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THE LABOUR OF ENJOYMENT

Towards a Critique of Libidinal Economy

Lacanian Explorations IV

August Verlag

Something changed in the master's discourse at a certain point in history. We are not going to break our backs finding out if it was because of Luther, or Calvin, or some unknown traffic of ships around Genoa, or in the Mediterranean Sea, or anywhere else, for the important point is that on a certain day surplus *jouissance* became calculable, could be counted, totalized. This is where what is called the accumulation of capital begins.

Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*

Lacanian Explorations

edited by Dominik Finkelde and Slavoj Žižek

The impact of Lacanian psychoanalysis on contemporary theory generated a series of questions that challenge the traditional categorial framework of practical and political philosophy. The series *Lacanian Explorations* continues this quest to rethink basic philosophical concepts through Lacan.

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INTRODUCTION

THE CLINICAL IS POLITICAL

The following book continues a line of thought attempted in an earlier volume.¹ It entails a discussion of the ongoing actuality of psychoanalysis for a critique of the mode of enjoyment historically introduced and enforced by the capitalist organisation of social labour and social life, as well as of thinking in general. Once more my attention has been directed to the Freudian and Lacanian efforts to elaborate something that could be called a critique of libidinal economy. The latter, as Jacques Lacan's engagement with Karl Marx allows one to argue, can be considered an essential component of the critique of political economy. I would like to begin the present study by referring to the way Lacan himself spelled out the political significance of his discipline: "The intrusion into the political can only be made by recognizing that the only discourse there is, and not just analytic discourse, is the discourse of *jouissance*, at least when one is hoping for the work of truth from it."² In this dense and surely somewhat cryptic remark the very first word already draws our attention. Psychoanalysis entered the political in the guise of an intruder, an uninvited guest or troublemaker, which disturbed the slumber of the world and was therefore met with resistance. However, this critical intrusion did not come from some apparent outside. It took place rather as an immanent rupture or short-circuiting that exposed something at the core of politics that had until that point in time remained unconsidered: the problematic role of enjoyment in the constitution of social links and in the reproduction of

¹ Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*, London: Verso 2015.

² Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 2006, p. 78.

power-relations. This claim may sound unusual, even pretentious, given that already the most superficial glance at the history of European political thought reveals that the question of political pleasures had been thematised continuously since Plato and Aristotle. What then is the genuine contribution of psychoanalysis to this topic, and moreover, what makes its intervention so controversial that it can be described as an intrusion?

An indication can be sought in the psychoanalytic recognition that *every* discourse is a discourse of enjoyment: there is no enjoyment without discourse and no discourse, which would not be a discourse of enjoyment.³ This phrasing invokes something similar to Lacan's famous slogan "the unconscious is structured like a language": enjoyment is articulated like a discourse—it is an inevitable product of linguistic, economic, religious, epistemic and other types of symbolic bonds, which affect the human body. If every discourse contains the production of enjoyment—something the psychoanalytic clinic revealed in all its problematic aspects—this implies that there is no meta-discourse or meta-language (to recall another Lacanian slogan), no "pure" language of being beyond the "dirty" language of enjoyment.

In contrast to this critical and clinical perspective, there is an entire philosophical tradition engaged in the quest for a discourse, which would precisely *not* be a discourse of enjoyment. This is the role that a major part of philosophy attributed to logic ever since Aristotle. Grounded on the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of the excluded middle, logic is supposed to guarantee the consistent and meaningful articulation of thought. Logic aims to bring thought and

³ The remark: "Every discourse is a discourse of enjoyment," echoes Lacan's description of discourse as an "apparatus of enjoyment" and of the signifier, this elementary unit of language, as the "cause of enjoyment". See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XX, Encore*, New York: Norton 1999, p. 24 and p. 55.

concept into correspondence with reality and prevent the inmixing of non-sense, error and contradiction in discourse. This goes for both scientific and philosophical discourses in their production of knowledge and their quest for truth, as well as for the most common and everyday use of language. Logic is understood as the fundamental *grammar* of thought and a *cure* against the aberrations and excesses of language. Enjoyment may here appear as an irrational and errant surplus, which throws language and thinking out of joint, undermines its consistency and thereby threatens to corrupt the tool that sustains intersubjective, social relations. The efforts to keep language and enjoyment apart extend up into 20th century linguistics, pragmatism and analytic philosophy. They, too, continue the effort to fabricate a language that would be nothing more and nothing less than communication, conforming to the regulative ideal of adequate expression.⁴ Hence linguistics, pragmatism and analytic philosophy attempt to establish a discourse that would be something other than a discourse of enjoyment, the ideal of a discourse *without* consequences. The crusade against linguistic non-sense—think of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rudolf Carnap and more recently Noam Chomsky's rejection of ontology and speculative philosophy, which they understand as discourse of non-sense, hence of enjoyment—, reflects the philosophical struggle with enjoyment,

⁴ In his later teaching Lacan called the epistemic object of linguistics (*le langage*, language) a pondering of knowledge on language (*elucubration du savoir sur lalangue*). His criticism goes as follows: "Communication implies reference. But one thing is clear—language is merely what scientific discourse elaborates to account for what I call language. Language serves purposes that are altogether different from that of communication. That is what the experience of the unconscious has shown us ... If communication approaches what is effectively at work in the *jouissance* of language, it is because communication implies a reply, in other words, dialogue. But does language serve, first and foremost, to dialogue? As I have said before, nothing is less certain." Lacan, *Encore*, p. 138. By reducing language to communication linguistics overlooks an underlying disequilibrium and inadequacy in language. In doing so it downplays the fact that "language affects us first of all by everything it brings with it by way of effects that are affects". *Ibid.*, p. 139.

this untameable discursive product, which always seems to come in the guise of a destabilising surplus or parasitic remainder. A discourse that would not be a discourse of enjoyment ultimately stands for the fiction of a thoroughly transparent language and of the speaking being as a master of language. This is where Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalysis critically intervenes with its discovery that unconscious phenomena ultimately can be reduced to linguistic structures and that manifestations of enjoyment expose a dimension of discursive production and therefore a certain autonomy of language. Clearly, this discovery points beyond the pragmatic question of “how to do things with words”.⁵

Lacan’s quote above seems to suggest that the link between enjoyment and discourse has been continually subjected to “mystification” (to borrow an expression from Marx). This is reflected in the conviction that discourse and enjoyment could be separated or that one could reach the solid foundations of the symbolic order, the fundamentals of language, by detaching it from the speaking body and thus from the problematic effects-affects it causes in the body. This separation, however, gives rise to a fiction that is twofold, not only of a transparent discourse without destabilising consequences, but also of a normalised enjoyment endowed with equilibrium, regulation and measure. By contrast, the psychoanalytic intrusion into the political revolves around the disruptive nature of enjoyment and of discourse. The Freudian notion of the unconscious stands for the recognition that there is no master of discourse,

⁵ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1976. The theory of linguistic performativity seems to account for linguistic production, albeit insufficiently, since it still presupposes a conscious human agency or subjective intentionality that manipulates language and words. The psychoanalytic problematic of enjoyment, on the other hand, points beyond the “performativity principle” and requires a materialist theory of language, which departs from the recognition of the autonomy of the signifier and thereby inverts the relation between the latter and the subject. According to Lacan such materialist theory must be coupled to Marxism. See Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits*, Paris: Seuil 2001, pp. 208–209.

that no subject can ever entirely master discursive production. Even if there is no master of discourse, there is nevertheless a discourse of the master, which fundamentally means the mastering of the speaking being by discourse. What is at stake here is the recognition of the signifier in its “absolute autonomy”,⁶ whereby production of enjoyment is a concrete manifestation or crystallisation of this autonomy in the speaking body.

Psychoanalysis surely drew attention to the existence of discursive enjoyment or, in other words, to the dependency of enjoyment on language. Moreover, it exposed the exploitative character of the production of enjoyment. This is where the discursive mechanism of *repression* enters the picture. According to Sigmund Freud, repression is the foundation of politics and more broadly speaking culture in general.⁷ That said, the way Freud conceived repression implies more than simply asserting that something in the political field remains hidden, distorted or inhibited that must therefore be unveiled, liberated or fully actualised. Repression is probably one of the most misunderstood Freudian concepts because it immediately evokes images and scenarios of oppression and struggle. The relation between repression and oppression turns out to be complicated as soon as we acknowledge that Freud saw in this mental mechanism a significant type of unconscious labour: *Verdrängungsarbeit*, the labour of repression, tasked with no less than the production of enjoyment.⁸ While repression certainly conditions oppression it still stands for a more fundamental process, a *productive*

⁶ Ibid., pp. 403–404.

⁷ According to Michel Foucault’s critique the Freudian notion of repression still presupposes a centralised and vertical power-relation, whereas his own work strived to acknowledge the decentralised nature of power, notably under the conditions introduced by capitalist modernity. For a pointed take on the problems that accompany Foucault’s critique of Freud, see Alenka Zupančič, “Biopolitics, Sexuality and the Unconscious,” *Paragraph* 39 (2016), pp. 49–64.

⁸ For a most detailed account of repression and of the problems it entails, see Sigmund Freud, “Repression”, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, London: Vintage Books 2001, pp. 146–157.

operation, which ultimately brings the discursive and the cultural order into existence. In other words, repression exposes that the political and cultural order is constituted on a fundamental *resistance*. This resistance constitutive of culture (and moreover for the symbolic order as such) precedes every object of resistance and produces the difference between resistance and the resisted (for instance the difference between nature and culture). This is what Freud called primal repression (*Urverdrängung*).

Once Freud acknowledged the productive character of repression, the latter began to designate a specific mode of enjoyment, even the most common libidinal economy, and explain the intrusive and involuntary character of enjoyment in general.⁹ Repression exposed a discrepancy between the way a discursive order appears to its observers and the way this very same order captures its subjects by embedding them in a strictly determined organisation of enjoyment. Here we again come across the intrusive aspect of psychoanalysis, insofar as Freud's theory and practice revealed in enjoyment the way individuals compulsively sustain and reproduce the established socioeconomic order even in its most exploitative aspects:

Characterizing the master's discourse as comprising a hidden truth does not mean that this discourse is hidden, that it is lying low. The word *caché*, hidden, in French has its etymological virtues. It comes from *coactus*, from the verbs *coactare*, *coactitare* and *coacticare*. This means that there is something that is compressed, that is like a superimposition, something that needs to be unfolded in order to be legible.¹⁰

⁹ To be more exact, for Freud repression stands for the most common *Tribschicksal*, destiny of the drive, its fixation. Other destinies are conversion of the drive into its opposite (for instance from activity to passivity), the turning round upon the subject's own self (for example in masochism) and sublimation. See Freud, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 14, pp. 117–139.

¹⁰ Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 78–79.

What is interesting in Lacan's formulation is that it rejects the conviction, according to which the problematic relations of domination and the exploitation they sustain would themselves be hidden. They are out there, in plain sight, the master's discourse does not hide what it is or what it wants. What does remain hidden is the link between exploitation and enjoyment, the reproduction of the relations of domination by means of the production of enjoyment. The social structures producing inequality, injustice and exploitation come in combination with a strictly determined subjective mode of enjoyment; therefore, enjoyment is never purely subjective (the subject's private matter) or voluntary (the subject's private choice). In their seemingly private enjoyment, subjects work for the system. Psychoanalysis thus exposed the exploitative nexus of *power-enjoyment*.¹¹ I will return to the issue of the relationship of labour and enjoyment on several occasions below.

The Latin etymology of the French word *caché* entails a critical way of looking at the involuntary and intrusive character of discourse and enjoyment: *coactus* (compulsion, constraint, forcing, coercion). The hidden truth in question thus concerns a key feature of discourse: the compulsion to repeat, the force of linguistic and economic structures and their determining power over the thoughts and actions of the subject. The Freudian concept of the unconscious was meant to theorise this compulsive functioning of discourse in the speaking being. Correspondingly, the analytic clinic deals with the damaging consequences of discursive compulsion, or rather of discourse *as* compulsion. Psychoanalysis here gives an important twist to

¹¹ Foucault famously spoke of power-knowledge, which could be described as the modern form of power-enjoyment. For Foucault power-knowledge was indeed the defining feature of modernity and served him to designate the political nexus of experimental science and the logic of capital, the accumulative regime of knowledge and the accumulative regime of value. Incidentally, in *Seminar XVII*, contemporary to Foucault's engagement with power-knowledge, Lacan defined knowledge as means of enjoyment, in strong reference to Marx's economic notion of the means of production.

the famous slogan of second-wave feminism, which has been subsequently adopted by the partisans of identity politics: “The personal is political.”¹² Instead of departing from a positive subjective identity, which distinguishes one political group from another, psychoanalysis encroaches on the political by exposing a universal subjective damage, which is the result of discursive compulsion. Freud registers in the symptom (or more generally in illness) a specific connection between the apparently singular character of the clinical case and the problematic features of the predominant socioeconomic order or cultural condition. The political is no longer examined from the viewpoint of a hypothetical abstract figure of universal subjectivity (transcendental subject, consciousness, *homo oeconomicus*, *homo legalis*, the subject of communication etc.) or from the perspective of a particular identity. Each of these perspectives ultimately remains caught in the fiction of a discourse that would not be a discourse of enjoyment. Instead, Freud and Lacan investigate the political from the viewpoint of a “damaged subjectivity”, which assumes in their critical and clinical work the status of a *social* symptom. As Lacan occasionally remarked, “the unconscious is politics”.¹³ This means first and foremost that the subject of the unconscious must be recognised as *the* subject of politics. If the psychoanalytic clinic is never entirely closed in the singularity of a clinical case and instead always-already unfolds within the political, then its theoretical and practical lessons directly concern the *negative* common ground of all subjects. Differently put, if for Marx individuals were “personifications

¹² The slogan first appeared in the famous text by Carol Hanish, “The Personal is Political,” <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html> (accessed 29/6/18). It is no coincidence that the main struggle of second-wave feminism evolved around the problem of reproduction, given that this essential form of unpaid labour is the main *compulsive* process women have been subjected to in capitalism. For a thorough historical and critical account of the violent restriction of feminine subjectivity to its presumable anatomical destiny, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, New York: Autonomedia 2004.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XIV, La logique du fantasme* (unpublished), 17/5/67.

of economic categories, the bearers of particular class-relations and interests",¹⁴ personifications of the abstractions sustaining the capitalist mode of production, then for Freud and Lacan these very same individuals are personifications of structural dysfunction and contradiction, their symptoms are never disconnected from the social framework and their seemingly personal suffering always-already enunciates a certain truth of the socioeconomic condition.

The political weight of psychoanalysis, at least in its Freudo-Lacanian guise, consists in the effort of organising the subject's thoughts and actions around an attempt to work on the structure that conditions their illness. On the one hand, psychoanalysis deconstructs the subject's identity and in so doing reveals the fantasmatic ground of every identity politics; on the other hand, it outlines something that indeed deserves to be called *non-identity politics*,¹⁵ politicising the non-identity and alienation inscribed in the subject as the point where the subjective and the social, the personal and the political form a structural continuum. Identity is replaced by identification—more specifically by identification with the symptom,¹⁶ hence with a symbolic formation, on the level of which non-identity remains an essential component of the subject's (or a group's) identity. By contrast, today's liberal versions of identity politics stand for the purification of identity from non-identity, while its racist and sexist appropriation openly displays the projection of difference onto the (cultural, sexual, ethnic, etc.) other. In this projection the difference, and hence the other, is openly

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, London: Penguin 1990, p. 92.

¹⁵ I am borrowing the term from Moya Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics*, London: Sage 2005, p. 160.

¹⁶ Identification with the symptom was according to Lacan one possible outcome of an analysis: "What, then, do we identify with at the end of analysis? Do we identify with our unconscious? I do not believe this, because the unconscious remains—I do not say *eternally* because there is no eternity—remains the Other ... What does this marking that is analysis consist in? Would it be, or not, identifying oneself ... with one's symptom?" Jacques Lacan, "Séminaire du 16 novembre 1976," *Ornicar?* 12/13 (1977), p. 6.

conceived as a menace, which needs to be abolished. Unsurprisingly, in such a political scenario identities are underpinned by the fantasy of an organically whole, fully constituted and stable subjectivity. One could also argue that contemporary identity politics ultimately comes down to identification with fantasy. Hence, from the viewpoint of the psychoanalytic theory of the subject “the personal is political” should be supplemented with “the clinical is political”—whereby the whole point is that the clinical is not reducible to the personal. The unconscious stands for the manifestation of the impersonal within what appears to be personal.

Lacan saw in psychoanalysis not only an intruder, but also an inversion (*envers*) of the master’s discourse. In striving to subvert the mastery that sustains the capitalist mode of production and to counteract its damaging consequences,¹⁷ psychoanalysis always had to struggle with organised resistance against its theoretical and clinical endeavours. This resistance surely succeeded in “re-educating”, neutralising or integrating many psychoanalytic schools in accordance with capitalist economic doctrine and its social imperatives. Nevertheless, this does not imply that psychoanalysis lost *all* of its critical, political and subversive

¹⁷ “The more saints, the more laughter; that’s my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse—which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some.” Jacques Lacan, *Television*, New York: Norton 1990, p. 16. The quote leaves hardly any doubt that the critical value of psychoanalysis consists in the move from “for some” to “for all”, hence from clinical singularity to political universality and consequently from identity politics (which inevitably remains a segregation politics “for some”) to non-identity politics (which would strive to become a communist politics “for all”). Lacan refers to the figure of the saint in order to illustrate the limit position of the analyst both in the analytic process and in the broader social framework: the saint-analyst as refusal of enjoyment (*rebut de la jouissance*, refusal and waste). In this precise respect the position of the analyst with regard to the enjoyment of the system inverts, on the one hand, the position of the neurotic and, on the other, stands for the endpoint of the analytic process (given that for Lacan there was no distinction between didactic analysis, the formation of analysts, and analysis of clinical cases, the cure of patients). For an extensive commentary of the political signification of the psychoanalytic “for all”, see Jelica Šumič, “La politique et la psychoanalyse: du pas-tout au pour tous,” in: Jelica Šumič (ed.), *Universel, singulier, sujet*, Paris: Éditions Kimé 2000, pp. 129–158.

significance. The latter must be reclaimed over and over again. What is required is a counter-repetition, among others things in the guise of a “return to Freud”, as Lacan described his own project. In doing so he demonstrated that psychoanalysis is the site of an ongoing *political* struggle. This struggle can surely assume the appearance of an epistemic conflict (with medicine, psychiatry, neurosciences etc.) but ultimately revolves around the political implications of the “hidden truth” revealed by Freudian theory and practice. The return to Freud stands for radicalisation, through repetition, of the epistemological, critical and political foundations and perspectives of psychoanalysis.

Freud’s theoretical and clinical efforts from the very outset circulated around the link between discourse, enjoyment and work. That said, it would not be illegitimate to consider *Arbeit* (work, labour) a fundamental psychoanalytic concept. Not only did Freud define the multiplicity of unconscious processes and intellectual operations such as condensation and displacement of thought material in terms of labour (in this respect Freud indeed deserves to be read as a theoretician of intellectual labour), he equally conceived psychoanalysis as transformative work on the structural conditions that sustain the subject’s mode of enjoyment (work on and against structural resistance he called *Durcharbeiten*, working-through). The main task of unconscious work consists in producing enjoyment, whereby this production entails a problematic consumption of mental activities, insofar as it pushes the subject to the point of *Verausgabung*. The German word most fittingly describes the problem at stake, since it stands for economic expenditure as well as for bodily and mental exhaustion, thus bringing together the social and the subjective aspect of the casualties effectuated by discursive compulsion. At the core of the link between unconscious labour and enjoyment lies the contradiction between the demand of enjoyment and the exhaustion-consumption of the subject.

To speak of the “work of truth”, as Lacan did in our initial quote, directly points toward the truth of work. This is where Marx’s insight that the capitalist invention of abstract labour transformed all productive human activities into *the* process of exploitation becomes most relevant for psychoanalysis. For Marx, too, envisaged the compulsive character of production and even associated this compulsion with the capitalist drive of accumulation.¹⁸ In contrast to classical political economy, Marx’s glimpse into the logical and structural foundations of production revealed a contradictory global picture of capitalism, together with the compulsive character of economic laws and imperatives. Freud extended the same critical outlook to the question of enjoyment: in order to treat subjective troubles and understand their actual material causes, one must envisage the tension within the link between labour and enjoyment, which crystallises in the phenomenon of the compulsion to repeat. In doing so one inevitably stumbles upon the libidinal component of social exploitation that Marx already detected in the capitalist “Faustian conflict between the drive of accumulation [*Akkumulationstrieb*] and the drive of enjoyment [*Genusstrieb*]”.¹⁹ The fact that Marx uses the word *Trieb* should not be underestimated. The drive of accumulation and the drive of enjoyment reproduce the same “Faustian conflict” as the death drive and the sexual drive in Freud. But rather than

¹⁸ For instance, Marx speaks of the “compulsion to perform surplus labour” (Marx, *Capital*, p. 1026). Elsewhere he detects in relation to the drive of enrichment something that could indeed be called a compulsion to repeat: “Only as a personification of capital is the capitalist respectable. As such, he shares with the miser an absolute drive towards self-enrichment. But what appears in the miser as the mania of an individual is in the capitalist the effect of a social mechanism in which he is merely a cog. Moreover, the development of capitalist production makes it necessary constantly to increase the amount of capital laid out in a given industrial undertaking, and competition subordinates every individual capitalist to the immanent laws of capitalist production, as external and coercive laws. It compels him to keep extending his capital, so as to preserve it, and he can only extend it by means of progressive accumulation” (ibid., p. 739).

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 741. Transl. modified.

seeing here a conflict between two opposing tendencies one should follow Lacan's suggestion that what is at stake is a split within one and the same drive. This ultimately allowed Lacan to recognise in surplus value the specifically capitalist form of discursive enjoyment.²⁰

The psychoanalytic examination of the link between enjoyment and exploitation exposed two phenomena, on which both Freud and Lacan grounded their take on politics: discontent (*Unbehagen*) and resistance (*Widerstand*). By speaking of cultural discontent (*Unbehagen in der Kultur*) Freud ultimately conceived culture in general and capitalism in particular as an organised disease or laboratory of psychopathologies. Rather than creating the conditions for the pursuit of happiness—this social and subjective ideal shared by ethical doctrines as different as Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, Bentham's utilitarianism and contemporary neoliberalism with its imperative of happiness—cultural demands, institutions and mechanisms cause traumatism, anxiety and exhaustion in the subject. Freud's aetiology of neuroses departed from the critical claim that social organisations such as family, church or army, as well as destabilising processes such as exploitation, war and crisis play the key role in the genesis and proliferation of neuroses. Predominant psychological and economic views still tend to treat "mental disorders" as some kind of *negative private property*, disconnected from the social mode of production, cultural conditions and

²⁰ Surplus value points directly to the modern vicissitude of the drive (*Triebschicksal*) that Lacan associated with repression understood in terms of "renunciation of enjoyment". See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XVI, D'un Autre à l'autre*, Paris: Seuil 2006, p. 17. Here, too, Lacan picks upon an insight that had been formulated by Marx: "While the capitalist of the classical type brands individual consumption as a sin against his function, as 'abstinence' from accumulating, the modernized capitalist is capable of viewing accumulation as 'renunciation' of his drive of enjoyment [*Genußtrieb*] ... Moreover, the capitalist gets rich, not, like the miser, in proportion to his personal labour and restricted consumption, but at the same rate as he squeezes out labour-power from others, and compels the worker to renounce all the enjoyments of life." Marx, *Capital*, pp. 740–741. Transl. modified.

economic imperatives. By contrast, psychoanalysis provides us with the conceptual tools for a thorough *de-privatisation* of psychopathological complexes and illnesses by demonstrating that they assume the status of a social symptom. This is the critical meaning of the assertion that there is only a discourse of enjoyment. Mental illness appears as collateral damage, which inevitably accompanies the reproduction of the social condition. In contrast to the various images and ideals of strong, normal or abstract subjectivity fabricated by philosophy, psychology, economy etc. throughout history, psychoanalysis encounters political subjectivity in the form of damaged life or alienated being. In this, too, the Freudian critique of libidinal economy most overtly intersects with the Marxian critique of political economy.

No wonder, then, that Freud's theoretical constructions and clinical practice, which provided him with material for his radical critique of culture, were anything but welcomed in scientific and cultural milieus. Psychoanalysis was met with rejection, and Freud's continuous confrontations with the problem suggest that culture is not only an organised disease but also an organised resistance—in the first place resistance against critique, which aims to uncover the rotten foundations and damaging impact of the organisation of social production and subjective enjoyment. Moreover, Freud showed that this resistance takes the privileged form of resistance against change, an underlying structural inertia, which sabotages every attempt at organised transformative work on given social conditions, structures and institutions. For Freud the situation is comparable to analysands, who refuse the analyst's help, sabotage the unfolding of the cure, and instead of confronting the core of their troubles retreat into illness.²¹

²¹ *Flucht in die Krankheit* (flight into illness) and *Krankheitsgewinn* (profit from illness) are two clinical phenomena that Freud closely associates with resistance to psycho-

Freud's theory of drives stands at the core of the recognition that every discourse is a discourse of enjoyment. A significant complication appears already at the level of the translation of both terms concerned. The German *Lust* surely stands for pleasure but it covers involuntary and uncontrollable phenomena such as lust as well. Lacan translated *Lust* with the term *jouissance* in order to enforce Freud's questioning of our everyday understanding of pleasure in terms of the bodily feeling accompanying the satisfaction of physiological needs (an understanding that despite all critical efforts continues to persist). Lacan's translation may not have been entirely successful because it introduced a difference that was not present in Freud: between pleasure, an affection of the body accompanying the decrease of tension and the satisfaction of presumably natural needs, and enjoyment, an affection of the body associated with the increase of tension and the satisfaction of drive. Freud's critical perspective on pleasure consisted of thinking the tension between both moments in one and the same bodily affection. In doing so, Freud could eventually abandon the homeostatic and relational concept of pleasure, which can be historically traced all the way back to Aristotle, replacing it with an entropic and non-relational conception. In the present volume "pleasure" and "enjoyment" will be used as synonyms, keeping in mind that they are both translations of the German *Lust*.

Another misunderstanding, which found its expression in translation, concerns the German *Trieb*, for which James Strachey, Freud's editor and translator into English, chose the word "instinct". Strachey's translation strengthened the conviction that Freud's *Trieb* stands in direct continuity with the physiological and biological framework, in which the notion first appeared in the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century

analysis. In the end the tendency of profitmaking in the libidinal and economic framework—the drive—is the ultimate source of resistance.

indeed designated a natural force such as instinct, rather than an eminently symbolic force, which is directly linked with the compulsive character of discourse. Freud himself contributed to this misunderstanding, since his earlier work departed from the idea of prohibition and, accordingly, the conflict between drives and culture, which in one way or another reproduced the opposition of nature and culture. From this viewpoint all subjective troubles and pathologies presumably arise from the fact that cultural demands, institutions and mechanisms repress, inhibit or prohibit the unmediated satisfaction of natural forces and inclinations in human beings. This indeed matches the regime of the “repressive hypothesis” that Foucault criticised in Freud and the Freudian Left.²²

Understood as “constant force”,²³ the drive in any case does not precede the symbolic order, but is its specific product, which over-represents a physiological stimulus or a bodily need. This means that the drive stands for something different than a more or less faithful symbolic translation of a physiological stimulus, instinct or need. The drive effectively replaces need as symbolic formation, isolates its imperative aspect and comes in the guise of a virtually infinite demand of pleasure for the sake of pleasure. As constant force, the drive stands for the perpetual affection of the body, constant stimulus. Consequently, pleasure is not a bodily affection that would accompany the satisfaction of some presumably natural need as a more or less accidental physiological by-product, but is instead produced by means of the symbolic apparatus, a product of uninterrupted work. From this point of view, language finally appears as a *factory of enjoyment*.

²² See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, New York: Vintage Books 1990, pp. 15–35.

²³ Freud, “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,” in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 14, pp. 114–118. Elsewhere Freud also speaks of the “constant tension of need” (Freud, “Repression,” in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 14, p. 147).

Here we come across a problem that is best exemplified in the shift of Lacan's theory of enjoyment: from prohibition to imposition, from repression to production, from contingency to necessity, where enjoyment becomes a duty (hence Lacan's reoccurring identification of the superego with the imperative of enjoyment). It was for this reason that Lacan saw in sadism (rather than in masochism) the perversion endowed with critical potential. Masochism still assumes that enjoyment could be separated from exploitation, obtained in the form of contractual enjoyment, by means of a symbolic agreement between the masochist and the dominatrix. Sadism, on the other hand, uncovers the compulsive, involuntary, forced and non-relational character of enjoyment, as Marquis de Sade's novels incessantly demonstrate. In this respect, the masochist assumption that there is such a thing as a libidinal contract, which would prescribe and regulate enjoyment, fails equally as much as philosophies of the social contract and theories of the economic contract do.

Perversions such as sadism and masochism openly mobilise the link of enjoyment and exploitation, they revolve around the libidinal investment in relations of exploitation. By contrast, neurosis stands for an expression of protest against the organisation of libidinal economy on the background of exploitative strategies. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, on the other hand, recognised in schizophrenia, rather than in neurosis, the privileged social symptom.²⁴ In their polemic they argued that psychoanalysis participated in the neurotisation of subjectivity characteristic of capitalism and, consequently, that Freud remained blind to the role of his own theories in the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production. Needless to say, the premise of the present book is that psychoanalysis is in the first

²⁴ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 1983.

place a critical theory of the social production of damaged life. As clinical practice, it aims at providing the subject at least with the minimal ground for working through the damaging effects of the capitalist mode of production in particular and the cultural condition in general. This may be an optimistic reading or an attempt to think philosophically what is still worth fighting for in psychoanalysis.

Looking back at the history of political and economic thought, one quickly observes that the question of pleasure always accompanied meditations on the just social order. One could, surely very roughly, isolate three major theoretical paradigms in the history of attempts to think the relation between libidinal and social economy: Aristotle, Adam Smith and Freud, or more generally, philosophy, economy and psychoanalysis. What distinguishes them is that Aristotle and Smith both depart from the conceptual wager that there is something like a *measure of pleasure*, or that pleasure contains immanent relationality and equilibrium. Freud, by contrast, departs from the constitutive *unmeasure of pleasure*,²⁵ without therefore rejecting its logical character. It is in order to demonstrate the link between pleasure and homeostasis that Aristotle introduced his notion of the right measure. The latter turns out to be a mere assumption, which in the end proves that there are only approximations to the true ethical life. Indeed, Aristotle's thought inhabits a "world of approximation", in which ethics

²⁵ It might be striking to omit Christianity from the picture. If there is continuity between Christianity and psychoanalysis, it exists in the acknowledgement of non-relational and excessive character of pleasure. Their main difference consists in the fact that only psychoanalysis outlined a truly materialist critique of enjoyment, and in this respect it assumes the same position as Marx's critique of political economy did toward religion, seeing in its teachings the mystified (repressed) expression of libidinal deadlocks and contradictions. The confrontation of Christianity with the intricacies of enjoyment is extensively explored in the work of Slavoj Žižek (for instance, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2003).

cannot be inscribed in the regime of knowledge. And the same goes for pleasure: there is no science of pleasure.

It may seem that in the modern “universe of precision” the tables have turned.²⁶ Political economy insisted that its notion of private interest—the name Adam Smith gave to the tendency of all economic subjects to pursue profit (which is a crucial figure of enjoyment)—stands for the quantifiable core of our being. Moreover, in the modern universe of precision the ultimate measure of pleasure is not so much private interest than economic value itself. In capitalism, value and pleasure finally seem to overlap entirely: no pleasure seems to be possible outside the commodity form and the value form.²⁷ Here, then, pleasure finally seems to become an object of science. Capitalism also pretends that it found in value the ultimate measure of being. The subject is translated into positive data by means of statistical methods, evaluation procedures and data mining, which all presumably target not some fictitious and abstract average, but an actual quantifiable universality that is susceptible to valorisation and pertains to all particular subjects. To measure subjects, and in so doing transform them into a source of value (labour-power), hence into a source of systemic enjoyment, is the ultimate goal of capitalist politics.

The guiding premise of the present volume is that Marx and Freud come together in something that could be called the politics of working-through, in contrast to two influential paradigms of libidinal politics: the politics of happiness (Aristotle)

²⁶ The terms “the world of approximation” and “the universe of precision” come from Alexandre Koyré, “Du monde de l’‘à-peu-près’ à l’univers de la précision,” in: *Études d’histoire de la pensée philosophique*, Paris: Armand Colin 1961, pp. 311–329.

²⁷ “There are only commodity pleasures” is the main axiom of the modern doctrine of pleasure (see Jean-Claude Milner, *Constats*, Paris: Gallimard 2002, p. 120). Put differently, the multiplicity of pleasures has been abolished under the predominance of commodity form and value form as the general envelope, which sustains the quantification and measurability of pleasure.

and the politics of narcissism (Adam Smith). The return to these two pre-Freudian paradigms in matters of libidinal economy, which opens the present volume (Chapter One), exposes the changed status of pleasure in the history of economics and political philosophy between premodernity and modernity. The volume then turns to the psychoanalytical critique of enjoyment (Chapter Two) and more particularly to its critique of narcissism (Chapter Three) in order to recognise in self-love a reaction formation rather than a fundamental condition of the human subject (in opposition to economic liberalism and neoliberalism that declare their indebtedness to Adam Smith's theory of the subject).²⁸ Narcissism is already a failed attempt at overcoming the persistence of alienation in subjective being. Unlike the majority of philosophical, political and economic thought, the radicality of Freud's psychoanalysis and Marx's critique of political economy derive from their full acknowledgement of alienation as a process, which is constitutive of the subject and does not necessarily carry only negative connotations. In this regard, Marx and Freud stand at the other end of a historical development, which leads back to Descartes' methodological doubt, the first systematic mobilisation of alienation in the history of philosophy and the beginning of the conceptual history of alienation (Chapter Four). The peak of this history is without any doubt Hegel's philosophy, in which speech and labour are for the first time recognised as processes of constitutive alienation. By shifting from narcissism to alienation the present volume then returns to Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation from the perspective of systemic indebteding, where the historical genesis of the capitalist form of alienation and more generally the capitalist *exploitation of alienation* is

²⁸ For an exhaustive historical and theoretical account, see notably Pierre Force, *Self-Interest Before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, and Christian Laval, *L'homme économique. Essais sur les racines du néolibéralisme*, Paris: Gallimard 2007.

anchored (Chapter Five). The last part of this volume then turns more systematically to the status of labour in psychoanalysis in order to examine the critical core of Freud's theory and clinical practice, the nexus thought-labour-enjoyment (Chapter Six). This topic is directly linked with the phenomenon of resistance (Chapter Seven), which is indeed a crucial problem both for psychoanalysis and for radical leftist politics. What is most challenging in resistance is its impersonal, structural, systemic character, rather than its psychological aspect, appearance or manifestation. These two problems—labour and resistance—are particularly insightful for understanding the intrusive and radical character of psychoanalytic discoveries and its engagement with politics. Labour and resistance also demonstrate that politically the most charged aspects of psychoanalysis are its epistemological and clinical deadlocks: the question of the end of analysis (and consequently the impossible character of the analytic profession) and the problem of death drive (the conception of which brings together the lessons of structural resistance). These psychoanalytic deadlocks are indeed indispensable for obtaining a complete picture of the problems that the Left must face over and over again.

PART 1
COMPULSION TO ENJOY

CHAPTER I

THE MEASURE OF PLEASURE: ARISTOTLE AND ADAM SMITH

Pleasure is a crucial problem in Aristotle's practical philosophy. Beyond its ethical and political framework pleasure is also associated with the immovable mover, whereby this highest form of pleasure, the intellectual pleasure of God, serves as the ontological foundation and orientation for political pleasures. In Aristotle pleasure thus plays the triple role of an ontological, political and psychological category, pointing toward the continuity between the subjective and political organisation of pleasure, on the one hand, and the ontological organisation of being, on the other. Since the "enjoyment of the Other" or the "enjoyment of being" (to use Lacan's expressions) tops the ontological hierarchy one could say that Aristotle's philosophy contains an axiom, which establishes identity between enjoyment and being: It is the same to enjoy and to be (to paraphrase Parmenides' axiom of the identity of thinking and being).

