is something extra-flat, which moves like the amoeba. It is just a little more complicated. But it goes everywhere. And as it is something (…) that is related to what the sexed being loses in sexuality, it is, like the amoeba in relation to sexed beings, immortal – because it survives any division, any scissiparous intervention. And it can get around. (…) This lamella, this organ, whose characteristic is not to exist, but which is nevertheless an organ – I can give you more details as to its zoological place – is the libido.** [10]

Lacan proposes this myth as his alternative to the Aristophanian myth from Plato's *Symposium*, to which Freud referred occasionally: At the beginning, human beings were a rounded Oneness composed or fused together from two halves, they were 'whole,' self-satisfied and self-sufficient beings, and this led them to arrogance and insolence, of which the gods disapproved. So they decided to split the human beings in half. Since that time, each half longs for its other half. Love, which emerges when we find our other half, is but this longing once again to become One with our other half. The crucial difference that Lacan wants to emphasise in relation to this myth is this: what the human being loses because of sexual reproduction is not his sexed other half, but a part of his own being. And, if anything, it is this part – not his sexual complement – that he seeks (in 'love').

In Lacan's story, at the beginning there were not rounded entities of wholeness, fused together from two halves, at the beginning there were some sort of amoeba-like creatures, creatures that maintain and multiply themselves without sexual reproduction. This is an image of life that preserves itself and expands by means of division, a life that is not individuated, which is to say that there is no difference here between the individual and the species. Every creature of this kind is directly the life of its species. And of course the gods could not punish the eventual arrogance and insolence of these creatures by cutting them in half – this would not lead to two deficient (sexual) halves, but to more self-sufficient beings. The real change occurs not with the division or splitting, but – and here the image Lacan evokes in his developments is quite concrete – with the occurrence of sexual reproduction, in which the continuation of life through the combination of two (different) sets of chromosomes involves a constitutive loss or reduction. Different from genetic replication, sexual reproduction involves the same logic of an irreversible loss that is at stake in what symbolic logic calls the operation of joining, on which Lacan models his

theory of the subject as emerging through a constitutive alienation. Joining is something other than adding; if we have two collections of five elements, and if two of the elements appear in both collections, the result of the joining of the two collections will not be ten, but eight.

Moreover, sexual reproduction implies individuation and links it to death: the species continues, lives on, through the individual specimens 'passing on.' dying.

In Lacanian myth the libido is thus this loss, constitutive of sexuality, that finds its way back (through "the defile of the signifier") and haunts this subject in the form of the drive. It fragments the subject from within. Partial objects of the drive are all beings of this loss/lack.

It might be interesting to point out that in the well-known passage from "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," where Freud refers to Aristophanes' myth, he understands or 'translates' it in a way that is also not that of a sexed being desperately seeking for its other half, but rather one that suggest Freud's own version of the lamella: "Shall we follow the hint given us by the poet-philosopher, and venture upon the hypothesis that living substance at the time of its coming to life was torn apart into small particles, which have ever since endeavoured to reunite through the sexual drives? … that these *splintered fragments of living substance* in this way attained a multicellular condition …? But here, I think, the moment has come for breaking off." [11]

Many cinematographic images have already been proposed in relation to Lacan's lamella, and in relation to Freud's phrasing here one can also not but think of *Terminator 2* - the scene in which the Terminator has been blown to pieces, forming small pools of quicksilver-like substance on the floor, which then slowly start reuniting, running towards each other

Upon a closer look at the issue of sexuality in (Freudian and Lacanian) psychoanalysis we thus come to a rather strange situation. On the one hand, there is a certain level of (misplaced) 'disappointment' that Lacan explicitly stresses on several occasions, notably in *The Four Fundamental Concepts* and in *Television* - psychoanalysis has taught us practically nothing about sex. Here is a good example:

> **[Psychoanalysis] teaches us nothing new about the operation of sex. Not even a tiny piece of erotological technique has emerged from it. (…) Psychoanalysis touches on sexuality only in as much as, in the form of the drive, it manifests itself in the defile of the signifier, in which is constituted the dialectic of the subject in the double stage of alienation and separation. Analysis has not kept, on the field of sexuality, what one might, mistakenly, have expected of it by way of promises – it has not kept such promises because it does not have to keep them. This is not its terrain.** [12]

On the other hand, the 'remnants of sexuality' in psychoanalysis, which are at the same time situated at its very centre, are but these bizarre, headless formations like the Lacanian 'lamella' or the Freudian originally fragmental reality of partial drives.

A concept of an ontological impasse

Of course, the issue that we are debating here, that of philosophical criticism of the psychoanalytical concept of sexuality, could also be said to only start here. So what if sexuality is posited (by psychoanalysis) as inherently problematic, non-substantial, as an 'inconsistent multiple' – to use the Badiouian term for pure being, as a multiple that is always a multiple of multiples (of multiples, of multiples …), so that the eventual 'stopping point' can in no way be a 'one' but only a *void?* As a matter of fact, on the level of formal description one can find quite striking parallels between Badiou's theory [13] of pure being as pure multiple that is inconsistent to start with, which 'consists' of the void, and is a pure "excess beyond itself," and the Freudian account of being as sexual. Yet this is precisely where psychoanalysis seems most vulnerable to the attack from philosophy: If we are down at the level of pure being, why on earth should we paint this pure being with sexual colours?

I definitely agree with philosophy in maintaining that the empirical argument (convoking the vast *experience* of human being as intrinsically sexual) would be out of place here. We must not forget, however, that the above question/objection only makes sense if we have already accepted the scheme according to which the sexuality is *one of the characteristics* of being (as

human). Yet this is precisely not the argument Freud is making. What Freud is saying is that the sexual (in the precise sense of an inconsistent circling of partial drives) is being. More precisely, and without pushing things too much, we could say that Freud is developing, constructing a concept of 'the sexual' as the (psychoanalytic) name for the inconsistency of being. And this is precisely what Lacan is more than willing to embrace in his theory: the sexual as the concept of a radical ontological impasse.

When, for example, he emphatically puts forward, in *Seminar XI*, that "the reality of the unconscious is sexual reality," [14] this should be strictly read together with another thesis that he keeps repeating in this seminar, namely that the unconscious is essentially related to something that belongs to the order of the *non-realized* or *unborn.*[15] This claim by no means implies that through analysis, this something will finally be 'born' and become 'fully realized.' It does not mean that the unconscious is a subjective distortions of objective reality (a distortion that could be 'straightened out' by the work of analysis) it refers instead to a fundamental 'flaw' of the reality itself, to something like an incomplete ontological constitution of reality. [16] It is well known how firm Lacan was in his insistence that there is nothing 'purely subjective' (in the sense of some psychological depth) about the unconscious, which he defined as the "discourse of the Other."

This could be said to be properly materialistic stance of psychoanalysis: the unconscious is not a subjective distortion of the objective world, it is first and foremost an indication of a fundamental inconsistency of the objective world itself, which – as such, that is as inconsistent – allows for and generates its own (subjective) distortions. The thesis here is indeed very strong: if 'objective' reality were fully ontologically constituted, there would be no unconscious. The unconscious bears witness to a problematic character of the 'objective reality,' and not simply to the fact that a subject 'has a problem.' The subject and 'his problem' are rather viewed by Lacan as the very mode in which some ontological impasse of objective reality exists *within* this same reality (as one of its subjective figures). It should be immediately clear how this; perspective radically differs from the popular contemporary ideological manoeuvre that consists in massive recognition of our subjective problems. Recognizing the singularity, subjective depth, and importance of *our* problems efficiently robs them of all objective validity. The imperative here is to recognize the rights of the subjective as subjective, and not as a possible

indicator of something objective, of some objective malfunction, of something in the objective reality that *is not*.

Another well known Lacanian axiom, namely that the "unconscious is outside," could also be understood in this stronger sense. This is to say not only in the sense that the latter is not full constituted and only exists as an excess over itself. This constitutive gap in the Other would thus be the very condition of possibility of the subject's 'own' repressions. Lacan himself say as much, when distinguishing between the structure of the unconscious as the structure of a gap *béance*), and all possible contents of the repressed: The unconscious is manifested to us as something that holds itself in suspense in the area, I would say, of the *unborn*. That repression should discharge something into this area is not surprising. [17] The image here is quite eloquent, and at the same time very precise: Repression fills in the gaps of (objective) reality. The gap of the unconscious is the other name for the reality of the inconsistent Other. This inconsistent Other is not an immediate, direct cause of (subjective) repressions, it is their indirect cause. Subjective distortions are not distortions of something that is objectively otherwise, they are distortions at the place of something that *is not.* This is precisely why – as Freud was soon led to discover – the sole deciphering of the coherent meaning behind the distortions of the unconscious is not enough to make the symptoms disappear. For the core of the problem is not some fragment of the raw reality, which has been distorted and must now be recognized such as it 'really is.' The problem – and this is precisely what is called the unconscious – is that this supposedly straight line of (true or false) representation is constitutively fractured, thrown 'out of joint': while the distortions *use* fragments of reality, they *correspond to* (and are driven by) the inherent void, or gaps, of this reality.

Now, what does it mean to say that the sexual is the psychoanalytic concept of this fundamental ontological impasse? In trying to understand this it is crucial to realize that what is at stake here is precisely not the proliferation of 'unconscious' sexual meanings (which can very well be what they said ontological impasse is filled, or jammed up with). Again, to see this is suffices to bear in mind how Freud was led to his theory of the sexual as related to the constitutively deviational partial drives. He was not led to it simple by discovering and deciphering the sexual meaning 'behind' the symptoms and different formations of the unconscious, rather the contrary, he was led to it by stumbling against the 'therapeutic failure' of the ultimate revelations of sexual

meaning. Sexual meanings were revealed, connections leading to it established and reconstructed; yet the problem/symptom persisted.

It is as if the sexual meaning, so generously produced by the unconscious [18], were there to mask the reality of the drives, to cut us from it by a screen that draws its efficiency from the fact that it is itself a means of satisfaction – satisfaction through meaning, satisfaction in the production of sexual meaning, and (as the other side of this) in the production of the meaning of the sexual. As paradoxically as this may sound, one of the primary tasks of psychoanalysis is to slowly but thoroughly deactivate the path of this satisfaction, to make it useless.

In this construction, sexual meaning is the other side of the sexual; they are irreducibly connected (in their singular generic point), but they are also radically heterogeneous, irreducible to one another. One has its ally in the unconscious, and finds its satisfaction in 'making sense' (as fundamentally making sexual sense), and the other satisfies itself with being. Yet this last point should not induce an image of a full, substantial satisfaction 'beyond meaning and thought.' For the being of the drive is nothing other than what Lacan calls the 'lack-of-being' that emerges (with revenge, so to say) as the 'unreal organ,' as 'libido,' as something that only exists as a constant deviation from itself and its constitutive void. This is why we could turn the expression 'lack-of-being' around and say that the drive is nothing other than *the being of the lack/void*.