This identity departs from the ontological assumption that both sides of the equation, being and pleasure, are inherently endowed with equilibrium. Whether psychological, political or ontological, pleasure is always associated with the state of rest: "[I]f the nature of anything were simple, the same action would always be most pleasant to it. This is why God always enjoys a single and simple pleasure; for there is not only an activity of movement but an activity of immobility, and pleasure is found more in rest than movement" (*Eth. Nic.*, 1154b).¹ This explains why Lacan eventually broke down Aristotle's philosophy to the

¹ I am using Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995. All references to Aristotle's works are indicated in the text.

homeostatic notion of the pleasure principle, the principle of constancy, according to which pleasure presumably tends toward an ideal state without affections or tensions, which would involve lack and therefore movement. In God this perfection is fully actualised: the activity of movement that pleasure inevitably seems to imply coincides with the activity of immobility. Aristotle's notion of right measure brings the assumed homeostasis of pleasure most directly to the point, but only in the framework of the "complex" pleasures of the political animal. Moreover, everything that has been said about pleasure applies to being and thinking. Recall that for Aristotle God is not only the highest of beings, but also a being whose sole activity consists in the thinking of thinking. Divine pleasure is purely intellectual, pleasure without body. Therefore, Aristotle seems to suggest a threefold identity: thought, being and enjoyment are one and the same—three names for a single homeostatic state.

In Aristotle's philosophy of language, on the other hand, pleasure also appears as an unusual disturbance that leads directly to the psychoanalytic thesis on the link between discourse and enjoyment. The problematic status of pleasure is thematised at a crucial moment, when the true speech of philosophers must be distinguished from the false speech of the sophists.² Here Aristotle stumbles upon an entirely different aspect of pleasure, which no longer pertains to the contemplative state of rest but rather to the affection of the speaking body through language—even exposing the autonomisation of language. While in the presumable ontological homeostasis of the immovable mover pleasure neither increases nor decreases but remains constant, sustaining a permanent state of happiness,

² Barbara Cassin explored this excess of pleasure in the most systematic manner, for instance in her recent volume on Lacan entitled *Jacques le Sophiste*, Paris: Epel 2012, and moreover in her classic work on the history of sophistry, *L'effet sophistique*, Paris: Gallimard 1995.

in sophistic speech the production of pleasure is tied to a fundamental discursive imbalance and denaturalisation of language, its detachment from communicative purposiveness. Aristotle argues that sophists *speak for the sake of speaking*, and in doing so their discourse produces pleasure, which serves no higher purpose and at the same time signals no satisfaction of any particular natural need.³ The discursive pleasure of sophistry is constitutively inadequate, *pleasure for the sake of pleasure* and, as such, has no place in Aristotle's classification of the forms of life and their matching forms of pleasure. The presumably natural function and *telos* of language as means of constructing social relations, producing true knowledge and serving meaningful communication is suspended and pleasure in speaking becomes its predominant goal. This inverted teleology makes sophistry appear as linguistic perversion, but at the same time it exposes a compulsion in this presumably counter-natural use of the linguistic tool, by means of which human animals otherwise sustain social links. One could argue that Aristotle constructed his entire philosophy in protest against this problematic production of pleasure for the sake of pleasure, a systematic effort to neutralise the sophistic threat and demonstrate that pleasure is immanently susceptible to regulation, relationality and right measure.

Aristotle proposes a doctrine, according to which pleasure accompanies accomplished actions, and more particularly actions, which contain their goal in themselves.⁴ By contrast,

³ Aristotle describes the sophists as "those who argue for the sake of argument (*logou khari legousin*)" (*Met.*, 1009a 20–21), using the term *logos*, which we also find in his famous definition of man as *zoon logon echon*, animal endowed with *logos* (speech, reason). The sophists thus denaturalise *logos* by making its activity a goal in itself. I rely on the readings of Barbara Cassin, as well as on her translation of Aristotle in: Barbara Cassin and Michel Nancy, *La décision du sens. Le livre Gamma de la Métaphysique d'Aristote*, Paris: Vrin 1992.

⁴ For instance: "Seeing seems to be at any moment complete, for it does not lack anything which coming into being later will complete its form; and pleasure also seems to be of this nature. For it is a whole, and at no time can one find a pleasure

the inverted teleology of the sophistic production of pleasure knows no point of accomplishment. It is virtually infinite and its negativity seems to invert and compete with the pleasure that Aristotle associates with the divine sphere. To repeat the abovementioned quote: “God always enjoys a single and simple pleasure”, which is coextensive with the process of the thinking of thinking. In distinction to humans who think in order to cognise the world (for Aristotle, all human beings “naturally desire to know” (*Met.*, 980a 22) and thinking is driven by this desire), God’s activity of thinking is *thinking for the sake of thinking*, and only by means of such a self-sufficient process can thought be identified with pleasure. Finite beings experience pleasure once their activity or action has reached its goal. God, on the other hand, does not act, insofar as He does not move, His activity is inactivity, but of an active kind. Such active inactivity can only be contemplation. Moreover, for Aristotle, the immovable mover is the ultimate motivation, even the cause of desire to act in accordance with perfection and excellence.⁵ In the social framework, the philosopher is supposed to be the paradigmatic personification and actualisation of such desire.

Thus pleasure is rest, a state without lack, as the Aristotelian god does not cease to demonstrate. A state containing any kind of lack inevitably implies movement and imperfection.⁶ We

whose form will be completed if the pleasure lasts longer. For this reason, too, it is not a movement” (*Eth. Nic.*, 1174a 15–20). Aristotle seems to suggest that there is something like pleasure of the eye, pleasure arising from the activity of vision. Freud and Lacan would agree, but they would argue against Aristotle that this pleasure makes the eye blind for its own gaze. Lacan, for instance, spoke of the triumph of the gaze (as an object of enjoyment) over the eye (its physiological function). See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1998, p. 103.

⁵ “How exactly does this deity move the universe? Not through any direct effort or design, but rather through the power of attraction. It moves as the object of desire moves, i.e., it moves without moving, it sets the stars into orbit and sublunar beings along their courses simply by being what is.” Aaron Schuster, *The Trouble With Pleasure: Deleuze and Psychoanalysis*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2016, p. 130.

⁶ Consequently, Aristotle’s god knows nothing about desire and could not be more foreign to the desiring God of monotheism. However, even though the recognition of

can recall that for Lacan this is the main premise of the logic of the signifier: once the signifier is defined in terms of pure difference to another signifier it automatically implies the dimension of lack. Consequently, language comes down to movement, for which structural linguistics introduced the term “metonymy”. In the subject, desire is the privileged expression of this metonymy and psychologically manifests itself as striving for pleasure. From the Aristotelian perspective, the speaking being is equally separated from pleasure, and, moreover, there cannot be any linguistic or discursive pleasure, since speaking equals expressing a lack. Lack proliferates in the space of language, so it makes sense that pleasure in terms of absence of movement can be found only in animals and in God: none of them is a being of lack, that is, a being of *logos*, a speaking being. But the silence of beasts and the silence of God are clearly of a different kind. Divine silence and its pleasurable homeostasis attracts human thought because and by means of its absence of movement, while animal pleasure pulls thinking downward through its absence of measure. It is neither surprising nor contradictory that Aristotle occasionally compares the sophists even with a vegetative form of life, since they deprive language of all logic, this privileged Aristotelian name for the right measure in language. The language of sophistry violates the principle of non-contradiction and of the excluded third, this ultimate ground of logic according to Aristotle. In doing so, sophistic discourse regresses to speech, which, because it does not say anything true and meaningful, is non-referential and does not communicate anything at all. Such speech ultimately coincides

the lack in God grounds monotheism this divine lack is at the same time something that the guardians of religious orthodoxy most openly abhor and resist. The lack in God signals that God is anything but the perfect being that religion still wants Him to be. Rather, God is the expression of ontological imperfection, a god of malfunctioning universe—and in this respect, too, He is the precise opposite of Aristotle's god, which is a god of the presumably harmoniously ordered and thus fully functioning *kosmos*.

with its extreme opposite, the autistic silence of plants: “But if all are alike both right and wrong, one who believes this can neither speak nor say anything intelligible; for he says at the same time both ‘yes’ and ‘no’. And if he makes no judgment but thinks and does not think, indifferently, what difference will there be between him and the plants?” (*Met.*, 1008b 8–12) Even though sophistic babbling appears as movement it is in itself absence of motion, language at a standstill. This means that, if such speech does indeed produce pleasure, the sophistic use of language in the last instance equals the abolition of language. Since the absence of logical ground makes the language of sophistry utterly unstable and nonsensical, it is no language at all. Because the sophists do not contemplate anything their speech for the sake of speaking and its corresponding pleasure for the sake of pleasure is the perfect opposition of the divine pleasure in self-contemplation, the opposite form of pleasure for the sake of pleasure arising from the thinking of thinking.

Sophistry is the eternal enemy of philosophy, because it undermines the consistency of contemplative life by teaching a doctrine that questions the ontological stability of being and the logical stability of language. Contrary to Aristotle’s conviction, sophistry demonstrates that there is something like a *language of enjoyment*. Moreover, it exposes that this language is inseparable and indistinguishable from the language of being, by means of which philosophical contemplation strives to come as close as possible to divine contemplation. In the end, pleasure for the sake of pleasure turns out to be an eminent logical, ontological and political problem. It is unsurprising that Aristotle’s political and ethical doctrine comes across a homologous problem in economy. This time it is the tendency of chrematistics, this knowledge of profitmaking, to misuse economic exchange for producing profit—a problem that Marx famously described with the expression *Geld heckendes Geld*, money-breeding money. Chrematistics is a pseudo-science whose

object is the increase of wealth, profitmaking through autonomisation and the automatising of economic fictions. Chrematistics presents itself as economic knowledge, just like sophistry puts on the mask of philosophical knowledge in its pleasure-making through linguistic fictions. More importantly, what chrematistics and sophistry have in common is that they both expose a compulsion in the economic and linguistic regime: “The life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else” (*Eth. Nic.*, 1096a 6–8). In both cases life seems to be hijacked, possessed by a foreign force, which exposes the discursive compulsion and makes the life of fictions prevail over the life of economic and political subjects. In chrematistics wealth is no longer useful, thereby becoming the embodiment of enjoyment in the psychoanalytic sense of the term. As Lacan pointedly remarked, “enjoyment is what serves no purpose [*ne sert à rien*]”,⁷ or more literally, enjoyment is good for nothing because it undermines usefulness. The merchant is a negative figure because he assumes the mediating position between both parties engaged in economic exchange, mediating the immediate, presumably authentic and uncorrupted social act of exchange. In doing so the merchant inverts the seemingly “natural” relation of the subordination of value to usefulness. Exchange as “natural” social act—which means that it contains an external goal, exchange of goods and satisfaction of needs, finite exchange—is denaturalised through mediation, which adds, or rather imposes, a new goal that is nevertheless immanent to exchange. The sophistic production of pleasure in speaking seduces one into lying, the chrematistic production of profit

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XX, Encore*, New York: Norton 1999, p. 3. Transl. modified.

causes injustice: both are for Aristotle counter-natural, insofar as they are radically compulsive.⁸

On the background of the compulsive character of the production of pleasure and of the accumulation of wealth, Aristotle formulates one of the crucial problems of political and economic thought, which intimately concerns the questionable compatibility of pleasure and justice, but instead points to the connection of pleasure with exploitation: "Why is it that man, who of all animals has the advantage of most education, is yet the most unjust of all? Is it because he possesses the power of reasoning to the greatest degree, and has therefore most carefully estimated the pleasures and happiness, and these are impossible of attainment without injustice?" (*Probl.*, 950b) Pleasure seems to sustain only universal injustice, whereas justice appears almost impossible to attain. Behind the famous double definition of the human being as *zoon logikon* and *zoon politikon*, which connects the power of reasoning, rationality and language, *logos*, with politics and engages in the rational foundation of politics, a more sober and even pessimistic definition of the human being announces itself, the unjust animal, *zoon adikotaton*. There is no pleasure without the tendency to suspend the imperative of justice or to subject the other. Injustice is anchored in pleasure. Hence, it should come as no

⁸ Marx saw in Aristotle's critique of chrematistics a direct link with the compulsion implied by the tendency of capital toward self-valorisation. Here, value assumes the appearance of an "automatic subject" and turns into an "animated monster, which begins to 'work' 'as if it were by love possessed'." Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, London: Penguin 1990, p. 302. Marx exposes the same problematic compulsion through the idea of automatism and possession. In capitalism, the compulsory character of profit-making is associated with the structural imperative of "production for the sake of production" or "overproduction". It should not be surprising that labour in these economic circumstances becomes the main expression of compulsion in question, a compulsive process *par excellence*. Discursive compulsion also stands at the core of the fetishist (or idealist) fantasy of the automatic subject, the objective appearance of capital as the subject of valorisation and as the subject of value-producing labour. The automatic subject is thus a mystification of discursive compulsion, and hence also a mystification of the drive.

surprise that since Aristotle the social regulation of pleasure remains one of the central tasks of political and economic thought. Libidinal economy, as Aristotle was the first to show in a systematic manner, is an essential component of economics, the organisation of pleasure and the organisation of production are two aspects of one and the same political process.

An important insight concerns the disproportion between knowledge and justice or the impotency of knowledge in motivating human beings to just political actions. The progress of reason, *nous*, which supposedly governs *oikos*, *polis* and *kosmos*, the household, the political and the ontological sphere, the human microcosmos and the divine macrocosmos, is a progress of injustice, a radicalisation of inequality and exploitation. If happiness causes injustice, then a society, which grounds its ideology in the pursuit of happiness, will inevitably produce a system of injustice. In order to solve the problematic link between libidinal economy and social exploitation Aristotle strived to isolate a guiding principle, which would counteract the tendency of pleasure toward corruption and the denaturalisation of social links. This attempt led him to the differentiation of forms of life, which incidentally correspond to three forms of pleasure:

To judge from the lives that men lead, most men, and men of the most vulgar type, seem (not without some reason) to identify the good, or happiness, with pleasure; which is the reason why they love the life of enjoyment. For there are, we may say, three prominent types of life—that just mentioned, the political, and thirdly the contemplative life. Now the mass of mankind are evidently quite slavish in their tastes, preferring a life suitable to beasts ... But people of superior refinement and of active disposition identify happiness with honour; for this is, roughly speaking, the end of the political life. (*Eth. Nic.*, 1095b-1096a)

The life of enjoyment, the ideal of majority, and contemplative life, the philosophical ideal, form two extremes, and between them there is political life proper. The wager of Aristotle's political philosophy was that the triangle "good, happiness, pleasure" could ground social justice, but the conditions of this justice are buried under the predominance of the life of enjoyment in the psychic and social life of human beings. The soul is equally divided in three parts, which reflect the forms of life, the vegetative, the appetitive and the intellectual. The appetitive part is split between reason and unreason in the very same way as political life is torn between life of enjoyment and contemplative life, between bodily and intellectual pleasure.

The object and the task of economics, as Aristotle conceives it as related to the *oikos*, falls in the intersection between pleasure and thought, and one could add that precisely in this respect human being can be reduced to a radical split between animal and god. The whole matter is additionally complicated by what has already been indicated, namely that in the Aristotelian framework enjoyment and thought stand for two types of pleasure for the sake of pleasure. While the life of enjoyment is matched by the pleasure of the body, contemplative life generates intellectual pleasure or simply stands for thought as pleasure. Nothing makes this link more evident than the case of God immersed in eternal contemplation. Because He is freed of all unpleasurable movements that physiological needs trigger in the body, God can enjoy pure pleasure in thinking and being, engage in self-sufficient activity and experience eternal happiness. Divine pleasure would be pleasure without unpleasure, or pleasure without negativity, which is automatically introduced by the presence of a (bodily) lack. Aristotle's god functions as some kind of guarantee for the separation of pleasure from unpleasure.⁹

⁹ Here, again, Aristotle's philosophy, economics and ethics could not be further away from Freud, who openly professes the continuum and indifference or indistinction between pleasure and unpleasure.

Political life, on the other hand, is most evidently torn between both forms of pleasure for the sake of pleasure, and should incline toward the contemplative pole, thereby enabling the governance of the divine part of the soul over the vegetative and the appetitive one. Political pleasure is *not yet* on the side of thought, this “other enjoyment” that Aristotle reserves exclusively for the highest form of life, and *no longer* on the side of pleasure that could be associated with other living beings or the masses of common human beings. Contemplative pleasure is the ideal that orientates political life *but* it is also the point of the suspension of the political. In its self-sufficiency, the intellectual form of pleasure is not merely just, but it also does not need any political sphere in order to be actualised. God is asocial, but in an entirely different way than animals and plants.

The life of *zoon politikon*, on the other hand, is in constant tension, caught between unreason and reason, irrational and rational pleasure, and it is this moment of negativity that makes its pleasure political, while at the same time providing the ground for the production of injustice. Animal and God know neither injustice nor alienation, because they do not know the tension between pleasure and unpleasure *within* pleasure itself—and therefore they do not know pleasure at all. Aristotle strictly distinguishes between *zoe* and *bios*: only the latter serves for describing human-political life, while other living beings fall under *zoe* (bare life, life without *logos*). *Bios* is *zoe*, colonised and transformed by the signifier. Because the pleasures of the political animal are generated as well as corrupted in the ontological grey zone between biological *zoe* and intellectual *logos*, between natural and divine, and because *bios* as such comes down to the immanent split between *zoe* and *logos*, its pleasure is supposedly susceptible to homeostasis and right measure. This will constitute pleasure as political pleasure and in this move abolish the compulsive tendency of the life of enjoyment toward the production of injustice, unmeasure and non-relation—in the last

instance, toward the misuse of *logos* for producing pleasure for the sake of pleasure. The latter presumably imitates the self-sufficient pleasure at the level of *zoe*, but is, as such imitation, a fiction of the pleasure of *zoe*. Pleasure for the sake of pleasure cannot be met in nature because nature does not contain the cause of enjoyment, the signifier, *logos*, which produces pleasure as unmeasure rather than measure.

Pleasure for the sake of pleasure knows two vicissitudes, which bring about two corruptions of the political. If human being wants to resemble the animal, it produces a chimera of pleasure for the sake of pleasure, which is pure unmeasure and therefore pure injustice. This does not mean that human being becomes as unjust as animals supposedly are; it produces an injustice, which is rooted in the imitation of animality, or rather, in the fiction of animality or pseudo-animality. If human being wants to resemble God, the pleasure of which one would expect to be pure measure, it again produces a chimera and falls into what Kant would call *Schwärmerei*,¹⁰ delirious thinking possessed by excessive enthusiasm—another dissolution of social links, since God no longer needs social relations and is indifferent to them. Only persistence in the split that grounds the social order allows the orientation in accordance with right measure. This is why according to Aristotle logic, understood as the normalisation of language, or the doctrine of supposedly natural use of language, must precede politics, economics and metaphysics. In order to learn how to enjoy correctly one must first learn how to speak correctly. Before one discusses right measure in matters of libidinal and social economy one needs to determine the right measure of language. Aristotle correctly intuited that language is at the core of the problem, or simply

¹⁰ For Kant's notion of *Schwärmerei*, see notably his pre-critical writing "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics," in: Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press 1992, pp. 305–359. See also Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure*, Paris: Vrin 1990.

the core problem, but he wrongly assumed that the “natural state” of language is equilibrium rather than disequilibrium.

The triad of *zoe*, *bios* and *theos* in the end reflects the differentiation of the three forms of life. The life of enjoyment belongs to the masses, the personifications of the *subject supposed to enjoy*;¹¹ political life proper belongs to the ruling class of masters, the personifications of right measure and of the *subject supposed to act* in accordance with justice; and finally the contemplative life is represented by philosophers, the personifications of the *subject supposed to know* (to use Lacan’s concept), occupying the border of the social and actualising the contact between human and divine. To repeat again, sophistry and chrematistics illustrate the pathological deviation in political life, the degeneration of pleasure. They are not simply regressions to the level of animal pleasure, since sophists and merchants remain beings of *logos*, with the difference that their *logoi* (language and reason) no longer sustain stable social relations. More precisely, they reveal the abyss of non-relation in the midst of the social—destabilising and dissolving in the production of pleasure for the sake of pleasure.

In his attempt to establish the link between the divine and the human libidinal economy, Aristotle’s accounts come to one crucial point of suspension. The right measure, which stands for the immanent tendency of human pleasure toward homeostasis, turns out to be a hypothesis lacking positive epistemic demonstration or foundation. There is no science (*episteme*), which would produce general knowledge of action and teach everyone to act in accordance with the imperative of justice. Aristotle’s last resort was thus to ground politics on the master’s ethics, the statesman as another personification of the subject supposed to know, only that his knowledge is not theoretical

¹¹ For the concept of the “subject supposed to enjoy”, see Mladen Dolar, “Introduction,” in: Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan’s Court*, London: Verso 1998, pp. ix–xxvii.

wisdom, as is the case in philosophy, but practical *savoir-faire*, knowledge of action.¹² More precisely, Aristotle's philosophy redoubles the function of the master on the Ideal of the Master (the immovable mover, which sustains the homeostatic order of being, ontological economy or onto-economy) and the ideal master (the aristocrat, who is first and foremost master of his body, pleasures and needs, the social embodiment of the right measure). However, with the modern downfall of the Aristotelian scientific paradigm, the old figure of the master became inoperative in political and libidinal matters. Without the immovable mover, the Ideal of the Master, which served as the ontological grounding of the ontic ideal master, the doctrine of right measure could no longer be sustained. But the modern move "from the closed world to the infinite universe" (to recall the title of Alexandre Koyré's major work) did not simply lead to the abolition of the master. Instead the master underwent an essential transformation, which was accompanied by the transformation of the function of pleasure in social links.

Lacan framed this modern development in the following manner: "At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was the utilitarian conversion or reversion. We can define this moment—one that was no doubt fully conditioned historically—in terms of a radical decline of the function of the master, a function that obviously governs all of Aristotle's thought

¹² "... since it is impossible to deliberate about things that are of necessity, practical wisdom cannot be knowledge nor art; not knowledge because that which can be done is capable of being otherwise, not art because action and making are different kinds of thing. It remains, then, that it is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man. For while making has an end other than itself, action cannot; for good action itself is its end. It is for this reason that we think Pericles and men like him have practical wisdom, viz. because they can see what is good for themselves and what is good for men in general; we consider that those can do this who are good at managing households or states." (*Eth. Nic.*, 1140a–b) The master is here understood as someone, who supposedly possesses practical knowledge. He is capable to foresee his own good and the good of others. In the household and the state, father and statesman personify the function of right measure in political life. In science this personification pertains to philosophers.

and determines its persistence over the centuries.”¹³ Lacan’s mention of utilitarianism (and on other occasions of political economy) suggests that the notion of private interest stands at the core of modern revolution in social relations. Its progressive introduction undermined the ancient master and invented the modern one. In the work of Adam Smith and the advocates of economic liberalism this modern master often assumes the shape of an egoistic individual, the ontic master, who is apparently without any ontological foundation whatsoever. From an Aristotelian perspective, modern politics appears to be grounded entirely in the negativity that was denounced as counter-natural on the example of chrematistics. Nevertheless, in Smith’s account the notion of private interest perpetuates some features that bring it surprisingly closer to Aristotle’s hypothesis of right measure than one would be inclined to think. What both notions have in common is their stabilising function: they describe a power, which sustains the compatibility of pleasure, happiness and justice. In the end, Smith, too, assumes a tendency of economic relations toward equilibrium and homeostasis, with the difference that the harmonious state of the market, this modern political space *par excellence*, presumably needs no external orientation through an ontological master. The harmony between private interests arises spontaneously and immanently from the interplay of these interests themselves. But the spectre of premodern metaphysics nevertheless returns even in the midst of this modern libidinal and economic scenario. For Smith introduces his famous notion of the invisible hand of the market and even more frequently speaks of market Providence; it is questionable whether either stands for an immanent or a transcendental force.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1992, pp. 11–12.

One often hears that Smith was the theoretician of narcissism and economic egoism, the one who “[erected] a stupendous palace upon the granite of self-interest”.¹⁴ A closer look shows that his position, however, is more ambiguous and complicated, for his economic thought recognises in the human being not only a strong self-interest but also an ontological lack, weakness or incompleteness:

In almost every other race of animals each individual, when it is grown up to maturity, is entirely independent, and in its natural state has occasion for the assistance of no other living creature. But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of.¹⁵

¹⁴ George J. Stigler, quoted in: Pierre Force, *Self-Interest Before Adam Smith*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 1.

¹⁵ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations Books I–III*, London: Penguin 1986, pp. 118–119. Smith’s excerpt comes strikingly close to the early Lacan: “The function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of *imagos*, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality—or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*. In man, however, this relationship to nature is altered by a certain dehiscence at the very heart of the organism, a primordial Discord betrayed by the signs of malaise and motor uncoordination of the neonatal months. The objective notions of the anatomical incompleteness of the pyramidal tracts and of certain humoral residues of the maternal organism in the newborn confirm my view that we find in man a veritable *specific prematurity of birth*.” Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, New York: Norton 2006, p. 78. From the Lacanian perspective, self-love would thus be a reaction to the ontological lack inscribed into human biological constitution, an unconscious resistance to the “anatomical destiny” of human being as living organism.

Self-love and the necessity of exchange are thus preceded by a constitutive lack, inscribed into human nature, by the premature birth of the human being—indeed, an ontological weakness. In contrast to Aristotle's differentiation of the forms of life, which ultimately reflects the social segregation introduced and sustained by the ancient master's discourse, Adam Smith more or less explicitly proposes *weak life* as the universal political form of life. Premature birth makes human beings automatically depend on other human beings, who are subjected to the same lack. In distinction to Aristotle, where social relations are ontologically grounded in the fullness of being and the homeostatic pleasure specific to the divine state of rest, Smith envisages the rootedness of social relations in the ontological negativity of the human being, a being marked and moved by lack. Lack then appears as the ultimate fabric of social links, both the condition and the main obstacle to the full deployment of human narcissism and egoism.

The dependence of man on others is complicated through the fact that these others are anything but benevolent—in contrast to Aristotle there is no *philia* (love, friendship) that would be sustained by private interest and in advance regulate or stabilise social relations.¹⁶ The force of private interest is instead the sole orientation of political life and human action. The hypothesis of friendship is replaced by the hypothesis of narcissism, which makes the latter appear as the primary human condition, but a closer look reveals that narcissism functions more as a defence mechanism against human ontological weakness. Correspondingly, social links are associated with a form of pleasure, which is from the Aristotelian perspective pure unmeasure, but which, according to Smith and other advocates

¹⁶ For the role of friendship in Aristotle, see notably *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII and IX.

of economic liberalism, still seems to sustain a stable order precisely because of the ontological weakness of human being.

What remain are the Aristotelian identification of pleasure with the good and the assumption of its compatibility with justice, which in Smith, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, still points toward a metaphysical principle. His famous metaphor of the invisible hand has often served as the main description of the immanent tendency of private interests toward homeostasis and self-regulation. The entirety of economic exchange is for Smith some kind of seduction through the mutual promise of pleasure, which in the modern political and economic universe obtains its privileged expression in surplus value. This is where the modern quantification of pleasure for the sake of pleasure enters the political. Smith ultimately says that if we seduce each other into apparent cooperation then each can draw its own pleasurable profit (*Lustgewinn*, to use Freud's expression) from social interaction through economic exchange, but this seduction will simultaneously produce a real effect of political justice and social cohesion:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. Nobody but a beggar chooses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens.¹⁷

Instead of the sophist, in classical political economy a different border of political life enters the stage, the beggar, whose placement outside the division of labour fully exposes the human

¹⁷ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, p. 119. See also Alenka Zupančič, "Sexual is Political?" in: Samo Tomšič and Andreja Zevnik (eds.), *Jacques Lacan: Between Psychoanalysis and Politics*, New York: Routledge 2016, p. 97.

being's natural weakness and dependency due to premature birth. A beggar cannot be considered a subject of private interest, by means of which political economy strived to resolve the contradiction between the anti-social character of self-love and the social link. The beggar does not engage in the seduction of his fellow human beings through economic exchange, but instead counts on their benevolence and compassion.¹⁸ For Smith, this is not only naïve but also irresponsible. Life in poverty is self-imposed and self-chosen, a negative vicissitude of private interest. The beggar is excluded from economy in the very same way as in Aristotle the sophist is excluded from knowledge and politics. The private interest of *homo oeconomicus* nevertheless turns out an inexhaustible source of social instability, instability as such. For the opposition of the beggar is the merchant, a subject, who not only consistently pursues his private interest, but who also possesses positive knowledge of his interests and becomes the perfect personification of the political-economic subject supposed to know, an economic scientist. This presupposed knowledge of how to do things with value, how to manipulate the laws of exchange and exploit the market dynamic in order to produce more value, enables the merchant to effectively actualise his intentions and, more importantly, to make private interest prevail over the public interest. Consequently, the identification of pleasure with good begins to crumble in a suspiciously similar way as in Aristotle:

The interest of the dealers, however, in any particular branch of trade or manufactures, is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the public. To widen the market and to narrow the competition, is always the interest of the dealers. To widen the market may frequently be

¹⁸ Today in almost every major city one can see the homeless selling newspapers. It was only a question of time before neoliberalism forcefully integrated the figure of the beggar into the spectacle of the capitalist "seduction through exchange".

agreeable enough to the interest of the public; but to narrow the competition must always be against it, and can serve only to enable the dealers, by raising their profits above what they naturally would be, to levy, for their own benefit, an absurd tax upon the rest of their fellow-citizens.¹⁹

This is, then, the first problem that private interest introduces into the political sphere, destabilising not merely political life but above all the market, this modern political space *par excellence*. In addition private interest denaturalises profit, or rather, it unmaskes the weakness of attempts to naturalise capitalist production for the sake of production or the narcissistic pleasure for the sake of pleasure. Smith at some point even remarks that private interest forms a significant if not crucial obstacle to freedom of trade: “To expect, indeed, that the freedom of trade should ever be entirely restored in Great Britain is as absurd as to expect that an Oceania or Utopia should ever be established in it. Not only the prejudices of the public, but what is much more unconquerable, the private interests of many individuals, irresistibly oppose it.”²⁰ For Smith, freedom of trade was ultimately a utopian ideal, a fantasy of economic homeostasis, or at best a regulative fiction or feint hypothesis, the realisation of which is structurally impossible. The problem of this realisation lies less in the resistance of the masses; the public is more or less indifferent to the freedom of trade (recall how today’s majority remains rather cold with regard to the international free-trade agreements); the problem lies in the drive for profit, to which the notion of private interest must be broken down. The freedom in question masks exploitation and the imposition of the sovereignty of the market. To quote

¹⁹ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, p. 358.

²⁰ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations Books IV–V*, London: Penguin 1999, p. 48.

another significant excerpt from Smith, which carries with it a certain contemporary import:

A company of merchants are, it seems, incapable of considering themselves as sovereigns, even after they have become such. Trade, or buying in order to sell again, they still consider as their principal business, and by a strange absurdity regard the character of the sovereign as but an appendix to that of the merchant, as something which ought to be made subservient to it ... It is the interest of the East India Company, considered as sovereigns, that the European goods which are carried to their Indian dominions should be sold there as cheap as possible; and that the Indian goods which are brought from thence should bring there as good a price, or should be sold there as dear as possible. But the reverse of this is their interest as merchants. As sovereigns, their interest is exactly the same with that of the country which they govern. As merchants their interest is directly opposite to that interest.²¹

Assuming that the merchant alone will corrupt the system gives him too much influence and credit. Rather than being the ultimate point and stable grounding (“granite of self-interest”), which would amount to the analysis of economic relations, interactions and dynamics, private interest points beyond itself to a significantly more problematic structural tendency in the system, a tendency toward disequilibrium and crisis. The ideal market, which would tame or regulate this tendency, does not exist. Private interest is thus never truly private. It stands in direct continuity with the compulsion of the economic system, or put differently, the notion of self-interest mystifies the structural “interest” of capital considered in its autonomy. In this

²¹ Ibid., pp. 222–223.

respect private interest might indeed contain a limited anticipation of the insatiable *Bereicherungstrieb* (drive of enrichment) and *Akkumulationstrieb* (drive of accumulation) that Marx addressed through the problem of overproduction, the imperative of accumulation and the category of fictitious capital. The latter is the most abstract form of production for the sake of production, where every trace of use-value has finally been abolished.

Self-interest in the end does not want to know anything about the presumable human pursuit of happiness. The only thing that counts is happiness of the system: production for the sake of production, which allows uninterrupted satisfaction of the demand for surplus value. According to Smith, exploitation could never constitute an economic interest, though it most evidently does. From the perspective of the ideal market, exploitation appears as a consequence of error, corruption of market laws, or it does not appear at all, since political economy acknowledges only the competition of narcissistic subjects, which is considered to be healthy for society and the main driving force of the capitalist economic system. In truth, exploitation is an expression of the inner contradiction of self-interest that Smith nevertheless intuited. Even though it appears as a psychological tendency of economic individuals, self-interest stands for the resistance of the system and for the way in which capitalism exploits the “ontological weakness” of human beings (their biological destiny of premature birth and their symbolic destiny of alienation in discourse).

Smith’s problem, how to establish a relation between self-love (private interest) and political justice (public interest), is impossible to resolve, since the intrusion of the private into the public and the public into the private has always-already happened. The sovereign has become an “appendix of the merchant”, as Smith writes, or rather, the merchant (the speculator) has become the personification of the modern sovereign. This

mutual intrusion of the inner into the outer and vice versa, the imposition of apparently private interests as public interests, was no theoretical problem or deadlock for Marx. He was pre-occupied with a wholly different issue, the progressive abstraction and autonomisation of structural interest, the tendency of capital towards self-valorisation, and hence the systemic self-love or enjoyment of the system. For Marx, there is no question of delimiting private from public interest or detecting the right measure, which would presumably stabilise political life. His point of departure is: there is no social relation, just as there is no market homeostasis, but only an economic instability and perpetual crisis, even when its reality is not experienced directly and overwhelmingly. It is no coincidence that in key passages Marx describes the tendency of capital to self-valorisation, this systemic self-love, with the term *Trieb* (drive), the very same term that Freud introduced in order to explain the multitude of instabilities in the mental apparatus and the polymorphic character of sexuality. The drive exposes the continuity between the inside and the outside and therefore stands neither for a purely psychological force, which would be entirely inherent to the individual, nor for some kind of independent social force, comparable to Smith's invisible hand or Providence, which would intrude into the subject's body and mind from the outside and shape its needs, thoughts and actions in accordance with its own tendencies. One could say that the drive stands for the impersonal in the personal, or the non-psychological in the psychological, and is located at the border, which both connects and delimits the personal and the impersonal, the subjective and the social, without ever being entirely reducible to either of them.

Because Marx recognised in the drive a force, which corresponds to the crisis-driven character of the capitalist mode of production and to the constitutive instability of economic structures and the conflictuality of social relations, he never required

any regulative principle comparable to Smith's invisible hand, this mystified version of the autonomy of market relations over its economic subjects. When it comes to market providence, it is more than symptomatic that the only mention of the invisible hand in *The Wealth of Nations* appears in the attempt to resolve the dilemma of how the subjects come to act *against* their private interests and suspend or temporarily overcome the presumable narcissistic and egoistic foundation of the capitalist social link:

As every individual, therefore, endeavours as much as he can both to employ his capital in the support of domestic industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.²²

A similar context appears in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where the metaphor of the invisible hand again appears only once (the term "Providence" by contrast is used more frequently), when Smith tries to answer the question of how the market directs the rich in an involuntary, unintended, seemingly

²² Ibid., p. 32.

contingent benevolence.²³ Providence is unconscious and the rich seem to be split between greed and benevolence in rather similar way as Aristotle's political animal is split between ontological homeostasis of pleasure and ontic imbalance of pleasures. The function of Providence consists in orientating the rich toward socially good action, just distribution of wealth, etc. It is clear how this moral optimism could have been appropriated by neoliberalism and its imposed utopia of free market. Regulation is considered to be immanent to economic subjects, expressing the same force as the self-regulation and self-correction of the market. Behind the apparent chaos of spontaneity and contingency there is metaphysical necessity. For neoliberalism, this view of economic relations justifies the shift from regulation to deregulation: the more market spontaneity the more occasion for the manifestation of Providence. What the market needs is the "necessity of contingency",²⁴ the necessity of economic wonders, in which Providence is manifested. But for Smith the free market is in the last instance a hypothesis. For neoliberalism, on the other hand, the free market is a reality: the entire freedom of the market can be fully actualised and its creative potentials unleashed by means of radical deregulation, withdrawal of the state, *laissez-faire*, which amounts to the total subordination of politics to economic fantasies. Neoliberalism is marked by a fanatic belief in the positive

²³ "The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessities of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species." Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, London: Penguin 2009, p. 215.

²⁴ To use a term by Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, London: Continuum 2008.

existence of the (economic) big Other and stands for a metaphysics, which only made sense in the decades of postmodernism, an economic metaphysics for a time when the end of philosophical metaphysics was proclaimed. Human beings were expected to reshape themselves in accordance with the free-market utopia (or rather the deregulated-market nightmare) and the imperative of inventing oneself in accordance with the free-market hypothesis became central for subjectivation. Everyone who abstained from this was considered a beggar.

In his groundbreaking study on *The Passions and the Interests*, Albert O. Hirschman argued that the introduction of interest into political and economic matters represents a historical break, which is comparable to the formation of a new epistemic paradigm in Thomas Kuhn's sense, hence with a scientific revolution.²⁵ From the Lacanian perspective, this revolution inevitably implies a transformation of the political function of the master. Political economy paved the way to a new articulation between value and enjoyment (Freud's notion of pleasure stands in direct continuity with the 17th–19th century debates on passions and affects in economy and political philosophy). The function of the master stands neither for passion nor for reason, it is anchored in-between the two, and this was already evident in Aristotle, for whom God was the point where reason and affect or the signifier and enjoyment coincide, presumably in a harmonious way. The master is the point of stabilisation of social links, but in modernity this stabilisation does not have a metaphysical, ontological foundation in the highest of Beings. The foundation is immanent, or so it seems.

With the notion of self-love Smith paved the way for constructing a genuinely modern *myth* of political subjectivity, the myth of narcissism and egoism as the main features of human

²⁵ See Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1977, pp. 42–44.

subjects. The vulgar understanding breaks the myth of Narcissus down to the idea of self-love. However, the Greek myth of Narcissus contains a drama, which has been symptomatically omitted in political economy and which was subsequently picked up again by psychoanalysis. This drama is related to the subject mistakenly taking his self-image for an image of the other: Narcissus did not know he fell in love with himself. According to the Greek myth, this error was the punishment by the goddess Nemesis for rejecting the love of the nymph Echo, a punishment that in the end pushed Narcissus into suicide. In contrast to political economy, Freud fully recognised this deadly dimension of narcissism by associating it with the drive. The life of the drive (*Tribleben*) is in the last instance radically indifferent to the life of the subject, and, simply put, it was because of this negative vitalism of the drive that Freud ended up speaking of the death drive.

From the critical perspective opened up by psychoanalysis, narcissism functions as the paradigmatic strategy of subjection and exploitation in the modern regime of power. The more an individual is narcissistic, the more it works for the capitalist system. Psychoanalysis and the critique of political economy both oppose the ideological figure of narcissistic subjectivity with a counter-figure, the social abject, the neurotic and the proletariat, which, if nothing else, demonstrate the impossibility for the subject to live up to the fiction of subjectivity propagated by economic liberalism and neoliberalism. But they also indicate that the efficiency of capitalist power resides in the exploitation of the gap that separates the actually existing subjectivity from the fiction in question. Both the neurotic and the proletarian are results of overproduction, particular personifications of waste material, which in reality has no place in so-called human capital.

CHAPTER II

THE UNMEASURE OF PLEASURE: FREUD

Utilitarianism significantly contributed to the mystification of economic contradictions under capitalism—recall that Marx mentions Bentham's utilitarianism as the fourth governing principle of the capitalist universe, next to freedom, equality and property.¹ Nevertheless, Lacan repeatedly argued that utilitarianism possessed an important critical value, which resides in the recognition of the tie between fiction and enjoyment, and more precisely in uncovering the causality of fictions:

I said that, if something freshened the air a bit after all this Greek foot-dragging around Eudemonism, it was certainly the discovery of utilitarianism ... In order to understand it one must read *The Theory of Fictions*. Utilitarianism means nothing but the following—we must think about the purpose served by the old words, those that already serve us. Nothing more. We must not be surprised by what results when we use them. We know what they are used for—they are used so that there may be the jouissance that should be [*qu'il faut*]. With the caveat that, given the equivocation between *faillir* and *falloir*, the jouissance that should be must

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, London: Penguin 1990, p. 280. Marx describes Bentham as “that soberly pedantic and heavy-footed oracle of the ‘common sense’ of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie” (Marx, *Capital*, p. 758). Common sense is the main force of mystification, because it restricts thinking to the mere description of appearances. With Alexandre Koyré one could argue that common sense pursues the ideal of Aristotelian science, which consists in *sozein ta phainomena*, saving the phenomena: the way reality appears to the human observer is the way reality is.

be translated as the *jouissance* that shouldn't be/never fails [*qu'il ne faut pas*].²

Jeremy Bentham's *Theory of Fictions* thus contains a crucial discontinuity in the history of the philosophy of language, focusing on the paradoxical ontological status of symbolic fictions. For Bentham, language is composed of fictions, which act as material causes of pleasure and unpleasure. In this respect Bentham's philosophy of language radically subverted the Aristotelian determination of the link between logic (science of language) and ontology (science of being). While Aristotle denounces the misuse of language for the production of enjoyment, and thereby strives to delimit the (philosophical) language of being from the (sophistic) language of enjoyment, for Bentham this distinction and delimitation is impossible from the outset: the production of being and the production of enjoyment are two aspects of the same discursive causality, or to put it with Lacan, there is something like "enjoyment of being".³ Bentham distinguishes between fictions (e.g. law, obligation, etc.) and non-entities (e.g. unicorn), but the underlying premise of his theory of language is that no matter what linguistic use, there is always the production of pleasure and pain traversing it. This production is most exemplified in the language of social institutions, legal language, language that binds and obliges to action. In this point Bentham most thoroughly anticipates Freud: by implicitly equating the fictitious with the symbolic, by demystifying fictions (detaching them from the negative

² Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XX, Encore*, New York: Norton 1999, pp. 58–59. See also Jeremy Bentham, "A Fragment on Ontology," in: *The Panopticon Writings*, London: Verso 1995, pp. 117–158.

³ "Thought is enjoyment. What analytic discourse contributes is the following, and it is already hinted at in the philosophy of being: there is enjoyment of being." Lacan, *Encore*, p. 70. Transl. modified. One could add to this critical remark that being as such can be understood as the enjoyment of philosophy, the philosophical mystification of *jouissance*.

meaning of a deceiving appearance or subjective illusion), he unveils the causal dimension that clings to their autonomy. The more language is inadequate, the more it produces spectral, autonomous and compulsive entities such as laws. Rather than representing some presumably unproblematic external reality, it brings about a discursive real (enjoyment) that stands in discrepancy with the realm of appearances, in the first place with the appearance of language as a tool of communication. Bentham thus openly affirms the causality of the signifier that Aristotle rejected from the philosophy of language. Because of this immanent inadequacy of language with itself, language appears as the paradigmatic example of non-relation.

The use of language as described by Bentham has little to do with usefulness, or does not concern useful purposes in the first place. Usefulness is accidental. What matters is that the use of language causes in the subject pain or pleasure and that this discursive action stands at the very root of the constitution, reproduction and intensification of power-relations. Power and enjoyment are inseparable. In this respect, the ancient sophists could be considered radical utilitarians *avant la lettre*, those who speak for the pleasure of speaking, thereby scandalising philosophy by unveiling the autonomy of language and the imperative nature of the signifier. At the other end of metaphysics, Bentham inverts the priorities of philosophy in a similar manner as the ancient sophists. For Aristotle, ethics is a practical knowledge of pleasure, which can never become true science, but this lack can be counteracted by means of its ontological foundation in the science of being, which brings the immovable mover into the picture. As already stated, Aristotle assumes the same ontological homeostasis in each register, the right measure of pleasure and the invariability of being or ontological stability, for which Lacan coined the neologism *l'éternel* (a combination of *éternel*, eternal, and *être*, being). By contrast, Bentham grounds the examination of pleasure and of being on

the full recognition of the productivity of linguistic fictions, thus unmasking the fantasmatic status of Aristotle's notion of ontological and libidinal homeostasis. In Aristotle the signifier is not simply rejected from the science of being, as his ontology openly builds on the logical normalisation of language. What is rejected is the causality of the signifier, which brings out the constitutive inadequacy of language.⁴

With psychoanalysis the utilitarian discovery of the causality of fictions was given an unexpected materialist twist. This turn is reflected first and foremost in the introduction of a figure of the subject, which is entirely foreign to utilitarianism and economic liberalism: to *homo oeconomicus*, the subject of private interest, it contrasts the subject of the unconscious, a subject, who is not simply destabilised by fictions (signifiers) but who is moreover their effect. In the same move the psychoanalytic thesis on the causality of the signifier reaches all the way back to a founding quarrel of philosophy, the tension between Plato and Aristotle. Freud's rejection of Aristotle is surely reflected in his critique of the ideology of happiness in works such as *Civilisation and its Discontents*—obtaining its ultimate expression in the move beyond the pleasure principle. With this step Freud gave up every theoretical attempt in working with the homeostatic notion of pleasure. In turn, Freud explicitly associated his extended notion of sexuality with Plato's discussion of Eros in *Symposium*. In this dialogue Plato demonstrates that there is something like a dialectics of pleasure, which departs from the love of particular objects and traverses all levels of being until it amounts to the very idea of beauty. Freud recognised in this dialectics, where the progress in abstraction is accompanied with the intensification of pleasure, the philosophical exemplification of his own theory of sexuality in the

⁴ Nevertheless, what is lacking in Bentham is the recognition of language as organised disequilibrium. With his notion of the unconscious, Freud took this distinctive step.

extended, non-biological sense.⁵ In doing so, Freud provided a materialist repetition of Plato's dialectical notion of Eros—materialist, not only because he explicitly links the production of pleasure with the causality of the signifier, but also because he adds to the Platonist insight into the dialectics of pleasure a conflictuality that was not there in Plato, namely the antagonism between the drive of self-preservation, Eros, and the death drive, Thanatos. For this antagonism, Freud found a mythological pre-formulation in Empedocles, whose cosmology was founded on the conflict between *philia* (love) and *neikos* (hate).⁶

Repeating Alexandre Koyré's remarks on Galileo, one could thus argue that Freud's theory of pleasure stands for a "triumph of Plato over Aristotle",⁷ because it thoroughly rejects the Aristotelian foundation of ethics on the link between pleasure and happiness. This foundation is possible only by means of a homeostatic notion of pleasure, by assuming that pleasure immanently tends toward the right measure. But this move beyond Aristotle becomes properly materialist only under the condition that Plato is corrected with the help of Empedocles' idea that all beings exist due to an underlying non-relation, in other words that being qua being contains conflictuality, antagonism and dynamic, which is the cause of its movement. What

⁵ "[W]hat psychoanalysis called sexuality was by no means identical with the impulsion towards a union of the two sexes or towards producing a pleasurable sensation in the genitals; it had far more resemblance to the all-inclusive and all-preserving *Eros* of Plato's *Symposium*." Sigmund Freud, "The Resistances to Psycho-Analysis," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19, London: Vintage 2001, p. 218. I shall return to this quote toward the end of chapter seven.

⁶ See Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 23, pp. 245–246.

⁷ See Alexandre Koyré, *Études d'histoire de la pensée scientifique*, Paris: Gallimard 1973, p. 212. To anticipate the developments from the second half of this volume, the move beyond the pleasure principle and the introduction of the drive imply an ethical model, which places the notion of work at the centre. The importance of what Freud calls *Durcharbeiten*, working-through, in the analytic process shows that the ethics of psychoanalysis is in the first place a "work ethics", organisation and mobilisation of unconscious work for the aims of the cure, which is in itself a process striving to transform the existing libidinal economy.

is eternal in Empedocles is not being but this ontological conflict, which prevents Empedocles from falling into the Parmenidian regime of *êtrenel*, the immovable, stable and eternal being. In order to overcome the restrictions of ontology, its homeostatic notion of being, it is not enough to introduce movement into being. A materialist conception of being recognises the conflictual features of this movement, or what Hegel at the other end of metaphysics famously called the labour of the negative.

Another feature brings Freud's metapsychology into direct proximity to Plato, namely the recognition of the epistemological value of mythology, where fiction serves as means of grasping, mobilising and eventually transforming the real. In Freud's *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* we thus read:

The theory of the drives is so to say our mythology. Drives are mythical beings, magnificent in their indeterminacy. In our work we cannot for a moment disregard them, yet we are never sure that we are seeing them sharply. You know how popular thinking deals with the drives. People assume as many and as various drives as they happen to need at the moment ... We have always been moved by a suspicion that behind all these little *ad hoc* drives there lay concealed something serious and powerful which we should like to approach cautiously. Our first step was modest enough. We told ourselves we should probably not be going astray if we began by separating two main drives or classes of drives or groups of drives in accordance with the two great needs—hunger and love.⁸

⁸ Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 22, p. 95. Transl. modified.

It is not unimportant that Freud always spoke of *Triblehre*, teaching of the drives, rather than *Triebtheorie*, theory of drives. In distinction to *Theorie*, which implies secured ground, systematised thought and most importantly the stabilisation of the object, *Lehre* still moves in an insecure, uncharted terrain, its objects are not fixed and positive entities, whose existence would be ontologically unproblematic and univocal.⁹ According to Freud, the drives are unclear and obscure and as such cannot be confronted directly, *neither* theoretically *nor* clinically; they are in no way simply apparent and distinct forces sustaining the mass of phenomena that the psychoanalyst handles in clinical experience. Moreover, the experience of the drive comes in the guise of an uncanny and unwanted guest or as a foreign force or tendency in the subject's body and mind—the experience of compulsion and the compulsive repetition that pertains to discourse. In the end one could say that the Freudian notion of the drive strives to grasp and explain first and foremost the bodily experience of the dynamic of representation and signification. The determination of the drive lies in its effects and consequences, the disequilibrium that the subject experiences in its own body—a disequilibrium, which is anchored in symbolisation. Furthermore, the quoted passage above leaves no doubt that the *Triblehre* contains more than a mere mythology. It involves an effort of rationalisation, which consists first and foremost in the reduction of drives to two main groups or classes. This reduction is supposed to counteract the uncontrolled assumption of drives, which would, indeed, sustain the mythologisation or mystification of the problematic force in question.

Elsewhere Freud expresses a similar line of thought by calling his metapsychology a witch, whose speculative accounts

⁹ In the very same vein, Lacan described his own work as *enseignement* (teaching), which he critically delimited from philosophy, the paradigmatic example of theory.

are summoned when other scientific and methodological means have failed. Such witchcraft is characterised by the fact that it uses the signifier, this fiction *par excellence*, as cause. In contrast to popular thinking, which postulates a distinct drive for every problematic tendency in mental life and gets caught in an excessive proliferation of drives, psychoanalysis sets out from rationalisation and minimisation. Freud's theory broke the assumed multiplicity of drives and posited the conflictual couple Eros and Thanatos. Lacan, a great rationaliser of Freud's work, pushed this reduction to the extreme by arguing that there is ultimately only one drive and that Freud's dualism should instead be interpreted as a *conflictual monism*. What Freud's metapsychology still conceived through the lens of an irreconcilable tension between two distinct and opposed drives, Lacan then understood as a contradiction immanent to a single force in the mental apparatus. In Freud, the concept of the drive already describes a constant force endowed with a life of its own. Freud spoke of *Tribleben*, the life of drive, which does not always take into account the life-preserving tendencies of the organism. He also spoke of *Tribschicksale*, destinies of drive, arguing that there is no drive without or beyond its vicissitude. Again, the Freudian notion of the drive does not stand for some kind of substantial or natural vital force, which would subsequently, in a cultural framework, undergo a development that would cut it off from its immediate, direct or authentic satisfaction.¹⁰

Freud's rationalisation of the drive departs from hunger and love, which may sound rather peculiar, since the former stands for the most basic physiological need and the latter for a

¹⁰ In his metapsychological writing on the drive Freud enumerates four vicissitudes, one could also say, four modes of satisfaction, or even four modes of existence of the drive: "reversal into its opposite, turning round upon the subject's own self, repression and sublimation". Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 14, p. 126. From these vicissitudes psychoanalysis works with sublimation because it is the only vicissitude sustaining the transformation of libidinal structure that the suffering subject experiences as problematic.

symbolic demand. What Freud aims at is the placement of the drive at the intersection of the two, hence beyond the simple dichotomy of natural need and symbolic demand. Just like hunger, the drive comes with corporeal manifestations. But this bodily aspect should not trick one into assuming that there is a biological or physiological force behind them, an instinctual need that could be described as natural. The force in question is conditioned by the existence of the symbolic order and corresponds to a demand, which strictly speaking cannot be satisfied. This is where love comes in: “[L]ove demands love. It never stops demanding it. It demands it ... *encore*. ‘*Encore*’ is the proper name of the gap in the Other from which the demand for love stems.”¹¹ The economy of love is anchored in the mutual conditioning or the interplay of lack and surplus. Its condition is not a lack in the organism, which could be temporarily counteracted, but a gap in the Other (language), to which no action of satisfaction can live up to. This symbolic gap gives rise to a force demanding uninterrupted satisfaction. If love thus indeed involves hunger, then this hunger is specified by the fact that it constantly demands more (*encore*). “Insatiable hunger” would be a possible psychoanalytic definition of love, as well as a most accurate definition of the drive. It is at the point of this insatiability that death enters the picture, assuming less the guise of some auto-destructive or suicidal striving toward death than a radical indifference toward the self-preservation of the subject. The life of drive demands the consumption of the subject’s life.

The drive is a hypothesis, without which psychoanalysis cannot perform its clinical task, but the object of this hypothesis is obscure. There is no ontological positivity attached to it, hence it gives rise to recurrent doubt. Doubt is indeed the main driving force of Freud’s work. Freud was not only a Platonist in his examination of the dialectical character of Eros but also a

¹¹ Lacan, *Encore*, p. 4.

rigorous Cartesian (as Lacan suggested on several occasions). In his hesitation to recognise in the drive a positive entity, Freud merits this title insofar as he insists on the impossible position of methodological doubt. Nevertheless, he does not take the definitive step that would lead to Cartesian certainty, where the unconscious and the drive would be turned into positive entities or substances and thus become objects of theory. In addition, Freud's hesitation, as the above quote from *The New Introductory Lessons* exemplifies, suggests that the unconscious and the drive, understood as hypotheses, assume the status of scientific fictions or "epistemic things".¹² By means of these fictions a real dynamic in the speaking body can be mobilised and manipulated—this is what Freud called the cure, a process, in which real transformations are brought about with the help of symbolic fictions (signifiers).

As Freud insists, the drive is not simply identical with hunger and love. This enigmatic and obscure force that the metapsychological epistemic object is supposed to grasp can neither be reduced to physiological needs and symbolic demands nor to the forces of organism and the forces of culture. The drive is neither nature nor culture, but a third domain, which calls the dichotomy "nature-culture" into question. This third domain contains a double surplus, which is intimately connected with a key feature of the drive that Freud describes in the following way:

If we now turn from the biological side to the observation of psychic life, then the "drive" appears to us as a limit-notion [*Grenzbegriff*] between the psychic and the somatic, as psychic

¹² For this notion, see Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Towards a History of Epistemic Things*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1997. Metapsychology contains the same speculative effort as the hard sciences, so it makes perfect sense that Freud sought his epistemological alliances in energetics and biology. As Lacan eventually wrote, "energy is not a substance, which, for example, improves or goes sour with age; it's a numerical constant that a physicist has to find in his calculations, so as to be able to work." Jacques Lacan, *Televisión*, New York: Norton 1990, p. 18.

representative of stimuli coming from within the body and reaching the soul, as measure of demand for work [*Maß der Arbeitsanforderung*], which is imposed on the psychic due to its connection with the bodily.¹³

Epistemologically speaking the drive is a limit-notion between the natural sciences and the humanities. Its object, a specific force in the subject's mind-body nexus, is equally a border: between the psychic (the symbolic, the discursive) and the somatic (the biological, the physiological). The drive differentiates and binds together, it is both inside and outside, the mental-cultural and the somatic-natural, a surplus of the latter in the former and a surplus of the former in the latter, if we want to stick to the dichotomy. If the drive is indeed a speculative concept, it is because there is something speculative in the human body itself: the connection of the symbolic with the biological, the ontological status of which remains ambiguous. The drive stands for a grey zone between fiction and stimulus, or between language and body. Freud marks this speculative aspect of the drive with two key terms: representation and measure, which both expose the inmixing of the symbolic into the biological and suggest that the drive is an exaggeration or amplification of the physiological stimulus through its "signification" (to use a term proposed by Jacques-Alain Miller). At the root of the drive there is a symbolisation of stimulus, which is itself stimulating, and even permanently stimulating (again "constant force")—it does not cease to stimulate the body. In the end, Freud abolished the old dualism of body and soul by recognising the immanent redoubling of the body on the physiological and the libidinal. The libidinal body is the *doppelgänger* of the physiological body, its spectral redoubling, which Freud nevertheless insists is immanent to the somatic.

¹³ Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," p. 122. Transl. modified.

If the drive results from this emergence of language, *qua* foreign body, within the physiological, then the libidinal is an over-interpretation of the physiological, a symbolically overblown or exaggerated physiology. By representing the various bodily excitations the drive transforms them into an ongoing stimulation, which never ceases to affect the body with the demand for pleasurable satisfaction, demanding pleasure for the sake of pleasure.

The remark regarding measure contains additional complications. Freud indeed makes the drive as a real force indistinguishable from the concept of the drive, the thing itself cannot be differentiated from the epistemic thing: in the ideal case, the epistemic object is supposed to provide the quantification and hence measurability of the phenomena pertaining to libidinal economy. But the main paradox consists in the fact that this measure in the end reveals the unmeasure, or imbalance, that the drive introduces into the already unbalanced organism, the discrepancy between what would be the repetitive satisfaction of a physiological need and the impossible satisfaction of an insatiable demand of pleasure for the sake of pleasure. Consequently, the drive comes down to the demand for perpetual unconscious work—and Freud makes an additional significant remark, according to which this demand is imposed on the mental apparatus due to its problematic connection with the organism. If we now want to ask what exactly is the point of connection between both registers, then the properly Freudian answer would be the gap in the physiological organism itself. What is at stake in the mind-body (or rather, the language-body) nexus is a link between two gaps. Hence Freud's talk about hunger and love in relation to the drive. To repeat, the drive can be broken down into the demand for pleasurable satisfaction, and in this respect it appears indistinguishable from a physiological need. But Freud's whole point is that this demand never ceases, in contrast to hunger, which at least

knows a rhythmic repetition. The drive then reveals that a symbolic appropriation or colonisation of the gap in the organism took place, or perhaps better, that with the emergence of language the gap in the organism gave birth to another, symbolic gap. With the emergence of this “other gap” in an organism already marked by a physiological gap a new force emerged in the body. To return once more to Lacan’s reflection on love, the force in question no longer points toward a demand of satisfaction coming from the organism, but to a separate demand coming from the Other, relating to the gap in the Other and demonstrating that this structurally unstable, lacking Other is endowed with an autonomous and compulsive functioning that no subject can ever master. The symbolisation, “signifierisation” or symbolic representation of the physiological gap introduced an uninterrupted excitation in the body. In the last instance speech comes down to this perpetual excitation, which brings us back to Lacan’s remark from the introduction that every discourse is a discourse of enjoyment. Here one could reformulate the phrase by saying that every discourse is an ongoing stimulation of the body or that language is not only a system of differences (signifiers) but also a system of stimuli organised around a gap, from which a demand for more, namely for surplus enjoyment emerges.

Freud defines the drive as constant force, which is also the point where his epistemic object touches upon a real dynamic in the psychosomatic interplay of forces and the translation of physiological stimuli into *one* constant stimulus.¹⁴ The term

¹⁴ For this reason Freud rejected the popular assumption of ever new drives. Instead, the drive is a “montage” (Lacan) of disparate stimuli into one single symbolically induced stimulus, as in the case of oral fixation, where the same pleasurable satisfaction takes place behind apparently distinct and unrelated actions such as sucking, smoking, eating, talking or oral sex. The vulgar understanding of psychoanalysis would, of course, immediately remark that all these actions are replacements, displacements or sublimations of oral sex. The Freudian position is exactly the opposite: satisfaction through sex and satisfaction through talking deliver exactly the same libidinal satisfaction. For the most recent exploration of the ontological implications

“measure” should be taken in this double sense: as symbolic operation, which sustains the epistemic (metapsychological) isolation and theorisation of real forces in the psychosomatic apparatus; and as real process, which results from the problematic connection of the organism with discourse, the biological body and the libidinal body. The drive is the border that sustains this immanent redoubling and in doing so it introduces in the somatic a virtually infinite demand for pleasurable satisfaction, an ongoing affection of the body through language. Through the translation of stimuli into symbolic demand, the drive also introduces into mental life a virtually infinite demand for unconscious work that embeds the subject in an endless process of intellectual labour. Libidinal economy is indeed a speculative economy, consisting of affectively charged fictions.¹⁵

We can again ask ourselves why Freud ended up calling his metapsychological speculations a mythology. In Plato, the myth always enters the picture at a critical moment, and as some kind of prosthesis for dialectical thought, a supplement, which explains too much and too little: too much, insofar as it disrupts the movement of dialectical thought and introduces a poetic excess, it constructs a fable by means of which thought is supposed to grasp a real that resists dialectical thought. But it also explains too little, insofar as the mythical discourse changes the register and pushes thought into a regime of knowledge from which the dialectical method supposedly strove to break. The break with *mythos* and poetics—this is the self-definition of philosophy, its most common self-understanding, perhaps

of this psychoanalytic equation of satisfactions, see Alenka Zupančič, *What Is Sex?* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2017. Needless to say that the present volume is deeply indebted to Zupančič’s work.

¹⁵ As Freud wrote in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess: “There are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between the truth and fiction cathected with affect.” Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (ed.), *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess*, London: Belknap Press 1986, p. 265.

even its founding myth.¹⁶ *Mythos* apparently stands in opposition to *logos*, it directs thinking away from *episteme* (scientific knowledge) back into the totalising discourse. But then the greatest myth was built in the old philosophical postulate of the homeostatic regime of being and into its notion of *kosmos*, a closed and harmoniously ordered totality of the real. If dialectics sustains the movement of thought and prevents the fall into the normalising regime of metaphorical ontology—into *éternel*, the conception of being through the assumption of ontological homeostasis—then myth indeed seems to aim at the stabilisation of being and the overcoming of *aporia*, exposed by the dialectical movement of thought. But this striving always fails (as Claude Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the structure of myths famously showed): myths demand other myths, which will fill in the gaps and inconsistencies of preceding myths. The excess of mythical explanation is also its lack of explanation.¹⁷ What matters most—and this is where Plato and Freud indeed unite under the same paradigm—is that Plato's philosophy exemplified in the best possible manner the dialectical link or the dialectical mobilisation of opposition between *mythos* and *episteme*. Only when this opposition is conceived as dialectical, thereby exposing the incompleteness and the instability of the scientific discourse and of the mythical discourse, can the

¹⁶ See Mladen Dolar, "The Owl of Minerva from Dusk Till Dawn, or, Two Shades of Grey," *Filozofija i društvo* 4 (2015), p. 875.

¹⁷ In this respect, the ultimate Platonist myth would be the Idea of the Good, insofar as it functions as ontological stabiliser, just as the immovable mover in Aristotle, another great philosophical myth. Here it is worth recalling Lacan's critique of Plato: "Plato's *Schwärmerei* consists in having projected the idea of the Sovereign Good onto the impenetrable void." Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book VIII, Transference*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2015, p. 5. Lacan then somewhat unexpectedly praises Aristotle's move away from Platonism in the questions of ethics, his linking of the Sovereign Good with the "contemplation of the stars, the world's outermost sphere" (Lacan, *Transference*, p. 5), in other words, with the thinking of thinking, thereby pointing out, in the mythical form of ontological homeostasis anchored in the immovable mover, the link between thought (discourse) and pleasure for the sake of pleasure.

efficiency of fictions or the causality of the signifier be recognised in theory and mobilised in practice.¹⁸

In its attempt to mobilise fictions for intervening in the problematic fixation of the drive, psychoanalysis strives for a technique for dealing with enjoyment, *savoir-faire*, practical knowledge, rather than *episteme*, theoretical knowledge. Although it would be far-fetched to claim that theoretical efforts play a minor part in psychoanalysis, Freud's metapsychological constructions, as well as Lacan's constant recurring to disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics or topology precisely demonstrate the opposite. Psychoanalysis thus on the one hand confirms the Aristotelian insight that there is no science of practical action, and consequently no science of pleasure, but on the other hand it insists, this time against Aristotle, that the disequilibrium of pleasure and the problematic juncture of the linguistic and the corporeal can obtain a systematised expression in the regime of *episteme*. With regard to the intertwining of theory and practice in psychoanalysis, and specifically with regard to the mobilisation of epistemic fictions in the process of the cure, it can also be added that Foucault was too quick in arguing that psychoanalysis falls entirely on the side of *scientia sexualis* (science of sex), rather than on what he considered the privilege of Antiquity and non-European thought, *ars erotica* (art of love).¹⁹ If anything, psychoanalysis is to be found at the intersection of the two. As clinical practice, it is supposed to help the subject invent a technique for manipulating enjoyment. In

¹⁸ The psychoanalytic clinic ultimately comes down to the use of fictions for transformative purposes. Plato's notion of politics, too, consists in the use of fictions for subjective and social transformations, which would ideally direct thinking and society toward a just political order, a political fiction, for which Plato nevertheless insisted that it could mobilise thought and action and hence bring about real social transformations. Needless to say that in Aristotle's foundation of politics on ontological homeostasis such transformation is not possible. There can be no Aristotelian clinic.

¹⁹ For Foucault's contextualisation of psychoanalysis within the opposition *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *An Introduction*, New York: Vintage Books 1990, pp. 53–73.

this respect analysis is an experimentation with one's own destiny as speaking being and "enjoying substance" (Lacan), an experimental technique of the cure striving to rearticulate the problematic connection of the discourse with the body (again "destiny of the drive"). As metapsychology, psychoanalysis is a peculiar experimental science: it experiments with discourse, in the first place with the power of fictions, not only to cause pleasure and pain, as Bentham would put it, but above all to cause changes in the compulsive mode of enjoyment. But it equally experiments with the production of efficient fictions. In this respect, there are fundamental concepts and knowledge in psychoanalysis, but they do not constitute a closed and invariable totality. If psychoanalysis can be epistemologically compared with hard sciences such as physics and biology (something that both Freud and Lacan overtly insisted), it is because its knowledge is constitutively an open work process. In other words, both theoretically and practically, psychoanalysis is a work in progress, a process of working-through. In accordance with his scientistic convictions, Freud himself believed psychoanalysis was a transitional science, a provisory epistemic formation, which will become obsolete, once hard sciences such as neurology or biology will provide univocal physiological explanations for mental illnesses. It did not occur to him that psychoanalysis shares this transitional feature or character with other modern scientific disciplines. With the breakdown of the Aristotelian epistemic paradigm, science as such had become transitional—albeit in a different sense than Freud had thought. The field of scientific knowledge, as well as the real that constitutes its object, is ontologically unstable and incomplete, so that epistemic processes never tend toward a point of closure and totalisation but instead form open-ended procedures.

To recapitulate, unlike Aristotle's right measure or Smith's private interest, the two most influential historical attempts to think libidinal and social economy from the viewpoint of the

homeostatic model, Freud departs from the recognition of the immanent instability of economic orders. He determines in the drive the force that corresponds to and accounts for this instability. Lacan formulated the core of Freud's contribution to the critique of pleasure in the best possible manner:

[Freud] claims it is a question of explaining a normal functioning of the mind. In order to do this he starts with an apparatus whose basis is wholly antithetical to a result involving adequation and equilibrium. He starts with a system, which naturally tends toward deception and error. That whole organism seems designed not to satisfy need, but to hallucinate such satisfaction. It is, therefore, appropriate that another apparatus is opposed to it, an apparatus that operates as an agency of reality; it presents itself essentially as a principle of correction, of a call to order. [...] The reality principle or that to which the functioning of the neuronic apparatus in the end owes its efficacy appears as an apparatus that goes much further than a mere checking up; it is rather a question of rectification. It operates in the mode of detour, precaution, touching up, restraint. It corrects and compensates for that which seems to be the natural inclination of the psychic apparatus, and it radically opposes it. The conflict is introduced here at the base, at the origins of an organism which, let us say, seems after all to be destined to live. Nobody before Freud, and no other account of human behavior, had gone so far to emphasize its fundamentally conflictual character. No one else had gone so far in explaining the organism as a form of radical inadequation—to the point where the duality of the systems is designed to overcome the radical inadequation of one of them. This opposition between the *phi* system and the *psy* system, which is articulated throughout, seems almost like a wager. For what is there to justify it, if it isn't that experience of ungovernable

quantities which Freud had to deal with in his experience of neurosis?²⁰

The object of Freud's theoretical efforts is *systemic disequilibrium*, or rather, disequilibrium as system. There is evidently more at stake in psychoanalysis than the simple replacement of the fictitious homeostatic model à la Aristotle and Adam Smith by recognising instability and tension, on the one hand, and their economisation, on the other. The problem clearly does not lie merely in one of the two systems, organism and language, which are articulated onto one another. The disequilibrium in question contains an inner differentiation and complexity and in fact consists of three, rather than two different levels of radical inadequation. Considered in themselves organism and language are surely both equally problematic, but their problematic character is only expressed in the way they are for one another, in the failed relation between the living being and discourse, the life of organism and the life of language. Surely language never comes without malfunctioning and error, but another failure emerges from the attempt of the symbolic system to overcome the radical inadequation of the organism. Language is a miscarried detour, a failed correction of the lack of the organism. For Freud all problems evolve around the fact that the attempt to overcome inadequation produces in the body a problematic surplus, hence another, discursively induced inadequation, which only adds to the already existing incompleteness of the organism. Freud addresses this surplus through the registration of ungovernable quantities in the neurotic body and mind. His critical notion of pleasure results from this recognition that he ended up assigning the demand of the drive.

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1992, p. 28. Transl. modified. Lacan refers here to Freud's early developments in an *Outline of Scientific Psychology*. The best and most exhaustive account of this crucial Freudian text is to be found in Mai Wegener, *Neuronen und Neurosen*, München: Wilhelm Fink 2004.

Rather than being guided by the assumption of some hypothetical subjectivity grounded in equilibrium (and here we are again reminded of the equilibrium between the three parts of the soul in Aristotle or the presumable equilibrium between private interest and public interest in Adam Smith), the experience of neurosis, an experience of disequilibrium, orients Freud's critical process. The neurotic subject, this Freudian paradigm of exhausted existence or damaged life, is thus organised around the unstable articulation of two unstable orders or around the non-relation between two structural instabilities, the living being (organism) and the speaking being (*parlêtre*). Freud's recognition of physiological or biological instability in its own way radicalises Smith's insight into the ontological incompleteness and dependency of the human being resulting from its premature birth. But he refrains from concluding that this biological lack is compensated with the construction of a well-ordered and regulated symbolic register or stable social relation. Instead Freud indicates that the attempt to counteract the consequences of this real lack inscribed in the biological organism brings about a complication with no equivalent or comparison at the level of the living organism. On the contrary, it is still grounded on the mobilisation of biological immaturity and its transformation into symbolic alienation. And so alienation in the symbolic order is the actual, even if unintended and contingent, result of the attempt at managing biological incompleteness by means of language and the social link.

From here there is only one step to the link between discursive dysfunction and social exploitation that Lacan strived to address with his notion of the master's discourse. As far as this discourse designates the logic of the signifier in general, at the background of which other structures can be articulated,²¹ its structural relations stand for the constitutive instability of

²¹ For the formulas of Lacan's four discourses, see Appendix I to the present volume.

language. On the upper level of Lacan's formula we find the chain of signifiers abbreviated in the couple S_1-S_2 (linguistic exchange and economic exchange, insofar as they are both grounded on a system of differences: the signifier as pure difference to another signifier; value as pure difference to another value). On the lower level Lacan places the split subject of the signifier, the subject of the unconscious, which ultimately stands for the constitutive alienation of the speaking being, and object a , which designates surplus enjoyment or pleasure for the sake of pleasure. $\$$ and a , the subject of the unconscious and the object of enjoyment (or rather enjoyment as object) are two "accidents" that language's dysfunction introduces in the already unstable organism. On the other hand, the master's discourse also stands for the relations of exploitation. This implies that the social link in question—and consequently every social mode of production and subjective mode of enjoyment grounded in the master's discourse, including capitalism—anchors exploitation in alienation. Or more precisely, it anchors exploitation in the abovementioned dysfunction of the organism and of language, and in the twofold mobilisation of biological prematurity and alienated symbolic existence. Needless to say that, considering this view of things, psychoanalysis, as clinical practice, cannot stand for the promise of abolishing or overcoming alienation. This impossible scenario would imply repeating the failure of Aristotelianism and economic liberalism, by resorting to a fiction of normative or normalised subjectivity. As a process of working-through, psychoanalysis, on the contrary, stands for an attempt at *managing alienation*. It thereby creates the conditions in which the analysand will be able to counteract the imperatives and the resistances derived from and imposed by cultural conditions.