To say that, for psychoanalysis, this void is intrinsically and irreducibly related to the sexual is not to say that the meaning of this void is sexual. What is at stake is, on the contrary, that the sexual is the *edge of meaning*, its border, its inner limit. And this is not simply to say that it is 'meaningless,' it is more than that – it is the point of inconsistency of being that induces production of meaning. Drive is thus the impossible joint articulation of being and meaning in their very heterogeneity

In one of his important essay, "Sur Marx et Freud," Louis Althusser suggested something that will help us formulate some sort of conclusion to these reflections. According Althusser, Marxian and Freudian theory have (at least) two fundamental things in common. They are both conflictual sciences, and their worst enemy is not a direct opposition, but revisionism. From the very beginning, Freudian theory has met not only with fierce attacks and criticism,

but also with attempts at annexation and revision. This testifies, according to Althusser, to the fact that it has touched upon something *true* and *dangerous:* this something needs to be revised, in order to be neutralized. Hence the incessant inner scissions characteristic of the history of Freudian theory: the theory has to defend itself, from within, against these attempts at revisionism. Before Freudian theory, Marxist theory had already given us an example of a necessary conflictual and schism-provoking science. In both cases, this is intrinsically connected to the very object of the sciences that Marx and Freud founded.

Both Marxism and psychoanalysis are situated *within the conflict* that they theorize, they are themselves part of the very reality that they recognize as conflictual and antagonistic. In such a case the criterion of scientific objectively is not a supposed neutrality, which in nothing other than a dissimulation (and hence the perpetuation) of the given antagonism, or of the point of real exploitation. In any social conflict, a 'neutral' position is always and necessarily the; position of the ruling class: it seems 'neutral' because it has achieved the status of the 'dominant ideology,' which always strikes us as self-evident. The criterion of objectivity in such a case is thus not neutrality, but the capacity of theory to occupy a singular, specific; point of view within the situation. In this sense, the objectivity is linked here to the very capacity of being 'partial' or 'partisan.' As Althusser puts it: when dealing with a conflictual reality (which is the case for both Marxism and psychoanalysis) one cannot see everything from everywhere (*on ne peut pas tout voir de par tout*); some positions dissimulate this conflict, and some reveal it. One can thus only discover the essence of this conflictual reality by occupying certain positions, and not others, in this very conflict. [19]

What I would like to suggest is that *the sexual* is precisely such a 'position' in psychoanalysis. Yet we must be careful how we understand this. It is not that the properly psychoanalytic point of view is such from which everything appears as sexual (as having a sexual meaning) – this is the point of view of the unconscious, and psychoanalysis is not here simply to fortify it, or to say that because it is unconscious, it must be true. For psychoanalysis, the unconscious is the indicator of a problem, of a conflict, of an antagonism, and not simply and directly its (hidden) truth. As said before: the line that goes from a problem to its (more or less distorted) representation is necessarily fractured or 'out of joint.' And this is part of the problem, not simply of its representation.

Starting from the analysis of the unconscious, psychoanalysis always has to work its way through to the nodal point (the 'naval') of this conflict, and to induce the subject to make the same shift in his position. Namely – and to put it simply – the shift from a standpoint from which everything he sees has a potentially sexual meaning or cause, to the standpoint of the sexual itself (as inherently incomplete), which can then real a quite different panorama. The lesson and the imperative of psychoanalysis is thus not: let us devote all our attention to the sexual (to 'sexual matters') as our ultimate horizon, but it is instead a reduction of the sex and the sexual (which, in fact, has always been overloaded with meanings and interpretations) to the point of an ontological inconsistency, normally screened off precisely by the proliferation of sexual meanings that tend to populate its gap.

In one of his interventions, bearing the date of October 22, 1967, Lacan coined a very concise and delightfully witty expression for the sexual as the point of ontological inconsistency: *l'etre-pur-le-sexe,* [20] "Being-towards-sex." This replacement or better, this displacement of the Heideggerian "Being-towards-death" does not follow the opposition of *eros* and *thanatos.* While admittedly less macabre than the Heideggerian slogan, it does not aim at putting being in any less problematic perspective, at relieving it from its inconsistency and of the point of its constrictive void – quite the contrary. Yet it gives this void a different name, a different structure, and puts eventual access to it in a different perspective.

Intervention II

Freedom and cause

When speaking about the philosophical and, more generally, social implications of psychoanalysis and of psychoanalytical theory, we cannot avoid the always rather tricky question of how the latter stands in relation to the notion of freedom. Is freedom a relevant issue at all for Lacanian psychoanalysis? On the face of it, one would not say so. Psychoanalysis seems to have little use for this notion; moreover it posits, at the very heart of its theory – at the point that concerns the constitution of the subject – the theory of the "forced choice," [21] which constitutes itself as a peculiar anamorphoisis of freedom. The choice, which is by definition supposed to imply a certain freedom, is precisely that through which the subject emerges as subjected to the symbolic order and determined by it. Furthermore, the structure of this forced choice (illustrated by Lacan with the famous "Your money or your life!" does not only imply that there is no choice, and that we can in fact only choose one of the two things or lose both, but involves yet another turn of the screw. Even that which we forcibly choose emerges from this choice as necessarily curtailed ('life without money' or, as the terms of this choice are posited by Lacan through the alternative 'being or meaning': the meaning of the subject in the symbolic field of the Other, deprived of what would link this meaning to the subject's being). The Lacanian theory of forced choice – also when further turned, as illustrated by the revolutionary slogan "Freedom or death", where the only way to choose freedom is to choose death and thus show that you have freedom of choice – certainly offers many crucial elements that one can use in the critique of the ideological slogans of freedom and of free choice, which play such a significant role in the economic and political hegemony of late capitalism. [22] What interests us here, however, is a different question: does psychoanalysis allow for the possibility of a concept of freedom that would not only be irreducible to this logic of 'non-repressive' (yet all the more effective) mechanisms of constraints, but would even be able to counter the latter, or disarm them? In spite of all the attested – and one should perhaps add – 'healthy' pessimism of Freud and Lacan concerning a 'final solution' of individual and social conflicts and antagonisms, the fact remains that inscribed in both the theory and practice of psychoanalysis is the possibility of a real qualitative shift. That is to say, of a shift that is not simple as exchange of one pathology for another (more acceptable), nor simple an understanding/awareness of the mechanisms that determine us, but one that involves a tectonic shift in the very functioning of these mechanisms. And the possibility of this shift is not at all unrelated to the dimension of forced choice, it is not simply its other, but emerges only against

its background.

“There is but the cause of that which does not work”

There exists a very intimate connection between the notion of the subject and the notion of freedom, a connection that achieves its philosophical peak in German idealism, yet a connection that also exists – with different emphases – at the very centre of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The idea, however, is not simply that of a ‘free subject,’ it is not about the notion of the subject that *has* freedom as one of its essential attributes, and can act ‘freely,’ Lacan never gets tired of repeating that subject is the effect of the structure, and in this sense it is anything but free. Yet the structure itself is far from being simply non-problematic, clear, or smooth-running. And perhaps the shortest definition of the subject in this theory would be that ‘subject’ is the conceptual name for that point of regularity, of substance, or of structure, in which the latter breaks down, or displays an inner difficulty, contradiction, negativity, contingency, interruption, or a lack of its own foundation. Subject is the place where discontinuity, a gap, a disturbance, a stain becomes inscribed into a given causal chain. Hence – on the level of everyday life – things like slips of the tongue, dreams, as well as jokes (surprisingly produced ‘sense in nonsense’) are the locus of the subject in the symbolic structure. They are also the locus where psychoanalysis introduces the notion of the cause. Jacques-Alain Miller has argued at some length that in psychoanalysis the question of the cause rises precisely when something interrupts the smooth continuity of events [23]: again, the examples range from most ‘innocent’ slips of the tongue to all kinds of ways in which different symptoms betray points of significant discontinuity. This puts the psychoanalytic use of the notion of cause outside its usual connection to lawfulness and regularity, and – perhaps – closer to the notion of freedom. The question of the cause appears precisely when a (‘causal’) chain breaks up, which is to say that what is crucial for the concept of cause in psychoanalysis is the element of discontinuity. From this perspective, it could be argues that for psychoanalysis the issue of freedom is closely connected to that of the cause: *not* with the absence of cause (as this relationship is often posited), but precisely with its presence or incidence. We could thus say that freedom only really appears when something *has a cause* (perhaps in both meanings that the word ‘cause’ has in many languages).

This is indeed a very valuable and important lesson, yet a lesson that still needs to be properly argued. For the following objection might be raised

immediately: Is it not much too hasty and too superficial to simply link the question of the interruption and of discontinuity to the question of freedom? Is the question of the cause in psychoanalysis not always the question of another, hidden cause, which can well be part of some other regularity than the one that has been interrupted, say, by the slip of the tongue, yet which nevertheless follows its own unyielding necessity and regularity? And has not psychoanalysis always tended to recognize in these seemingly accidental slips a firm logic and regularity? This is true, of course, and the discontinuity in itself is certainly no immediate proof or expression of freedom. What it proves or bears witness to is something else, namely the fact that between the two levels that psychoanalysis deals with (say the 'manifest' and the 'latent.' To use the Freudian terms) there is no smooth, immediate passage, just as there is no fixed key that could provide the translation of one level into the other. As Mladen Dolar has put this:

> **The reconstruction of the latent text behind the strata of distortion is far from presenting us with the unconscious *in persona.* On the contrary, we are on the track of the unconscious only in the space between the two, in the irreducible interval between the manifest and the latent, in the surplus of distortion over the 'true' content, in the dream-work that produced the distortion.** [24]

In other words: in principle, the distortion (as a form of discontinuity can be explained, related to its causes, yet besides the unconscious causes of distortion, there is also something else at work here, something that we can call the unconscious *as the cause* of the distortion, as the surplus of the distortion over 'true' content, as a cause motivated by itself. Yet, as such, as *causa sui*, this cause only exists in the very relationship between the two levels (the manifest and the latent), and not independently of them. In short, we are dealing with a cause that is linked to the existence of the two levels and to the constitutive gap between them, yet which is not directly determined by, irreducible to, either of them. It only exists as the articulation of their non-relationship.

It is in this sense that we should understand a crucial Lacanian thesis concerning the issue of the cause: *"Il n'y a de cause que de ce qui cloche"* [25] -this is my attempt at translating this hardly translatable idiom: there is but the cause of that which does not work, or which does not add up. There are (at least) two important ideas behind this proposition. One is the non-immediate character of the causal relationship, which has its classic philosophical articulation in the Hume – Kant debate. The connection between cause and

effect involves an irreducible gap, or leap, on account of which Hume wanted to dismiss the very notion of the cause, and which led Kant to propose rational subjectivity as the transcendental constitutive background against which the leap involved in the passage from a cause to its effect remained possible without the causal structure simple falling apart. One could also say: a causal relation connects two things in their very split. It designates the connection there where we are not dealing with an immediate passing of one thing (or state) to the other. And here is Lacan's rendering of this:

> **Cause is to be distinguished from that which is determinate in a chain, in other words the *law*. By way of example, think of what is pictured in the law of action and reaction. There is here, one might say, a single principle. One does not go without the other. The mass of a body that is crushed on the ground is not the cause of that which it receives in return for its vital force – mass is integrated in this force that comes back to it in order to dissolve its coherence by a return effect. There is no gap here, except perhaps at the end. Whenever we speak of cause, on the other hand, there is always something anti-conceptual, something indefinite. The phases of the moon are the cause of tides – we know (…) that the word *cause* is correctly used here. Or again, miasmas are the cause of fever – that doesn't mean anything either, there is a hole, and something that oscillates in the interval.** [26]

The last sentence of this quote brings us to the other important idea involved in Lacan's account of causality: something appears in this hole, in this interval, in this gap, in this structural split of causality, and it is for this something that psychoanalysis reserves the name of the cause in the strict sense of the term (the cause of object *a*, the objet as the distortional cause of itself).