The duality of the systems and the non-relation between them can serve to unmask the political-economic association of pleasure and private interest as the disavowal of the anchoring

of capitalist power-relations in the exploitation of disequilibrium that marks biological and symbolic structures. Psychoanalysis, by contrast, makes of this double negativity of organism and of discourse the privileged object of inquiry. Production of enjoyment exploits the inadequacy between the “self-preserving” tendencies of organism and the “self-preserving” tendencies of discourse (the autonomy of discourse). As a result, the instabilities at the level of the subject resonate in political-economic reality, and inversely, the political-economic instabilities are perpetually inscribed in the mental apparatus. Unlike right measure or private interest, which are supposed to sustain homeostasis and stabilisation in libidinal and socio-economic regimes, psychoanalysis introduces its own political category, which could potentially counteract and break the vicious circle of exploitation and enjoyment, and consequently work against the systemic injustice reproduced by the predominant social mode of production. This political category is sublimation, which stands for a specific intervention in the economy of the drive: satisfaction without repression.²² In contrast to psychoanalysis, Aristotle and Smith assume the position of ordering power, which is precisely the position of repression—in the first place the repression of negativity that Freud targets through his efforts at theorising the dysfunction of the mental

²² “In the definition of sublimation as satisfaction without repression, whether implicitly or explicitly, there is a passage from not-knowing to knowing, a recognition of the fact that desire is nothing more than the metonymy of the discourse of demand. It is change as such. I emphasize the following: the properly metonymic relation between one signifier and another that we call desire is not a new object or a previous object, but the change of object in itself.” Lacan, *Ethics*, p. 293. What Lacan says here about desire contains a point that can be extended to the drive, even though the latter’s fixation on the object is the exact opposite of the metonymic character of desire. In both cases, however, it is only “the change of object in itself”, that is, the change as object, that initiates a transformation of libidinal structure. Sublimation thus shows that it is not enough to simply change the object—repression stands precisely for a libidinal economy, which allows a changing of the object without changing the overall structure sustaining the mechanism of repression. In order for a vicissitude of the drive or a mode of enjoyment to change, change itself must become a libidinally invested object.

apparatus. For this reason, both Aristotle and Smith end up producing their own failed versions of the master, which is supposed to stabilise the libidinal and social economic structure, the Aristotelian statesman, this premodern master, and the Smithian self-loving *homo oeconomicus*, the presumably modern master. Freud, on the other hand, affirms the constitutive contradictions of the system by determining the force, whose satisfaction in advance excludes every possibility of homeostasis. His main insight consists in the full recognition that there is something like a *logic of instability*.²³ Political economy constantly confronts this instability, among others in the guise of economic crisis, but proposes only its mystification and imaginary resolution. In this precise respect political economy remains the heir of the Aristotelian fantasy of homeostasis in the ontological, political and psychological register.

When it comes to the Aristotelian question of forms of life, psychoanalysis and the critique of political economy introduced a particular negative form, which is intimately linked to the deadlock of libidinal economy, rather than proposing a system fetishising life. Marx and Freud share the political category of *damaged life*, whose privileged personifications in their work are the proletarian and the neurotic. In this way both Marx and Freud reintroduced actual political subjectivity back into the picture—against the fetishist personifications of the master, on which Aristotle's right measure and Smith's private interest are grounded. Damaged life is the exact opposite of the narcissistic life of economic abstractions, which, as Marx's insight into the dialectics of fetishism has shown, points toward the idea of the vital forces of capital (money-breeding money, self-engendering value, automatic subject). Both in critique of political economy and in psychoanalysis the crucial effort consists in

²³ The formalisation of which was for Lacan the logic of the signifier, hence his implicit thematisation of structuralism as the *science of instability* of symbolic systems.

detecting, not a fictitious economic category, which would express the structural tendencies of capital toward self-valorisation in a fictitious figure of subjectivity, but rather the singular point of the subject, where the universality of suffering under the predominant social mode of production and the point of resistance to the system come to expression. This can be understood as *universal negativity*. Everyone must recognise that with respect to subjectivity they are implemented as a raw material, on which the system reproduces its strategies of exploitation.

One can argue that psychoanalysis first exhaustively exposed and theorised the nexus of power-enjoyment. In opposition to the Aristotelian and Smithian paradigm, the Freudian perspective insists that, in order to grasp the link between power and enjoyment correctly, one must think “love” in tandem with alienation. Yet the introduction of love risks changing the object of inquiry: “[O]ne gives way first in words, and then slowly in the thing itself.”²⁴ The term “Eros” and its derivatives (erotic, love, friendship) risk renewing the mystification of the deadlocks that accompany the production of enjoyment and serve to expose its connection with the reproduction of exploitative relations of power. For psychoanalysis, love economises the absence of the (sexual) norm, or as Lacan argued, love “makes up” for the inexistence of the sexual relation.²⁵ Love can quite literally be understood as the “make-up” of this inexistence, but also the form of its appearance, the way a subject experiences its consequences. Freud’s writings on culture extend this lesson to the social context, claiming that, from the perspective of the production of enjoyment, a homologous inexistence seems to mark the cultural condition as a whole. The libidinalisation of

²⁴ Freud, “Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego,” in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 18, p. 91. Transl. modified.

²⁵ Lacan, *Encore*, p. 45. For an extensive discussion of Lacan’s commentaries on the sexual non-relation, see again Zupančič, *What Is Sex?*.

actually existing social links makes up, as good as it can, for the inexistence of a stable and functional social relation. If every intersubjective bond is libidinal, then the inexistence of the sexual relation and the inexistence of the social relation ultimately turn out to be one and the same libidinalised inexistence: “[T]he mass is clearly held together by a power of some kind: and to what power could this guidance be better ascribed than to Eros, which holds together everything in the world.”²⁶ The dyad of *Kraft* and *Macht* best exemplifies the role of the drive in social links and the instability its involvement entails. Freud reserved *Kraft* (force) for the drive and described Eros as *Macht* (power). Eros holds everything together and therefore cannot only serve as the ground of social links but, as such, already is such link. For this reason it indeed deserves to be described as power. The drive, on the other hand, is conflictual, blind and persistent in its pursuit of enjoyment. Freud describes the drive as constant force, which, considered in itself, does not form a link or a bond. However, the whole point of Freud’s text is to show precisely that there is no drive in itself; there are only destinies of the drive, in which the drive enforces its conflictual and antagonistic character. This immediately suggests that in the last instance language as such can be considered a destiny of the drive. Indeed, Freud insisted throughout his work that repression is the most common *Tribschicksal* and that the symbolic order as such is grounded on a primary repression.²⁷

The social link thus contains two contradictory aspects, the anti-social and the social, the drive and Eros (in the extended sense of “love”). This is not unrelated to Freud’s dualism of the

²⁶ Freud, “Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego,” p. 92. Transl. modified.

²⁷ To repeat, primary repression does not stand for the suppression of some presumable natural force, which would mean a threat to culture, but rather for the production of the difference between nature and culture. Primary repression would equally be an attempt at resolving the inadequacies that define the organism. The failure of this attempt at the same time stands for the production or constitution of another inadequate order, the symbolic.

drives: the aforementioned couple translates directly into Thanatos (or the death drive) and Eros (or the drive of life). When Lacan insisted that every drive is virtually a death drive, he aimed exactly at the anti-social and non-relational aspect of the drive, the drive broken down into a constant force, which is indifferent to the tendencies of the self-preservation of the organism or to the tendencies of the speaking being to form social links. The death drive is self-preservation that has backfired. One could also say that the social link comes down to the tension between the relational and the non-relational aspect of the drive, or to put it in Freud's terms, to the tension between *Kraft* and *Macht*, force and power. The drive would then stand for the immanent excess of a social link or a relation of power, and Eros for the opposite tendency, which consists in the mobilisation of the drive for constituting a social link or sustaining a relation of power. Of course, the mobilisation in question does not happen spontaneously or automatically. It can only be achieved and sustained through work—it is at this point that the Freudian notion of *Arbeit*, unconscious work, obtains its full weight.

The couple of Eros and the drive stands for a minimal difference within one and the same dynamic of symbolic structures, the materiality of which is both discursive and corporeal. Eros, hence the power-relation, holds society together under the condition that the subjects engage in the work of love, or more generally, in libidinal labour. Hence Freud's conclusion that social groups are formed through production, mobilisation and the channelling of what at first glance appears as purely subjective enjoyment. From the Freudian perspective there are no libidinal individuals preceding the group; they are constituted through discursive intervention. Were Freud to claim otherwise, he would remain stuck in the political-economic paradigm, according to which narcissistic individuals precede the social framework as social atoms. In order to demonstrate the

link between libidinal and social structures, and moreover, between enjoyment and exploitation, Freud analyses two prominent examples of masses grounded on repression, the church and the army, which simultaneously represent two main state apparatuses, the ideological and the oppressive. As artificial masses²⁸ the church and the army can only hold together through an external constraint, which prevents their dissolution and “check[s] alterations in their structure”.²⁹ The formulation overtly indicates that a social link is permanently traversed by instabilities, which go hand in hand with its libidinisation. Again, a social link can be defined as a libidinated non-relation. This means that libidinisation allows the subjects their moments of enjoyment and at the same time sustains the established regime of power.

At this point the obvious question could be raised: Who enjoys? Freud's answer is that there is direct continuity between the subject's enjoyment and enjoyment of the system. Or better, what enjoys in and through the subject is the system itself. Because social links are internal and external to the subject, enjoyment cannot but take place both inside and outside the subject's mental apparatus. Joan Copjec formulated this topological issue in the best possible manner:

²⁸ We could ask what natural masses would be? Are there masses in nature and is herd a natural mass? Is a mass not precisely a break with the animal herd? Freud raises some doubts as to the existence of something like a herd instinct in human subjects, and the main objection consists in the fact that herds have no leader, which structures the social mass on the mechanism of identification. Freud then corrects W. Trotter (on whose work he leans in his engagement with the herd instinct) by saying that man is more a horde animal rather than a herd animal, “an individual creature in a horde led by a chief” (Freud, “Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego,” p. 121). To put it with Lacan, the horde-mass is most often structured in accordance with the master's discourse. There is no horde without a master, even if the latter is an abstraction. Lacan determined three other discursive structures, hence three alternative libidinal economies, which cannot be reduced to the master's discourse and to its modern sophistication, capitalism, even though they depart from it.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

The difference between the individual and the group ... *falls within the individual*. That is, there is something of the group in every individual, but that something cannot be consciously known by the individual. This something in the individual more than itself is “the group” or “some One”, something to which one belongs but in which one is not engulfed. For, though the group or the One is bigger than the individual, it figures as a *part of* the individual. This is a peculiar logic—the part is bigger than that which it is part of—but it is absolutely central to psychoanalysis, which places emphasis on the *relations* between individuals.³⁰

The social structure and its ordering of enjoyment is always *extimate*, to put it with the well-pointed Lacanian neologism. Returning to Freud’s remark on the liminal epistemological and ontological status of the drive one could add that the drive is not only the border between the psychological and the physiological, between being and non-being or between fiction and the real. It is also a border between the subjective inside and the social outside. Because of this positioning of the drive, enjoyment inevitably intensifies power mechanisms rather than detaching the subject from political structures. This becomes most explicit in the correct placement of anxiety and panic. Freud argues that “panic anxiety presupposes a loosening in the libidinal structure of the group and reacts to that relaxation in a justifiable manner, and the contrary view—that the libidinal ties of the group are destroyed owing to anxiety in the face of the danger—can be refuted”.³¹ Anxiety is thus not the cause of structural and subjective instability but an affect that accompanies or emerges with the intensification of instability in the libidinal-social structure. From the perspective of

³⁰ Joan Copjec, “The Inheritance of Potentiality,” <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3704-the-inheritance-of-potentiality-an-interview-with-joan-copjec> (accessed 30/3/18).

³¹ Freud, “Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego,” p. 96.

the critique of libidinal economy, a social crisis explodes when the system demands too much enjoyment, when systemic enjoyment is radicalised, or simply, when the system turns openly exploitative. In such cases individuals are confronted with their actual status within the system: as object, or in Marx's words, as a surplus population assuming the double role of potential source of wealth (exploitable reserve army of labour-force) and redundant material or systemic waste.

One sometimes hears enthusiastic claims that love is a possible solution to political deadlock. Here, too, Freud turns out to be a realist in politics when he makes the following remark regarding the difference between identification and love (*Verliebtheit*, a term that means more like "having a crush" than love proper, which is already a form of organised libidinal labour). In love, Freud writes, the "object has, so to speak, consumed the ego",³² the libidinal bond reified the subject. He then comments on the difference between identification and love, which is not unimportant for a critical perspective on the continuum of libidinal and social economy:

In the former case the ego has *enriched* itself with the properties of the object, it has "introjected" the object into itself ... in the second case it is *impoverished*, it has surrendered itself to the object, it has substituted the object for its own most important constituent ... In the case of identification the object has been lost or given up; it is then set up again inside the ego, and the ego makes a partial alteration in itself after the model of the lost object. In the other case the object is retained and is as such overinvested by the ego and at the ego's expense.³³

³² Ibid., p. 113.

³³ Ibid., p. 121. My emphasis.

Identification is the mechanism of enrichment, love the mechanism of impoverishment: critical thought, departing from Marx and Freud, consistently thought of these both as essential components in power-relations. Love is linked with impoverishment and exploitation, insofar as it sustains and feeds fetishisation. Marx was fully aware of the importance of love in the constitution and reproduction of the capitalist power-relation. For instance, in *Capital* we stumble upon the following thought, where love is revealed in its non-psychological, structural function: “We see then that commodities are in love with money, but that ‘the course of true love never did run smooth’.”³⁴ The amorous bond not only clarifies the relation between commodities and money, and more fundamentally between labour-power and capital, but also exposes how this relation is anchored in an underlying asymmetry, inequality and non-relation. Linking back to the passage from Freud one could add: while commodities are in love with money, money identifies with commodities. The more this identification blurs or erases the difference between value and commodities, that is, value introjects commodities the more it contaminates the world of objects with its spectral nature. By doing so it intensifies the character of commodities as “sensual suprasensual things”, materialised immateriality, and radicalises the conditions of fetishisation, according to which the subjects treat value as an immanent quality of things, or even as an autonomous Thing, rather than as an asymmetric social relation. It is worth recalling that Marx saw in fetishisation a mechanism, which takes place independently from consciousness. In the fetish he detected an objective, non-psychological appearance—which means, precisely, that for him fetishisation was closely associated with discursive compulsion. The operation of identification erases the minimal, yet crucial difference between commodities and

³⁴ Marx, *Capital*, p. 202.

commodity-producing commodity (labour-power), between the object and the subject of production. As a result, the symptomatic status of the commodity labour-power, its non-identity, is rejected from the overall picture. On the background of this rejection of non-identity, value can finally assume the appearance of substance or of substantive quality, or in Marx's own wording, value becomes an automatic subject, which appears to labour—in both meanings of the term “labour”: produce value through work and give birth to more value. The identification of capital with labour-power turns out to be the inevitable inversion of fetishism. In this critique of social appearances Marx then again resorts to the metaphor of love:

By turning his money into commodities which serve as the building materials for a new product, and as factors in the labour process, by incorporating living labour into their lifeless objectivity, the capitalist simultaneously transforms value, i.e. past labour in its objectified and lifeless form, into capital, value which can perform its own valorisation process, an animated monster which begins to “work”, “as if its body were by love possessed”.³⁵

Again, when the fetishisation of economic abstractions reaches its ultimate point, capital no longer appears as the unstable and contradictory structure of the modern social mode of production or as an impersonal drive of self-valorisation, but as the actual subject of value, which differs from labour-power in one important aspect: while labour-power stands for the non-identical subject of value, capital stands for the presumably self-identical value as subject, which appears to be at the same time its own cause and effect, *causa sui*. Consequently, the politics of capital comes down to identity politics, while the politics

³⁵ Ibid., p. 302.

of labour stands for non-identity politics. What Marx describes as possession by love in fact stands for over-identification of capital with the commodity-producing commodity, over-identification, which generates the fetishist appearance of capital as a vital power that animates the commodity universe and moves all spheres of the capitalist mode of production (production, distribution, circulation and consumption). In the end, this possession by love manifests as systemic self-love or self-fetishisation, a feature that has become omnipresent in times of financialisation.

However, Marx's passage contains an important detail, which comes in the guise of a quote: "As if its body were by love possessed" (*als hätt' es Lieb' im Leibe*) is a line from Goethe's *Faust* ("Auerbach's Cellar in Leipzig"), where it forms the chorus of a drinking song. The contrast between Goethe and Marx's context is quite striking:

There was a rat in the cellar-nest,
Whom fat and butter made smoother:
He had a paunch beneath his vest
Like that of Doctor Luther.
The cook laid poison cunningly,
And then as sore oppressed was he
As if he had love in his bosom.
...
He ran around, he ran about,
His thirst in puddles laving;
He gnawed and scratched the house throughout,
But nothing cured his raving.
He whirled and jumped, with torment mad,
And soon enough the poor beast had,
As if he had love in his bosom.
...

And driven at last, in open day,
He ran into the kitchen,
Fell on the hearth, and squirming lay,
In the last convulsion twitching.
Then laughed the murderess in her glee:
“Ha! ha! he’s at his last gasp,” said she,
“As if he had love in his bosom!”³⁶

Goethe’s association of love with poisoning is the perfect inversion of Marx’s context, where love sustains the intensification of fetishist appearances. Love motivates people to believe the strangest things, like in the political-economic sphere, where “the love of profit induces an easy belief in ... miracles, and ... there is no lack of sycophantic doctrinaires to prove their existence”.³⁷ The economic miracle in question is the “immaculate conception” of value, production of value without the involvement of exploitation, the already mentioned fetishist appearance of self-engendering value that traverses the world of commodities, money and financial capital. Marx refers to Goethe in order to describe a crisis scenario, in which capital appears increasingly autonomous because of intensified libidinal investments: “too much” love from its subjects makes capital look like an “animated monster”, a creature possessed by a foreign force, which makes it run around freely and create devastation in social, subjective and environmental space. But this possession is the normal state of the capitalist system: there is no capitalism without “animated monsters”. On the other hand, the injection of poison would produce its own love-like effect signalling the breakdown of the capitalist “rat”. Different orientations on the Left propose different names for this poison: organisation of the exploited, communist revolution,

³⁶ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company 1871, pp. 86–87.

³⁷ Marx, *Capital*, p. 332.

redistribution of wealth, radical democracy, etc. What seems to be certain is that the de-libidinisation of economic abstractions would introduce another fetishisation of social links and thus ground another libidinal politics. If the common political horizon of psychoanalysis and the critique of political economy can indeed be framed in terms of working through the resistance of capitalism and hence working on a “way out of capitalist discourse”³⁸ then this can only happen through the effort of replacing capitalist identity politics with communist non-identity politics. While the former is grounded on the identification of capital with the subject of value, and hence on fetishisation of capital as (automatic) subject of politics, the latter would have to avoid repeating the error of postulating an abstract, positive, vital or non-alienated figure of subjectivity and instead ground the social link on what Lacan toward the end of his teaching called identification with the symptom. This identification is indeed paradoxical, since the subject does not identify with some positive feature in the other but with the negative feature of non-identity, which is mobilised as *the* bond between different subjectivities. Identification with the symptom thus breaks the particularism of identities and the capitalist logic of fetishisation by incorporating universal negativity in the subject’s identity (alienation, inadequacy, instability) that binds all subjects beyond their particular cultural, political, economic, sexual and other identities and that is the feature of the social link as such. Seen from this perspective, communism would then stand for a politics consisting of the collective management of alienation, or a process of working through alienation—in contrast to its capitalist exploitation and intensification through structural processes such as commodification and financialisation, as well as through the concrete violence of precarity, war and crisis.

³⁸ Lacan, *Television*, p. 16.

PART 2
FROM NARCISSISM TO ALIENATION

CHAPTER III

NARCISSISM AND REVOLUTIONS IN SCIENCE

At the level of subjective pathology, the capitalist anchoring of social production in overproduction brings about one particularly interesting example, which crystallises the logic of the drive and provides specific insight into the actual status of surplus value. In the universe of production for the sake of production, hoarding seems to be a pathology, which corresponds to the status of the miser in premodern, non-capitalist modes of production. The miser identifies value with actual treasure. In this respect, he is anything but a speculator. Unlike the contemporary stockbroker, the miser is an empiricist, for whom wealth can only be reached by taking money out of circulation, depriving it of its use-value as a means of exchange and thereby fetishistically purifying its value status. The miser's treasure is value materialised. The hoarder, too, takes objects out of circulation, deprives commodities of their use-value by accumulating a negative treasure of useless objects, a private dumpster, where no economy of recycling is allowed to intervene. The hoarder thus in his own way reveals the truth of the capitalist overproduction: what this production essentially produces are not use-values, objects, which would correspond to some pre-supposed human need,¹ but waste-products, surplus-objects, insofar "surplus" also describes something useless and redundant: to produce means to over-produce, or more precisely in

¹ As Marx already saw it, production of commodities is always-already production of needs: there are no preceding human needs. A need *qua* need is created together with its object. For an extensive examination of the problematic of need, see Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*, London: Verso 2018.

order to produce surplus value, one must produce trash, abject things, an excess of useless objects.

The critical insight provided by the hoarder consists in the fact that he is, just like the premodern miser, a hostage of the object,² or rather, a hostage of the abject, insofar as he reveals the virtual abject-status of commodity, of surplus value and of the subject in the capitalist universe. Hoarding is in this respect only thinkable in the universe governed by production for the sake of production. Of course, at the level of appearance, the hoarder is the negative of the miser, since he focuses on the “automatic growth” of trash rather than treasure, but at the structural level, the miser and the hoarder show two sides of the surplus-object, its sublime face in the case of miser, and its trashy side in hoarding. In the end the hoarder rigorously follows the equation: trash is treasure, or more generally the abject is surplus-object, garbage is value. But the actual truth revealed by hoarding follows from the critical inversion of the infinite judgment: treasure is trash. For this reason, the advocates of capitalism are scandalised by consequent usury and hording. They both suspend the ideological belief that there is the “right measure” in the pursuit of “private interests”, self-regulating order, which is both inside (in the subject of private interest, *homo oeconomicus*) and outside (in the market relations and the entire capitalist mode of production).

Psychoanalysis draws attention to the hopelessness of every attempt at differentiating the normal from the pathological. On the level of the drive, such distinction is inoperative. By explaining the so-called normal from the perspective of the pathological, by showing that the pathological is no less logical, produced in accordance with rational mechanisms and moreover standing for suffering (*pathein*) induced by logical constraints, psychoanalysis also demonstrates that the actual distinction to

² I borrow the description from Mladen Dolar, *O skoposti*, Ljubljana: Analecta 2002.

be made is between “majoritarian” and “minoritarian” pathologies, the former imposing an ideological fiction of normality and normativity in thought and action. The Freudian method shows how the critical questioning of the traditional dichotomy can progressively lead to its abolition—this is the main point of the psychoanalytic insult of human narcissism—without therefore opening the path to the vulgar pathologisation of rationality.

Epistemological questions, too, were a major concern for Freud, even though he never wrote a systematic epistemological treatise. We find these questions scattered in the metapsychological writings, the papers on the psychoanalytic technique and lastly in his recurring critique of worldviews. It is in the latter that Freud most thoroughly reflects on the relation between science and psychoanalysis. Probably his most well known remark, which cuts to the core of his epistemological perspective, is where he associates psychoanalysis with the modern scientific revolution:

In the course of centuries the *naïve* self-love of humanity has had to submit to two major insults [*Kränkungen*] at the hands of science. The first was when it learnt that our earth was not the centre of the universe but only a tiny fragment of a cosmic system of scarcely imaginable vastness. This is associated in our mind with the name of Copernicus, though something similar had already been asserted by Alexandrian science. The second insult fell when biological research destroyed man’s supposedly privileged place in creation and proved his descent from the animal kingdom and his ineradicable animal nature. This revaluation has been accomplished in our own days by Darwin, Wallace and their predecessors, though not without the most violent contemporary opposition. But human megalomania will have suffered its third and most wounding blow from the psychological

research of the present time which seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty messages of what is going on unconsciously in its psychic life.³

The epistemological connection between physics, biology and psychoanalysis consists of their shared sabotage of the libidinal investment of physical, biological and mental reality; hence in short-circuiting the continuity between the pleasure principle and the reality principle that was sustaining the premodern regime of knowledge. The *ancien régime* of science was blind to the inmixing of libidinal fantasies in the production of knowledge. Because of this blindness Aristotelian and medieval science overlooked the fact that they were ultimately the master's science, a science sustaining the reproduction of premodern (slaveholder and feudal) relations of domination and subjection. But despite its subversive character, modern science remained a discourse of enjoyment: it participates in the modern division of labour through the fact that its knowledge is supposed to play the role of the "means of enjoyment",⁴ which makes of scientific disciplines the main driving force of the perpetual capitalist revolution of the means of production. In this capitalist epistemic framework the role of religion and other worldviews did not simply lose significance, even if the meaning attributed to the natural real at first seemed challenged or

³ Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 16, London: Vintage 2001, pp. 284–285. There are good reasons for assuming that Freud's reflections were inspired by the German physiologist Emil du Bois-Reymond's obituary on Darwin. See Gabriel Finkelstein, *Emil du Bois-Reymond: Neuroscience, Self and Society in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2013, and Emil du Bois-Reymond, "Darwin und Kopernikus. Ein Nachruf," in: *Vorträge über Philosophie und Gesellschaft*, Hamburg: Meiner 1974, pp. 205–208.

⁴ See the chapter entitled "Knowledge, a means of *jouissance*" in Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 2006, pp. 43–53, where Lacan develops his critique of epistemic economy.

even abolished. As Freud was well aware when he later revisited the relation between the natural sciences and psychoanalysis, the epistemic revolution ultimately failed to extend its emancipatory potential from the register of knowledge to the socio-economic framework. Resistance to this emancipatory potential prevailed and political as well as subjective reality became regulated by the capitalist intertwining of two libidinal economies: economic production of surplus value and religious production of surplus meaning.⁵

But to return again to the Freudian quote: while the short-circuiting of the libidinal investment of reality already took place in physics and in biology, psychoanalysis entered the stage as an attempt to think through the logical mechanism of this short-circuiting and its consequences. Freud narrows down the revolutionary potential of psychoanalysis to the concept of the unconscious, which, in opposition to the philosophical and psychological theories of the soul, consciousness and subjectivity, introduced a radical decentralisation of thinking and refuted the widespread consensus regarding the primacy of consciousness. The same revolutionary potential pertains to the concept of the drive, which demonstrated that human beings are not even masters of their own narcissism. Behind the psychological façade of human self-love there is the much more persistent “narcissism” of the drive. Here it is again necessary to relativise Freud’s scientific optimism by repeating that capitalism brought about a significantly more sophisticated insult to human narcissism: by organising the social mode of

⁵ For Lacan surplus value and sense, understood as “enjoyed sense” (*jouissance*), were two forms of enjoyment. For Freud’s critique of religion and his rather pessimistic view of the outcome of the modern scientific revolution, see Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 22, pp. 158–182. Lacan famously addressed the relation between (capitalist) science and (Christian) religion in *The Triumph of Religion*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2015, pp. 55–84. For him the return of religion in the midst of politics was merely a question of time. The truth of this insight has been sufficiently proven as we have been living through the resurgence of religion in politics for decades now.

production and the subjective mode of enjoyment around the fixation of the drive on surplus value, a surplus-object unknown to the pre-capitalist modes of production. Insofar as capital contains the tendency to self-valorisation, which brings discursive compulsion to a point, it indeed stands for the modern vicissitude of the drive. Behind the apparent promotion of individual narcissism and egoism capitalism implemented the most efficient form of libidinal and social exploitation by making its subjects pursue the shadow of an enjoyment that is never really there.⁶

The astronomical revolution of the 16th–18th centuries supplanted the Aristotelian homeostatic model of the closed, finite and ontologically complete world. The latter presupposed the ontological division between the mathematical superlunary sphere of eternal truths and eternal rest, and the non-mathematical sublunary sphere of generation and corruption. The new astronomical revolution replaced this with the decentralised model of the infinite (or rather the non-finite, ontologically incomplete) universe.⁷ The very same revolution in spatial terms marks Freud's replacement of the closed world of consciousness with the virtually infinite space of the unconscious. His dethroning of the ego and his abolition of the primacy of consciousness in mental life culminates in his apparently technicist vocabulary, when he prefers speaking of the mental apparatus, in which an interplay of forces and conflictuality between

⁶ By speaking of master and household, Freud's choice of terms contains a critical displacement of Aristotle and Adam Smith's view of the relation between social and libidinal economy. Introducing the unconscious does not imply that the household knows no master. Rather, the master becomes the privileged name for social abstraction, which orders—in both meanings of the term: introducing order and commanding—the social mode of production and the subjective mode of enjoyment. In order to explicate this point, Lacan introduced the notion of the master-signifier, which stands for the signifier of enjoyment and translates Freud's insight that the drive must be broken down to the demand for pleasurable satisfaction.

⁷ See Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1957.

heterogeneous instances is constantly at work. Freud's so-called first topology (systematised in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900) revolves around the tension between two systems, consciousness-preconsciousness and unconscious, the second topology (introduced in *The Ego and the Id*, 1923) involves the conflict between ego, id and superego. It is within this later development that the tension in the id, the conflict between the drive of self-preservation and the death drive, comes into focus.

All these various developments spell out in different ways the fundamental thesis, which had guided Freud since his earliest years, that mental reality is anchored on unstable ground—a psychic conflict. Unsurprisingly, in the last years of his life Freud proposed another version of this conflict that stands for the emergence of the subject, the splitting of the ego, which can be observed in defence mechanisms such as repression, fetishism, resistance etc.⁸ Freud's introductory lecture, from which the above quote is taken, additionally mentions traumatism, which played a crucial role in the invention of psychoanalysis. Needless to recall that the first scandal with which Freud stirred up the scientific community was his traumatic aetiology of hysteria, according to which neurotic illnesses could be traced back to sexual causes and find their ultimate explanation not in some presupposed innate or inherited predisposition, but in the traumatic impact of the child's first encounters with sexuality. At the very core of this theoretical move is the fact that Freud began searching for the possible causes of mental illness outside the secure positivistic and scientifically mapped territory. The search not only subverted the established notions of sexuality, body and thought; it also challenged the predominant conceptions of scientificity and thereby revealed that the conflict between competing epis-

⁸ See Freud, "Splitting of the Ego in the Mechanisms of Defence," in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 23, pp. 275–277.

temological doctrines is always-already embedded in a broader political conflict.⁹

The central axis, around which Freud's discussion of the three revolutionary sciences gravitates, is the problem of resistance. No scientific pioneer thematised resistance to science more thoroughly than Freud. He recognised in it a crucial epistemological and political problem—also conceiving it as a conceptual cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory and practice. The examination of subjective and cultural resistance, notably resistance against scientific revolutions, entails a major psychoanalytic contribution to epistemological and political debates since it questions the existence of a neutral subject of cognition and the assumption of continuous epistemological progress. Freud speaks of the evil spirits of criticism summoned by his exposure of the role of unconscious mechanisms in mental and cultural life. It is as if Freud touched upon a taboo topic, which was supposed to remain out of the picture, and this taboo is spelled out in the banal sounding remark that the ego does not master its own household, or differently, that the ego is a figure of weak subjectivity.

After it had already been removed from physics and biology, psychoanalysis accomplished the abolition of Aristotelianism in psychology. This abolition meant that another logic of thinking had to be determined. Recall Freud's insistence that the unconscious knows no (principle of) contradiction, and consequently no principle of excluded third—which means that the

⁹ Lacan at some point wrote: "What thus persisted was the question, which makes our project radical: the question moving from: *is psychoanalysis a science?* to: *what is a science, which includes psychoanalysis?*" Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits*, Paris: Seuil 2001, p. 187. Lacan here surely distinguishes the epistemological orientation of his own teaching from Freud's "scientific desire". At the same time his entire work strove to underline that psychoanalysis mobilises the conflictuality inherent in the modern regime of knowledge as such. Louis Althusser strove to make a similar point in relation to Marx's critique of political economy, describing historical materialism, as well as Freud's psychoanalysis, as "conflictual science". See Louis Althusser, *Écrits sur la psychanalyse. Freud et Lacan*, Paris: STOCK/IMEC 1993, pp. 225–226.

unconscious does not think in an Aristotelian way, or to quote a rightly famous excerpt from Lacan:

In fact the subject of the unconscious only touches the soul via the body, by introducing thought into it: here contradicting Aristotle. Man does not think with his soul, as the Philosopher imagined. He thinks as from the fact that a structure, that of language—the word implies it—carves up his body, a structure that has nothing to do with anatomy. Witness the hysteric. This shearing happens to the soul through the obsessional symptom: a thought that burdens the soul that it doesn't know what to do with. Thought is in disharmony with the soul. And the Greek *nous* is the myth of thought accommodating itself to the soul, accommodating itself in conformity with the world, the world (*Umwelt*) for which the soul is held responsible, whereas the world is merely the fantasy through which thought sustains itself—"reality" no doubt, but to be understood as a grimace of the real?¹⁰

Philosophy constructed a series of myths, which are supposed to demonstrate the "accommodation" of thought with reality, in other words, the mastering of reality through thought. Not only the Greek *nous* and *psyché*, but also the modern ego is such a philosophical myth. Elsewhere Lacan went so far as to argue that to claim "'man thinks with his soul' means that man thinks with Aristotle's thought".¹¹ Psychoanalysis overcomes this Aristotelian take on thinking at the very level of its name: *logos* of *psyché*, science of the soul, is replaced by *analysis* of *psyché*, dissolution of the soul. Psychoanalysis is a manifest anti-psychology, grounded on the disharmonious conception of thought: not only is there no accommodation between thought

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Television*, New York: Norton 1990, p. 6. Transl. modified.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XX, Encore*, New York: Norton 1999, p. III.

and reality, but there is moreover and primarily resistance to thinking the real, in the first place to thinking the real of thinking. This resistance is suspended in rare moments such as scientific revolutions, where thought is thrown out of its imaginary accommodation, its apparently secure inner and outer *oikos*, and its adaptation to the real in accordance with the pleasure principle.

Psychoanalysis equally debunks the modern myth of the narcissistic ego as the primary unit preceding socioeconomic relations as the indivisible social atom. Against this conception, Freud not only engaged in splitting this presumable atom (hence his talk of the splitting of the ego, which was further developed by Lacan's introduction of the barred subject of the signifier), but it also questions the primacy of narcissism, insofar as the latter is associated with the ego (Freud's *Lust-Ich*, pleasure-ego). Freud speaks of *Kränkungen der Eigenliebe* (insults of self-love), whereby the word *Kränkung* resonates well with *Krankheit* (illness). Among all scientific *Kränkungen* the psychoanalytic one is in Freud's view the most radical, since it touches upon the very kernel of the defence mechanisms on which human thinking is grounded: not only is there no human master in the mental household, but what we encounter in the guise of the human species is a sick and alienated animal. Human narcissism and its megalomania (*Größensucht*) are insulted most at the point where the constitutive role of alienation in the production of subjectivity and the inscription of illness in the subject are revealed: when being appears in the guise of *being-sick*, and more generally, when intellectual processes and mechanisms are no longer explained from the point of an idealised logic, psyche or ego, but rather from the perspective of neurosis. We can again return to Lacan's excerpt from *Television*, where he inverts the Aristotelian perspective by recalling the lessons of hysteria and obsessional neurosis, namely, that they demonstrate the alien status of thought, in sharp contrast to the harmonious model that the

Aristotelian soul or even the Cartesian cogito seem to imply. Not only is thought not in accordance with reality; first and foremost thought is not in accordance with itself. Hysteria and obsession demonstrate that thought is essentially a disturbance; it emerges from the fact that the linguistic structure introduces instability into the already unstable organism. In short, the laws, mechanisms and intricacies of intellectual processes are best observed, studied and understood in illness. To the ideal of a strong ego, self-identical consciousness or self-loving *homo oeconomicus*, psychoanalysis opposes a dysfunctional mental apparatus and the conception of thought as a specific malfunctioning and disequilibrium in the living body. Thought is an illness, but also, illness is thought, which is why the basic *Kränkung*, the insult of human narcissism, is *Krankheit*, illness itself. The fact that thought is exposed to constant illness already contains an injury, and by taking *Krankheit* as the privileged entry point into the exploration of the laws of thinking, by claiming that illness is rational, psychoanalysis merely added insult to injury.¹²

Resistance against psychoanalysis comes as a peculiar negative verification of Freud's theories: the stronger the resistance the greater the indication that thought encountered something real resisting the fantasmatic framework, with which the predominant ideology orders and organises reality and, to repeat Lacan's formula one more time, accommodates thought with this construction of reality. Freud saw in cultural resistance

¹² The cosmological and the evolutionary insult did not really undermine the symbolic structure sustaining relations of domination and subjection. Recall, for instance, Lacan's occasional remark that Copernicus was still a Ptolomeian, preserving the centralised cosmological model, which grounds the political regime of the "Sun-King"; or the comparison of Darwin's evolutionary model with English capitalism that thinkers as diverse as Marx and Georges Canguilhem drew attention to. Only the psychoanalytic intervention seems to be intimate enough to penetrate the façade of narcissism, thereby shedding new light on the mechanisms of domination and subjection whereby the ideological mobilisation of narcissism installs the most efficient and decentralised of power-relations. It is telling that Freud uses the term *Eigenliebe* (self-love), which is for Adam Smith the cornerstone of the capitalist social link.

proof that his work touched upon a substantial truth regarding the nature of human thinking, sexuality and culture. For in many cases this resistance comes down to affective contradiction and sabotage, just as in an analytic situation the analysand's resistance signals that the cure has encountered the kernel of their psychopathological complex. Resistance could also be described as an affective epistemological obstacle, which on the one hand is anchored in the subject, but on the other hand equally pertains to the structure, which conditions the subject. In this respect there is no purely psychological, individual or thoroughly private resistance. Psychological resistance stands in direct continuity with the resistance of structures sustaining the social mode of production.

The decentralisation of reality and the epistemological distinction between reality and the real deserves to be called *Kränkung* because physics suspended the libidinisation of reality characteristic of the premodern cosmologies: the abolition of the cosmos is first and foremost the abolition of a libidinal-epistemic object, with which Aristotelian science sustained the link between the ontological and the ontic master, God and statesman. The pleasure of God, the pleasure of the statesman and the pleasure of the father, this master of the *oikos*, stand in direct continuity. The cosmos was a household ordered by the divine immovable mover. The abolition of the closed world is first and foremost a consequence of the de-psychologisation of the physical real. Contrary to cosmology, which remained a science of imaginary *relations* and ontological homeostasis, modern physics is constituted as a science of *non-relations* and ontological instability, unveiling the "ontological incompleteness of reality"¹³ or the non-all structure of the real. If we take Freud's term *Kränkung* here in its entire speculative potential,

¹³ See Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, London: Verso 2012.

we could say that the main discovery of modern physics consisted in the fact that reality, as such, is “ill”. The real ultimately does not function (functioning was still the feature of the real according to Aristotelian science), but rather something that dis-functions, contains errors, gaps and instabilities, which sustain its movement and becoming.

Biological *Kränkung* consisted in the abolition of the presumable ontological rupture between man and animal. Freud claims that man denied reason and soul to animals, but forgets that this denegation was actually modern (Cartesianism). For Aristotle not only animals but also plants possess a soul, his biology contains something like an ontological panpsychism, which is yet another expression of his attempt at extending a specific libidinal organisation to non-human reality. The specificity of biological insult is that by abolishing the human exception it seems to restrict the alienated status of man, placing him in continuity with the rest of creation. But the actual *Kränkung* lies elsewhere: life, as such, is alienation and illness, to refer once again to the speculative meaning of *Kränkung*. Darwin turns life into a decentralised battlefield. It is no surprise that Marx dedicated *Capital*—a book dealing with the economic exploitation of subjective alienation and illness that capitalism itself produces—precisely to Darwin, thereby reclaiming the epistemologically subversive character of evolutionary biology for his own critique of political economy. Evolutionary biology can surely be appropriated for the justification of the socio-economic fantasies of political economy; but it nevertheless remains the epistemological terrain, where the non-teleological course of evolutionary development, driven by the negativity of life as such, is homological to a non-teleological conception of history, driven by the negativity of class struggle.

Finally, the character of the psychological *Kränkung* is double. It reveals the illusory status of consciousness: the ego is an imaginary construction, a superficial effect that has been

mistakenly conceived as positive substance (*res cogitans*); and it introduces a theory of the subject on the ground of illness and the constitutive alienation of the speaking animal. On another occasion, Freud proposes a prosopopoeia of psychoanalysis, in which the revolutionary discipline addresses the ego with a curious political comparison:

“You behave like an absolute ruler who is content with the information supplied to him by his highest officials and never goes among the people to hear their voice. Turn your eyes inward, look into your own depths, learn first to know yourself! Then you will understand why you *must* fall ill; and perhaps, you will avoid falling ill in future.” ... But these two discoveries—that the life of sexual drives [*Triebleben der Sexualität*] in us cannot be wholly tamed, and that mental processes are in themselves unconscious and only reach the ego and come under its control through incomplete and unreliable perception—these two discoveries amount to a statement that *the ego is not master in its own house*.¹⁴

Sexuality and thinking imply a headless master. This becomes clear through the correct determination of the force that results from the problematic connection between the mental and the bodily, the symbolic and the biological. The question of the insult of human narcissism turns out to be more sophisticated than it seems as soon as one considers the complexity of Freud's concept of the drive, and more particularly, the link between narcissism, enjoyment and resistance. One cannot stress enough that in the Freudian context narcissism stands first and foremost for the resistance-insistence of libidinal structure (for the object-fixation of the drive) and is no longer restricted to

¹⁴ Freud, “A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis,” in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 17, p. 143. Transl. modified.

the psychological subject. Freud's notion of narcissism indeed contains a wide-reaching epistemological break: before him, narcissism was used in order to designate an auto-erotic sexual activity, satisfaction through one's own body, but Freud entirely reinvents the meaning by highlighting that behind the narcissism of individuals there is a more fundamental narcissism of libido and of the drive.¹⁵

From the Freudian perspective, political economy and its notion of self-love remain stuck in the same superficiality as psychology, which equates narcissism with a somewhat excessive individual egoism. As we saw above, the ontological lack that Smith acknowledged in the structure of the subject already points toward the drive of self-preservation. For Freud, however, self-preservation is internally split into the self-preservation of the organism, which obtains its expression in the sexual drives or Eros, and the excessive autonomy of libidinal economy, which contrasts the self-preservation of the organism with the self-preservation of the drive. Freud strived to explain this excess in self-preservation with the notion of the death drive or Thanatos. *Triebleben*, the life of drive designates a dimension of life that from within reaches beyond the life of the organism, a negative vitalism of the drive, indifferent toward the wellbeing of the organism. Freud thereby runs the risk that the death drive will be confused with a self-destructive or suicidal tendency in libidinal life or a being-toward-death, when in fact what he targets is a force that can never get enough life. The drive in terms of self-preservation is still defined through the negativity of lack and the life it strives to preserve is a life

¹⁵ "[F]inally it seemed probable that an allocation of the libido such as deserved to be described as narcissism might be present far more extensively, and that it might claim a place in the regular course of human sexual development ... Narcissism in this sense would not be a perversion, but the libidinal complement to the egoism of the drive of self-preservation, a measure of which may justifiably be attributed to every living creature." Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 14, p. 73. Transl. modified.

stained by lack. The death drive, on the other hand, demands more life, surplus-life. But the whole point is that the death drive can demand surplus-life only on the basis of the perpetuation of the lack-of-being or damaged life.

When he introduces the subject of narcissism, Freud writes that the “individual does actually carry on a double existence, as self-purpose and as a link in a chain, which he serves against his will, or at least involuntarily”.¹⁶ This double existence of the individual resembles Smith’s distinction between self-love and dependency on others, which are mutually intertwined and inseparable. Self-love, or what Freud occasionally names *Lust-Ich*, pleasure-ego, may appear primary but is in fact a reaction formation, whose primacy is retroactively constituted, a form of resistance to the ontological lack and structural instability inscribed into the organism, which obtain their symbolic translation-transformation in the individual’s social existence. According to Lacan the same double existence or immanent redoubling marks language in general and its basic unit, the signifier, in particular. As cause of enjoyment, on the one hand, the signifier is detached from its link with other signifiers, reduced to the imperative signifier: S_1 . As pure difference, on the other hand, the signifier is the relation to another signifier: S_1-S_2 . In the first sense, language consists of a swarm of master-signifiers, forming what Lacan called *lalangue*, language as a factory of enjoyment. In the second sense, language consists of a chain of differences, forming what Saussure called *langage*, language marked by the logic of representation, in the first place as symbolic representation of the ontological lack of the human being.¹⁷ Hence, Lacan’s definition of the signifier as what

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 78. Transl. modified.

¹⁷ For the notion of swarm, see Lacan, *Encore*, p. 143. Production of enjoyment and representation of the subject *qua* lack are two inseparable aspects of language, which are always at work in parallel and at the same time.

represents a subject for another signifier—whereby the subject in question is conceived precisely as a subject of lack.

In accordance with the recognition of the double existence of the individual, Freud introduced his first minimalist distinction of drives, which sustained all his subsequent work: “The separation of the sexual drives from the ego-drives would simply reflect this double function of the individual.”¹⁸ What is striking in the overall development of Freud’s theory of the drives is that the notion of the death drive progressively followed from the category of the ego-drives and hence from primary narcissism associated with the pleasure-ego. Given the ontogenetic and phylogenetic development Freud concludes that before the libidinal investment of objects, hence before every relationality and transference of libido onto external objects, there is an originary self-investment. It is the persistence of this self-investment behind or rather within every libidinal investment that the death drive implicitly stands for:

Thus we form the idea of there being an original libidinal investment [*Besetzung*] of the ego, from which some is later given off to objects, but which fundamentally persists and is related to the object-investment much as the body of an amoeba is related to the pseudopodia which it puts out. ... We all noticed the emanations of this libido, the object-investment, which can be sent out and drawn back again. We see also, broadly speaking, an antithesis between ego-libido and object-libido.¹⁹

In the original libidinal investment the distinction between the ego and the object is not yet established, or rather, because the ego is the object of this first investment, the libidinal investment

¹⁸ Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” p. 78. Transl. modified.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 75. Transl. modified.

produces an immanent demarcation line between the ego and... the ego. Thus in the end this first (auto-erotic) libidinal investment already produces the splitting of the ego, or rather the ego as split. Libidinal economy is anchored in this constitutive split and, one could say, constitutive alienation—the emergence of a self-reified ego in the guise of primary narcissism. Subsequent exporting or extension of libido to other objects merely reproduces this presumably primary self-reification or self-objectification. But if the originary libidinal investment involves alienation this suggests that it also stands for an original resistance, given that narcissism remains a reaction formation even in this primary state. There is an underlying thesis at work here, which is directly related to the mobilisation of pleasure in premodern cosmologies, namely: libidinal investment is a form of resistance.

Originary investment comes down to the process of internal exteriorisation, which in the same move “territorialises” and “deterritorialises” the libido, to put it with Deleuze and Guattari. The first differentiation between the inner and the outer thus runs through the ego itself. Narcissism, whether primary or secondary, presupposes in any case the splitting of the ego—the constitution of the ego’s identity on the background of non-identity.²⁰ There is no non-alienated and non-divided ego preceding libidinal self-investment. The constitution of the ego as such contains a double movement: on the one hand, production of the split in and through the action of investment and, on the other, retroactive projection of the image of a non-divided pleasure-ego preceding the originary investment. The erogeneity of the body, its susceptibility to arousal repeats the same intertwining of two apparent heterogeneities: “We can decide to regard erogeneity as a general characteristic of all

²⁰ The Hegelian formula of the “identity of identity and difference” involves the same double existence of the individual as Freud.

organs and may then speak of an increase or decrease of it in a particular part of the body. For every such change in the erogeneity of the organs there might then be a parallel change of libidinal investment in the ego.”²¹ Hence, just as there is no ego before self-investment, there is no body before a territorialised investment, which manifests as affection or erogeneity. Freud speaks of parallelism, which perpetuates his dualistic perspective, but from the Lacanian viewpoint it would be more appropriate to speak of parallax,²² which corrects the Freudian dualism by seeing it as a conflictual monism.

Freud’s homology between the unicellular organism and the mental apparatus is not entirely successful, since the entity that presumably precedes the self-investment is constituted retroactively—the originary pleasure-ego is a fiction, which cannot be placed before the secondary object-ego. If the libidinal investment finds its ultimate biological metaphor in the amoeba putting out its pseudopodia, the originary libidinal investment is not comparable to the situation, in which the pseudopodia would be stretched inward. Instead in the originary state a stimulus would have to emerge so to speak *ex nihilo*, since the inside and the outside are not yet differentiated. The emergence of the stimulus then establishes the awareness that the pseudopodia, which are at this stage still “organs without a body” (Žižek), belong to the “undifferentiated vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation”,²³ which is more like a “body without organs” (Deleuze).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, from which this biological imagery is adopted, Freud makes an additional simplification by moving from a relatively complex unicellular organism to a simple *Bläßchen* (bubble, vesicle), whose “surface turned toward

²¹ Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” p. 84. Transl. modified.

²² For the psychoanalytic appropriation of this notion, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2006.

²³ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 18, p. 26.

the external world will from its very situation be differentiated and will serve as an organ for receiving stimuli".²⁴ Here we have a different image of a living organism, and on a more speculative level a different metaphor of life in general. Instead of libidinal investment the question now is resistance against stimuli, which would bring about a change in the organism. In the human subject, and beyond the framework of the biological metaphor, such resistance is not only associated with consciousness, which, understood as the surface of the mental apparatus, comes according to Freud closest to the biological equivalent of "membrane" or "crust". Resistance pertains also to the forces of life that the Freudian *Trieblehre* associates with the drive of self-preservation. The immediate paradox of life at stake here is that life ultimately stands both for the perpetual state of stimulation and for the resistance against stimulation. Translated into the combination of problems addressed in the writing on narcissism and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, libidinal economy is both investment and resistance. Libidinal investment brings about an imbalance and a state of excitation that needs to be abolished, and the concept of the drive is supposed to unite both opposing tendencies in one internally divided and inconsistent force. The paradox of life is a paradox of the drive—this explains why Freud's developments extended the conflict between Eros and Thanatos well beyond the clinical and the social framework, to the domains of the other two revolutionary sciences, physics and biology.

In Freud's writing on narcissism it is the originary self-investment and in his later context the stimulus that creates the difference between the inner and the outer. A stimulus functions as disturbance, destabilisation, even traumatic intrusion, so that in Freud's later framework the question of resistance that

²⁴ Ibid. The entire second part of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* starting with section IV spells out in great detail the implications of the biological model for understanding the dynamics in the mental apparatus.

the discussion of narcissism to some extent pushed to the background stands at the centre of the debate. A stimulus can come from inside or outside, whereby the former scenario complicates this differentiation. Freud clearly says that one can resist against the external stimuli, whereas the internal stimuli make this resistance impossible. This immediately complicates the topological order at stake in libidinal economy: in the case of an internal stimulus, the border between inside and outside is both everywhere and nowhere. This is why the immanence of difference and its corresponding topology outweigh the dualistic model, which works with opposed externalities. Freud acknowledged the speculative character of his metapsychological extrapolations,²⁵ but from Lacan's perspective, he was still not speculative enough, since he remained stuck in the limitations of his conflictual dualism and failed to propose a thoroughly conflictual monism. As soon as one abolishes the idea of an initial homeostasis, which is subsequently destabilised through a stimulus or traumatism,²⁶ one inevitably comes to the conclusion that the structure of the mental apparatus operates in permanent disequilibrium. Disequilibrium is primary—and it is this disequilibrium resulting from the permanent excitation of the organism that should be called life, in this concrete case the life of drives (*Tribleben*).

Freud's speculative biology does not simply take the life sciences as a positive epistemological foundation for psychoanalytic concepts and theories but as an exemplification of the most speculative aspects of psychoanalysis. Moreover, Freud targets the speculative dimension of biology as such. The example of amoeba sending out the plasma functions as the ultimate

²⁵ Section IV of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is introduced with the famous line: "What follows now is a speculation, often far-fetched speculation that everyone will consider or dismiss according to his particular predilection." Ibid., p. 24. Transl. modified.

²⁶ Freud inclines toward their equation: trauma results from a stimulus breaking the barrier between the inside and outside.

imagery of alienation in the double meaning of *Entfremdung* (deprivation) and *Veräußerung* (externalisation). Rather than being in a state of pure equilibrium and homeostasis, the indifference between the subject and the object that Freud postulates at the origin of the subject's development is a state of pure alienation. There is no inmixing of the ego here as the latter is a failed retroactive imaginary stabiliser; it is a mere consequence of the fragile border between the inside and the outside of the organism. By means of biological speculation Freud traces the becoming of division, the constitution of the subject-object relation, which is not yet an externalised opposition at the assumed originary or primary level. The idea of primary narcissism contains the idea of alienation without a pre-existing alienated, or in other words, alienation without an ontologically pre-constituted alienated being. The recognition of this constitutive alienation, which conceptually intertwines with primary narcissism understood as narcissism without the ego, is what brings the actual psychoanalytic blow to human narcissism. Not only is the human being a narcissistic animal but also something in the human being is more narcissistic than humanity itself. This is what the Freudian claim that the ego is not a master in its own house comes down to. Primary narcissism is not so much primary in the historical sense, even though Freud constantly works in view of ontogenesis and phylogenesis, but in the logical and economic sense: the force of the drive and its pursuit of pleasure for the sake of pleasure colonises all forms of satisfaction and unmasks the impossibility of homeostasis at the level of libidinal and biological life. The narcissism of the ego masks the much more radical narcissism of the drive—whereby the whole point of Freud's speculative efforts comes down to demonstrating, against the political-economic notion of self-love, that at its primary level narcissism and alienation are inseparable. To repeat, primary narcissism is constitutive alienation.

CHAPTER IV

ELEMENTS OF A HISTORY OF ALIENATION

In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, the issue of alienation once again became a central concept in the critical examination of the capitalist production of subjectivity and of the crisis-driven means by which capitalism reproduces its conditions of existence.¹ This return to alienation should come as no surprise. The notion of alienation remains the key conceptual cornerstone of the materialist theory of the subject and critical theory of society. To recall, a materialist take conceives alienation as productive operation, which is constitutive of the subject. There is no non-alienated subject preceding alienation—the subject is brought into existence through the process of alienation, together with the fiction of full subjective being, non-alienated self, consciousness or ego-cogito, whose apparent primacy results from a retroactive projection, as was the case with Freud's pleasure-ego. The insight that there is no subject preceding alienation was among the crucial lessons of Marx's mature thought. This resulted in the critical distance he took to his own early humanism and Feuerbachian anthropological materialism.² The critique of political economy placed

¹ To mention only a few recent analyses: Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) 2012, Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, New York: Columbia University Press 2016, and Slavoj Žižek, *Incontinence of the Void*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2017. There is also accelerationism, whose position is rather peculiar and could be described as “desiring alienation”. For a critical confrontation with this unfortunate movement, see notably Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Acceleration and Capitalism*, Arlesford: Zero Books 2014, and Ketī Chukhrov, “Desiring Alienation in Capitalism. Zeal to De-Alienate in Socialism,” *Crisis and Critique*, (2) 2017, pp. 133–151.

² Althusser even spoke of an “epistemological break”, thus suggesting that a materialist theory of the subject inevitably implies a materialist epistemology (even though Althusser restricts his discussion merely to the question of the transformation of

the process of labour at the centre of its examination, amounting to the equation: labour *is* alienation. To anticipate later developments, psychoanalysis adopted this Marxian thesis and supplemented it with two further variations: “thinking is alienation” and “enjoyment is alienation”. What is at stake, and what I would like to insist on in the following, is that in its conceptual history alienation does not stand exclusively for a negative process, which would need to be overcome. In Marx and Freud alienation is surely the name of a crucial social and subjective problematic, which provides the privileged entry point for the critical examination of the exploitative aspects of capitalism and the pre-capitalist modes of production (with Lacan one could say: the history of the master’s discourse). But alienation is also the name of a political process, in which subjectivity is organised around a common effort in working through the resistance of the system and thus performing transformative work on the social mode of production. One could also say that, as soon as the point of departure is not the individual but the relations between individuals, alienation stands for the main effect of every social link or libidinal bond. The question is then whether this social link is anchored in the exploitation of alienation—as is the case in capitalism and other, pre-capitalist modes of production—or whether it enables the subject to work through alienation—which was one of the ultimate goals of Marx’s critical thought and Freud’s clinical work. Speaking of working-through alienation might be preferable to that of overcoming alienation, since the latter inevitably leads to the problematic teleological perspective, according to which some uncorrupted human condition, regulated and stable social link or authentic subjectivity would await at the end of the process.

philosophy and moreover rejects the notion of the subject). See Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, Paris: Maspero 1964, pp. 24–27.

Socialism and communism were anything but immunised against this teleological trap. According to Ketī Chukhrov's recent reading, the October Revolution aimed at the "coercive *criminalisation* of alienation on all levels—social, economic, cultural".³ Of course, what was initially criminalised or prohibited was the capitalist form of alienation, sustained by the commodity form as the general envelope of all social and subjective relations and the sanctity of private property. Stalinism, however, did not stop there but indeed wanted to criminalise alienation as such. From a Lacanian perspective the ultimate point of such an endeavour would be the prohibition of language. Because this is hardly possible, the next "best thing" is prohibition of speech, or at least its obsessive censorship. In this respect, Stalin was an extreme Aristotelian, someone, who in the last instance demanded total transparency and dealienation in language and thought. His criminalisation of alienation, if that was truly what he was after politically, could therefore only amount to a new, radicalised form of alienation and introduce a paranoid system of state terror.⁴

In contrast to the two predominant strategies, which either strive for dealienation by assuming an essentially fantasmatic figure of non-alienated subjectivity, the overarching fantasy of a non-alienating socioeconomic condition, or search for a way out of alienation by making a case for its radicalisation and acceleration, Marx's and Freud's efforts consist in mobilising alienation in order to organise actually existing subjectivity around a laborious process of social and subjective transformation. Working through the resistance of an exploitative social system is a process without a predetermined goal, that is,

³ Chukhrov, "Desiring Alienation," p. 138.

⁴ The condition is hardly better in capitalism. Economic liberalism and neoliberalism, too, strive for prohibition of alienation, both with their imperative of enjoyment and their enforcement of non-alienated subjectivity in the guise of the economic egoist and libidinal narcissist.

without anticipation of the future condition and most notably without fantasies of a society and subjectivity without negativity. Psychoanalysis, at least as it was introduced by Freud and reinvented by Lacan, consists in management of alienation and breaking the link between exploitation and enjoyment rather than organising subjectivity around *compulsive dealienation*, dealienation on demand, which merely ends up introducing a new form of exploitation of alienation, *repressive dealienation* (to paraphrase Marcuse's "repressive desublimation"). The task of the critique of political economy, as it was conceived in Marx's mature years, equally lies in the organisation of the exploited around the effort of breaking the capitalist link between exploitation and labour, rather than in constructing future scenarios of a dealienated social and subjective condition. Indeed, Marx fully understood, just like Freud, that in the process of exploitation alienation stands for the ultimate expression of discursive compulsion and of structural resistance—compulsion and resistance coming from economic laws and from the tendency of capital to self-valorisation, or what Marx explicitly describes as the capitalist drive of self-valorisation. Needless to say that from Marx's and Freud's perspective both aspects of alienation, the "good"—working-through and organisation—and the "bad"—compulsion and exploitation—, are two sides of one and the same antagonistic process. For this reason one also cannot assume a condition free of alienation without regressing to the pre-critical and pre-psychoanalytic, homeostatic and therefore "Aristotelian" conceptions of language, society and subjectivity.

In times of financialisation, labour seemed to have lost its status of being the central political category or the central economic abstraction, where the link between alienation and exploitation can be demonstrated. Financial capitalism introduced new forms of alienation, which presumably require an updated critical take beyond Marx. This is where psychoanalysis turns out

to be an important ally for the critique of political economy. Marx examines the capitalist mode of production from the viewpoint of the transformation of all forms of labour into abstract labour, and more precisely into a symptomatic commodity, labour-power, in which the general capitalist juncture of alienation and exploitation is brought to a central point.⁵ Freud's theory of the unconscious, too, is unimaginable without this junction, which now appears as that between alienation and enjoyment. In order to think this junction Freud needed to introduce the concept of labour, which he extended to the multiplicity of unconscious operations. By insisting that the Freudian analysis of the production of pleasure and the Marxian analysis of the production of surplus value are homological, Lacan hinted that the Freudian conception of thought processes as labour could provide a new twist on the central role of labour in Marx. To anticipate the developments in later chapters, for psychoanalysis, the production of enjoyment is a form of labour for the system and the flipside of the juncture of exploitation and labour as it was recognised by Marx.

Lacan's structuralism provided another crucial contribution to the materialist conception of alienation by extending the latter to language as such, to the extent that speech becomes equated with alienation. Labour, thought and language are conceived as processes that are constitutive for the subject, and from which alienation is impossible to eliminate simply

⁵ To recall the old story, labour-power assumes a symptomatic status insofar as it is both a commodity among others and the only commodity that has the power to produce other commodities. This makes it both equal and non-equal to other commodities. Of course, labour-power is not to be mistaken with the psychological figure of the worker. The inverse is the case: the worker is only one possible social personification of labour-power. The latter stands in the first place for the point of structural inconsistency of the immense collection of abstractions (to paraphrase Marx's description of wealth)—a commodity, which according to Marx shows that the source of value in capitalism remains anchored in exploitation, through the abstract structural violence of commodification, financialisation and indebteding, as well as through the raw violence of colonialism, racism, sexism, war etc.

because such hypothetic removal would require their abolition. Examining these processes through the primacy of alienation implies that there is no subject, which would assume the function of the master of labour, thought and language. Concretely, there is no *homo oeconomicus*, no subject of private interest preceding and underlying the relations that constitute economic reality. Furthermore, there is no intentional consciousness, no subject of cognition preceding and underlying the relations that constitute mental reality. Finally, there is no speaker, no subject of communication preceding and underlying the relations that constitute discursive reality. There is, however, a subject that is produced out of joint as soon as a body begins to work, think and speak. Again, this subject does not constitute the centre of economic, mental or linguistic reality, but rather is exposed as a decentred character. Lacan introduced the sign \$, standing for the split or barred subject, in order to contrast this “weak” subjectivity produced in the three processes to the fictions of a “strong” non-alienated subjectivity postulated by political economy, psychology and the philosophy of consciousness.

In addition, Lacan also introduced the concept of the barred Other, which openly states that alienation is not only something pertaining to the subject but also marks the Other. Lacan’s repeated slogan, “The Other does not exist”, means precisely this: The Other is split, incomplete, organised disequilibrium, which nevertheless produces real consequences—or rather, it produces them precisely *because* it does not exist or *because* it is alienated. By introducing the figure of the alienated Other, Lacan’s teaching went against the three predominant figures, or rather hypotheses, of the existing and non-alienated Other, which all correspond to the three abovementioned fantasmatic figures of dealienated or non-alienated subjectivity: firstly, the political-economic figure of the Other in the guise of the Market (Adam Smith’s “Providence”), understood as a self-regulating and non-conflictual space governed by “Freedom,

Equality, Property and Bentham” (private interest, social egoism), to put it again with Marx’s wording; secondly, God, more specifically the God of the philosophers, which is supposed to sustain the subject’s certainty (and even the subject’s existence) and guarantee the link between knowledge and the real; and thirdly, Language (“our god Logos”, as Freud occasionally wrote⁶), which would be entirely deprived of the production of pleasure, pain and deceit, as in the case of Aristotle’s logical normalisation of language. On the background of Lacan’s critical and materialist notion of the alienated Other one could draw the polemical conclusion that not only economic liberalism, but also philosophies of consciousness and philosophies of language cannot proceed without postulating a non-alienated Other. The partisans of socialism and communism, insofar as they assume a future state of subjective dealienation or abolition of alienation, also inevitably perpetuate the belief in a fully functioning big Other, or differently put, they unknowingly make the idea of communism depend on the existence of God.

The return to alienation in recent critical debates can also be interpreted as a symptom of the failure of economic liberalism and neoliberalism and as a sign of the ideological death of *homo oeconomicus*. The understanding of subjectivity, which socially prevailed in the last two centuries and which was enforced with the more or less unintended help of the philosophies of consciousness and ego-psychology, turned out to be what it was from the beginning: ideological fantasy, whose function was to distort, repress or mystify the fact that capitalism can only sustain itself through the production of exploitable subjectivity. The social obligation of every individual was

⁶ Although the context in Freud is slightly different: “Our god, *Logos*, *Reason*, is perhaps not a very almighty one, and he may only be able to fulfil a small part of what his predecessors have promised. If we have to acknowledge this we shall accept it with resignation.” Sigmund Freud, “The Future of an Illusion,” in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, London: Vintage 2001, p. 70.

to become an ideal economic subject, social egoist or self-loving subject of private interest, capable of mastering and overcoming alienation in the social sphere. From the viewpoint of this presumably authentic and fundamental but actually fictitious image of subjectivity, alienation appears like a sign of the individual's failure to live up to the "natural condition of man" as propagated by the liberal and neoliberal economic doctrines. Individuals are obliged to pull themselves out of the state of alienation, the latter being considered as their personal problem.

While economic liberalism can be counted among the attempts to repress the link between alienation and the production of subjectivity, modern philosophy was inaugurated by a specific use of alienation in the form of radical doubt. It was at the background of the encounter with this problematic, which remained unthought in premodernity, that philosophy could abolish the premodern theory of the subject—the metaphysical soul. The problem of alienation could thus be seen as the demarcation line between philosophical premodernity and modernity. Descartes more or less explicitly recognised in the subject a particular form of instability. In his methodological doubt this instability remained restricted to the level of thought and was temporarily overcome through the passage from *cogito* as the subject of doubt to *res cogitans* as the subject of certainty. Well over two centuries later the critique of political economy, along with psychoanalysis, re-encountered the same instability in labour and language. They recognised in the market and in language a systematised disequilibrium, which inevitably contains the production of a problematic surplus. However, between both extremes of modern thought lies the Hegelian discontinuity in the history of philosophy. Hegel's system marks the point where the tables turned and alienation became the privileged conceptual entry point into thinking the subject and social links. By placing at the core of philosophical interest something that remained a mere short-circuit in Descartes'

modern orientation in philosophy, Hegel indeed created the conditions, which would soon thereafter enable the materialist turn in philosophy in general and in critique in particular.⁷

To take once again a step back, the discovery of alienation, the first crucial philosophical encounter of alienation as constitutive for the thinking subject and for a materialist theory of the subject, coincides historically and logically with Descartes' very introduction of the modern notion of the subject. Descartes founded philosophy on the modern scientific revolution and as an outcome resolved the wide-reaching crisis this revolution triggered in systems of thought. It was only a matter of time before these consequences would shake the Aristotelian foundations of the theory of the subject, his metaphysical psychology anchored in the hypothesis of the soul. Even if Descartes did not entirely abolish the vocabulary that was passed on by the Aristotelian tradition, the introduction of *cogito* marked an irreversible point that opened up the horizon, in which the subsequent conceptualisation of alienation was made possible.

Descartes' philosophical gesture is subjective alienation in action, its most genuine exemplification. We merely need to consider his transformation of Montaigne's scepticism into a positive method of systematic doubt in order to notice that we are dealing with a specific mobilisation of alienation in the field of modern science, or more generally, in the modern mode of the production of knowledge. Lacan most openly embraced the thesis that alienation became a philosophical question only with Descartes, that philosophical and scientific modernity is inaugurated in and through subjective alienation—in distinction from premodern science, which was according to Plato and Aristotle driven by *thaumazein*, wonder. Lacan repeatedly showed how the invention of *cogito*, Descartes' reduction of all

⁷ In this respect the critique of political economy, psychoanalysis and structuralism are all equally deeply indebted to Hegel.

human existence and its qualities to the pure “I think” historically, philosophically and epistemologically conditions the Freudian discovery of the unconscious and makes the subject of the unconscious, another version of thought without qualities (notably without the quality of consciousness) thinkable in the first place. This is a strange, one might even say alienating thesis, since nothing could be more foreign to the Freudian subject than the Cartesian *cogito*, this subject reduced to the pure identity of thought with itself (“I think”) and to the apparent identity of thinking with being (“I think therefore I am”).

The catch, and the crack, for that matter, the crack on the surface of consciousness that inaugurates the “royal road” to alienation and negativity surely resides in the worm of doubt, which splits the subject and directs the movement of its thoughts. But it also resides in the structure of the most famous inference in the history of philosophy (next to Aristotle’s syllogism on the “mortality of all men”): the problematic “therefore” (*ergo*), which deduces being from thinking and which can be read as a joint that seems to establish continuity and at the same time indicates a minimal rupture or displacement between thinking and being, as well as within thinking and being. “Therefore” is a double index: a link and a break, a continuity and a discontinuity. “Therefore” binds only in order to expose a permanently resolute difference—a fissure in the subject’s thinking and being. Due to this ambiguity of the *cogito*, Cartesianism could eventually ground both the philosophies of consciousness and the philosophies of alienation, modern idealism and materialism.

Unknowingly, Descartes’ “therefore” contained the first recognition of the spatio-temporal displacement that marked the subject. But his deduction of *cogito* and the reduction of thought to consciousness amount to a centralised geometry of the subject, which erroneously postulates the primacy of relata before relation, the primacy of thinking and being before their problematic

relation of identity and non-identity, continuity and discontinuity, homotopy and heterotopy. In addition, privileging identity over non-identity removes the temporal dynamic from the process that constitutes the subject. The best geometric representation of such a presumably non-alienated subject remains the Cartesian coordinate system, in which the space of *res extensa* “emanates” from the central point without extension.⁸ In contrast to this Cartesian geometrisation of the space of thinking, the affirmation of alienation as constitutive for the subject implies a topological model that Lacan somewhat enigmatically called “the asphere of *non-all*”.⁹ The space of thinking and hence the structure of the subject are not closed and centralised (which would be the case if one were to take the sphere as the geometrical model). The space of thinking and the structure of the subject are also not simply infinite. They are the negation of finitude (a-sphere or non-sphere), which exposes their constitutive incompleteness (non-all). In this way not only spatial disclosure but also the historical process is introduced as the key component of the structure in question. The Cartesian *cogito* thus does not designate a being but a process of becoming. The subject here no longer appears as an invariable and stable extra-historic or trans-historic centre, but rather as an unstable, metonymic negativity, which undergoes historical transformations and is thus permanently embedded in an open and conflictual process of becoming. This is where thinkers

⁸ Koyré argued that the Cartesian geometrisation of space in terms of abstract motion (of point drawing a line, line drawing a surface, surface drawing a three-dimensional space) eliminates temporality, thus proposing an atemporal geometry of thinking, which, to add, unsurprisingly led Descartes to postulate a thinking substance. The latter rejects every idea of subjective becoming. See Alexandre Koyré, *Galileo Studies*, New Jersey: Humanities Press 1978, pp. 91–92. The Cartesian topology of the subject is hence the perfect opposite of the psychoanalytic one, which reunites topology and time (incidentally, *Topology and Time* was also the title of what would have been Lacan’s final seminar before the dissolution of École freudienne de Paris).

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits*, Paris: Seuil 2001, p. 474.

like Hegel, Marx and Freud correct Cartesianism with their dialectical and materialist turn.

In his variations on *cogito*, Lacan made a great deal of Descartes' "therefore", proposing ever new interpretations and transcriptions of Descartes' inference, which all target the inscription-constitution of the subject on two heterogeneous but nevertheless mutually linked places and registers: enunciation-enunciated, thought-being, consciousness-unconscious, truth-knowledge.¹⁰ Hence, the idea of the split, which traverses thought and sustains its subject, constituting its existence on a line that both associates and divides, making the subject in the same move identical and non-identical to itself. Descartes missed the opportunity to philosophically grasp the split in question. Alienation was encountered and overlooked as soon as he accomplished the move from methodological doubt to scientific certainty and from *cogito*, understood as enunciation without substance and thought without qualities, to *res cogitans*, conceived as immaterial substance and thought with qualities. Subsequent philosophies forgot, if one may say so, the encounter with alienation at the birth hour of the first modern theory of the subject, and privileged the examination of the laws of conscious thought. The main feature of the subject, its constitutive instability, and its futile, metonymic and thus alienated character were removed from the picture.

When, at the other end of modern metaphysics, Lacan argued that the subject of the unconscious is the same as the subject of modern science, he strove to correct the *bévue*, the mistake, error or overlooking that grounded Cartesian rationalism and dominated a major part of modern philosophy. The *bévue* in question was finally reversed by Hegel, whose renewal of the dialectics of identity and difference provided the methodological tool to

¹⁰ All these readings are to be found in Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1998.

overcome the centralised model of subjectivity and repeat the Cartesian gesture in reverse. It would not be difficult to recognise in sense certainty, this first stage of the spirit's becoming in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, an analysis—in the etymological sense of deconstruction or decomposition—of *cogito*, an intensification of the gap between thinking and being, which enables us to conceive thinking as alienation and being as becoming. By returning to *cogito* through this peculiar figure of sense certainty, Hegel opened up the space, in which the Cartesian *bévue* could be elevated to the level of the concept. Only now could the Cartesian *une-bévue* finally become the Freudian *Unbewusst*.¹¹ Why not read the controversial and so often misunderstood Hegelian idea of the end of philosophy in line with the repetition of Descartes' foundational gesture from an inverted perspective? What Hegel wanted to put an end to—unsuccessfully, but at least in his attempt he laid the foundations for a dialectical materialist orientation in thinking¹²—was nothing other than the rejection of alienation from the philosophical theories of subjectivity. From Hegel via Marx to Freud, alienation finally comes to name the constitutively unstable structure of the subject and points toward a decentralised space of thinking, a structure in becoming or a structure as becoming.