The elements exposed above could be related to yet another discussion of causes in psychoanalysis: to the already mentioned two aspects of the question of the cause (the question of the unconscious causes, and the question of the unconscious as cause) we can add a third one, which seems even more fundamental and concerns the very cause of the constitution of the unconscious. This is a debate developed in a very intriguing way by Jean Laplanche in answer to the deadlocks of the Freudian theory of sexual seduction (of

children).

Laplanche and the cause of the unconscious

Let me briefly recall the principal stakes of the debate. Freud first posited the sexual seduction of children by adults as real, that is to say, as a factual/empirical event in the child's history, which is then repressed and can become the ground or *cause* of different symptoms and neurotic disturbances. Later on, he abandoned this theory in favour of the theory of the fantasy of seduction: generally speaking, seduction is not an event that takes place in empirical reality, but a fantasy constructed later on, in the period of our sexual awareness, and it only exists in the psychical reality of the subject. If approached with the tool of the distinction between material reality and psychical reality (fantasy), the question of sexual seduction leads either to the claim that everything is material seduction (for how exactly are we to isolate and define the latter: does the touching of the baby's lips, for example, or its bottom, qualify as a seduction?), or else it leads to the conclusion that seduction is entirely fantasmatic, mediated by the psychical reality of the one who 'feels seduced.' Laplanche's answer to this conflict between raw materialism and psychological idealism is profoundly materialistic in the sense that he recognizes a properly *material* cause, yet a cause that cannot be reduced to (or deduced from) what has empirically happened in the interaction between the child and the adult. In other words, according to Laplanches, the true trigger of the subsequent constitution of the unconscious lies neither in the raw material reality nor in the ideal reality of fantasy, but is the very materiality of a third reality, which is transversal to the other two and which Laplanches calls the material reality of the enigmatic message. Simply put: in their interaction with adults, children keep receiving messages that are always partly enigmatic, ridden with the unconscious of the other (which is also to say, by his or her sexuality). This means that these kinds of messages are not enigmatic. Only for those who receive them but also for those from whom they come –they do not, properly speaking, 'understand' them themselves, or know exactly what they are conveying. These messages (which, of course, do not need to be verbal, they can be gestures, different ways of nursing the child, etc.) have their own material reality, they are not fantasies or *a posterior* constructions, yet they are also not a direct sexual seduction. The child interprets these messages, and organizes synthesizes them in a more or less coherent, meaningful story. However the interpretation, explanation, understanding of these messages

always has its other, back side: places where this explanation does not work, places that are left out of the interpretation, places where we are dealing with a leftover which is repress. That I to say, we are dealing here with the constitution of the unconscious as the refuse (déchet) of this interpretations of enigmatic messages. [27]

It is worth stopping here for a moment and asking the following question: Is Laplanche not moving a little too fast in identifying two rather different things and thus reducing the tripartite structure, which he himself has put such emphasis on, to a simpler binary structure? For in the account presented above, we end up with two elements: on the one side, we have the conscious, manifest content or interpretative narration and on the other side, the unconscious as the non-digested/non-digestible pieces of the other's message, the piece that has not been integrated into the given interpretation. What we lose by putting things this way (and what otherwise clearly follows from some other aspects of Laplanche's theory) is that the unconscious itself is also always-already an interpretation. In other words: we should not simply identify the refuse, the indivisible remainder of the interpretation (of the enigmatic message) with the unconscious. Rather, we should say that the unconscious (the work of the unconscious, as well as its 'formations') is precisely the interpretation which strives to incorporate this piece, this – to use Lacan's notion – object into its narrative. The unconscious interprets by taking this leftover into account, it interprets with respect to it. If the constitution of the unconscious does in fact coincide with a certain ('conscious') interpretation taking place, i.e. with a certain solution that is given to the enigmatic message of the other, this does not mean that the unconscious is simply what is left outside (and is not included in our interpretation); rather, the unconscious is that which *continues to interpret* (after the conscious interpretation is done). Even more precisely: it is that which only starts to interpret alter some understanding of the enigmatic message produce is. For what it interprets is, to put it bluntly, precisely the relationship between the given interpretation and its leftover. And it interprets from the point of view of this leftover. Which is also the reason why the unconscious formations are by definition 'compromise formations.' We should perhaps add that that which compromises them is precisely that which brings them closer to the real. The fact that the unconscious interprets from the point of view of the leftover is the very reason why this particular interpretation is not simply an interpretation of interpretation, with all the relativism implied in this formulation, but is inscribed instead in the dimension of truth. And this is

precisely what psychoanalysis puts its stakes on when taking the unconscious formations seriously.

We are thus dealing with three elements: a specific subjective figure related to the formations of the unconscious, and two kinds of causes. One kind consists of elements (words, gestures, gazes, etc.) that constitute what Laplanches calls 'enigmatic messages' circulating in the Other, and the other is this objective (or object-like) surplus/leftover of the interpretation of these messages. I would further add that this leftover is not simply some element of the 'message' (a word, a gesture, a gaze) which was left outside the interpretation, but it is rather something like an 'objectivities' of a certain quality that these elements can have in relation to the interpreting subject. Laplanche calls this quality 'enigmatic'; for reasons which will be given below; I would rather call it 'problematic.' It refers to the fact that there is always "*quelque chose qui chloche,*" something that does not add up in the relationship between the subject and the Other, in the relationship between the (subject's) being and meaning – this relationship is built on an irreducible inner difficulty. For our present purposes, we could simply say that the objective leftover (of the interpretation) is the mode in which this difficulty materially exists, exists *as object.* Neither the subject nor the Other have his object, although it is related, linked to both. More precisely: it is what relates or binds the two in their very heterogeneity, in the inexistence of their common denominator.

Let us now try to explain why this is worth reconsidering before accepting Laplanche's definition of the problematic character of the relationship between the subject and the other in terms of the '*enigmatic* message'. Do we not miss, by putting things in theses terms, a crucial step in the constitution of the unconscious? The expression 'enigmatic message' seems to suggest that original/traumatic thrust is caused by some mystery of meaning. The subject (we could say the subject-in-becoming) does not know what exactly it is that the Other 'wants to say,' the conduct of the Other strikes him as enigmatic, and he strives to make some sense of it. It all starts with an enigma, that is to say, with the presupposition that what is going on in this interaction might become coherent, or simply less oppressive, if its meaning were properly established. Laplanche rightly insists that there is no pre-established meaning behind this enigma, waiting to be uncovered and properly understood (the enigmatic message of the Other are enigmatic for the Other as well). This is also related to his thesis according to which 'psychical reality' is not created by me, but is

essentially invasive, it comes, it invades us from the outside, where it is already constituted (as the unconscious of others).

However, in all its elegance, this deduction omits a crucial element, which is not so much chronological as it is structured. Even if we accept, as we gladly do, that the structure of the unconscious is something that the subject encounters in the outside reality, something that he encounters in the form of the inconsistency of this reality, there is nevertheless something else that needs to take place between this point and the point where he takes this incoherence to constitute an *enigma,* which he then tries to solve. An enigma can only emerge together with the presupposition of meaning and everything that this presupposition implies – for example, the belief that this meaning exists in the Other. In other words, Laplanche successfully explains why the enigmatic message is enigmatic for the Other, but he does not explain why it appears as enigmatic (and not simply utterly meaningless, or beyond any question of meaning) to the subject. It is not enough that the subject encounters something that comes from the Other and is enigmatic in itself – in order for this something to appear to him as an enigma, the subject must have had already 'chosen' meaning. This way we come back to the Lacanian theme of forced choice: the subject (of the unconscious) is what emerges when, in choosing between being and meaning, he can only choose meaning. This is the necessary other side of the fact that we take what is going on in our interaction with others to constitute an 'enigmatic message.'

This is to say that to understand this difficulty in our interaction with others in terms of an enigmatic message already presupposes the unconscious (and cannot be its cause.) The constitution of the unconscious coincides with the *presupposition* of meaning, with the forced choice of meaning (which only makes the interpretation possible), and not simply with the repression of the first representation that eludes his interpretation. What Laplanche calls the leftover of the interpretation, the piece of the message that remained outside meaning, failing to be integrated into it, and was thus repressed, already presupposes the unconscious and in a way embodies the real of its constitution, that is, the very non-relationship originally rendered in the structure of a forced choice. The repression is only possible against the background of this force choice which is the Lacanian rendering of what Freud called 'primal repression' (*Urverdrängung*), and which strictly speaking coincides with the constitution of the unconscious.

Our hypothesis, introducing slightly different emphases than Laplanches, would thus be that in the interaction between the child and the adult, the enigma, the enigmatic message, is not there, for the former, on account of the fact that the Other is present (also) with his unconscious. Rather, it is always-already an *answer*, an answer to a deadlock, an impasse, a pressure that could be formalized in terms of the forced choice. The enigma is not the beginning, it is already 'secondary.' It emerges against the background of a forced choice of meaning. It is only against this background that the whole story of enigmatic messages (of the Other) can take off, of searching for meaning, of desire for understanding. Another way of defining this 'background that coincides with the constitution of the unconscious, would be to present it in terms of presupposition that the symbolic reality of the field of the Other is coherent, that the Other *knows*, that he wants something, knows *what* he wants, that *there must be a reason* for him to say and do what he is saying and doing. Regardless of what the other says, wants to say, knows he is saying or does not know he is saying, the subject has to *himself* make this turning-point assumption or presupposition: this means something. Before trying to figure out what it means, there must be a subjective positing of the fact that 'it means.'

The object of freedom

Now what exactly is the 'it' that 'means,' that triggers off the machinery of meaning? We must be very precise in answering this. It is not simply all the words, gestures, gazes and thousand other things that take place in my interaction with the other. It is, once again, *ce qui cloche,* that which does not work in this interaction. It is the free-floating radical, the object that circulates in the relationship between the subject and the other, embodying the very quandary of this relationship. And it is not that we interpret this object, we interpret everything else (words, gestures, gases, etc.), yet this object is, properly speaking, the motor of the interpretation. However, in order for it to function as such, something else must take place – precisely what I described before as the subject making the supposition that there is an (enigmatic) meaning to be established here. What happens with the introduction of this supposition is – if we try to describe it in purely structural terms – that the subject places, situates the object in the Other, within its field of gravity, so to say. The Other that has the object is the enigmatic Other, which is not only to say that we are not sure what its messages mean, but also that we are sure they *have a meaning*.