Hence, if Descartes' *bévue* is the negative condition for Marx and Freud, then Hegel's mobilisation of alienation—and more specifically of negativity that he closely associated with labour by speaking of the labour of the negative—is their positive condition. One significant excerpt may suffice in order to exemplify

¹¹ I aim here at Lacan's pun in his "Séminaire du 16 novembre 1976," *Ornicar?* 17–18 (1977), p. 5. The translation of *Unbewusst* with *une-bévue*, of course, operates on the level of homophony and not on the level of semantics. Its function is simply to remind one that Freud's notion of the unconscious does not stand for a container of hereditary transhistoric contents and phylogenetic inheritance but rather for the short-circuiting and instability of language.

¹² As Žižek's recent work repeatedly argues. See, for instance, Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, London: Verso 2012.

the importance of Hegel in the conceptual history of alienation, a rather peculiar passage from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one of the three grand oeuvres on alienation, next to Marx's *Capital* and Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. In the passage concerned, Hegel privileges two processes that demonstrate the constitutive character of alienation and that simply cannot be thought rigorously without or beyond this problematic. It turns out that these processes are precisely speech and labour, and one could read the entire work of Marx and Freud as two immense footnotes spelling out the consequences of this crucial Hegelian insight. Hegel's entry point in the matter does not conceal the fact that, in order to think alienation correctly, one needs to address its spatial aspect, so that in the end one envisages the dynamic features of space, in which discursive processes such as speech and labour unfold:

This outer, in the first place, makes only as an *organ* the inner visible or, in general, a being-for-another; for the inner, in so far as it is in the organ, is the *activity* itself. The speaking mouth, the working hand, and, if you like, the legs too are the organs of performance and actualization which have within them the action *qua* action, or the inner as such; but the externality which the inner obtains through them is the act as a reality separated from the individual.¹³

Speech and labour are framed as actions, which inevitably reach beyond the individual and in doing so sophisticate the relation between the inner and the outer. Their products constitute a dynamic and autonomous register of reality and are endowed with a life and logic of their own. What is more, this reality fabricated by speech and labour is not simply external

¹³ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004, p. 187. Transl. modified.

to the individual. Once externalised, words and commodities turn back to the speaker and the labourer, enclose their body and in this double movement between inside and outside constitute conscious individuals (identity) as unconscious subjects (non-identity). The produced subject is not entirely reducible to the psychological individual. Marx and Freud examined the paradigmatic examples of such transformative actions: the transformation of labouring bodies into measurable labour-force through the act of economic exchange; the transformation of speaking bodies into the subject of the signifier through the act of linguistic exchange. In both cases subjectivation takes place beyond conscious intentions and the tendencies of the speaking and labouring bodies. Finally, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* provides an entire catalogue of the transformations of spirit through a series of discursive actions, from the most basic empirical assertion of certainty via the struggle for recognition between lord and serf to art, religion and speculative science.

The chapter on physiognomy, from which the quote above is taken, contains an entire philosophy of organs, in which Hegel dismisses the Aristotelian perspective, according to which language can be broken down to its pragmatic core, where it appears as an organ of communication and a tool for constructing stable social relations. Instead Hegel develops something that indeed deserves to be called the first thoroughly modern (precisely for being non-Aristotelian) philosophy of language. The organ of speech and the action it sustains are radically de-psychologised: "the speaking mouth, the working hand" are organs without a body, whose action, however, affects the body in a destabilising way, introducing a disequilibrium and fragmentation. As discursive actions, speech and work "carve up" the body, to repeat Lacan's formulation. The non-psychological and non-intentional character of speech and

labour exposes the autonomy and the compulsion of discourse that sustains both actions.¹⁴

In the organs of speech and labour the inner and the outer form a spatial continuum, which is at the same time a historical process that Hegel conceptualises as becoming. Unlike other bodily organs, the speaking mouth and the working hand perform actions, in which the self becomes a being-for-another—they are organs, which bring about non-identity. To speak and to labour means to produce differences: language is an immense collection of signifiers, which are in themselves pure differences to other signifiers; and the market is an immense collection of values, which are in themselves differences to other values. The organs of speech and labour deserve to be privileged because they contain both discontinuity and continuity between the inner and the outer. Hegel's move beyond the pragmatic notion of the organ becomes most evident in the claim that "the speaking mouth and the working hand" contain action *qua* action, meaning that their action aims less at an external goal (production of useful objects, communication of inner needs or description of external and internal reality) than containing a goal in itself. Thereby they suspend the classical teleological framing of action: communication in the case of speech or production of use-values in the case of labour.¹⁵

We can already observe to what extent Hegel's philosophy of organs anticipates the critical scope of Marx and Freud's account

¹⁴ This is not unrelated to the most fundamental discursive gesture of modern science, which grounds its procedures and efficiency on what is de-psychologised language *par excellence*, mathematics, thereby fully actualising the autonomy of the signifier and detaching it from its restrictive communicative and meaningful framework. Mathematics is the most sophisticated isolation, actualisation and exemplification of the autonomy of language—a language, which *makes* no sense.

¹⁵ Of course, action *qua* action is not restricted to the two organs only. In the last instance, the entire body is the terrain of action *qua* action. In this way, the body as such can be considered as an organ, that is, as something that the subject never "is" but rather "has". Lacan made a great deal of the way we speak about and hence relate to our bodies. See, for instance, Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XXIII, The Sinthome*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2016, p. 52, p. 128.

of labour and speech. Action *qua* action stands for a distortion or minimal displacement, which splits the pragmatically directed action from within. Through externalisation, the interior is separated from the individual: it turns into an otherness that stands opposite the individual. The produced object is thought materialised, so that the labourer and the speaker think with their organs, the speaking mouth and the working hand, as well as with the objects and words that these actions produce. There is no thinking substance behind the action of speech and labour. For Hegel, as well as for psychoanalysis and the critique of political economy, thought names a sophisticated relation of simultaneous continuity and discontinuity between the inside and the outside (this is precisely what Hegel calls *Geist*, spirit). Then there is another privileged expression of the discrepancy that is uninterruptedly at work in labour and speech:

Language and labour are expressions [*Äußerungen*] in which the individual no longer keeps and possesses himself within himself, but lets the inner get completely outside of him, disclosing it to the other. For that reason we can equally say that these expressions express the inner too much, as that they do so too little: *too much*, because the inner itself breaks out in them and there remains no antithesis between them and it; they give not merely an *expression* of the inner, but are directly the inner itself; *too little*, because in language and action the inner turns itself into the other, thus disclosing itself to the element of transformation, which twists the spoken word and the accomplished act and makes of them something other than they are in and for themselves, as actions of this particular individual.¹⁶

¹⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 187–188. Transl. modified.

Language and labour reveal the imaginary status of consciousness and individuality, for action *qua* action implies a subject, within the individual, that is heterogeneous to the individual. In their detachment from the individual, or rather, in their “ex-sistence” in the individual, speech and labour demonstrate the existence of thought, intentionality and knowledge *without* consciousness. And to repeat, the point of passage from the interior to the exterior cannot be located: it is everywhere and nowhere in speech and labour. Both processes deindividualise the speaking and the labouring body and can for this reason be considered the privileged modes of subjectivation through alienation. Hegel situates alienation in the equivocality of symbolic expression (*Äußerung*) and spatial externalisation (*Veräußerung*). Structure thus becomes indistinguishable from the spatial order. The continuity between the self and the other, the localisation of thought in the subject and in the object indicates that for Hegel the inner self strictly speaking does not exist, but is rather retroactively constituted in all its imaginary character.

To return at this point to Descartes’ founding gesture: despite all its tendency to stabilise thought and subjectivity, the Cartesian example succeeded in demonstrating that *cogito* is no metaphysical substance, but a specific action, which depends entirely on the signifier: a signifier in action, whose ontological consequences remain ambiguous. *Cogito* is caught in an ontological grey zone between not-yet-being and no-longer-non-being. Descartes’ idealistic decision with respect to these consequences led to the familiar substantialisation of thought and the abolition of “continuous-discontinuity” or “discontinuous-continuity” between the inside and the outside. Their subsequent materialist determination conditioned a threefold decentralisation: of thinking, of language and of history. Hegel, Marx and Freud are Hyper-Cartesians, in the sense that they overcome the normalisation of Descartes’ founding gesture by

radicalising its groundbreaking point of departure and inverting the idealist stabilisation of the *cogito*, which transformed its metonymic being into the metaphor of thinking substance, and thereby regressed into the framework of metaphorical ontology.

To repeat, the actualisation of the inner in the outer through speech and labour contains a structural discrepancy that cannot be overcome. This is what Hegel aims at when he writes that the externalisation (which is one of Hegel's terms for alienation: alienation grasped in spatial terms) expresses simultaneously *too little* and *too much*, without there being any right measure or adequate relation between the expression and the expressed. The externalisation produces a lack that appears located in the subject and a surplus that takes the shape of the external object. Production is thus marked by a parallax structure. From the position of the self the externalisation through speech and labour produces a loss because the translation of the inner in the outer cannot faithfully reproduce the self—since the self does not pre-exist externalisation but is constituted through its reflection in the other. Because the self is constitutively split, this split assumes the form of incompleteness and loss that necessarily accompanies the metamorphosis of the inner into the outer. The metamorphosis introduces a torsion (or a twist: Hegel uses the verb *verkehren*, which also has spatial connotations) into words and actions, highlighting that speech and labour necessarily cause non-identity of the self in the split between the loss (“too little”) and the surplus (“too much”). The in-and-for-itself is contained in the organs of action, which makes it actual for others. Hegel very precisely formulates that in the same action the inner breaks out of itself, it becomes more than it is when considered as retreated in itself. The action of speech and labour only retroactively makes the self and the other appear in opposition and external difference. Such differentiation makes no sense in the organ of speech and labour, where the action *qua* action is precisely the

torsion of the inner in the outer and the alienation of the subject in the Other. Language and labour are continuously marked by productive errors rather than adequate reproductions.

Hegel's discussion of speech and labour then concludes in the following way:

The action, then, as a completed work, has the double and opposite meaning of being either the *inner* individuality and *not* its *expression*, or, qua external, a reality *free* from the inner, a reality which is something wholly other from the inner. On account of this ambiguity, we must look around for the inner as it still is *on the individual himself*, but visible or external. In the organ, however, it is only as the immediate *acting* itself, which attains its externality in the act, which either does, or again does not represent the inner. The organ, regarded in the light of this antithesis, does not therefore provide the expression, which is sought.¹⁷

The completed work is actual opposition, entirely intertwined with the inner, but also entirely detached from it. The focus on the organ reveals more than the product. It shows that every action involves a constitutive inadequacy, so that Hegel implicitly works with a doctrine of truth in terms of inadequation, *non-adaequatio rei et intellectus*. If we conceive truth in relational terms, then this relation is here presented as non-relation, or as Hegel eventually expressed it in direct anti-Aristotelian manner, *contradictio est regula veri, non contradictio falsi*,¹⁸ the principle of truth is contradiction rather than non-contradiction, truth is conflictual and non-relational rather than relational. If

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 188. Transl. modified.

¹⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Theorie Werkausgabe*, vol. 2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1970, p. 533. I draw here from Mladen Dolar, *Heglova Fenomenologija Duha*, Ljubljana: Analecta 2017, pp. 27–28.

we return to the question of action, then it does and does not represent the inner: it represents the inner for another, for instance for another signifier, in the case of language, or for another value, in the case of labour under capitalist conditions. The action *qua* action always entails a concretisation of the autonomous system of differences and is the action of structure. This concretisation, of course, implies some kind of adequacy: who would seriously claim that there is absolutely no communication in language, or that values and words do not designate things? But this relationality is not essential, primary and necessary because the same concretisation implies inadequacy, which, as Hegel underlines, produces an inner loss and an outer surplus. The latter have no equivalent or adequate reference in the order of things, but are instead grounded in the action of alienation.

The organ does not provide the sought expression because of “antithesis”, as Hegel says, thereby aiming at the simultaneity and inseparability of adequacy and inadequacy, representation and misrepresentation of the inner in the outer. To return to the ambiguity of the word *Äußerung*: the organ does not merely express but externalises; it does not merely constitute an imaginary relation but a symbolic non-relation; it does not merely represent a given but produces a displacement, which manifests in the double shift toward “more” and “less”. Language and labour are both actualisations and movements of this non-relation and contradictory tension between expression and externalisation. Expression would be a faithful reproduction of the inner in the outer, while externalisation is an unfaithful production, which introduces into reality more than it contained—even if this “more” eventually assumes the form of a lack.

The question of the subject and of the mode of production that brought it into existence is the privileged battleground of materialism and idealism. This is no less true for contemporary

debates, where the concept of the subject can serve as the main test of the so-called “new materialisms”. In his *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx famously criticised the old and new materialisms of his time for remaining stuck in the idealist framework of philosophical theories of cognition (consciousness, human essence, sensuality, etc.). He detected the lack of pre-critical materialism (and of his own humanism) in the fact that it failed to articulate a truly materialist theory of the subject, which would link alienation with the question of the production and transformation of subjectivity. In order to do so, alienation first needed to be detached from its dramatic humanist context and conceived as the general name for the production of decentralised, de-psychologised and de-substantialised subjectivity. In other words, the subject as constitutively alienated stands for being, which is susceptible to change. For this reason, Marx concluded somewhat hastily that all philosophers, including those of materialist provenience, have merely interpreted the world, insofar as they have conditioned every subjective and social change with the immovable character of being. Political subjects and social orders need to aspire toward the unchangeable highest Good, the realisation of which they have to become in the sensual world. Marx’s seemingly anti-philosophical thesis still contains a legitimate point, even though it can be easily contested with the remark that no philosopher was ever satisfied with the mere interpretation of the world:¹⁹ philosophers have mistakenly identified the subject of politics with the subject of cognition. Marx, on the other hand, embeds his critical thought in a movement, according to which a truly materialist conception of action and change would necessitate an inverse position, a sharp distinction between the subject of cognition, which replaced the premodern metaphysical soul, while

¹⁹ For such critical reading of Marx’s 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, see Mladen Dolar, “The Owl of Minerva from Dusk Till Dawn, or, Two Shades of Grey,” *Filozofija i društvo* 4 (2015), pp. 884–885.

conserving its idealist character, and the subject of alienation, produced by the autonomy of the symbolic order, which acts compulsively within speech and labour. For Marx there is no such thing as a politics of cognition, which is why such interpretation of the world never could bring about any social or subjective change.

CHAPTER V

THE LABOURING COGITO

Freud is not often ranked among the theoreticians of labour, even though his work makes it clear that his theory of the unconscious and his concept of the drive not only depend on the energetic notion of labour but also contain a significant speculative turn in its conception. This conceptual turn is closely related to the link between labour and compulsion that Marx exposed in the capitalist invention of abstract labour. Already in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud applied the energetic notion of *Arbeit* to mental processes by speaking of *Traumarbeit* (dream work). His subsequent works listed other concrete examples of unconscious labour such as *Witzarbeit* (joke work), *Trauerarbeit* (mourning work), *Verdrängungsarbeit* (repression work), itself equal to resistance and, finally, analysis as such is described as *Durcharbeiten* (working-through), a process that notably consists of counteracting resistance and abolishing (Freud uses the Hegelian verb *aufheben*) repression. The labour of analysis is the negative of structural and subjective resistance, which makes of psychoanalysis a praxis evolving around the split of unconscious labour between resistance and becoming. As I will argue on several occasions further below, Freud addressed the split in question in his often misinterpreted formulation of the analytic task in the imperative: *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*.¹

¹ The phrase can be translated as “Where It was, there I shall become”. In this way we can point out the tension between the action of resistance, or resistance as a labour process, which mobilises all mental activities for preserving the established fixation of the drive, and the action of working-through, or the analytic work on libidinal structures, which strives to bring about a change, a transformative becoming. Hence, Freud’s implicit ontological thesis: being, considered in terms of structural stability,

Freud's writings thematise another series of unconscious operations, for which André Green proposed Hegel's term "the labour of the negative".² These processes all involve the consumption of intellectual labour in keeping an underlying conflict or trauma that determines the subject's history and libidinal economy in a state of repression. The prefix *Ver-* indicates the negativity of all mechanisms in question. To stick merely to their enumeration, three such mechanisms differentiate subjective positions and psychopathologies: the neurotic *Verdrängung* (repression), which was the main focus of Freud's theoretical and clinical work, the perverse *Verleugnung* (disavowal), made famous notably by his writing on fetishism, the psychotic *Verwerfung* (foreclosure), which stands at the core of the Schreber and the Wolf-Man case, and last but not least, there is the operation that seems to link each of these together by uncovering their discursive character, *Verneinung* (negation). In addition to this list, there are the two main achievements of unconscious labour discussed in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and other major works that deal with the dependency of the unconscious on language, *Verdichtung* (condensation) and *Verschiebung* (displacement), which distort, censor and cypher rather than reject, disavow or negate problematic elements of subjective and social reality.

What is remarkable in this Freudian catalogue of intellectual operations that together provide an approximate enumeration of the concrete forms of the labour of the negative is that some of them, notably *Verleugnung* and *Verneinung*, do not hide their dependency on language, while others, such as *Verschiebung* or *Verdrängung*, display the spatial aspect of these operations. Hence the two epistemological references of linguistics and

is a result of resistance, and insofar it always contains a tension, which prevents it from "fully being".

² André Green, *Le travail du négatif*, Paris: Minuit 1993. See also Mladen Dolar, "Hegel and Freud," <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/34/68360/hegel-and-freud/> (accessed 3/5/18).

topology—two complementary takes on structural dynamic and instability in general—that Lacan considered indispensable for the correct understanding of the Freudian unconscious. Additionally, in each of these cases we are dealing with intellectual operations that are significantly marked by failure. They fundamentally miss their goal, the neutralisation or removal of a problematic or traumatic element of reality. Negation is accompanied by affirmation or can potentially be interpreted as such (think of the patient's famous exclamation "I don't know who the person in the dream is, but it is not my mother", where the negation only raises the analysts' suspicion that the recounted dream must have something to do with the analysand's mother). Disavowal, on the other hand, always comes in combination with acknowledgement (recall Freud's discussion of fetishism, which at once privileges an object or bodily part only in order to disavow the absence of a penis on the female body, an absence that the fetishist subject "interprets" as castration, but this same fetish object then serves as a reminder or "memorial of castration").³ Repression is inseparable from the return of the repressed, which is expressed most clearly in the symptom, itself a compromise formation that signals both the action of repression and the persistence of the repressed (in other words, the symptom marks the conflictual point, where repression and the return of the repressed takes place). Finally, foreclosure always comes in tandem with the return of the rejected symbolic element in external reality in the form of an auditory or visual hallucination. The labour of the negative thus entails the insistence of the excluded and inevitably

³ For both examples, see Sigmund Freud, "Negation," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19, London: Vintage 2001, p. 235, and "Fetishism," in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 21, p. 154. See also Alenka Zupančič, "Not-Mother," <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/33/68292/not-mother-on-freud-s-verneinung/> (accessed 3/5/18).

perpetuates an underlying conflict that is paradoxically affirmed through its negation or removal from the framework of reality.

The Freudian theory of the unconscious amounts to a general identification of thought and labour, with the addition that the association of labour with negativity makes of thinking an essentially conflictual labour process (as demonstrated in the aforementioned operations, which all involve a psychic conflict). The equation of thought and labour is surely due to the fact that Freud—by speaking of the mental *apparatus* rather than of the psyche—grounded his concepts on energetics and mechanics, from which the notion of labour is adopted.⁴ Beyond this epistemological foundation of Freud's take on the relation between thought and labour, as well as beyond the seemingly technicist vocabulary, which replaces the discourse of the psyche with the discourse of the apparatus, the philosophical weight of psychoanalysis gravitates around the thesis that the actual insight into both processes can be obtained only under the condition that we move beyond the question, who thinks or works. In this respect Freud's de-psychologisation of thinking pursues the same line as Marx, whose critique of economic discourse departs from the de-psychologisation of labour. By speaking of abstract labour and labour-power Marx demonstrates that the question, who works, blurs or mystifies the negativity at work in every act of extraction of surplus value, whether in the sphere of production or beyond. What matters is a thorough logical examination of the way the capitalist invention of abstract labour ended up transforming political subjectivity.

The main critical gesture of Marx and Freud thus resides in the move from “who” to “where”, from the thinking and

⁴ For a systematic epistemological account of the natural-scientific foundations of the Freudian theory, see notably Paul-Laurent Assoun, *L'épistémologie freudienne*, Paris: Payot 1981.

labouring “substance” to the place of thought and labour. At the centre of this critical endeavour is once again the de-substantialisation of thought, a related yet more radical attempt at the Cartesian reduction of all thought procedures to the apparently empty “I think”, withdrawn from the noise of the world. The Cartesian move, radical as it may seem, nevertheless failed to remove one crucial quality of thought, which was in turn destabilised by scepticism—consciousness, of which Descartes made the anchoring point of the subject’s certitude. In a crucial passage, Lacan evaluated the critical scope of scepticism in the following manner:

Scepticism does not mean the successive doubting, item by item, of all opinions or of all the pathways that accede to knowledge. It is holding the subjective position that *one can know nothing*. There is something here that deserves to be illustrated by the range, the substance, of those who have been its historical embodiments. I would show you that Montaigne is truly the one who has centred not around scepticism but around the living moment of the *aphanisis* of the subject. And it is in this that he is fruitful, that he is an eternal guide, who goes beyond whatever may be represented of the moment to be defined as a historical turning-point. But this is not scepticism. Scepticism is something that we no longer know. Scepticism is an ethic. Scepticism is a mode of sustaining man in life, which implies a position so difficult, so heroic, that we can no longer even imagine it—precisely perhaps because of this passage found by Descartes, which led the search for the path of certainty to this very point of the *vel* of alienation, to which there is only one exit—the way of desire.⁵

⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1998, pp. 222–223.

That Descartes' method merely imitates scepticism is confirmed from the viewpoint of the results provided by the provisory morality and the meditation on *cogito*. Cartesian doubt is undoubtedly anchored in *aphanisis*, in which we can observe the emergence of a subject, whose being is reduced to fading, neither present nor absent, caught in the grey zone of existence and inexistence, a subject, who is no longer *Nicht-Sein* (non-being) and not yet *Dasein* (existence, being-there) but rather is a *Fort-und-Da-Sein* (being-there-and-away, in reference to Freud's example of his grandchild's *fort-da* game). The subject's being contains a perpetual dynamic, which takes the form of exchanging appearance and disappearance. However, Descartes' road to science, paved by his desire for epistemic certainty and ontological stability, seems to sacrifice the crucial aspect of scepticism and thereby of the *aphanisis* of thinking and being—not simply the refusal of all knowledge and the regression into some textbook example of sophistic relativism, but rather the insistence on non-relation and the incompatibility of truth and knowledge: the impossibility of overcoming the conflictuality of truth by reducing it to accumulated knowledge endowed with certainty, where truth appears in the guise of facticity and relationality. Moreover, if there is something “heroic” in the position of scepticism, it concerns its persistence in the situation, in which the subject of thought assumes the impossible position that Lacan describes as “separation”. The latter stands for a radicalised form of alienation, which reveals the inexistence of the Other (for instance, the inexistence of Descartes' benevolent and truth-loving God) and exposes the groundlessness of the subject's thinking and being. The sceptic recognises in the subject's fading (instability, incompleteness, uncertainty) a constitutive feature of subjectivity, which at the same time exposes the incompleteness of the Other. For this precise reason Lacan correlated the barred subject with the barred Other.

In this respect, radical scepticism points in a direction that seems to lead away from Descartes. In the sceptic's separation from every fantasmatic ground projected in the Other, the fading of the subject intensifies to the extent that it becomes the sign of inexistence, negativity and incompleteness of *the Other*. The sceptic's cogito would thus infer: "I doubt therefore I fade", and moreover, "I doubt therefore the Other does not exist",⁶ thereby exposing the continuum between alienation of the subject and alienation of the Other. In Descartes, on the contrary, the fading of the subject is seemingly overcome by an attempt to demonstrate the nexus of the ontological existence of the subject and the epistemological certitude of knowledge, which are in turn taken as signs of the Other's existence. Or the other way around, Descartes' foundation of the subject on certainty, the certainty of knowledge and the stable relation between knowledge and truth are possible only under the assumption of a benevolent Other, a truth-loving God, who does not play tricks on us. It is no coincidence that Lacan described this Cartesian God with the term "the subject supposed to know", the subject of knowledge desired by the alienated subject of doubt, concretely by Descartes himself. In Descartes' philosophical meditations knowledge is delegated to the positive figure of the Other, and is above all knowledge of existence, while for a consequent sceptic knowledge is decentralised and cannot be delegated in any way, whether to the subject or the Other, and is above all knowledge of inexistence. Scepticism thus does not simply undermine science, but instead points toward a negative science or even a science of negativity. To borrow Althusser's formula, scepticism is the royal road toward

⁶ But this inexistence of the Other does not deprive it of its material consequences: "What has a body and does not exist? Answer—the big Other." Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 2006, p. 66. The bodily experience of the unconscious and of enjoyment stands for the materialisation of the Other's inexistence (that is, its incomplete ontological constitution).

a “conflictual science” and in philosophy a path toward critique (as Kant’s confrontation with David Hume’s epistemological scepticism shows). Cartesianism, on the other hand, and in spite of its radical and revolutionary aspects, ended up grounding the “accumulative regime of knowledge”,⁷ science in accordance with the capitalist accumulative regime of value.

Why, then, could Lacan argue in the very same seminar, from which the commentary on scepticism is taken, that Freud was a Cartesian? At which point does psychoanalysis introduce a reorientation of the Cartesian method that leads away from the assumption of an apparently unproblematic relation between knowledge and truth to *aphanisis* as the conflictual truth of the subject that no knowledge can overcome, and in the same gesture to the non-relation between truth and knowledge? Precisely in the dissociation of “I think” and “I am”, in the conception of *cogito* as a form of displacement, slip or lapsus (again: *une-bévue*). Descartes’ philosophical lapsus consisted of the conclusion that thought implies the existence of a thinking substance, from which all traces of negativity have been removed. Starting from thought, one can come not only to being, but even to certain being and from there finally to absolute being. Freud repeats Descartes by inverting him, reconnecting with the living moment of scepticism, on which the Cartesian method is grounded. Here, the *aphanisis* of the subject exposes the dynamic of being, conflictual becoming and the inexistence or ontological incompleteness of the Other. If there is a return to Descartes in psychoanalysis, it can therefore only be a return to the Descartes of radical doubt rather than to Descartes of certitude, to the Descartes who enforces the link between science and scepticism rather than to the Descartes who invents a new God of the philosophers, the subject of knowledge, and

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XII, Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse* (unpublished), 9/6/65. The modern epistemic imperative thus becomes *sapere aude* (dare to know), the flipside of the economic imperative of accumulation.

correlates it to the subject of certitude. Descartes is indeed an ambiguous figure, whose movement of thought initiates a de-substantialisation of thought (abolition of the metaphysical soul) only in order to amount to its re-substantialisation in *res cogitans*, a thinking thing or thinking substance.

Psychoanalysis may not have succeeded in reinventing scepticism, but it did propose a double affirmation of the sceptic anchoring of thought in “the living moment of the *aphanisis* of the subject” and of the Cartesian rupture with the premodern theory of the subject, the metaphysical soul. Freud’s way of proceeding is from “I think” to “I desire”, in Descartes’ case “I desire to be” or “I desire to know”. “*Desidero* is the Freudian *cogito*”.⁸ Another possible psychoanalytic formulation of the *cogito* would thus be: “I desire, therefore I fade”, thus proposing an inversion of Descartes’ ontological thesis. *Desidero* exposes “the metonymy of [the subject’s] being”,⁹ rather than its fixity and stability. The subject of desire cannot but remain caught in the movement of presence and absence, lack and surplus. This is also the critical point of Freud’s imperative *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*. The subject never really “is”: it remains torn between a “being” that *was*, and a “being” that *will be*, between “no-longer-being” and “not-yet-being”. The Freudian subject, the subject of the unconscious, is a process of becoming, from which the restlessness of the negative is impossible to eliminate. Once it is deduced as a subject of certitude, the Cartesian *cogito* is anchored in an apparently ahistorical present, while the Freudian *desidero* remains split between past and future, which come together in a conflicted labour in the present. The centrality of labour in Freud’s theory of the unconscious leaves no doubt that the unconscious *cogito* is internally redoubled on *desidero* and *laboro*. The problematic of labour enters the picture

⁸ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 154

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1992, p. 321.

in its double guise, as the ongoing labour of the unconscious, which sustains the established psychopathological complex (*Wo Es war*), and as the labour of analysis, which strives to bring about a future change in the analysand precisely by working on his or her history and the stretching of its consequences into the present (*soll Ich werden*). Changing the past is the main condition for inventing a future.

Thought and labour appear as conflictual processes containing opposing tendencies. This is why Freud began his theoretical and clinical work with the notion of psychic conflict, but then quickly realised that economisation plays an important role in the mental apparatus, in the sense that it both sustains and resists the conflict in question, in other words, that it draws satisfaction from the conflict—under the condition that this conflict remains in the state of repression (“mystified”, as Marx would say). The content of thought is condensed and displaced, reworked and thrown into circulation, the products of this perpetual labour are then consumed in order to produce pleasure: “Our mental activities pursue either a useful aim or an immediate pleasure gain.”¹⁰ As soon as the mental apparatus reveals behind or underneath its useful aims the perpetual machinery of libidinal economy, the connection between thought, labour and pleasure, all mental activities can be examined from the perspective of the demand of enjoyment. From the viewpoint of this intellectual production, thought then no longer appears only as labour but also as enjoyment: “Thought is *jouissance*.”¹¹

A brief reference to the acuity of Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* might be in order here. The longest section of this groundbreaking work contains a precise dissection of unconscious labour, which shows that behind the appearance of dreams as preservers of sleep there is an entire organisation of

¹⁰ Freud, “Some Additional Notes on Dream-Interpretation as a Whole,” in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, p. 127.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XX, Encore*, New York: Norton 1999, p. 70.

thinking around the demand for satisfaction coming from the repressed unconscious desire, for which Freud argues that it can be broken down to the demand for pleasure. As soon as the analytic gaze examines this “other scene” of mental production, it becomes clear that the actual disturbance of sleep comes from inside rather than from outside, in the form of an insatiable demand for pleasurable satisfaction. In a famous analogy,¹² Freud links the repressed unconscious desire with the role of the capitalist in the social organisation of production. It is this desire that provides the “drive-force” (*Triebkraft*) for the production of dreams, these mental commodities, and that can afford the “outlay” (*Aufwand*)—but an outlay that consists of what? In any case the production of an unconscious formation is initiated by an economic investment, which manifests as disturbance of sleep, and Freud’s subsequent work will consist in determining the mental currency invested in unconscious production. The answer, which Freud eventually arrived at, is that this currency is nothing other than pleasure (libido), into which all mental activities are ultimately translatable. At the same time the mental currency does not point to some dealienated subject of enjoyment but, on the contrary, belongs to the headless unconscious “capitalist”. Freud provided two different yet interrelated names for this figure: desire and drive. Nevertheless, a damaged subjectivity is implied in the logic of perpetual libidinal investment and the compulsive production of pleasure for the sake of pleasure: “One is bound to employ the currency that is in use in the country one is exploring—in our case a neurotic currency.”¹³ Here, Freud leaves no doubt that there is no happy reunion between the subject and enjoyment. And, more

¹² See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 5, pp. 560–561. I have extensively commented on the corresponding quote in Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*, London: Verso 2015, Chapter II.

¹³ Freud, “Formulations on the Two Principals of Mental Functioning,” in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 12, p. 225.

precisely, that the subject of enjoyment, that is, a subject that would enjoy beyond alienation, does not exist: the inverse of the production of surplus enjoyment is production of neurotic subjectivity. Or, differently put, even though labour and enjoyment are two aspects of one and the same thought process, the instance of enjoyment is not identical with the instance of labour.¹⁴

At the core of these issues stands the ambiguous status of the libido that Freud situates in the following way: "We have defined the concept of libido as a quantitatively variable force which could serve as a measure of processes and transformations occurring in the field of sexual excitation."¹⁵ Libido is the psychoanalytic epistemic object, constructed on the model of physics, where energy stands for a numeric constant allowing the quantification of natural processes. The concept of the libido is Freud's attempt at rationalising the dynamic of mental processes and transformations in sexuality: the measure of pleasure. But unlike the Aristotelian right measure or Smithian private interest, the Freudian attempt at determining the measure of pleasure must account for the impossibility of mental equilibrium.

Just like physics needed to "fabricate" energy as an epistemic object, or as a "numerical constant",¹⁶ in order to accomplish

¹⁴ Unconscious labour presupposes libidinal investment, which keeps production running, and moreover is converted libido: pleasure that manifests as unpleasure or lack of pleasure. The unconscious tendency can be pinned down to a demand for pleasure, which is at the same time a demand for labour. But as Lacan insisted, libidinal investment, which triggers unconscious production, needs to be understood in terms of the "renunciation of enjoyment". Enjoyment is renounced in order to obtain more enjoyment, whereby this libidinal investment is perpetually driven by dissatisfaction, lack of enjoyment. Because the unconscious tendency never gets enough enjoyment, it constantly repeats the act of libidinal investment. "I can't get no satisfaction" would indeed be an accurate prosopopoeia of desire, whereas the drive would correspond more to "I can't get enough satisfaction".

¹⁵ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, p. 217.

¹⁶ "[E]nergy is not a substance, which, for example, improves or goes sour with age; it's a numerical constant that a physicist has to find in his calculations, so as to be able to work." Jacques Lacan, *Television*, New York: Norton 1990, p. 18.

its theoretical work and allow for the mobilisation of natural forces, Freud “fabricated” libido in order to be able to grasp the logic and the mechanisms of unconscious production, to intervene in this mental structure by means of the analytic conceptual apparatus and mobilise its forces for the aims of the cure. What matters is the move from quality to quantity, through which the different steps or stages of libidinal economy can be isolated. The first step in this economic order consists in libidinal investment, which is equivalent to the intensification of bodily excitation and is experienced as dissatisfaction and the compulsive demand for pleasure—a release of accumulated libido (excitation) in the mental apparatus; in the case of sleep this increased bodily affection manifests as its disturbance. In the second step, unconscious labour responds to the demand for satisfaction and initiates a process, which will amount to the production of a dream. This intellectual activity produces the object of satisfaction, which is precisely pleasure, but the observation of the entire mechanism shows that, quantitatively speaking, the third step consists in an increase of pleasure and thus in an increase of tension. The three steps can be transcribed in the following circulation: renunciation of pleasure (libidinal investment)—unconscious labour—increase of pleasure: $P - L - P'$. If we take Freud’s comparison of unconscious desire in libidinal economy with the role of the capitalist in social economy seriously, we notice that the described circulation is equivalent to the circulation $M - C - M'$, to which Marx broke down capitalist production at the beginning of the first volume of *Capital*, and where the three letters stand for financial investment (M – money), production of commodities, which equals to the consumption of labour-power (C – commodity) and extraction of surplus-value (M' – increase in money, profit).

If there is indeed a critical perspective to psychoanalysis, then the Freudian equation of thought with labour, his

conception of thinking as a labour process and Lacan's conception of discourse as a mode of production stand at its core. This led Lacan to Marx's critique of capitalism. Marx drew attention to the fact that capitalism contains a structural tendency to "reduce all life to an element of value",¹⁷ an attempt at the total quantification and valorisation of the existing, which is reflected in the implicit capitalist equation of life-force with labour-force. Marx identified in the proletariat a symptomatic voice of protest against the capitalist tendency to the total quantification of subjective existence. This tendency is eventually reflected in the obscene idea that the subjects owe their existence to the system because, as quantifiable subjectivities, they have always-already been bought:

The capitalist has bought the labour-power at its daily value. The use-value of the labour-power belongs to him throughout one working day. He has thus acquired the right to make the worker work for him during one day ... The time during which the worker works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has bought from him. If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist.¹⁸

By purchasing labour-power, that is, by reducing the subject to an object, the capitalist has obtained the exclusive right over the labourer's life. The apparently free and equal economic exchange is grounded on a radical inequality between those who possess the means of production and therefore assume the structural position of power, and those whose entire existence is reduced to the possession of labour-power and who therefore assume the structural position of impotence or weakness.

¹⁷ As Lacan put it in his path-breaking analysis of Pascal's wager. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XVI, D'un Autre à l'autre*, Paris: Seuil 2006, p. 18.