This has a very important consequence. It implies that the constitution of the subject of the unconscious strictly speaking coincides with the *exclusion* of the unconscious (on the side) of the other. The Other knows, and is coherent. Here, I believe, resides the apple of discord between Laplanche and Lacan. According to Laplanche, in the Lacanian perspective - when it comes to the interaction between, say, a child and his parents – the adults appear as if they had no unconscious, they appear as monolithic, purely 'symbolic' functions that can be found nowhere in reality (which in fact is full of adults ridden with their own unconscious). As reasonable as this objection might seem, it misses a crucial point. If we radicalize Laplanche's own statements – as I tried to do here – then the Lacanian conception does very much hold water to the extent in which the interaction child – adult is not only asymmetrical (as Laplanche suggests, with the unconscious already constituted on the one side, while only being is constituted on the other), but involves a more fundamental 'missed encounter': the unconscious of the other is 'sacrificed' (expelled, *urverdrängt*) in the constitution of the subject's own unconscious. It is here, at this point, that the other emerges as the (big) Other. The emergence of the subject of the unconscious and the emergence of the Other are correlative. The Other guarantees the consistency of the field of meaning. The Other knows everything except that it *"does not exist"* (that it is inconsistent, that it does not know). And so far as the subject can believe that the Other does not now *that,* he can maintain his own repressions - even if he 'knows' about them and is perfectly capable of discussing them. For what protect them is precisely the ignorance of the Other at this singular point which enables the presupposition that the Other knows. It is this singular in ignorance of the Other that makes possible the well-known disavowals of the kind. "I know very well (that X does not exist), but I nevertheless behave as if it does."

fetishistic disavowal

An amusing illustration of this configuration can be found in the following joke, to which I like to refer: A man believes that he is a grain of seed. He is taken to a mental institute, where the doctors do their best finally to convince him that he is not a grain, but a man. No sooner has he left the hospital than he comes back, very scared, claiming that there is a chicken outside the door, and that he is afraid that it will eat him. "Dear fellow," says his doctor, "you know very well that you are not a grain of seed, but a man." – "Of course *I* know that," replies the patient, "but does the chicken?"

There is a very important materialistic lesson to be drawn from this joke:

If something is to be changed in our unconscious, it has to be changed in the structure that supports it. This is also why psychoanalysis is profoundly materialistic: it claims and demonstrates that the safeguard of our unconscious beliefs does not lie somewhere in the depths of our intimacy, but exists out there (in the Other). But what exactly is the element through which a real shift can occur here?

First let us situate on the same line the two elements that we arrived at in our discussion following different paths. First, the surplus (of) distortion, which at the same time disturbs and carries the relationship between the manifest and the latent content. Second, the falloff, the leftover of the conscious interpretation, which is not simply unconscious, but propels the work of the unconscious interpretation and is present in the unconscious formations as their 'formal' aspect (and not as a particular content), as the form of the distortion itself, its 'grammatical structure.' To these two, we can add in the same line a third element, namely what psychoanalysis conceptualised with the notion of the drive [28]. The drive is, of course, not unrelated to the question of the grammatical structure (reversals of 'active' and 'passive' voice – like 'seeing' and 'being seen' – are constitutive of the drive in Freudian theory); furthermore, the drive embodies a fundamental inner split of all satisfaction, the non-relationship between demand and satisfaction, leading to the possibility of another, supplemental satisfaction. This has the effect of de-centring not so much the subject as the Other, and the de-centring at stake could be best formulated as follows: the subject never finds the satisfaction directly *in* the Other, yet he can only find it through the detour of the Other. This detour is irreducible. The drive is something other than the supposed solipsistic enjoyment, and one should conceptually distinguish between the two. Without entering into a detailed discussion of this difference we can indicate a possible way of its articulation. Enjoyment (in the strong sense of the Lacanian *jouissance*) is ultimately always linked to repression, they mutually sustain each other – repression always protects some enjoyment, whereas enjoyment could also be said to protect certain repressions (and the persistence of symptoms beyond the deciphering of their unconscious meaning would belong to this category). The drive, on the other hand, is precisely not linked to repression as a 'solution' of the impasse of the non-relationship between the subject and the Other, since it exists precisely *through* and *as* the very 'life,' or articulation, of this non-relationship.

transference is inevitable illusion

These three elements, which are all different articulations of the same fundamental topology, are precisely the 'navel' (to borrow Freud's expression) through which the empirical life of every subject is related to its constitutive conditions in the Other. If we adopt the Lacanian name for this navel, namely the 'object small *a,*' we can formulate this dialectics as follows: if the concept of the Other refers to symbolic coordinates that structure our word and provide its vocabulary, the object *a* is always an effect of the Other. At the same time, however, it also incarnates a specific, singular point of this process, namely the point where the effect maintains an 'open line' with the symbolic structure that generates it, so that the latter is itself dependent, 'vulnerable' in respect to this object. In every formation of the unconscious one has to find, locate, and determine this navel, this object. In order to make any sense, the analysis of the unconscious formations thus relies upon the following double presupposition: 1) the object in question can be detected and found in these formations, and 2) something can be effectively changed, shifted through it, and not only explained. The object *a* is, for example, that element of a symptom through which the causality that led to it is kept alive in this symptom as the effect of a certain symbolic impasse. The symptom is thus, on the one hand, a rather rigid symbolic form (or ritual) that can be automatically triggered by certain circumstances, but in all this rigidity and automatism it is also – to use the fashionable expression – a continuous *work in progress*, it is the site at which the conflict determining the subject is still operating and continues to be played out in real time. The very existence of the symptom testifies to this conflict being still alive, and at the same time carries in itself the sensitive point of the structure to which it belongs.

From here we can now return to Laplanche and to the point where we have decomposed the Laplanchian 'enigmatic message' into two moments – the moment of the real involved in the problematic character of the subject's relationship to the Other, and the moment in which this problematic character is posited in terms of an 'enigmatic message.' For what follows from here is an important psychoanalytic lesson for certain contemporary theories of ethics. The work of analysis proceeds in the direction of separating, untying these two things. It is not only about interpreting, deciphering the 'true' meanings; the interpretation also has to produce its own limit, that is to say encircle and locate the very points that constitute the meaningless navel of the field of meaning, or

of the field of the Other, and induce a separation here. This separation implies, to put it simply, that the subject will not find the answer to what he is in the Other (nor in himself), but is only likely to find or encounter it in the form of an indivisible remainder of his actions in relation to the Other. In this configuration, the Other no longer appears as the Other of an enigmatic message. The opacity of the field of the Other no longer 'interpellates' the subject to find its possible meanings, but should incite the engagement of the subject in his own destiny as always-already social, that is, as always-already taking place in the field of the Other and irreducibly connected to it. The crucial moment of 'separation' involved in psychoanalysis should be understood in this sense: not as a simple separation from the Other, from all symbolic structures and the social mediation of the subject's being, but as the *separation of the Other* from the object that drives its structure.

There is, however, a whole school of contemporary ethical reflection, inspired more or less directly by Emmanuel Levinas, which has as its central point precisely the affirmation (and fortification) of the enigma of the Other. In this ethics, the subject is confronted, or has to be confronted with, the enigma of the Other – a Demand in relation to which the subject is absolutely responsible. We have seen above how psychoanalysis brings to light the fact that the constitution of the enigma of the Other, the elevation of the latter to the place of an infinite enigmatic Demand, is the precise counterpart of (primal) repression. This does not prevent repression from necessarily belonging to the constitution of the subject, neither does it mean that psychoanalysis must attempt to prevent it (in advance) at any price (rather, psychoanalysis always approaches it after the fact, by an operation of 'separation' performed on an already accomplished 'original' synthesis). However, to recognize the necessity of repression in the constitution of the subject is not the same as to promote repression to the rank of the highest ethical maxim. Which is exactly what the above mentioned ethics does. The ethics based on the Other as the locus of an infinite enigmatic demand/message is an ethics that elevates repression to the level of the ethical principle. In this sense, it is definitely foreign to the ethics of psychoanalysis. It is that ethics in which the infinite demand of the Other coincides with our 'infinite responsibility' as to the way in which we interpret the Demand of the Other, its enigma. The enigma of the Other demands our interpretation (and the engagement that follows from it), but at the same time we are absolutely responsible for this interpretation (and hence for our actions). This is also the point at which this ethic situates freedom. As formulated by Levinas, the human

will "is free to assume this responsibility in whatever sense it likes: it is not free to refuse this responsibility itself." [29] We are dealing with something that could be described as infinite, never-ending interpretation – the production of the unconscious – and our infinite responsibility for it. The responsibility is thus essentially double responsibility, or unconditional duty, *to interpret,* and at the same time the responsibility for *the way in which we interpret.* In spite of all the emphasis that this ethics puts on the original and central place of the figure of the (radical) Other, the latter is somehow reduced to a catalyst via which the subject comes to know his unconscious and assumes responsibility for it (and keeps generating more of it). The enigma of the Other appears as the point through which the subject refers to itself via the constitutive interval of interpretation.

Quite differently from this perspective, psychoanalysis supplements the work of (possibly endless) interpretation with the gesture described above, separating the meaningless object, which drives the machinery of meaning, from the site where the meaning is constituted (the Other); it separates the meaningless object that functions as generator of meaning from the semantics of words and gestures. This separation is something very different from the infinite responsibility with which the subject actively but never altogether successfully 'fills in' the lack in the Other. This logic of endlessly supplementing the lack in the Other, which has the effect of intensifying the Demand of the Other, is what brings Levinasian ethics dangerously close to what Freud describes as the vicious circle of the superego. The following passage is most eloquent in this respect:

> **Duties become greater in the measure that they are accomplished. The better I accomplish my duty, the fewer rights I have, the more I am just, the more guilty I am.** [30]

According to Freud, the superego (as 'internalised authority') has precisely this same vicious way of behaving: the more virtuous the man is, the more severely and distrustfully it behaves, "so that ultimately it is precisely those people who have carried saintliness furthest who reproach themselves with the worst sinfulness." [31]

As we have already stressed, the separation involved in psychoanalysis is

something other than this kind of infinite responsibility (that increases by being accomplished). It rather induces something like a singular, and quite precise, responsibility – responsibility in relation to this singular object which is not the Other, but which is the decentred point through which the Other, and its corresponding subjectivity, are being maintained or *not*. This is also the point to which psychoanalysis relates the question of the cause, as well as the question of freedom, which becomes the question of a singular causality: a causality that is not a 'causality through the subject,' not a 'causality through the Other,' but a *causality through object*.

Some (un)timely observations

Psychoanalysis starts as an interpretation of symptoms. Yet, insofar as these symptoms are themselves already an interpretation, connection, synthesis of different elements, the work of analysis is actually the work of de-interpretation. In this respect, one can only agree with Laplanches's emphasis on the radically *analytical* character of psychoanalysis (as method). Synthesis is always on the side of repression. Freud's capital discovery in relation to dreams and their interpretation was the rejection of their supposed symbolism and of the existence of a key to their interpretation. Free associations are something very different: they disintegrate a more or less coherent story, take its elements in utterly divergent directions, introduce new elements, etc. Whereas symbolism makes the free associations silent.

We should add, however, that this interpretation as de-interpretation and unbinding is not the whole story – there is also the crucial operation of separation, which consists in circumscribing and isolating the very split that sustains this infinite production of meaning (and its interpretation), and which is not itself an element of meaning. Isolating this split as such amounts to *isolating the drive* and its object. This does not mean, however, that the object-drive is simply an 'elementary particle' which remains when analytical *unbinding* (interpretation as de-interpretation, the untying of the symptomatic ties) is realized to its – more or less – bitter end. It suffices to briefly recall Freud's theory of the constitution of the drive from the inner split of (the satisfaction of) need, or else the Lacanian conceptualisation of the drive through the divergence between *goal* and *aim* (encapsulated in the formula that the drive finds it satisfaction without attaining its aim) – it suffices to recall this in order to grasp that the drive is an *elementary form of the split* (and not an elementary

particle). It is the divergence/split that is elementary, i.e. more elementary than its 'particles.' The object of drive is the split, the gap itself as object.

As counterintuitive as it might sound, this topology (the split somehow precedes that which is split in it) is indeed crucial for an understating of the drive, especially if we bear in mind that, at bottom, this split entails nothing less than the division between the mental and the physical and their possible articulation. [32] If we take this division in its largest sense, as the division between 'nature' and 'culture,' we could say that psychoanalysis discovered the drive as the point of the short circuit between the two terms. Yet what does this mean? Does it mean that we can define human beings as the zone where the two realms overlap? Although not altogether false, this formulation can be strongly misleading and wide open to religious reading of human beings as composed of two principles of the natural (or material) and the spiritual. The crucial point to make [33] is that what is at stake is not an overlapping of two already well-established entities, but an intersection which is generative of both sides that overlap in it. In other words, human beings are not composed of the biological and the symbolic or of the physical and the metaphysical – the image of composition is misleading. Human beings are rather so many points where the difference between these two elements, as well as *the two elements themselves* as defined by this difference, are generated, and where the relationship between the two dimensions thus generated is being constantly negotiated (posited, re-posited, repeated, solidified, defined, and redefined). From this perspective, there is no 'pure life' (pure nature) or 'pure symbolic' prior to this curious intersection or split. The generating point of the symbolic is this paradoxical joint, and the symbolic as a wholly independent, autonomous realm, is something *produced* – it is produced at the periphery of the movement generated by the intersection and retroactively affects it own point of generation, its own 'birth,' so to say. And the drive is intrinsically connected to this split as such, to the split as elementary – more elementary than the 'elements' that split in it.

This has yet another important consequence. If drive is the elementary form of the *split that is itself a tie,* a copula. The drive is the incidence of a fundamental heterogeneity which, through the very operating of the drive, is maintained as heterogeneity within the very field to which it is heterogeneous. The drive is a tie with a radical otherness, a tie that functions beyond – or perhaps more precisely: on this side – of the tie provided by meaning (the

transformation of this heterogeneity into a Message, an enigmatic Demand, etc.). The drive is the split, the heterogeneity as the *form of a tie* that is not the form of meaning/message. The point I have attempted to make is thus the following the dismantling of the ties practised by analysis (interpretation as de-interpretation) stumbles against another, different kind of tie, which is isolates and where it stops: it stumbles against the tie that irreducibly binds the subject and the Other in an element that is heterogeneous to both; is stumbles against the subject of the drive that binds the self and the otherness in their very split, in their very heterogeneity, as the point of their (inner) dialectics on 'montage.'

The big question, the 'million dollar question,' that necessarily arises here is of course, this: can this singular type of the function as the ground of any social tie, or is the latter always based on the repression of the former? I will not answer this question here, but will say something else instead. If there is any intrinsic politics of psychoanalysis, it consists in insisting on its work of unbinding and of separation (in the sense sketched out above), and in not succumbing to the following criticism, which is becoming louder and louder: psychoanalysis only disintegrates, dismantles, separates, it is obsessed with negativity and lack, it never amounts to any affirmative, positive project (be it political or simply 'human') The politics of psychoanalysis today should be to not yield to this (by trying to 'nevertheless' propose something 'positive'), but to pursue its work of analysis which has always had an intrinsically social character.

Does this mean that psychoanalysis has to obtain from passing any kind of social judgment and to uncritically accept, if not even actively support, the contemporary disintegration of social ties, the crumbling of solidarity and of collective projects, the spectacle of the social tissue breaking into tiny pieces, small individual islands of enjoyment? I believe that it has to do something else, namely to critically examine this diagnosis itself, the diagnosis that should raise suspicion already on account of its being so gladly embraced by everybody, by those on the right and those on the left, by the rich and the poor, the religious and the not religious, the exploited and the exploiters. Do we really live in the time of an accelerated dissolution of the social ties and of the emergence of an untied multitude of individuals as solipsistic islands of enjoyment? What if this diagnosis itself is a form of repression, a 'compromise formations' fiercely criticizing a certain content (the criticism of which is utterly acceptable) in order to avoid the real source of the problem? What we could say, for example, is this:

the existence of the multiplicity of individuals as solipsistic islands of enjoyment is precisely the form of existence of the contemporary *social link.* The socio-economic mobilization of individuals may not take the same form as 100 or 200 years ago, yet this is not to say that it doesn't take place and that we are not – as individuals with our own way of enjoyment – very much engaged in 'feeding' the present *social* link, which bind us to itself, and to each another. Here we should stress again what we have already indicated: that perhaps the crucial mistake lies in the fact that we are too fast and too willing to understand enjoyment as something essentially 'atavistic,' solipsistic, or simple a-social, cut off from the field of the Other, Contrary to this, we should recognize the point where – through the dialectics of repression and its maintenance – enjoyment is very much linked to the Other and is always –already social. More precisely: the subject of enjoyment does not need the Other, except at the point where the latter, with its 'bare' existence, guarantees the repression that the enjoyment 'needs' in order to emerge as enjoyment.

Closely connected with this is another popular, and similarly problematic diagnosis of 'our time,' which says: we all know that the Other does not exist, that it is barred, inconsistent, lacking. Big Other is in decline, which could be seen in the way symbolic authorities are breaking down, in our general non-commitment to anything but our own solipsistic enjoyment. This is also a diagnosis that is sometimes reproachfully thrown in the face of psychoanalysis: "You keep talking about the inexistence of the Other, and here you have it! This is how your precious ethics looks when realized in society!" We thus all know that the big Other does not exist. But do we really, do we really know and act as if we knew it?

The answer is not necessarily affirmative. It rather seems that we are going to great pains in order for the Other never to learn this (and hence to go on functioning as the support of our precious repressions – like in 'the man and the chicken' joke mentioned above). What is going on and what is being described as a non-belief in the existence of the Other, as a situation in which the symbolic Other no longer has any hold on us, is in fact a situation that should be described be described slightly differently: namely that the Other no longer has any hold on us in the guise of a concrete, 'small' other. In other words, what is abandoned is the possibility of the link or short-circuit between an other and the Other, the possibility to believe that a 'small' other can be the very mode of existence of the big Other. No concrete person (parent, teacher,

president, etc.) is truly an instance of the Other, because s/he is always only human, inconsistent, if not altogether weak and pathetic. Should we not see and recognize here a rather spectacular operation of saving the big Other? The Other can stay whole non-barred and omniscient in its ignorance as long as it is not active, operative in any small other (which is also to say that is *a priory* exempt from responsibility on this level). It is being preserved as a place (the notorious as a place (the notorious empty place: i.e. a place which is in principle 'empty' of all small others, yet a place where we put different small others at will, as well as remove them from it). This emptiness 'in principle' (as a radical separation of the two levels) guarantees, among other things, that no small other will ever compromise the big Other. This separation is something very different from the (psychoanalytical) separation that I was discussing earlier. Instead of admitting the fact that a separate object can be the generic source and the truth of what is going on in the symbolic Other, it simply cuts the latter off and leaves it in radical transcendence (in the sense that its structure remains untouchable). We are indeed dealing with a rather panicked conservation of the Other as utterly *inactive,* but also as utterly un-compromised, intact, absolute; the symbolic order (which is principally 'our' economic order) appears as a playground within which we are free to change anything we want, to play with different possibilities and endless variations, yet we are utterly powerless in relation to the crucial parameters of this socio-economic structure itself (there is no sensitive point, no 'hold' by means of which one could shift it and change its coordinates). This also implies – to return to the starting point of this paper – a radical foreclosure of the cause, of the object-cause, and thus of any concrete form of freedom. In other words, freedom loses its relation to cause and becomes as abstract form of the 'freedom of choice,' which promotes the subject to the doubtful status of the container of supposedly authentic inclinations and preferences.

Far from representing a kind of 'realisation of the teachings of psychoanalysis' this social configuration is in fact a radical closure of the unconscious. It represents a closure in relation to which psychoanalysis itself will also have to finds its response.

Intervention III

COMEDY AND THE UNCANNY

That uncertain limit

The subject of this last 'intervention' falls in the field of what carries the general name of aesthetics, and aims at developing an example of what psychoanalysis can help us discern in this field. It concerns the relationship between two phenomena that seem to stand on opposite ends of our emotional, or affective, responses: the comic feeling and the feeling of the uncanny (Freudian das *Unheimliche*). In many aspects, however, these two phenomena are much closer and more intimately connected than one would expect. As aesthetic phenomena, they could be perhaps best defined as two modes of deploying – the ***Nothing.*** This, at least, is the perspective from which we are going to launch our investigation.

As regards comedy, its close relationship to nothing seems rather striking. *Much ado about nothing,* for example, is not just the title of a comedy. Like more than one Shakespearean title, it is paradigmatic. It captures a crucial dimension of comedy. On the condition, of course, that one does not take this 'nothing' too lightly, or as simply synonymous with insignificant, trifling, irrelevant, and immaterial, but that one takes it seriously. For comedy teaches us that it should be taken seriously. Comedy does a lot of things with nothing. But above all, it likes to point to the irreducible materiality of nothing.

Let us look at a very direct example of this, a joke told in a comedy (Ernst Lubitsch's *Ninotchka*), a joke that excellently captures one of the crucial mechanisms of comedy:

> **A guy goes into a restaurant and says to the waiter. "Coffee without cream, please." The waiter replies. "I am sorry sir, but we are out of cream. Could it be without milk?"**

A lot of things could be said about the mechanism of this joke. Linguistically, it extends the paradox involved already in the word *without*, which literally means 'with absence of.' And one can easily see how, following the logic, coffee *with* absence-of-cream could be something quite different than coffee *with* absence-of-milk. At stake here are not just more or less interesting and amusing logico-linguistic peculiarities, but also, and as said before, a certain – rather ghostly – materiality of nothing. With the waiters reply, denying the possibility of non-serving something that they do not have, there emerges a very palpable and concrete dimension of this absence, a spectral object. Or, perhaps even more precisely, the object 'cream' (or 'milk') appears in its spectral dimension,

deprived – by the negation – of its symbolic standing, yet insisting in the real, searching for its cup of coffee, so to say. The object appears in its negative counterpart, which would not let itself be reduced to nothing, or treated as nothing. It is important not to miss the point: we are not dealing simply with 'nothing appearing as something' in the sense of a symbolic rendering of nothing (like in the case of the symbol 0 or some other marker of negativity), but rather with the *remainder* of nothing, with nothing as insisting/emerging in the real, while being deprived precisely of its symbolic support. One could also say that we are not dealing with a lack on the signifying level but with a lack as a partial object or, even more precisely, as a partial object or, even more precisely, as a hanging on to partial objects (such as cream, milk, etc.).