¹⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, London: Penguin 1990, pp. 341–342.

Behind the appearance of free exchange between equal subjects there is the actual economic act of the dispossession of life. In economic exchange the subject's life becomes the capitalist's private property. Because "the capitalist has his own views of this point of no return, the necessary limit of the working day"¹⁹ and, one could say, of the working life, the subject is indebted to the system through the very fact of being alive—this would be the more or less explicit position of the capitalist system toward its subjects. A protest against this systemic obscenity can be encountered only when the labouring subjects are pushed to the verge of exhaustion.

In Freud the same resistance can be attributed to neurotic subjects, for which one could say that they are tired of thinking, insofar as thinking stands for a compulsive process of unconscious work, an uninterrupted production of pleasure for the sake of pleasure. In a way, neurotic protest revolves around the fact that the neurotic thinks too much. He or she experiences thinking as compulsion and is consumed by enjoyment, which is continuously imposed in the form of libidinal investments. The neurotic is tired of being subjected to perpetual mental work. While the proletarian seeks liberation from the injunction to work, the neurotic demands liberation from the injunction to enjoy. These are the two sides of the capitalist categorical imperative. In both cases the subject is caught up in a mode of production and a mode of enjoyment, whose tendency cannot be satisfied otherwise than through the endless compulsive repetition of the act of satisfaction. In these circumstances the subject is inevitably condemned to a life of labour. It should thus come as no surprise that for Marxism and Freudianism labour remains the central category, from which the intricacies of the social and libidinal economy can be examined in a critical light. Labour and enjoyment coincide in damaged subjectivity

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 342.

rather than in some kind of “automatic subject” (this fetishist fantasy of what Marx called “vulgar economics”). This implies that there is no happy reunion between the subject indebted to the system and the surplus-object that the system extracts from all subjective activities, whether bodily or mental.

Before pursuing the implications of the Freudian contribution to the problematic of labour it may be worth turning to those contemporary positions in political philosophy and critical social theory, for which labour is no longer the central or the most crucial category in a critical confrontation with capitalism. We often hear that the conflict between the capitalist and the labourer has been replaced with the more radical non-relation between the creditor and the debtor. Maurizio Lazzarato, who developed this thesis in the most exhaustive manner, proposed the following diagnostic of our present condition:

Neoliberal capitalism has established an asymmetric class struggle that it governs. There is only one class gathered around finance, the power of credit and money as capital. The working class is no longer a class. The number of workers has considerably increased since the 1970's all around the world, but they no longer constitute a political class and will never again constitute one. The workers do have a sociological and economic existence, they form the variable capital of this new capitalist accumulation.²⁰

Despite the pessimistic conclusion, Lazzarato's diagnosis goes straight to the core of a structural problem. He argues that the

²⁰ Maurizio Lazzarato, *Gouverner par la dette*, Paris: Les prairies ordinaires 2012, p. 10 (my translation). Can we really assert with such certainty that workers will never again constitute a political class? But then again, did they ever constitute a thoroughly solidified class in the first place? Even if the class struggle between the creditor and the debtor is asymmetrical this does not imply that the class struggle between capital and labour was ever symmetrical. On the contrary, class struggle always consisted of attempts to fragmentise or sabotage the internationalisation of the workers' movement.

contemporary critique of political economy should recognise in the figure of the indebted man the privileged social symptom, in which the asymmetric character of capitalist social relations is crystallised. With the abolition of the organised workers movement, the old appearance of class struggle between capital and labour has been presumably replaced with a more radical asymmetry, which turned class struggle into a “one-way street”, into the structural and actual violence of political and economic institutions over indebted populations lacking any means of organised resistance. This new appearance of class struggle evolves around the *bond* between the creditor and the debtor, which replaced the *contradiction* between capital and labour: “The relation creditor/debtor introduced a strong discontinuity in the history of capitalism. For the first time since capitalism exists it is not the relation capital/labour, which is in the centre of economic, social and political life”.²¹ Today’s social personifications of the indebted subject no longer share their social appearance with the figure of proletariat, aside from the fact that they are even more dispersed and lack the organisation than the workers. Moreover, in this new regime the indebted subject no longer confronts concrete embodiments or personifications of capital, but instead has to fight institutions, networks of institutions and legal regulations, national and international financial institutions, multinational corporations and free trade deals. For the indebted subject it becomes increasingly impossible to directly confront the master, who orders the regime of financial capitalism. The creditor is an abstraction, whose personification is the anonymous financial bureaucrat and its institutionalisation in the network of central banks, corporations, and international financial and political organisations. The master is a spectre floating between the

²¹ Lazzarato, *Gouverner par la dette*, p. 11.

multiplicity of anonymous administrators of financial interests and the unattainable network of financial institutions.

In industrial capitalism the capitalist social link was marked by impossibility, which ultimately came down to the contradiction between capital and labour. As Marx reveals, at the core of this impossibility is the problematic and insatiable demand of capital—understood as the drive of self-valorisation—for surplus value. In this framework class struggle signals that there is no such thing as a social relation. Economists strived to conceive the capitalist social relation by assuming a symmetric *quid pro quo* between equally free individuals. Against this regulative tendency Marx demonstrated that behind the apparent freedom, equality, property and deregulated pursuit of private interests was exploitation, inequality, disappropriation and systemic violence. The social bond between the creditor and the debtor seems to radicalise the asymmetry that Marx revealed in economic exchange. Debt places the subject in the position of impotence, which obtains its main concretisation in the failure to establish an organised political confrontation, a unified political class, which would be able to confront the systemic creditor. Referring to Lacan one could speak about a proper structural displacement in the history of capitalism, by means of which the modern master, capital, stepped forth in its entire impossibility, that is, in its abstraction and instability: “[once] the clouds of impotence have been aired, the master signifier only appears even more unassailable, precisely in its impossibility. Where is it? How can it be named? How can it be located—other than through its murderous effects, of course.”²² To repeat, class struggle here appears as a one-way street, in which the main strategy of the capitalist struggle against every form of alternative political organisation consists in the imposition of universal indebtedness. Being indebted, the subjects

²² Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p. 178.

owe their existence to the system, but the central problem here is that the subjects are indebted in advance. Debt is structural, and as Lazzarato implicitly shows, debt is also the matter, the discursive stuff, from which the subject is fabricated in financial capitalism. The subject is so to speak born into the state of economic debt that has been and continues to be accumulated by the system. Here, however, the problematic of national debt enters the picture and the historical discontinuity between industrial capitalism and financial capitalism might appear blurrier—and it does so through the problematic status of primitive accumulation, through which Marx traces the genesis of the modern credit system, national debt and the modern state-form (capitalist state *qua* nation-state).

A return to Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation indeed reveals that what today appears as the radical historical discontinuity of the creditor/debtor relation reaches further into the past until it ends up coinciding with the historical foundations of capitalism. The latter consist in the anchoring of the capitalist social link on the demystification of the religious debt-guilt nexus and its progressive transformation in the capitalist debt-profit nexus: "The system of public credit, i.e. of state debts, the origins of which are to be found in Genoa and Venice as early as the Middle Ages, took possession of Europe as a whole during the period of manufacture."²³ With the two-fold emergence of abstract debt and abstract labour we also have the instalment of the abovementioned impotence and impossibility: the system of public credit puts the subject in the position of impotence and the market of labour in the position of impossibility. Credit and labour appear as two different yet interrelated ways of articulating the imperative of the production of surplus value and organising social production *qua* production for the sake of production. The whole point of this

²³ Marx, *Capital*, p. 919.

specifically capitalist production is that it does not crystallise only on the level of financial economies, where there is evidently no production of use-values but merely a useless and self-sufficient generation of value out of value. Production for the sake of production is already at stake in the production of commodities. What matters in this production is its speculative kernel: overproduction. One could equally say that capitalism knows no other production than overproduction, in which the production of use-values is subordinated to the imperative of producing value, this useless production *par excellence*. Observed from the viewpoint of overproduction and the inversion of the relation between use-value and value, capitalism essentially amounts to the production of the abject: not only in the form of the commodity but also the financial abject that Marx abbreviates in the formula $M - M'$, the apparently automatic increase of value. The production in question reflects further the multiplication of what Marx calls the industrial reserve army and surplus-population. In the capitalist mode of production, populations are considered redundant, in the last instance equivalent to the abject. At the same time they are necessary because in relation to financial speculation they assume the structural and the actual role of the debtor, and in relation to social production the role of exploitable material from which value is extracted.

The possession of states through abstract debt and the possession of bodies through abstract labour are two sides of the same historical and logical process—and Marx openly underlines its compulsive character. At the end of the entire process the credit system was institutionalised in the state-form, thus constituting capitalist subjectivity in its twofold existence, as member of an indebted modern nation and as social personification of abstract labour:

The state debt, i.e. the externalisation [*Veräußerung*] of the state ... marked the capitalist era with its stamp. The only part of the so-called national wealth that actually enters into the total possession of modern nations is their state debt. Hence, quite consistently with this, the modern doctrine that a nation becomes the richer the deeper it is indebted. Public credit becomes the credo of capital. And with the emergence of state indebteding, lack of faith in the national debt takes the place of the sin against the Holy Ghost, for which there is no forgiveness.²⁴

At this point Marx's narration of primitive accumulation reaches a significant turning point. He speaks of *Veräußerung*, externalisation of the state, thereby introducing one of Hegel's key terms for describing alienation in spatial terms. The process of primitive accumulation thus stands for the invention of the specifically capitalist form of alienation. To recall, Marx's attempt at the historical reconstruction of the prehistory of capitalism departed from the concrete forms of violence, which accompanied the forced dispossession and urbanisation of the English peasantry and which exemplifies alienation in action. He then moved on to the abstract structural, logical violence, the inverse of raw corporeal violence, which drives the birth of capitalism and is associated with the social implementation of public credit—the invention of national debt that Marx equates with the externalisation of the state.

In order to address a central problem in the capitalist organisation of social production *qua* overproduction and *qua* systemic indebteding, Marx resorts to a metaphor, which in no way hides its libidinal resonance: "The public debt becomes one of the most powerful levers of primitive accumulation. As with the stroke of an enchanter's wand, it endows unproductive

²⁴ Ibid. Transl. modified.

money with the power of creation [*Zeugungskraft*] and thus transforms it into capital, without forcing it to expose itself to the troubles and risks inseparable from its employment in industry or even in usury.”²⁵ In capitalism unproductive money obtains its *Zeugungskraft*, force of (pro)creation. The capitalist economy as a whole seems to entail the liberation of the creative potentials of economic fictions, albeit for useless purposes and on the background of a proliferation of exploitation, from general indebteding, colonialism, war, crisis and, finally, labour. The sexual meaning of *Zeugung* appears on several other occasions in *Capital*, for instance when Marx speaks of money-breeding money or money bearing its own children. As Aristotle already knew, the whole point of this semblance of procreation is that it contains its goal in itself and that it is ultimately a form of compulsion. Marx literally speaks here about the pleasure of money, which was already at stake in the hoarder’s accumulation of treasure. But in contrast to the hoarder, who makes the treasure grow by means of taking money out of circulation and thus actually imprisons rather than liberates its force of (pro)creation, the capitalist succeeded in transforming the pleasure of money into financial enjoyment through credit. In opposition to the political-economic fable of the birth of capitalism out of abstinence, which is supposed to explain the accumulation of value and the transformation of money into capital with saving (a superficial form of renunciation of enjoyment), Marx’s rationalisation of so-called primitive accumulation argues that at the root of capitalism there is exploitation in the form of excessive indebteding (the actual meaning of the renunciation of enjoyment), which intersects with the exploitation of labour.²⁶ Systemic indebteding is the ultimate sign

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ As Lacan reminded his audience: “The wealthy have property. They buy, they buy everything, in short—well, they buy a lot. But I would like you to meditate on this fact, which is that they do not pay for it.” Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p. 82. The

that there is no such thing as an “automatic subject”, the increase of value without exploitation. Behind the appearance of the automatic growth of value—which, to put it bluntly, would be equal to something like “masturbatory procreation” or “procreation through masturbation”—there is the perpetual production of indebted subjects through the “externalisation of the state”. The process of externalisation is always-already a process of internalisation: debt is incorporated into the subject, by means of which the latter is embedded in a compulsive process of labour for the system. Once it forms the tissue of capitalist social relations and the discursive matter, out of which the subject of capitalism is fabricated, once it enters the “total possession of modern nations”, as Marx writes, the national debt transforms the risks of the capitalist system into dangers for its subjects.²⁷

The insight of Marx’s critical appropriation of the political-economic tale of primitive accumulation is thus that the capitalist and the labourer are always-already internally doubled on the creditor and the debtor. The capitalist *is* the creditor and the proletariat *is* the indebted subject, or rather, the creditor/debtor relation *is* the flipside of the capital/labour relation. Marx demonstrates that in capitalism one becomes a political subject only under the condition of disappropriation, the invention and imposition of abstract debt and of abstract labour being its two faces. A minimal difference between the debtor and the proletarian nevertheless seems to exist, and it corresponds to the difference between impotence and impossibility: the indebted subject is a proletarian disappropriated of

rich make others pay for their indebteding by buying their labour force. Precisely for this reason Marx insists that the wealthy cannot be considered economic subjects but merely social personifications of capital and administrators of the structural interests and tendencies of the capitalist system as a whole.

²⁷ “Sovereign is he who can transform his own risks into others’ dangers, positioning himself as a creditor of last resort.” Joseph Vogl, *The Ascendancy of Finance*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2017, p. 165. One could hardly find a better definition of the capitalist master.

its very impossible position in the overall organisation of production. In other words the indebted subject also entails the proletariat's symptomatic position within the system, but this position is radicalised insofar as the organisation of subjectivity around a common political process of working on and against the resistance of the capitalist economic system begins to appear unattainable.

According to Lacan the task of psychoanalysis is to elevate the subject from impotence back to impossibility. This is also the task of political organisation. And just like psychoanalysis, the process of political organisation, which takes the critique of political economy as its point of departure and orientation in thinking, stands for a specific labour-process, the intellectual labour that Freud associated with psychoanalysis and named *Durcharbeiten*, working-through.

PART 3
THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF LABOUR
AND RESISTANCE

CHAPTER VI

PSYCHOANALYSIS AS WORKING THROUGH WORK

The psychoanalytic examination of the link between labour and enjoyment introduced a new perspective on the centrality, not simply of labour, but rather of the link between alienation, exploitation and social non-relation in Marx's critique. At the core of the psychoanalytic "intrusion into the political" lies the homology of libidinal and social economy, which traces the impact of social structures on the subject's "affective life" and exposes the continuum of power-relations and libidinal bonds. Enjoyment here turns out to be anything but subversive or transgressive, and notably in capitalism it becomes an essential form of labour for the system. In Marx the analysis of labour already allowed critical thought to examine the wide-reaching consequences of the link between alienation and exploitation, whereby the crucial aspect of this examination consisted in exposing the autonomy of symbolic abstractions, which organise social production: commodity, value and capital determine thoughts and actions beyond consciousness, intentionality and "private" interest; they order all life around compulsive symbolic machinery. Moreover, abstract labour in Marx and unconscious labour in Freud point toward the persistence of an insatiable force in the subjective and social framework, the demand for surplus enjoyment in Freud and the demand for surplus value in Marx. In order to describe this tendency, they both recur to the notion of the drive, which no longer stands for some presumable natural force, but rather for the force of the symbolic order. The drive is thus neither a remainder of nature in culture nor a transhistoric cultural invariable, but depends entirely on its vicissitudes or destinies (*Tribschicksale*, as Freud

puts it) as well as on its object fixations. According to Freud, and even more so Lacan, every social mode of production must also be analysed from the viewpoint of the “destiny of enjoyment” that it imposes on its subjects. The apparent anachronism of the psychoanalytic affirmation of labour as an indispensable critical category can be quickly converted in its ongoing actuality, insofar as it exposes the problematic aspect of its abstract and therefore virtually infinite character. This is also the point where psychoanalysis most openly strives to engage in the organisation and mobilisation of unconscious labour for transformative purposes. Freud’s papers on the psychoanalytic technique gravitate around this central issue: How to change a *Tribschicksal*?

In an apparently minor “technical writing” entitled “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through”, Freud very pointedly tackles the inner tension of the analytic process, which is expressed in the confrontation between the aims of the cure and the analysand’s resistance to analysis. He introduces his reflections by recalling the division of labour (*Arbeitsteilung*) in analysis and revisits the birth of psychoanalysis from hypnotism,¹ reminding the reader that the epistemological shift from hypnotic suggestion to analysis (and, in Lacan’s vocabulary, the structural shift from the master’s discourse to the analytic discourse) led to the following result:

Finally, there evolved the consistent technique used today, in which the analyst gives up the attempt to bring a particular moment or problem into focus. He contents himself with

¹ More precisely, from its failures, which concern the incapacity of hypnotism to manage transference and consequently the patient’s resistance to the cure. Of course, the shift from hypnosis to analysis, from the patient’s passive reception of imposed orders to working with the patient’s recollections and resistances necessitated an entire redefinition of the cure itself. For a historical account of the move from hypnosis to analysis, and notably of the role of hysteria in this process, see the classic study by Gerard Wajeman, *Le maître et l’hystérique*, Paris: Navarin/Seuil 1982.

studying whatever is present for the time being on the surface of the patient's mind, and he employs the art of interpretation mainly for the purpose of recognizing the resistances which appear there, and making them conscious to the patient. From this results a new sort of division of labour: the doctor uncovers the resistances which are unknown to the patient; when these have been mastered, the patient often relates the forgotten situations and connections without any difficulty. The aim of these different techniques has, of course, remained the same. Descriptively speaking, it is to fill in gaps in memory; dynamically speaking, it is to overcome resistances due to repression.²

Analysis produces in the analysand a new split, playing out the ongoing unconscious labour, which sustains the established libidinal economy (destiny of the drive, object fixation), against the analytic labour, summarised by the three operations that are remembering, repeating and working-through. One should immediately add here that remembering and repeating are already two conflictual moments of unconscious labour, which can be best exemplified through the symptom. The latter is a compromise formation, responding to the demand of enjoyment and at the same time signalling the deadlock, in which the subject remains caught. With working-through, here specified as work on resistance, the analytic effort consists in mobilising the other two, remembering and repeating. At this point we encounter the first counter-intuitive aspect of Freud's notion of resistance: the latter does not stand for the subject's resistance to the consuming libidinal structure, but rather for the resistance of this structure itself. Resistance is detached from its apparent psychological carrier and begins to overlap with

² Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12, London: Vintage 2001, pp. 147–148. Transl. modified.

unconscious labour, or in Marx's terms, with abstract labour. Resistance stands for the ongoing mobilisation of subjective forces for the reproduction of the structural conditions of production. Working-through, on the other hand, is supposed to bring about a new antagonism in the subject's life: the tension between analytic labour and unconscious labour replaces the old psychic conflict, which forced the person to undergo analysis. Working-through thus stands less for the analysand's gradual processing, reworking and understanding of unknown, unpleasant or traumatic material than for a perpetual effort in overcoming unconscious resistance, which threatens to compromise the unfolding of analysis and mislead it into dead ends. The Freudian technique has entered the realm of the political at this point of tension between resistance and analysis, and hence the contradiction between two modes of repetition: the repetition at stake in the compulsive unconscious labour and the repetition at stake in the no less compulsive imperative of working-through. If the group consists of at least two individuals (rather than a minimum of three), as Freud argued in his *Group Psychology*, then the antagonism traversing the analytic situation is eminently political. This is true insofar as the political is split up into the resistance of social structures, which compulsively pulls every particular subject back into the perpetuation—or at least the “tolerance”—of the given order, and the labour of organisation. The latter strives to orientate thinking and political subjectivity around a repressed, distorted and conflictual truth. This is anything but unrelated to the capitalist relations of production.

Due to the importance of the split of unconscious labour in the analytic process, it should be once again noted that Freud conceived psychoanalysis as a process of subjectivation, rather than a process of normalisation or reintegration. Analytic labour strives for a thorough confrontation with the structural reality that sustains a psychopathological complex. In this respect the individual is radically depsychologised, which is

already implied by the very name “psychoanalysis”—*analysis* of *psyché*, decomposition of the soul. Insofar as its causes are not sought or projected in the individual but in the relation between the subject and the Other, one could equally speak of a depsychologisation of illness. Illness is a consequence of a problematic action of structure in the living body, a materialisation of structural dysfunction and a privileged entry point into structural causality. As Lacan famously remarked, *il n’y a de cause que de ce qui cloche*, the cause is always a cause of something that does not work.³ For this precise reason psychoanalysis pursues significantly different goals from the “work on oneself” or from the imperative “know thyself” that various psychological and therapeutic techniques still adopt as their ultimate goal. The former fails to confront the symptomatic status of individual suffering and instead “privatises” the illness, while the latter assumes that the solution lies in the production of knowledge, that change in the last instance equals cognition and understanding, whereby it overlooks or at least downplays the intricacies of resistance. The compulsive persistence of resistance suggests that something in the subject stubbornly rejects knowledge, categorically refuses to know, indeed, there is a passionate ignorance,⁴ a refusal of knowledge

³ See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1998, p. 22. *Clocher* means to limp. Lacan’s choice of verb makes quite clear that the bodily dimension is crucial here, which involves the material consequences of structural dysfunction in the living body and even the indistinctness of structural action from physical problems. Psychoanalysis thus suggests that dysfunction should be understood as a mode of functioning, rather than its opposition. To link back to the problem of language, Lacan rejects the attempts in reducing language to the communicational model by insisting that language functions precisely by way of parapraxis, displacements of meaning, equivocity, production of enjoyment, etc. The subject of the unconscious is the effect of this structural dysfunction. Hence, the unconscious is structured like *a* language (and not like *Language in abstracto*). Differently put, the existence of the unconscious demonstrates that there is only dysfunctional language and that the ideal *Language* assumed by various philosophical and linguistic schools throughout history does not exist.

⁴ Lacan eventually said that there are only three human passions: love, hate and ignorance.

rather than will to knowledge. No mapping of the subject's history or recollection of repressed traumas guarantees the progress of analysis. Ultimately, illness, too, can function as a particular form of resistance. Freud addressed this "negative therapeutic reaction" by speaking of flight into illness (*Flucht in die Krankheit*) and of profit from illness (*Krankheitsgewinn*). Both terms directly reflect Freud's claim that all mental activities involve production of pleasure (or as Lacan rephrased it, that every discourse is a discourse of enjoyment). It would be way too simple to see in flight into illness an expression of the analysand's irrationalities, abnormalities or acting against their wellbeing. From Freud's perspective flight into illness is instead the ultimate expression of the impersonal, structural character of resistance and the mobilisation of unconscious labour for the reproduction of the existing mode of enjoyment and/or destiny of the drive. Illness remains useful for this reproduction: inhibitions, symptoms and anxieties keep the subject in the position of impotence and function as compromise formations, which despite all appearances to the contrary keep the libidinal economy running. As long as the subjects remain in the position of impotence they are integrated into the system. This integration through illness corresponds to the most common *exploitative* destiny of the drive, which Freud called repression. For this reason, too, Lacan recognised in psychoanalysis a social link, which is the inversion of the libidinal bond determined by the master's discourse—namely the inversion of repression through sublimation. The master's discourse is reproduced in all those psychological and psychotherapeutic techniques aiming at reintegration, normalisation or adaptation of individuals—an endeavour, which is ultimately doomed to fail or which *repeatedly* fails. While the therapeutic strategies preserve the subject in the position of impotence, the psychoanalytic replacement of the psychic conflict with the conflict between the analytic labour and structural resistance elevates the

subject from the position of impotence to the position of impossibility. The whole difference consists in the fact that, while in the position of impotence, the subject remains deprived of the possibility to act, that is, to work on the problematic libidinal structure, which consumes its existence: it remains subjected to compulsive unconscious labour. By contrast, once it assumes the position of impossibility the subject is no longer merely the site of compulsive action, but an agent in an antagonism of labour. Put differently, while impotence designates the vicious circle of labour and enjoyment standing at the core of the subject's illness as a crucial problem, impossibility stands for an attempt to mobilise structural instability, deadlock and contradiction for the process of working-through. This is where Freud's description of analysis as an impossible profession finds its proper meaning: it is impossible because it ultimately cannot ground its efficiency in some accumulated positive knowledge or ready-made technique but instead has to be reinvented from one particular case to another, since every new encounter with resistance radically questions its existence.

If in psychoanalysis knowledge is not an essential element of the cure but rather an almost accidental by-product, which can at best serve analysts in revising their theories or for highlighting the role of social links in the genesis of new psychopathologies, the effects of the cure fall in the analysand's speech itself, as Freud immediately noticed. The cure depends on truth rather than knowledge, and in this respect psychoanalysis is indeed a "truth procedure" (Badiou) rather than a process of cognition. However, the truth in question is evidently not a truth that would be compatible with knowledge, truth in terms of facticity or relation between words and things. As Jacques-Alain Miller pointedly put it:

There is no doubt a truth which is but the opposite of falsehood, but there is another which stands over or grounds both

of them, and which is related to the very fact of formulating, for I can say nothing without positing it as true. And even if I say “I am lying,” I am saying nothing but “it is true that I am lying”—which is why truth is not the opposite of falsehood. Or again we could say that there are two truths: one that is the opposite of falsehood, and another that bears up both the true and the false indifferently.⁵

It is at this level of indifference between true (fact) and false (fiction) that psychoanalysis encounters a conflictual truth, which targets the real core of subjective illness. This truth stands in direct connection with the real of structure that no knowledge can do away with. For the discourse of science and its commercial supplement, the pharmaceutical industry, the malady does not (or perhaps rather, should not) speak. There is no conflictual truth on the level of neuronal processes, only truth compatible with knowledge and therefore reducible to objective facts. Consequently, there is no causal link between cultural mechanisms and subjective suffering. Illness is here thoroughly privatised. By contrast, for Freud the malady speaks, and its speech turns around a structural tension, which consumes the subject, but for which the latter also seeks the symbolic means of transformation. This explains why the revealing of “objective facts” does not automatically produce a therapeutic change in the subject. Because the truth in question is connected to speech, it is also connected to labour—hence Lacan’s formulation “the work of truth” in the excerpt quoted in the introduction to the present volume. Truth labours in both meanings of the word: it is what gives birth to the subject (eventually to the subject of illness, or the subject as illness) and it is what labours in the subject. Psychoanalysis thus implies a

⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller, “Microscopia,” in: Jacques Lacan, *Television*, New York: Norton 1990, p. XX.

doctrine of truth, which could not be more at odds with the one transmitted by the philosophical tradition. To repeat again: for most orientations truth designates a stable and adequate relation between words and things, language and reality or speech and facts. For Freud, truth is related to dysfunction, traumatism and psychic conflict: the conflictual truth of mental and social structures. Obtaining its privileged expression in the symptom, which sustains the appearance of order and codifies the conflict underlying this order as its repressed, truth always relates to non-relation or to something that does not work in what apparently works. It addresses the tensions, the cracks and the contradictions in social and subjective reality, *inadaequatio* rather than *adaequatio rei et intellectus*.

Freud quickly learned that the more analysis circumscribes the psychic conflict the stronger the patient's resistance. For this reason, the entry into psychoanalysis demands from everyone to become a "labourer of truth". At this double point concerning the abstract (non-psychological) and conflictual character of labour, psychoanalysis meets a structural reality that is inseparable from the one revealed by Marx: "No doubt the worker is the sacred place of this conflictual element, which is the truth of the system"; further, "in a strike the collective truth of labour is manifested"; and even more emphatically, "there is one single social symptom—every individual is really a proletarian".⁶ These and numerous other statements, in which Lacan associates the subject of the unconscious with the capitalist labourer, reproduce the Freudian equation of thought and labour. In doing this, Lacan more or less implicitly argues that thought echoes the contradictions and consequences of exploitation that mark social labour. The privileged expression of this perpetual exploitation is what in German is quite

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XVI, D'un Autre à l'autre*, Paris: Seuil 2006, pp. 39–41; Jacques Lacan, "La troisième," *La Cause freudienne* 79 (2011), p. 18.

fittingly called *Verausgabung*. From its various connotations, two are particularly crucial for the points Freud makes when interrogating thought processes and the production of enjoyment: namely expenditure in the economic sense (or what he repeatedly refers to as the “economic factor”, libidinal investments, etc.) and exhaustion in the psychological sense (which reveals what is ultimately consumed in the ongoing unconscious labour is the subject itself). The homology between Marx’s critical and Freud’s clinical work is inevitably reflected in the conflictuality of labour, which becomes visible under the condition that the critical and the clinical focus on its abstract character: “labour theory of value” (according to which exploitation cannot be exempted from the production of surplus value) meets “labour theory of the unconscious” (claiming that the *Verausgabung* of the subject cannot be eliminated from the production of surplus enjoyment). Marx equally speaks of *Verausgabung* as the economic expenditure or consumption of human labour-power whereby, as he indicates, there is a redoubling of labour in the abstract and the concrete. In other words, this is what English differentiates in the words “labour” and “work”. Hence, the double character of labour stands at the core of the double meaning of *Verausgabung*:

On the one hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power, in the physiological sense, and it is in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour that it forms the value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power in a particular form and with a definite aim, and it is in this quality of being concrete useful labour that it produces use-values.⁷

⁷ Marx, *Capital*, p. 137. Engels added to this passage an editorial footnote explaining that the English differentiation between work and labour corresponds with Marx’s distinction between abstract labour, which produces values, and concrete labour, which produces use-values.

What is crucial in this distinction is that Marx already intuitively something that can indeed be described as parasitism of the infinite on the finite.⁸ The link between exploitation (consumption of living bodies to the point of their exhaustion) and expenditure of labour-power is explained through the insight that the labouring subjects are affected by an abstraction, here abstract labour, which is the correlate to another, more fundamental abstraction that Marx later in *Capital* describes as the drive: *Bereicherungstrieb* (drive of enrichment), *Akkumulationstrieb* (drive of accumulation), *Selbstverwertungstrieb* (drive of self-valorisation) and even “the drive for an unlimited extension of the working day”.⁹ The latter confronts the labouring subject with a virtually infinite task. It is from this angle that *Verausgabung*, expenditure, is always-already linked to exploitation, whether libidinal or social, where compulsive economic expenditure manifests itself in the subject’s bodily and mental experience of exhaustion.

Freud famously described the unconscious labourer as neither thinking nor calculating or judging,¹⁰ thereby rejecting in advance any possible reconciliation of the subject of the unconscious with the subject who thinks (*cogito*), calculates (*homo*

⁸ See Jean-Claude Milner, *L'oeuvre claire. Lacan, la science, la philosophie*, Paris: Seuil 1995, p. 67.

⁹ Marx, *Capital*, p. 346. Marx’s formula resonates perfectly with Freud’s claim that the drive comes down to *Arbeitsanforderung*, demand of labour, in Marx’s case the demand of surplus-labour. In addition to Marx’s “labour theory of value” and Freud’s “labour theory of the unconscious” Lacan’s return to Freud through Marx introduced something that could indeed be called a “labour theory of language”, which critically rejected the apparent neutrality of language, its exemption from the socially predominant mode of enjoyment. Lacan’s statement “There is no metalanguage” could be interpreted in the following way: there is no abstract or neutral language, which would not be traversed by the conflicts that mark the social order, or on the other hand, there is no discourse, which would not be a discourse of enjoyment. The same conflictuality that Marx detected between abstract labour and capital’s demand for the production of *Mehrwert*, and Freud between unconscious labour and the drive’s demand for the production of *Lustgewinn*, returns in Lacan’s overall theorisation of the relation between the signifier, the subject and enjoyment.

¹⁰ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 5, p. 507.

oeconomicus) and judges (*homo legalis*). This means also that abstract labour (labour-power) and abstract thought (the subject of the unconscious) do not protest, or rather, they contain no instance, from which a voice of protest could be raised. But such protest nevertheless happens: “The cure is a demand that originates in the voice of the sufferer, of someone who suffers from his body or his thought.”¹¹ At the beginning of the cure there is suffering speech, uttering a demand for analytic labour, which would help the subject overcome the psychic conflict. The first sign of the subject is in the exhaustion (*Verausgabung*) caused by expenditure (*Verausgabung*), the suffering that accompanies the nexus of thought, labour and enjoyment. The subject’s suffering is anchored in the intertwining of virtual infinity (the perpetual process of unconscious labour and the persistent unconscious demand of enjoyment) with the finite (body or thought). Freud exposes in thinking the same parasitism of the infinite on the finite as Marx. This parasitism is best exemplified in the internal loop Freud detected in the demand of pleasure for the sake of pleasure. Because the drive demands no particular object, but rather encounters its exclusive object in pleasure that inevitably accompanies every act of satisfaction, whether of physiological needs (“hunger”) or symbolic demands (“love”), it can be described as the constant demand for infinite satisfaction, satisfaction that is never alleviated.¹²

¹¹ Lacan, *Television*, p. 7.

¹² This is why there is no trace of any “subject of enjoyment” in Freud—no subject, which would stand in an unproblematic or harmonious relation to enjoyment. There is only the subject of unconscious labour, a subject of *Verausgabung* in both meanings of the word. The same point can be extended to the issue of the “automatic subject” in Marx. Even though the term appears in the context of fictitious capital, the “automatic subject” does not exist—it is an objective appearance of capital *qua* drive. The assumption of the existence of the “automatic subject”—which is a *fetishist* assumption—is thus best countered by Marx’s consistent and recurring *critical* description of capital as drive. In both Marx’s and Freud’s scenario the drive stands precisely for a subjectless force.

Hence, there must be a demand for the cure, which marks the breakdown of the subject caught in the tension of the finite (mind, body) and the infinite (desire, drive). But in this scenario psychoanalysis refrains from reducing the sufferer to a figure of the victim. If the contrary would be the case then its interventions would aim at keeping the subject in the position of impotence. As a response to the sufferer's demand for the cure comes the analyst's demand for work, the imperative of working-through. In other words, the demand *for* the cure turns into the demand *of* the cure. Only by transforming the "impotent sufferer" into the "impossible labourer" can the analytic technique intervene in the compulsive libidinal structure, on the background of which the analysand uttered his or her demand for the cure in contradiction to the demand of the drive. Here, psychoanalysis inevitably meets its principal challenge, the reality and efficiency of resistance, and is thereby confronted with a virtually infinite task. The analysand assumes in the analytic process the position of the labouring subject, thereby becoming the site, where the conflict between the demand of the drive backed up by resistance and the demand of the cure backed up by nothing but the psychoanalytic technique unfolds. Behind the appearance of providing the main portion of labour (interpretations, reconstructions, orientations, etc.), the analyst is reduced to the conflictual limit point that can be placed neither entirely inside nor entirely outside the analysand's discourse. The place occupied by the analyst in the overall structure of the psychoanalytic discourse is no transcendental metaposition, from which positive knowledge of the pathogenic complexes, symptoms, unconscious formations, etc. would pour down on the patient's mind or from which the analytic technique would provide sense and meaning to the enigmatic and opaque elements of the subject's history;¹³

¹³ To recall, knowledge is in the last instance a means for (the production of) enjoyment and sense a form of enjoyment (Lacan's *jouir-sens*).

nor is the analyst's position that of absolute immanence, for this would mean that the analysand successfully integrated its "extimate" character into his or her universe, thus neutralising in advance every potential efficiency and disruptive or transformative impact of analytic intervention, interruption or attempt at reorientation. If the analyst assumes a metaposition, s/he becomes indistinguishable from the subject of knowledge, which consequently makes her/him appear in the function of authority. In this way subjectivation tips over into subjection, or in Lacanian terms, the analytic discourse regresses to the university discourse, where the analysand is automatically deprived of the capacity to perform the transformative work on structure and is instead shaped in accordance with "therapeutic knowledge". In other words, the analysand is reduced to the passive figure of the victim and to the position of impotence. If, on the other hand, the analyst's position is entirely assimilated, this signals another failed management of transference and a victory of the analysand's unconscious resistance against analytic labour—or to formulate it again in the vocabulary of Lacan's theory of discourses, the analytic discourse in this case regresses to the hysteric's discourse, from which it historically and structurally emerged.¹⁴ In both scenarios resistance abolishes the productive antagonism between unconscious labour and analytic labour, which sustains the transformative work on structure or the process of working-through.

As mentioned earlier, Freud eventually described psychoanalysis as an impossible profession.¹⁵ This impossibility is intimately linked to the already indicated topological features of

¹⁴ In both regressions a displacement or rotation (quarter turn) of the discursive elements is at work. For the formal aspect, see the schemas of Lacan's four discourses (Appendix I).