What links the above example to a more general functioning of comedy is precisely the production of this kind of spectral *object,* that is, so to say, of the object-like materiality of the spectral. This does not mean that the nothing itself is so directly visible in all such comic objects as it is in the above joke. The point is rather that this kind of 'irreducible nothing' is involved every time the comedy performs its trick of objectifying something seemingly immaterial, or existing only in a (differential) relation to other things. In the case of verbal comedy, this is often achieved by taking certain figures of speech quite literally (ignoring the gap that makes them symbolic), or else by treating certain 'immaterial' things as objects. Let us take two examples. The first one is from Shakespeare (*Much ado about nothing*), who was a master of this kind of verbal comic poetry.

> ***Leonato***
>
> **(…) There is a kind of merry was betwixt Senior Benedick and her [Beatrice]: they never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.**
>
> ***Beatrice***
>
> **Alas, he gets nothing by that. In our last conflict four of his five wits went haling off, and now is the whole man govern'd with one (…) (Act I, Scene I)**

Here we have the idea of several 'wits' literally leaving a person and 'haling off' on their own (causing trouble elsewhere, one could imagine). 'Wit' is produced as a detachable, autonomous, self-standing objet. The other example is more contemporary, and it comes from the Marx brothers

(*Duck Soup*):

> **Treasury Secretary: "Sir, you try my patience!"**
>
> **Firefly (Groucho): "Don't mind if I do. You must try mine sometime."**

In this comically sensible production of patience as something, for example, to be eaten, we also witness an amusing materialization of nothing. Yet we must be careful in attempting to understand this. What I am aiming at is not simply that 'patience' is the nothing (the immaterial thing) that gets materialized. The point is that the pun works, and makes sense (in nonsense), by way of eliminating the gap that normally separates the two orders (say mental and physical objects). And it is this eliminated *gap*, which normally functions as a negative condition of 'making sense,' that now appears as something substantial, albeit spectral: it becomes the very substance of Groucho's patience that the treasury secretary is invited to try.

Let us make a rather abrupt stop here, and take a look at the uncanny, for the 'materiality of the spectral,' as well the production of the 'impossible' (detachable and re-attachable) objects are precisely what comedy seems to share with the uncanny A 'wit' going around by itself, patience as an object to be consumed (or 'tired' in some other way), or, to return to the first example, entities such as 'absence –of-cream' going around all by themselves – all these seem to be precisely the kind of objects that we could encounter both in comedy and in the uncanny.

It is also amazing how well their respective definitions seem to fit the other as well. Bergson's famous definition of the comical, "something mechanical encrusted on something living" [34], with all its versions ("a person giving us the impression of being a thing") and subversions ("a thing behaving like a person" [35]) could function perfectly as definitions of the uncanny. On the other hand, Schelling's famous definition of the uncanny, praised by Freud in his essay on the topic, could easily be applied to the comical: "everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light." [36] The proximity between the comical and the uncanny seems itself both comical and uncanny. We are dealing with two phenomena that are *at the same* time extremely close to one another and extremely far away. They appear to be two completely different universes, yet separated by an exceptionally thin line, very hard to pin down.

There is, of course, the whole phenomenon of laughing out of uneasiness: we can laugh because we are troubled by something, or scared by it. Yet this kind of laughter as a response to anxiety is not what interests us here. What interests us, instead, is the proximity between the uncanny and the *purely* comical, that is to say the comical that immediately strikes us as comical, and cannot be described as a response to, or a defence against, anxiety.

This odd coincidence of the comical and the uncanny is not confined to the supposedly abstract level of their definitions. We started out by indicating a certain proximity in the nature of the objects they produce and play with. In a recent paper dedicated entirely to the relationship between the comical and the uncanny, Robert Pfaller put forward four essential elements that they have in common: the advent of symbolic causality (something that starts as a play or a pretence takes the upper hand and starts functioning in the real), the success (not only that everything succeeds, it even succeeds too much, 'more than intended'), the repetition, and the figure of the double. [37] Elaborating on Octave Mannoni's analysis of theatrical illusion, and introducing the notion of 'mental experiment' as central, Pfaller proposes the following definition of the structural difference between comedy and the uncanny: *the comic is what is uncanny for others.* Mannoni's example of an actor playing a dead man on the stage, and suddenly sneezing, is indeed a very good illustration of this. In order to find the occurrence of a dead man sneezing comical, the following constellation would have to exist: not only do I have to know that the man is not really dead (but is merely an actor pretending to be dead), I also have to be able to presuppose that somebody could believe him to be really dead, that they could be deceived by the theatrical illusion (and could thus be horrified by his sneezing). In other words, it is as if I ran through the following mental experiment: "Just imagine that someone did not know that he was watching a play, and believed that the corpse was really dead. The sneezing would have scared the shit out of him!" We must be careful not to confuse this with simple mockery. The point is not that we need this (presupposition of an) ignorant other in order to feel good about ourselves (to feel 'superior' or smarter). The point is rather that we need this other in order to be able to *relate* to the uncanny object, instead of being overwhelmed by it.

In what follows, I will propose a somewhat different reading of the relationship between comedy and the uncanny, focusing on the question of the status of the nothing in one and the other, as well as on the question of the real

(in the Lacanian sense of the term), a reading that nevertheless remains indebted to Pfaller's analysis at many points.

"Theatrical illusion"

There are some grounds for challenging Mannoni's reading of theatrical illusion as basically following the scheme of 'fetishist disavowal' or delegated belief (we know better than to believe this or that, but we keep on believing it by delegating this belief to the Other, by presupposing it in the others). [38] According to this scheme, and simply put, we can follow a theatre performance most vividly, tremble for the characters, cry for them, etc., although we know very well that all this is only a play, because we identify with the gaze of the Other who is supposedly fooled by this performance. In other words: although we know that the things we see are not real (or really happening), we (can) believe they are via the hypothesis of the Other for whom this performance is put up, or *via* the presupposition of some others who would believe the performance real. According to Mannoni, what is at stake here is the same kind of delegated belief that helps us to maintain, against our better knowledge, some of our own archaic beliefs which are banned by the demands of rationality that we live in.

Although this structure of delegated belief, conceptualised by Mannoni and some others, is absolutely pertinent and applies to many a case of our everyday interactions, it is questionable if it indeed applies to theatrical illusion (or, more broadly, to other forms of artistic fiction), and if it exhausts its functioning.

We know that we are watching a play, a performance, and that there is a constitutive difference between the actor and the character she is playing, so that if the character dies, the actor does not. If this does not prevent us from feeling deep distress when the character dies, is the reason really that, against our better knowledge and by presupposing this belief in the Other(s), we allow ourselves to believe that the person really dies? Is it not rather because (artistic) fiction is not the opposite of the real, but one of its best vehicles? There is real in theatre (and other forms of artistic fiction), which is different from saying, both, that all that happens in theatre is unreal or that it is all real. If we reduce what is at stake to the distinction between reality and ('pure') illusion, we lose precisely that third reality that artistic fiction is very much involved with, and which cannot be reduced either to the empirical materiality of what 'really happens,' nor to the illusion sustained by the presupposed belief of the Other/of others. As a matter

of fact, we could say that artistic reality (or, more specifically, theatrical reality) has exactly the same status as the 'material reality of an enigmatic message' theorized by Laplanche. As we saw in the previous chapter, Laplanche refuses the simple distinction between empirical reality (what 'really happened') and fantasy (what we imagine happened), pointing out that there exists a very significant materiality of a third reality, transversal, yet irreducible to these tow. Similarly, we could say that what we see on the stage is really there (an actor pretending to be dead is really pretending to be dead – the gestures that we see, as well as their absence, are 'real,' they are not imagined), and that from there the stage produces its own material reality. The fact that the latter is largely based on illusion or pretence, does not rob it of its direct material effects, which are 'real,' they are not imagined), and that from there the stage produces its own material reality. The fact that the latter is largely based on illusion or pretence, does not rob it of its direct material effects, which are 'real.' When Lacan suggests, in his commentary on the play-scene in *Hamlet,* that the truth has the structure of fiction, he aims a precisely that there is an aspect of 'theatrical illusion' that is (or can be) the very mode of truth, and not its opposite. The question of truth is never simply the question of whether something really happened or was it just a pretence, a 'play,' the question of truth concerns the relationship between what we see (be it a reality or a play) and the real that structures it. Reality as such is never true or false, but we can say that some aspect or conjunction of reality captures its truth, that is to say, it touches the point of the real that dictates its structure. Even if based on illusion, a play can do the same – it can even do so more effectively, since it can venture to produce, or construct, the right conjunction of reality.

It is true, however, that for the theatrical illusion to function (i.e. to be able to produce, on stage, the elements that can touch the real and 'configure' the truth of a situation), it usually needs to be 'framed,' delimited from reality, by a more or less explicit form of fiction. And in order to sustain this frame or demarcation, it is indeed necessary to rely upon the instance of the Other. Yet, does is really involve our believing (in the real of what is happening on the stage) by presupposing this belief in the Other, or delegating it to the Other? Is it not rather our explicit *knowledge* (that it is 'only a play' we are watching) that is being delegated to the Other. Is it not that in order to 'enjoy' a fiction, we deposit, so to say, our knowledge with the Other, as for safekeeping, while we can relax and let ourselves 'fall into' the play, be completely absorbed, 'fooled' by it? In other words: we delegate our knowledge of 'how things really stand' to

the Other, so that we can calmly indulge in believing, or accepting, what we see, The Other is the guaranty that outside the play there is a reality firmly in its place, a reality to which we can return (after the play, or at any moment of the play, if we choose to). The logic at stake in this configuration could thus be described as follows: as long as the big Other knows that it is only a play and not reality, I can believe it is reality. (And I can be accordingly shocked or 'trapped' if, like the murderous Claudius for whom Hamlet stages the performance, I realize that what I (only) *believe* to be reality, really *is* reality.

Let us now go back to the 'sneezing corpse' example. In a theatre performance, a sneezing corpse will not strike us as uncanny – it will strike us as funny, possibly comical, and we will come back that distinction in a moment. What *could* strike us as uncanny, on the other hand is if at the end of the play, the actor playing the corpse did not stand up to receive the applause with the other actors, but were to remain lying dead on the floor. This would imply precisely that the Other (supposed to know how things stand in reality and to *guarantee* that they remain standing as they do) no longer holds this knowledge and this guaranty for the subject. In other words, it would imply that own better knowledge (of the fact that this is 'only a play' we are watching) is left without support in the structure of the Other. If we think about it for a moment, this is a very typical configuration of the uncanny: the nightmarish, claustrophobic feeling when the subject is alone in seeing that there is something wrong with what is happening with no Other to support her knowledge or experience, and to make it transmittable to others. [39] For example, the subject sees things and connections that the others do not, and if he tries to speak about them, he risks being considered mad, etc. In the uncanny, the emergence of the impossible-real object in the field of the Other always involves this radical severance of the subject from the Other.

On the other hand, among the things that make us laugh we must distinguish several different configurations and feelings that are not all already comical. One is the feeling of pleasurable relief that we experience when – after a certain period of anguish and doubt – we get some reassurance that the Other is still guaranteeing the reality outside the fiction, thus supporting the constitutive division between reality and the real (for example, if, after awhile, the 'corpse' on the stage nevertheless got up to receive the applause with the

rest of the actors). This relief, which can make us laugh, is not yet in itself comical. A further and perhaps more interesting distinction is that between funny and comical, strictly speaking. To take again the sneezing corpse example: an actor playing a corpse that suddenly sneezes can be (only) funny or (also) comical. The episode is funny when it functions as something that *displays a lack* in the edifice of representation. The conditions of the possibility representation are not challenges themselves, the Other keeps guaranteeing the difference between the actor and his character, but the actor fails to continue filling in, covering all the representative space that is opened to him by the Other guaranteeing the difference between himself and his character. He lets his 'reality-self' disturb the character. If they remain on this level of empirical reality (of actors, or setting, or something else), disturbing the 'purity' of the performance (i.e. of the representation), pointing to its failures, then these kinds of incidences are merely funny, lacking the real comic quality.

On the other hand, the sneezing of the actor playing a corpse can induce a comic feeling if we come to perceive it not simply as the actor's failure, but rather as the knowledge of the Other, sustaining the very frame of fiction, suddenly appearing *within* this very frame, on the stage, in the form of the sneezing as an object. In other words: differently from the uncanny, where the emergence of such object implies a withdrawal of the (symbolic) Other, and with it the collapse of the frame delimiting the space of 'fiction,' a properly comic configuration implies this frame appearing within its own scope (in the form of the comic object), without disappearing as a frame. This simultaneous appearance of – in Lacanian terms – the Other and the object *a* on the same level is a comic scene par excellence. In the case of our example, the very knowledge (guaranteed by the Other) that what we are watching is only a play, appears within the play in the form of the sneeze. And, as stated above, this is also what distinguishes a comic configuration from other kinds of funniness.

For example, there is a difference between a 'romantic' reading (including the phenomenon of 'romantic irony'), according to which, in sneezing, the supposed 'real; of the actor's body is contesting the purity of symbolic representation refusing to be reduced to it, and a quite different, comic, reading, according to which the very guaranty of the symbolic representation itself appears on the stage as this corporal, sneezy presence. [40]

One should also not fail to notice that the ‘sneezing of a corpse’ produces a very similar object as the absence-of-cream in the joke about coffee without cream. A sneezing wandering around on its own, detached from the organic link with a body to which it belongs. An object which ‘forgot’ that its body is already dead, etc.

However, the true object of comedy is not simply the sneezing, but precisely that space or zone that simultaneously separates and links the sneezing and its body or, say, the voice and its source, the smile and its face, the pleasure and its cause, etc. It is this interval itself that becomes objectified by comic techniques.

Nothing remains to be seen

We can now resume things by saying that what both comedy and the uncanny have in common has to do with – nothing.

In the normal, or ordinary run of things (which includes a large diapason of phenomena that are ‘funny’ and/or ‘scary,’ without possessing the specific feature that would make them either ‘comical’ or ‘uncanny’ [41]) we are dealing with the following configuration. There is a fundamental negativity which exists and functions as the condition of differentiality within our (symbolic and imaginary) world, i.e. of its readability. In Lacanian terms: the constitution of reality presupposes an element ‘falling out’ (of it), supporting – through its very lack – the consistency of given reality. There is a constitutive lack, which is of a different order than any lack that we encounter in our reality. Differently from that constitutive lack, the lack that we encounter in reality is always-already reflective, constituted, mediated by the symbolic, manageable by the symbolic. That is to say that it includes the possibility of referring to it (that is, to ‘nothing’) as if it were something. A symbol can fill in the lack, it can designate its place, it can designate an absence, it can make what is not here present. It is thus important to distinguish between two kinds of negativity: the fundamental negativity of a constitutive lack (which is never visible as such, but through which everything else becomes visible), and an asserted or ‘posited’ negativity, lack absence, etc.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, both comedy and the uncanny can involve certain ‘illogical’ appearances that point to the collapse of that fundamental-constitutive negativity itself, the constitutive gap between

different orders. This is perhaps more obvious in the case of the uncanny, so let us first pursue its path.

In his analysis of the uncanny (as related to anxiety), Lacan chooses to capture what is at stake in this configuration with this strikingly incisive formula: *le manqué vient a manquer,* "the lack comes to lack." [42] The constitutive lack which, precisely as a lack, supports our symbolic universe and its differentiations (which allow for the operation of 'making sense'), comes to be lacking. What emerges in its place is an 'impossible,' surplus object that has no place in given reality and blatantly contradicts its laws. To a certain extent, Lacan's formula also applies to the comical. It is implied, for example, in the figure of 'surplus-success' which according to Pfaller, is common both to comedy and to the uncanny (things have a funny way of not only succeeding but of succeeding too much, 'more than intended').

Lacan further claims that this 'lack of the lack' is precisely what is involved in his concept of the object *a* (as real). Which is why anxiety "is not without object," [43] and is not about uncertainty, but rather implies a terrifying certainty bound to this object. In order to provide a more concrete rendering of these formulas on the side of the uncanny, let us look at an example. Take the image of someone's eyes being plucked out (and appearing autonomously), an image that seems to haunt the human imaginary from a very early stage, and which is often associated with the uncanny. When analysing the uncanny aspect of this image, one usually points out two things: **1**) instead of the eyes, two empty holes yawn in the person's face. **2**) Eyes themselves, once detached from the body, appear as ghastly, impossible objects. In relation to the first point, one has the tendency to assume that the holes are terrifying because of the lack they imply, i.e. because they are holes, empty corridors leading to uncertain depths. Yet is it not rather the opposite that is really ghastly? Namely, that instead of the eyes, which – on the imaginary level – always suggest an *in(de)finite depth,* an opening into a possibly inscrutable, bottomless dimension of subjectivity (eyes being considered as 'opening into a person's soul'), the holes instead of the eyes are *all too shallow* all too finite, their bottom all too visible and close. So that, once again, what is horrifying is not simply the appearance (or disclosure) of a lack, but rather that the "lack comes to lack." That this lack itself is removed, that it loses its support. One could also say: the moment when the lack loses its symbolic or/and imaginary support, it becomes 'a mere hole,' which is to say - an object. It is a nothing that, literally, remains (there) to be seen. [44]

At the same time, and correlatively to this, the eyes – once they are removed from their sockets – are immediately transformed from 'openings' (into the soul) to the very opposite of an opening, to a surplus 'abject.' In this sense, the plucked out eyes appear as that which is absolutely *en trop*. They are the surplus which cannot be re-inscribed in the symbolic economy of plus and minus, of lack and its complement.

Incidentally, these observations can help us understand the tectonic shift in a subject's symbolic economy that Lacan aims at demarcating with his formula of anxiety ("the lack comes to lack"): the subject loses the very support that her desire and broadly, her symbolic universe had in a (constitutive) lack. This is exactly why he insists that the castration complex – which is the point where both the Freudian analysis of anxiety and his analysis of the uncanny in Hoffmann's story *The Sandman* lead to and stop at – is not, in fact, the last step in analysing anxiety. There is, claims Lacan, a more fundamental, "original lack," a lack in the real, a "structural flaw [*vice de structure*] inscribed in the being-in-the-world of the subject that we are dealing with." [45] One must be careful not to take his claim as a kind of 'philosophical neutralization of psychoanalysis' which would replace the always somehow controversial notion of castration with a much more acceptable (and much more profound sounding) idea of a 'structural flaw,' or an 'ontological defect/lack.' Lacan does not aim at dismissing the central role of the 'castration complex' in human experience – on the contrary, he aims at *explaining* it. The castration complex functions as the pivotal point of our experience because it provided a symbolic rendering, a symbolic support, and hence a way of dealing with/transposing the 'lack in the real.'

In other words, the point where Lacan goes further than Freud on this issue does not consist in his dismissing the castration complex as not central, but in turning the tables around. His claim is that at the bottom of anxiety, there is not a (revived) fear of menace of castration, but a fear or menace of castration, but a fear or menace of losing the castration itself, that is to say, of losing the symbolic support provided by the castration complex. This is what his formula of anxiety, "the lack comes to lack," finally aims at. The pivotal point of anxiety is not a 'fear of castration,' but instead the fear of losing the support that the subject (and her desire) have in castration as a symbolic structure. This is why anxiety is usually not related to symbolic prohibitions but rather to them being lifted. It is the loss of this support that results in the apparition of those

ghastly objects through which the lack in the real is present in the symbolic as an absolute 'too-muchness', ghastly objects which dislodge the object of desire and make appear, in its place, the cause of desire.

The realism of desire versus the realism of the drive

The above remarks already provide a first indication of the direction in which we will search for a possible definition of the difference between comedy and the uncanny. The uncanny relies entirely on the structure of desire (and its collapse), based on the antinomy of the object of desire and its (transcendent) cause. The cause of desire is the originally lost object, the loss of which opens up the scene on which all possible objects of desire appear. The object-cause of desire is constitutively excluded from the field of desire (and its objects), that is to say, from the Other. This absolute disjunction of the real-object and reality (as constituted through the Other) is fundamental for the possibility of the uncanny: If the object-cause emerges on the level of the Other (instead of being 'present as absent'), it produces the uncanny. A good example of this antinomy of the Other and the object-cause, which cannot appear on the same level, is given by Mladen dollar a propos of the figure of the double in the uncanny. If as Lacan maintains one can only have access to reality, to the word one can recognize oneself in, on the condition of the loss, the 'falling out' of the object *a*, then

> **The double is that mirror image in which the object *a* is included. The imaginary starts to coincide with the real, provoking a shattering anxiety. The double is the same as me plus the object *a*, that invisible part of being, added to my image. In order for the mirror image to contain the object *a*, a wink or a nod is enough. Lacan uses the gaze as the best presentation of that missing object, in the mirror, one can see one's eyes, but not the gaze which is the part that is lost. But imagine that one could see one's mirror image close its eyes: that would make the object as gaze appear in the mirror. This is what happens with the double, and the anxiety that double produces is the surest sign of the appearance of the object.** [46]

One could thus say that the uncanny is based upon, and 'exploits' the realism of desire the emergence of that which "ought to have remained secret and hidden" – to use the Schellingian definition [47] induces a collapse of reality (as, fundamentally, the reality of desire). The literature of the uncanny plays with the threat of this collapse, which is also to say that it plays with the fundamental

ambiguity and ambivalence of desire: a desire cannot desire the real that makes it desire yet it is also tempted to fantasize about embracing this Cause in a self-destructive (over) realisation, that is to say, precisely the 'over-realisation' that we encounter in the uncanny. It is an 'over-realisation' with which we pass over to the other side – which is not the case with surplus-realisation in the comical.

In relation to this 'realism of desire' (the constitutive lack cannot come to be lacking without the reality constructed around this lack falling apart), comedy seems to take an utterly unrealistic stance: the lack comes to lack, the ghastly object appears where it should not, the Other and the object appear on the same level – but *so what?* Nothing terrible happens it is rather terribly funny.

Indeed, comedy does not follow the laws of the 'realism of desire,' that is to say the laws of reality as underpinned by the transcendental structure of desire. On the contrary, it blatantly defies them. Yet, at the same time, there is not a good comedy in which we could not feel quite distinctively that there is something very real in all this unrealism. It is as if comedy referred to a different real of human experience, a real that does not follow the laws of reality (of desire) to begin with (which is different from saying that it 'transgresses them'). Comedy strangely combines the 'incredible' with a rather down-to-earth realism. It avoids idealization, yet it remains strangely optimistic in the way it often defies all human and natural laws, getting away with things that one would never get away with in 'real life.' This unrealistic, 'incredible' side of comedy is also related to its proverbial vitalism: a kind of undead, indestructible life, a persistence of something that keeps returning to its place no matter what. In view of this, should one not say that the realism of comedy is in fact a realism of drives, which is 'unrealistic' precisely in the sense described above. Drives are not bound by the 'reality principle,' and they have a way of stubbornly returning to their place, which is de-placed to begin with. [48] In this perspective, we can see how what is usually referred to as the 'vitalism' of comedy (the fact that it seems to stretch life beyond all laws of probability) is in fact nothing other than the vitalism of the death drive. That is to say, the vitalism of the internal *contradiction* of (human) *life* itself. Far from referring to something in us that 'wants to dies,' or that aims at death and destruction, the Lacanian notion of the death drive refers to an excess of life itself.

Since this notion of death drive is often the issue in contemporary philosophical debates, and has earned Lacan the reputation of assigning to death

the determinant role in human subjectivity (along the lines of the Heideggerian Being-towards-death), one cannot stress the above point too much. [49] Lacan's 'death drive' is precisely the reason that the subject can never be reduced to the horizon of her death. This is not to say, on the other hand, that as an excess of life the death drive saves us from our finitude, or that this "immortal, irrepressible life" (Lacan) will indeed go on living *after* we die, that something of us will survive in it. The archetypical comical figure of, say, passionate habit or a tick that keeps persisting even after its subject is already dead (or asleep or indisposed) in any other way), is the way comedy renders palpable the inherent and always-already existing two-fold nature of human life, its internal separation/contradiction. The 'real' life is precisely not beyond our life in reality (it does not lie with the Thing forever lost from reality), it is attached to it in a constitutively dislocated way. For comedy, the real life is the reality of our life being out-of-joint with itself. By drawing on the structure of the drive, comedy does not preach that something of our life will go on living on its own when we dies, it rather draws our attention the fact that *something of our life lives on its own as we speak,* that is to say at (possibly) any moment of our life. This is precisely what is at stake in the point we made earlier in relation to the sneezing corpse example: the true object of comedy is not simply the sneezing (or any other tick, habit, obsession that comedy chooses to bring forward), but precisely that interval that simultaneously separates and links the sneezing and its body, the habit and its bearer, the smile and its face, the pleasure and its cause. It is this logic of *constitutive dislocation* (as immanent nothing) that links the comedy to the dynamics of the drives, and distinguishes it from the uncanny, which is bound to the dynamic of desire with its logics of *constitutive lack* (as transcendent nothing).

Endnotes

1. In the following outline of *Three Essay* I use argumentation that I first developed in the article "Psychoanalysis" in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-century Philosophies,* ed. By Constantin V. Bonndas (Edinburgh University Press, 2007).
2. Sigmund Freud, "Three Essay on the Theory of Sexuality" in *On*

Sexuality, The Pelican Freud Library, vol. 7 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 83 Translation modified at the point of the Freudian term *"Trieb"* (*'instinct'* in Strachey's translation): 'drive' has become generally used as a more accurate translation.

3. Ibidem, 57.
4. Ibidem, 96.
5. Ibidem, 156.
6. Ibidem, 139.
7. Ibidem, 140.
8. Sigmund Freud, "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love" in *On sexuality,* 258.
9. See the following comments that Lacan makes on this issue in *Television* "Because energy is not a substance, which, for example, improves or goes sour with age; it is a numerical constant that a physicist has to find in his calculations, so as to be able to work. (…) that's not just of my own devising. Each and every physicist knows clearly, that is to say in a readily articulated manner, that energy is nothing other than the numerical value [*chiffre*] of a constant. Now what Freud articulates as primary process in the unconscious (…) isn't something to be numerically expressed [*se Chiffre*], but to be deciphered [*se dechiffre*], I mean *jouissance* itself. In *which case it doesn't* result in energy, and can't be registered as such." Jacques Lacan. Television (New York and London. W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 18.
10. Jacques Lacan *The Four Fundamental concepts of Psycho-Analysis* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1979), 197-198.
11. Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in *On Metapsychology.* The Pelican Freud Library, vol. 11 (Harmondsworth Penguin 1984), p. 332 (our emphasis)
12. Jacques Lacan *the Four fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, 266.
13. See Alain Badiou, *L'etre et l'evenement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988). For a wonderful and very clear account of Badiou's theory of being (and event)

see Peter Hallward, *Badiou. A subject to Truth* (Minneapolis & London University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

14. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis,* 150.

15. Ibidem, 22,23, 30.

16. I owe the notion of an "incomplete ontological constitution of reality" to Slavoj Zizek who introduced it by way of his reading of what is known as the 'open; ontology of quantum mechanics, and its 'uncertainty principle.' See his paper " K materialisticni teoligiji" in *Filozofski* 1/2007.

17. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis,* 23.

18. At the level of the unconscious, (almost) every meaning is sexual or is related to a sexual meaning. What does this tell us? Instead of conceiving this in terms of the unconscious as a kind of refuge, sanctuary, receptacle of inadmissible sexual thoughts, we should conceive it in terms of the unconscious as active *generator* of sexual meaning.

19. Louis Althusser, "Sur Marx et Freud" in *Ecrits sur la psychoanalyse* (Paris: STOCK/IMEC, 1993), 229.

20. See Jacques Lacan, "Allocution sur les psychoses de l'enfant" in *Autres ecrits* (Paris: Seuil 2001), 365.

21. See Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), 210-213.

22. For a detailed study of mechanisms of submission that rely essentially on the imperative of freedom, see Jean-Leon Beavois Traite *de la servitude liberale. Analyse de la soumission* (Paris Dunod, 1994) Basing his findings on a series of socio-psychological experiments , the author shows most convincing how the granting of freedom can be the best way to make the other do precisely what we want. First, we confront the other, from a position of a certain (social) authority, with a choice between two actions, one of which he is most reluctant to do while knowing, at the same time, that this is precisely the action we expect from him. Second, we keep repeating that the choice is entirely his, that he is entirely free in

his choice. Given these two circumstances, the following will happen: he will do exactly what we expect him to do and what is contrary to his (previously tested) convictions – furthermore by virtue of the mechanism of 'free choice,' he will rationalize his action by changing these very convictions. In other words, instead of viewing the action that was so perfidiously imposed upon him as something 'bad' that he had to do (since authority demanded it), he will convince himself that the 'bad thing' is actually *good,* since his is the only way for him to justify the fact that he 'freely chose' his course of action.

23. Cf. Jacques-Alain Miller, "to Interpret the Cause: From Freud to Lacan" in *Newsletter of the Freudian Field.* Vol.3. No 1-2 (1989).

24. Mladen Dolar, Spremna studija" in Sigmund Freud. *Nelagodje v kulturi* (Ljubljana Gyrus, 2001). 104.

25. Jacques Lacan. *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychoanalyse* (Paris: Seuil. 1973), 25.

26. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis,* 22.

27. Cf. Jean Lapanche, "La psychoanalyse comme anti-hermeneutique" in *Entre seduction et inspiration l'homme* (Paris Press Universitaire de France, 1999), 258.

28. I have discussed this notion in more detail in the first 'intervention'.

29. Emmanuel Levinas. *Totality and infinity. An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh Duquesne University Press. 1969), 218-219.

30. Ibidem, 244.

31. See Sigmund Freud, "Civilisation and its Discontents" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Work of Sigmund Freud,* vol. XXI (London Vintage), 125-126.

32. As Freud puts it, "the concept of drive is thus one of those lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical." Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the theory of Sexuality" in *On Sexuality,* The Pelican Freud Library, vol. 7 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 83. Translation modified at the point of the Freudian term '*Trieb'* ('instinct' in Strachey's translation): 'drive' has become generally used as more accurate

translation.

33. I developed this in more detail in the concluding chapter of *The Odd One In. On Comedy* (Cambridge. Massachusetts & London: the MIT Press, 2008).

34. Henri Bergson, *Laughter* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. 1980), 97.

35. Wyndham Lewis, *The Complete Wild Body* (Santa Barbara. Black Sparrow Press, 1982), 158.

36. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" in *Act and Literature,* The Pelican Freud Library, Volume 14 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 345.

37. See Robert Pfaller, "The Familiar Unknown, the Uncanny, the Comic" in Lacan. *The Silent Partners,* ed. By Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 2005).

38. See Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 161-183.

39. On this and many other crucial points of the uncanny, see Mladen Dolar. "I Shall be with You on Your Wedding-Night": Lacan and the Uncanny" in *October 58* (1991), 5-23.

40. For more on this point, which I hold related to the fact the comedy proper follows the parameters of what Hegel called the 'concrete universal,' see chapter 1 in my book *The Odd One In On Comedy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: MIT Press, 2008).

41. In other work, and in the same way that not all that is scary, or horrible, is uncanny (or related to anxiety), the comical should not be confused with the much larger field of what we can find 'funny.' It is a specific category of funny which, indeed, has more in common with the uncanny than with some other instances of 'funny.'

42. Jacques Lacan, *Le seminaire. Livre X. L'angoisse* (Paris: Seuil), 53.

43. Ibidem, 105.

44. Jacques Alain-Miller defined the difference between lack and hole in the following terms: lack is spatial, it designates a void *within* a space, while hole is more radical and designates the point at which this spatial order

itself breaks down. See his *"Le non-du-pere, s'en passer, s'en servir,"* available on www.lacan.com.

45. Jacques Lacan, *L'angoisse,* 160-161.

46. Mladen dollar, "I Shall be with You on Your Wedding-Night': Lacan and the Uncanny." 13.

47. Indeed, in order to see how Schelling's definition of the uncanny ("everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light") is very close to Lacan's definition, it is enough to stress the following "what ought to have remained secret" is to be understood in the strong sense, i.e. in the sense of a *constitutive* absence from the scene, and not in the more relative (or even moral) sense of what is 'appropriate' to be seen and what not.

48. This is how Slavoj Zizek formulates the distinction between desire and drive "desire is grounded in its constitutive lack, while drive circulates around a hole, a gap in the order of being" *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: The MIT Press, 2006) 61.

49. On this controversy, see Slavoj Zizek, The Ticklish Subject (London: Verso, 2000), 13-1675, and *The Parallax View,* 62-67 see also Alenka Zupancic *Ethics of the Real. Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso), 249-250.

In ***Why Psychoanalysis?*** Alenka Zupančič outlines the relationship

between the ontological, the ethical and the aesthetical spheres of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In three bold interventions she investigates the questions of **Being, Freedom and Comedy**. Taking her departure from issues of sex, cause, and horror Zupančič reinterprets Kant's philosophical categories and outlines a unique theory of the subject. ***Why Psychoanalysis?*** continues her seminal work ***Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan*** from 2000 and links it with more recent work about comedy. ***Why Psychoanalysis?*** Is suitable for beginners as well as for more advanced readers.