¹⁵ The remark most famously appears in Freud's 1937 text "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", as well as in other writings. For an extensive contextualisation of the remark in relation to the analytic interpretation, see Sarah Kofman, *Un métier impossible. Lecture de "Constructions en analyse"*, Paris: Galilée 1983, pp. 9–29.

the analyst's position in the cure, which evidently does not stop when the actual session is over. The aim of psychoanalysis is to initiate a lasting tension between the aims of the cure, which respond to the analysand's demand, and the structural resistance, which consumes the analysand's entire intellectual labour maintaining the libidinal economy of repression intact. Again, it is important that the analytic labour is sharply distinguished from the "work on oneself", not only because the analytic cure involves a radical decomposition of the self, but also because the imperative of "work on oneself" is silently backed by another imperative, namely to abstain from the work on structure, to leave the existing order untouched and to make the subjects solely responsible for their illnesses. The capitalist sanctification of private property is accompanied by the privatisation of "disorders": they are the subject's negative property, which they have to "work away" in order to assume their social duty as valorisable economic subjects. Psychoanalysis fundamentally questioned such univocal delimitation of subjective and social structures, so that every demand for the cure always-already contains a demand for a change in the social structure, whether the analysand is aware of it or not. Instead of "work on oneself" psychoanalysis pursues the imperative to work on the mode of enjoyment imposed by the predominant social mode of production. It should therefore come as no surprise that Lacan counted the search for an exit from the capitalist discourse among the main tasks of psychoanalysis. The aim is to enable for the subject a mode of enjoyment that is not anchored in the capitalist injunction to enjoy and consequently in the subjection of existence to the insatiable demand of pleasure for the sake of pleasure. In the capitalist framework, analysis thus strives to liberate the subject from commodified pleasure or "abstract pleasure" (in accordance with Marx's notion of abstract labour) and in doing so it inevitably strives to detach the subject from the commodity form and from its corresponding parasitism of the

infinite demand for surplus value (this capitalist version of surplus enjoyment) on the finite.¹⁶

Marx connected the virtual infinity at stake in the labour-process with the already mentioned feature of capitalism that he described with the formula “production for the sake of production”, interminable or infinite production. Financial economies are the most abstract actualisation of this production, since they abolish all use-value and focus only on the apparently automatic increase of value. Marx indicates this infinitisation in the abbreviations: M-C-M’ (money – commodity – increase of money) and M-M’ (money – increase of money). This virtual infinity chains every subject in the capitalist universe to the link between useless production and abstract labour. The short-circuit of this infinity would surely target the liberation of labour from the vicious circle, in which its subject is embedded, but this liberation is not possible without a specific transformation of infinity at stake in the process of labour. For this reason the question of political organisation appears to be as interminable, not to say as infinite a process as psychoanalysis was for Freud.¹⁷

Of course, Marx and Freud do not resign themselves in view of this prospect of infinite labour against the virtual infinity of production for the sake of production. Neither considers the infinite and the universal to be “immovable” structures. Rather, the imperative of working-through that conditions the orga-

¹⁶ As Milner put it, in the capitalist universe “there are only commodified pleasures” (Jean-Claude Milner, *Constats*, Paris: Gallimard 2002, p. 120), or in Lacan’s wording, “surplus value is the cause of desire, from which an economy made its principle: that of the extensive and hence insatiable production of the lack-of-enjoyment” (Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits*, Paris: Seuil 2001, p. 435). At the level of libidinal economy, production for the sake of production, this fundamental capitalist invention, reflects the internally doubled production of surplus enjoyment and lack-of-enjoyment. The mutual conditioning of lack and surplus guarantees the efficiency of capitalism and in the last instance makes the subject compulsively “desire” exploitation.

¹⁷ That Freud was well aware of this proximity of psychoanalysis and politics is reflected in the fact that he included governing among the impossible professions. I will return more extensively to this issue in the final chapter.

nisation of labouring subjects, whether in the psychoanalytic school or in the political organisation, implies permanent work on resistance, which threatens to sabotage the production, invention or construction of a non-exploitative social link and emancipatory universalism. We thus arrive at a conflict between two universalities and two open-ended (because non-teleological) labour-processes: on the one hand, the closed universality of the commodity form and the bad virtual infinity of production for the sake of production, which is the existing formal envelope of all thought and labour; and, on the other hand, the non-all, the universality of emancipatory politics constructed among others by the labour of analysis and the labour of critique within and in contradiction to the capitalist order. Psychoanalysis and the critique of political economy share the insight that the transformation of universality and infinity, which forces the labouring subject (the proletarian, the neurotic) into a permanent state of exhaustion, can itself be achieved through the operation of forcing, which will create the conditions of possibility for a structural becoming and for the organisation of thought, labour and enjoyment around the imperative to construct a conflictual mode of political universalism. Marx and Freud both practice a combination of the critical and the clinical, discursive experimentation, which aims to antagonise the order that consumes, exhausts and exploits its subjects, and in which the latter articulate their demand for cure, a demand for experimentation with the limits, contradictions and deadlocks of the existing libidinal and social economic structure. This is where the old question of the relation between theory and practice, or rather, between the critical and the clinical enters the picture. The task of the production of concepts (critique as a form of theoretical labour), which serves as an orientation for thinking, and work on resistance (clinic as a form of practical labour), which aims at restructuring the libidinal-social bond, are two aspects of one and the same

experimental process. If there is a difference between them, it consists in the fact that concepts are destined to transmit the clinical lessons, the solutions, to which analysis has led and the problems and failures it encountered: they are supposed to demonstrate the persistence of a universal problem in particular suffering. In this respect *Interpretation of Dreams* and *Capital* are both compendiums of case studies, which expose the continuum between subjective illness and social illness. The existence of the unconscious thereby demonstrates that the task of political organisation is not to arrive at a condition, in which thought would be finally free of alienation but rather to enable suffering subjects to form a social link, at the centre of which will no longer be the relation between alienation and exploitation. Again, capitalism is not a system, which would simply alienate and corrupt some presumably authentic human nature and intersubjective relation, but rather a system that grounds its efficiency in the exploitation of alienation and invents ever new forms and strategies of exploitation on the background of the split structure of the subject.

One of the crucial aspects of analytic labour is the analysis of resistance, for which Freud reminds us that it does not merely derive from consciousness but is for the most part unconscious and structural. He goes even further by recognising in the mechanism of repression the most crucial expression of resistance to analysis. With the insight that repression and resistance form two inseparable aspects of unconscious labour we thus come across yet another counter-intuitive and speculative moment in Freud: the identification of labour with resistance, on the one hand, and repression with the satisfaction of the repressed drive, on the other. Far from claiming that the drive stands opposite to repression as some pre-existing force, which was subsequently deprived of direct and uncorrupted satisfaction, Freud argues that the drive demands repression as *the* form of satisfaction, just like desire demands endless

codifications, displacements and masquerades. To recall again, for Freud the drive comes down to *Arbeitsanforderung*, the demand for perpetual unconscious labour producing pleasure for the sake of pleasure. Capitalism is the first system in history, which managed to effectively embed this demand of the drive in the social mode of production. Capitalism stands for a reinvention of surplus enjoyment (or pleasure for the sake of pleasure) in the guise of surplus value, or as Lacan puts it: “[S]urplus *jouissance* became calculable, could be counted, totalized. This is where the so-called accumulation of capital begins.”¹⁸

Working-through brings another *Arbeitsanforderung* (demand of labour) into the picture, thus introducing a different kind of split in unconscious labour and in libidinal economy. Should another mode of labour and enjoyment become possible next to useless surplus labour and surplus enjoyment then the subjects must persist in the conflict of labour that Marx’s critical thought and Freud’s analytic method initiated in their lives. The famous Freudian imperative, *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* (Where It was there I shall become) can be read from this perspective: where an unconscious labour process took place indifferently or against the subject’s existence, there the subject should begin to work on resistance in order to trigger a transformative dynamic in libidinal economy. The opposition between “being” and “becoming” in Freud’s imperative addresses precisely this: the reproduction of the given order that *was* hitherto consuming-exhausting the subject must be destabilised by means of analytic labour. The latter orientates the present conflict of labour by means of a futurity, in which the subject will be embedded in a process of becoming without being dependent on the figure and the assistance of the analyst.

¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 2006, p. 177.

It is interesting to observe that Freud formulates his imperative in analogy with cultural labour: “Where It was, there I shall become. It is cultural labour [*Kulturarbeit*], not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee.”¹⁹ One could easily misunderstand analytic labour as a process of appropriation and cultivation of raw instinctual nature, the taming of natural forces and their integration into the cultural framework, the transformation of wild nature into exploitable nature. Such analogy between cultural and analytic labour would risk ontologising the unconscious and making of “It” a quasi-biological phylogenetic inheritance. The Freudian comparison is only partially explanatory, insofar as it draws attention to the fact that analysis implies its own conquest of territory, with the difference that this terrain is not some untamed libidinal substance but unconscious labour, the space of thinking and the social structure itself. Because the subject is always-already embedded in a structure that knows no outside, the conquest can only take place through the generation of an immanent antagonism. To repeat again, if the struggle for labour is the most crucial component of this antagonism, it is because it is always-already a struggle for thought, as well as struggle for enjoyment, which would not be grounded in repression.²⁰ The conquering (mobilisation and organisation) of labour against capitalist strategies of exploitation and the unbearable character of the capitalist mode of enjoyment can only take place if labour becomes conflictual. “Where It was there I shall become” addresses this conflictuality—whereby we can recall that for Lacan the “I” in Freud’s sentence was neither the strong ego of ego-psychology nor the Cartesian *cogito*, who fantasises itself as the master of nature,

¹⁹ Freud, *New Introductory Lessons on Psychoanalysis*, in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 22, p. 80. Transl. modified. Freud aims at the acquisition of land in the Netherlands.

²⁰ The question raised by psychoanalysis is thus, is there such a thing as enjoyment without exploitation (or non-exploitative enjoyment), and consequently, is there the possibility of a social link, which will not draw profit from the alienation of the subject.

but the split subject of the signifier (the social personification of which was for Freud the neurotic) and the split subject of value (the social personification of which was for Marx the proletarian).

Because of resistance to analytic labour and hence to the detachment of labour, enjoyment and thinking from capitalist social conditions, the commodity form and the value form, is constantly at stake in the analytic cure, psychoanalysis addresses the analysand with the imperative of rigorous labour. What Lacan called “the ethics of psychoanalysis” should be read in terms of a “work ethics”, or better, as a politics of labour. “Do not give up on your desire” or “act in conformity with your desire”²¹—the imperative that Lacan proposed in his seminar on ethics—do not aim at just any desire, but precisely at desire for change that sustains the demand for cure. Desire is in this context the driving force of the analysand’s persistence in the process of analytic labour, in working through the layers of resistance to change. In other words, the analysand should work on resistance with the same perseverance as unconscious desire and capitalist libidinal economy resist psychoanalysis. S/he should move from the demand *for* a cure, which brought him or her into analysis, to the demand *of* the cure, thereby becoming the personification of the analytic desire: *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, where there was the resistance of unconscious desire, there my desire for change and my work on resistance shall work toward a non-exploitative libidinal-economic order. There is no becoming without working-through.

As soon as resistance is uncovered the analysand must stick to the basic rule of psychoanalysis all the more firmly. One could argue that psychoanalysis consists not of one but rather two fundamental principles: the first is free association, the

²¹ See the closing lecture entitled “The paradoxes of ethics, or Have you acted in conformity with your desire?” in: Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1992, pp. 311–325.

imperative to suspend selective criticism or censorship, to report every association that comes to mind during the analytic session. Freud never explicitly formulated the second fundamental principle. Nevertheless, he repeatedly thematised the all-encompassing dimension of resistance. Hence the implicit second principle that conditions the success of psychoanalysis concerns precisely the imperative of working-through, the uninterrupted labour on resistance.

Remembering, repeating and working-through, the three operations composing analytic work, stand in close proximity to the three achievements in the critical orientation to thinking, the labour of critique, which is yet another crucial form of cultural labour. Despite being born in a medical context, which seems foreign to the epistemological and social critique as practiced by thinkers such as Kant and Marx, the Freudian method did not take long to demonstrate its inscription in the framework of the critical tradition. For Freud, this tradition was surely inseparable from the Enlightenment, the promotion of scientific progress and reason in overcoming the “illusions”, which sustain existing social relations and, as such, exercise cultural resistance to psychoanalysis. Lacan, on the other hand, never cultivated much hope or held any illusions or idealisations with respect to the Enlightenment. By contrast, he progressively pushed Freud’s critical and clinical perspectives in the dialectical and materialist direction, concretely toward the radicality of Hegel’s philosophy and Marx’s critique of political economy.

Since Marx, the main preoccupation of critique has consisted of the following aims: first, uncovering the misperceptions and false understandings of structural contradictions that traverse all registers of human reality; second, isolating these contradictions by contextualising them in the broader network of relations that sustain the functioning of reality, thereby taking hold of their actual causes and consequences; and third,

elaborating a systematic strategy for overcoming power-relations and techniques of exploitation, which draw from the more or less successfully concealed, mystified or distorted breaks in the given order. Like psychoanalysis, critical thought has to confront organised resistance in the social and subjective framework. When it comes to psychoanalysis, its critical and clinical steps concern first the reconstruction of psychic conflict that sustains the patient's illness; then repeating the conflict within the analytic situation, whereby this repetition reveals the chain of unconscious associations that surround the conflictual kernel of the subject establishing continuity between the subject's history and the broader cultural causes that participated in the genesis of illness; and finally providing an orientation to the subject in analysis, which will enable it to break the anchoring of its existence in the given suspension between the external demands of reality and the subjective demand for the cure. The task of critique is thus *Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten*, remembering, repeating and working-through.

The psychoanalytic subversion of existing structural relations that condition the psychopathological complex takes place in an intermediate zone, where the treatment of the subject is inseparable and indistinguishable from the transformation of reality. This is why psychoanalysis eventually takes years and does not follow the imperative of the economisation of time nor of the reintegration of individuals into the existing social order. In addition, the end of analysis does not mean that the analytic aims were achieved: the subject is supposed to continue the process of working-through beyond the analyst's support.²² Analytic labour, of which, as aforementioned, the labour

²² This could be one possible reading of Lacan's well-known claim that every analysis is a training analysis, which means as much as: every analysis involves the transformation of the desire *for* the analyst (the analysand's transference toward the analyst) into the desire *of* the analysis (the analyst "transference" toward the psychoanalytic cause). What unites both positions, the analyst and the analysand, is the imperative of working-through, to which the latter is no less subjected than the former.

on resistance is an essential component, is not meant to stitch up appearances, which would merely repress or displace the problem, while leaving the suffering subject as helpless as before. The scandal of Freudian psychoanalysis has consisted in the fact that it was the first clinical practice, which systematically refused to sustain predominant appearances such as normative subjectivity and normalised sexuality.²³ At the same time it deconstructed the distinction between the subjective and the social, thus introducing a socioeconomic aetiology of mental illnesses, which deprived social mechanisms, structures and institutions of their presumable innocence and non-involvement in the genesis of individual psychopathologies. Freud's idea of the dissatisfaction with culture enunciates precisely this: individual psychopathologies reflect the psychopathological character of social structures; society is thus responsible for the damage caused in the individual's mental life. Freud also recognised three features in capitalism or the privileged agencies, which make of traumatic neurosis a social symptom rather than a private matter: exploitation, war and economic crisis. Given its radical critique of culture it should come as no surprise that psychoanalysis met such intense cultural resistance, which never ceased to threaten its existence.

²³ The mobilisation of psychoanalysis for feminist and anti-colonial struggles as such amplifies the subversive character of Freud's work. Such attempts show that it is not a question of simply believing in the subversiveness of psychoanalysis but that psychoanalysis as such does not assume a metaposition—rather it is itself the terrain of an ongoing struggle. Its subversive edge must be sustained by means of the ongoing work. See, for instance the feminist affirmation of psychoanalysis in the classic work by Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin Books 2000 (Mitchell published her work in 1974, at the height of the second-wave feminism). When it comes to the mobilisation of psychoanalysis for a radical critique of colonialism, Franz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris: Seuil 1952, remains decisive. A more recent attempt in this field can be found in the widely debated work of Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, Durham: Duke University Press 2010. Wilderson, in turn, grounds his readings on Lacan.

CHAPTER VII

SEXUALITY AND RESISTANCE OF THE SYSTEM

The shift beyond the narrow psychological question “Who resists?” to “Where does resistance come from?”, its decentralisation and detachment from the psychological individual and consciousness, revealed to Freud the omnipresence of resistance. This resulted in the grounding of libidinal and social structures on a constitutive action of resistance he called *Urverdrängung*, primary repression:

We have reason to assume that there is a primary repression, a first phase of repression, which consists in the psychical (ideational) representative of the drive being denied entrance into the conscious. With this a *fixation* is established; the representative in question persists unaltered from then onwards and the drive remains attached to it ... The second stage of repression, *repression proper*, affects mental derivatives of the repressed representative, or such trains of thought as, originating elsewhere, have come into associative connection with it. On account of this association, these ideas experience the same fate as what was primarily repressed. Repression proper, therefore, is actually an after-pressure. Moreover, it is a mistake to emphasize only the repulsion, which operates from the direction of the conscious upon what is to be repressed; quite as important is the attraction exercised, by what was primarily repressed upon everything with which it can establish a connection. Probably the trend towards repression would fail in its purpose if these two forces did

not co-operate, if there were not something previously repressed ready to receive what is repelled by the conscious.¹

The constitutive character of resistance reveals in the latter the main action of structure: structure is what resists, structure *is* resistance. If in Freud's writings repression appears as a defence mechanism directed against something (trauma, contradiction, memory, drive, etc.), then primary repression stands for resistance, which *precedes* the resisted and is constitutive of the very difference between resistance and the resisted. In other words, if repression is resistance in its *reactionary* character then primary repression stands for resistance as *productive* action, production of difference, contradiction or psychic conflict, in relation to which constituted resistance, hence repression proper, appears as "after-pressure". Secondary repression is then an action incited by and standing in direct continuity with the action of primary repression or constitutive resistance. Freud remarks that the force of repression is internally split. If seen from the perspective of consciousness, it appears as repulsion, which seems to keep the repressed away from consciousness. On the contrary, if seen from the perspective of the unconscious, it appears as a force of attraction. The latter demands the work of repression as the means of satisfaction for the repressed tendency, the drive, which cannot even initially appear in conscious life as such.

The recognition of the primary level of resistance in the guise of *Urverdrängung* and the foundation of libidinal and social structures on a constitutive resistance significantly

¹ Sigmund Freud, "Repression," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, London: Vintage 2001, p. 148. Transl. modified. Primary repression stands thus for an ongoing process, which sustains and reproduces the conditions of possibility of an exploitative destiny of the drive. Elsewhere I have tried to spell out a homology between Freud's notion of primary repression and what Marx addresses under the banner "primitive accumulation". See Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*, London: Verso 2015, pp. 130–148.

complicates the tasks of analysis and indeed makes it an impossible profession. The clinic implies working on the dysfunction and disequilibrium that define structure, counteracting the casualties that discourse (language, social link, economic order) causes in the subject's body and mind. Put differently, analysis stands for the process of working through the real of structure, through its impossibilities. This can be seen in Lacan's repeated equation of the real with the impossible, with something that is "impossible to sustain",² the unbearable and consuming consequences of what Freud described as the juncture of the mental with the bodily. Here the psychoanalytic striving for elevating the analysand's subjective position from impotence to impossibility again becomes apparent. While in the position of impotence all unconscious labour is consumed for sustaining repression, the predominant form of satisfaction for the drive, the position of impossibility allows the analytic "division of labour" to split this consumption open and mobilise the structural deadlock, the impossibilities and contradictions of libidinal economy and social structures in order to loosen the existing fixation of the drive and trigger a process of sublimation. The analytic imperative, *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, would thus stand for the effort in forcing the shift from structure as resistance to structure as becoming, or from the fixation of the drive to the bending of the drive. This surely does not imply that structural resistance is ever entirely overcome. Freud remained a pessimist in this respect. What analysis strives for, on the contrary, is the uninterrupted conversion of resistance into becoming, a dynamisation of structure that does not assume the construction of a thoroughly modified structure free of impossibilities and contradictions at the end of this process. By assuming the position of impossibility, the subject

² "Clinic is the real insofar as it is impossible to sustain." Jacques Lacan, "Ouverture de la section clinique," *Ornicar?* 9 (1977), p. 11.

becomes the site of a conflict between two imperatives, forms and goals of labour. In contrast to Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalysis, psychology and various variants of psychotherapy remain at the level where resistance is restricted to the analysand's ego and where the goal remains adaptation or reintegration of individuals into a given socioeconomic framework. In this respect, psychology and psychotherapy perform the task of "stitching up appearances", a task that Freud otherwise contributed to philosophical and religious worldviews.³ Their efforts contribute to the intensification of repression, which, rather unsurprisingly, reproduces the exploitative socioeconomic order. Is it any wonder then that epistemic resistance to psychoanalysis is the result?⁴

The depsychologisation of psychic conflict reveals the intimate connection between repulsion and attraction, depending on the perspective one assumes in analysing the labour of repression (*Verdrängungsarbeit*). What appears as a psychological defence mechanism undergoes a continuous transformation into the resistance of the drive through the attraction-extraction of surplus enjoyment from the labour of repression. In the psychic conflict, where the subject assumes the position of impotence, resistance *to* the drive is successfully converted into resistance *of* the drive, sustaining its fixation on the object and reproducing its paths of satisfaction. Additionally, the drive

³ To recall another memorable passage from Freud (*New Introductory Lectures*, in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 22, p. 161 and note 1), in order to criticise the philosophical fabrication of world-orders, he quotes Heine's mocking lines: "With his nightcaps and the tatters of his dressing-gown he patches up the gaps in the structure of the universe." For psychoanalysis, the central gap in the structure of the universe, at least in the cultural and mental one, is the subject itself.

⁴ That psychology is a component of the ideological state apparatus is certainly not a new insight; Althusser and Freudo-Marxists, as well as Deleuze and Guattari already drew attention to this complicity. This criticism does not mean to suggest that (all) psychologists and psychotherapists are perfectly conscious of the task they perform for capitalism. For an extensive critique of psychology through the lens of psychoanalysis, see David Pavón-Cuellar, *Marxism and Psychoanalysis: In or against Psychology?*, London: Routledge 2017.

reveals that there is an intimate link between resistance and compulsion to repeat. They both come together in the demand for enjoyment, which displays the compulsive repetition of the act of satisfaction. Freud on several occasions drew attention to the fact that the id stands in alliance with the superego, meaning that the demand of enjoyment obtains its expression in the law: enjoyment becomes imperative. The superego is thus not simply an instance that prohibits enjoyment; it rather elevates the demand of the drive into a categorical imperative. In the capitalist universe the ultimate duty of every subject is the producing of pleasure for the sake of pleasure, in other words, becoming what Lacan called “the ideal worker” (combining Marx’s notion of abstract labour and Freud’s notion of unconscious labour). To this superego imperative of enjoyment, *Jouis!*, the subject can only respond with: *J’ouis!*, “I hear” or “I understand”,⁵ hence with submission to labour. Consequently, the flipside of this imperative is the demand for *useless* labour for the sake of labour. Again we come across the parasitism of virtual infinity and its mortifying consequences—*Verausgabung*, expenditure-exhaustion—for the subject.

In the recognition of this fatal dimension of enjoyment, the most radical aspect of Freud’s clinical discoveries and metapsychological developments enters the picture: the death drive. In the compulsion to repeat, or more precisely in the interdependence of repetition and resistance at the core of the production of enjoyment, Freud discovered “too much”, in the first place too much to bear for psychoanalysts themselves. Due to the misunderstandings that still accompany the concept, it is always worth repeating that the death drive was never meant to designate some mysterious or irrational striving toward death, or a simple tendency of all life to return to the lifeless

⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, New York: Norton 2006, p. 696.

state of matter, even though Freud occasionally writes this.⁶ The death drive stands for the radical indifference and detachment of the unconscious demand of enjoyment from the self-preserving tendencies in the subject and moreover in life itself.

At this point it is worth recalling Xavier Bichat's famous definition of life as an "*ensemble of functions, which resist death*",⁷ where life is already approached from the viewpoint of resistance. Bichat seems to have at least intuited something similar to Freud's notion of primary repression here: the structures of life ultimately come down to resistance, which economises the difference between life and death. But the Freudian discovery nevertheless contains a crucial displacement of Bichat's perspective. Bichat failed to recognise the compulsive repetition, which is for Freud crucial for the phenomenon of resistance. Hence, in the Freudian speculative bio-ontological scenario, the difference between life and death is internalised and death itself changes its meaning. It no longer stands for the end of life in the everyday sense of the term, but rather for life's striving for more life, for production of surplus-(in)-life on the background of lack-(in)-life—a production that inevitably manifests itself in a destructive way. Resistance of life itself is here internally redoubled into resistance as self-preservation (insofar as Freud speaks of the drive of self-preservation) and resistance as production of life beyond life, of surplus-life (insofar as Freud speaks of the death drive). The introduction of the concept of the death drive takes place on the background of the recognition that *Triebleben*, the life of drive, constantly displays a radical indifference to the subject's life and that this indifference

⁶ For the most thorough recent discussion of the death drive, see Alenka Zupančič, *What Is Sex?*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2017, pp. 94–106. Zupančič ends her account with something that one might call an "optimistic" reading of the death drive. I will stick to its "pessimistic" side, since this aspect was crucial for Freud's confrontation with structural resistance.

⁷ Xavier Bichat, *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort*, Verviers: Editions Gérard & Co 1973 [1800], p. 11. Original emphasis.

inevitably manifests itself as the resistance of “death” to the self-preserving tendencies in and of the subject. Only that this death, to repeat again, no longer stands for the end of life but for the inverted vitalism of the drive, the conversion of life’s resistance to death into the mortifying resistance of the drive. Paraphrasing Freud, one could say that, of course, the individual or the organism wants to live, but something in this individual or organism wants to live more than the individual. Self-preservation of life, or resistance of life against death, contains a teleology that backfires. While in Bichat the opposition between life and death could still be understood as external and his definition of life through resistance integrated in the teleological understanding of self-preservation, for Freud life involves a more dramatic antagonism between the self-preservation of the organism and the self-preservation of the drive. Again, death here no longer stands for a state deprived of life, but for a constant and compulsively driven force in life itself, death as drive.⁸ For Freud, life would thus be defined through the split of resistance into resistance *to* death (self-preservation) and resistance *of* death (death drive). The second resistance stands for the subordination of all vital functions to the production of surplus enjoyment or, again in line with Freud’s bio-ontological speculation from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the production of surplus-life, this privileged object of the death drive. With the death drive, Freud conceived life as a compulsive process and as a process of alienation. Only here does it become clear that psychoanalysis, as Freud conceived it, in

⁸ Slavoj Žižek speaks in this context of the undead: “The paradox of the Freudian ‘death drive’ is therefore that it is Freud’s name for its very opposite, for the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis, for an uncanny *excess* of life, for an ‘undead’ urge which persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption. The ultimate lesson of psychoanalysis is that human life is never ‘just life’: humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life in excess...” Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2005, p. 62.

no way promotes a naïve vitalism (“creative potentials of the drive”, etc.), but instead takes on a sharp critical standpoint. Again, Freud is more radical than Bichat here: life is not simply an ensemble of vital functions, which resist death as the immanent limit of life, thereby exposing its finitude, but is moreover an internally split and conflictual force, which relates to itself through resistance to its own immanent excess. The death drive stands for the parasitism of virtual infinity on finitude—and the scandal of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* consists of the thesis that this parasitism does not only characterise cultural life, but also biological life, thereby rejecting in advance every fetishisation of life and more generally every “positive vitalism” grounded on the rejection of negativity (something that Bichat’s definition of life in terms of resistance against death still sustains, or at least can be appropriated for).

In his controversial speculative step beyond the clinical framework of psychoanalysis, Freud believed that he could legitimately extend his observations on the drive from cultural to biological life, and consequently, that the vital functions of every biological organism contain the same immanent excess as the symbolic functions of the speaking being. In other words, life as such appears as a disease, or at least is befallen by a disease called surplus enjoyment.⁹ Although Freud’s extension of the drive’s deadlock to the biological framework can be seen as an easy target for criticism—and it was extensively criticised by many psychoanalysts, to the extent that it provoked something like a resistance to psychoanalysis within psychoanalysis itself¹⁰—it nevertheless contains a crucial critical and materialist

⁹ For the link of life with disease, and also in connection with Freud’s notion of the death drive, see Aaron Schuster, *The Trouble With Pleasure*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2016, pp. 30–37.

¹⁰ Among prominent early critiques of the notion of death drive we find representatives of Freudo-Marxism such as Wilhelm Reich and Otto Fenichel. See notably Wilhelm Reich, “Der masochistische Charakter. Eine sexualökonomische Widerlegung des Todestriebes und des Wiederholungszwangs,” *Internationale Zeitschrift für*

lesson. The latter retroactively provides speculative value to the most banal sounding clinical material, a reminder that the life of the drive and the conflict this life entails should not be contrasted or opposed to the idea of some kind of homeostatic and harmonious life, from which all traces of negativity and conflictuality are removed, or in which the only conflict involved is one of finitude. There is no life without negativity, and more specifically, there is no life without virtual infinity. For Freud, the problem does not lie in life's finitude, in the inevitable fact that "all things must pass", but rather that while this finitude strives for self-preservation its ontological lack or incompleteness are being exploited to sustain the preservation of a virtually infinite and insatiable demand for surplus enjoyment. The drive points toward the "opposition" of life against life beyond the opposition of life against death, hence beyond the pleasure principle, insofar as the pleasure principle still moves within the opposition of pleasure and unpleasure, whereas the realm beyond the pleasure principle overcomes the opposition, reveals its fictitious character, and takes unpleasure, or what the subject experiences as unpleasure, as yet another source of pleasure. From the perspective of the death drive, death becomes a privileged source of pleasure for the sake of pleasure (surplus enjoyment). Translated into a capitalist framework, death—and particularly war as the most organised form of death, death as military industry—becomes a crucial source of surplus value. With the death drive, Freud indeed brings his conception of pleasure to culmination, which is entirely foreign to the Aristotelian identification of pleasure with good. From the perspective of the death drive, pleasure appears in the guise

Psychoanalyse 18 (1932), pp. 303–351, and Otto Fenichel, "Zur Kritik des Todestriebes," in: *Aufsätze*, vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main/Berlin: Ullstein 1985, pp. 361–371. For the broader historical account, see Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3, New York: Basic Books 1957, pp. 271–280, and more recently Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Freud In His Time and Ours*, London: Harvard University Press 2016, pp. 222–225.

of compulsive pleasure for the sake of pleasure or surplus enjoyment. Here the conclusion can only be that pleasure is evil.

Another detail that is always worth recalling is that Freud introduced the death drive in order to describe the excessive nature of the drive as such and *not* a separate drive. In other words, the death drive is not something to be added to the sexual drive and to the multiplicity of the so-called partial drives (oral drive, anal drive, scopic drive etc.), but designates the compulsive persistence of the demand for surplus enjoyment of every particular object fixation of the drive (oral pleasure, anal pleasure, scopic pleasure, intellectual pleasure etc.). With the death drive, Freud thus proposes the metapsychological formulation of the ultimate level of resistance that psychoanalysis must confront in its theory and practice; it is the final justification as to why its practice deserves the title “impossible profession”. Additionally, capitalism begins to appear as the social mode of production, which most efficiently mobilised this excessive dimension of the drive. The mystified expression of this mobilisation could indeed be recognised in the idea of the “automatic subject”, the apparently automatic and spontaneous increase of value, which is precisely non-compulsive. The hypothesis of the existence of an automatic subject remains idealistic not only because it overlooks that such a figure of the subject cannot be “realised” without social exploitation, but also because it loses sight of the link between capital, understood as the drive of self-valorisation, and compulsion. Only the latter is a properly materialist determination of capital. Hence, if culture always to some extent contains the realisation of the death drive, then the indifference of capitalism, its aggressive pursuit of surplus value, its organisation of social production around the imperative of production for the sake of production seems to suggest that capitalism is a culture of

the death drive *par excellence*,¹¹ a culture of organised resistance to any form of life, which would not conform with the “vitalism” of capital, the tendency of capital to self-valorisation.

Another significant form of resistance comes from the subject whereby the intricacies of sexual difference, the problematic relation between anatomy and sexuality, and last but not least the contradiction between sexuated positions, even something that could indeed be described as class-struggle between the sexes,¹² enters the picture. Freud detects a crucial expression of resistance in the guise of the masculine “rejection of femininity” (*Ablehnung der Weiblichkeit*). The masculine position constitutes a closed totality, which ultimately rejects, excludes or represses every Other sex. This closed set is nevertheless internally divided in accordance with the logic of I and o, having and not having, surplus and lack... of the phallus. In this phallogentric universe, woman can only appear as a figure of lack, as a passive or castrated subject, in relation to which man appears to himself as a whole figure, an active and non-castrated subject. By contrast, the feminine position constitutes a disclosed totality or open set.¹³ Here, *all* subjectivity, with no exception, appears in the guise of a symptom. One could say

¹¹ One could also speak of capitalism as a “society of the death drive”; see Todd McGowan, *Enjoying What We Don't Have: The Political Project of Psychoanalysis*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press 2013, pp. 283–286.

¹² In a different context this aspect, or perhaps rather appearance, of class struggle was most thoroughly analysed by Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, New York: Autonomedia 2004. If Lacan argued that Marx recognised in the proletariat a *social* symptom, one could justifiably insist that a structural reading of Freud enables one to recognise the same status for woman. Federici's work would then stand for an account of the history of capitalism from this symptomatic position and would, despite her open criticism of Marx, repeat a fundamentally Marxian gesture.

¹³ The work of Juliet Mitchell challenged the feminist conviction that Freud reproduced the “rejection of femininity” he discovered in the phenomenon of castration anxiety and the subject's resistance to castration. In what follows, I will merely tackle the link between class struggle and the struggle between sexes from the outlook offered by Freud's analysis of resistance. Lacan's formulas of sexuation, which are the reference frame for the developments above (see Appendix II), can be interpreted as an attempt to think the contradiction between the masculine and the feminine position in homology with the class struggle—whereby one should keep in mind that for

that, in contrast to the masculine position, which is constituted on the basis of an internal segregation, the feminine position stands for the universalisation of a negativity, which traverses every subject: what binds subjects is their alienation. In this respect, the woman and the proletarian indeed personify more than the Other class or the Other sex. They stand for the subject *par excellence*, for repressed and exploited subjectivity, to which no strong subjectivity can be contrasted and which reveal the fantasmatic status and the actual inexistence of such a strong and whole subjectivity. Just like capital, man, too, is not a subject, but a structural position of domination, assumed by all those individuals, whether anatomically male or female, which choose to comply with the system anchored in the exploitation of subjective alienation.

Behind the entire problematic addressed by the masculine “rejection of femininity” stands the (masculine) fantasy of “monosexuality”, unified sexuality, or sexuality without negativity. This fantasy is directly connected to the fact that there is only one libido,¹⁴ and further, only one signifier of enjoyment, the phallus, which, however, in the same instance signifies the lack of enjoyment. To reiterate, the old problematic of phallocentrism inevitably emerges here, together with the question, whether psychoanalysis assumes the position of the centrality of the phallus or rather engages in a thorough critique of phallocentrism. Following Lacan’s return to Freud one should insist that Freud explored the asymmetry between lack and surplus as an immanent driving force of the exploitative

Lacan “man” and “woman” stand for contradictory structural positions, which can be equally assumed by biological men and women.

¹⁴ This was Freud’s thesis when he all too quickly concluded that this libido is masculine. By contrast, Lacan’s formulas of sexualisation insist that there are two contradictory versions of this oneness, the masculine (fetishist) and the feminine (symptomatic). One could add here in passing that the fetishist hypothesis of the “automatic subject” could be characterised as masculine, whereas the symptomatic position of the critique of political economy would be structurally feminine.

libidinal economy grounded in repression. At the same time this pair becomes the point of departure for what psychoanalysis reveals as the masculine position in sexuality. While every idea of the Other sex is rejected, woman is put in the position of the embodiment of lack and castration. In opposition to this masculine fantasy of femininity, man does not simply define himself as the figure of sexual completeness, but moreover as the embodiment of surplus. According to Freud masculinity is thus grounded on the rejection of femininity or on the resistance to castration, which assumes for the masculine subject the appearance of the woman. Hence, the masculine version of the link between masculinity and femininity inevitably grounds an exploitative power-relation backed by man's unconscious rejection and cultural prohibition, restriction or regulation of feminine sexuality, and more generally, of any sexuality, which would not define itself on the assumption of a universal sexual norm, which comes down to the dichotomy of lack and surplus. But as Freud's analysis of the fetishist mechanism of disavowal has shown, every man unconsciously assumes for himself the position of the non-castrated exception or believes to be exempted from castration. His disavowal of castration in the sexual partner is in fact an expression of resistance to his own castration. The masculine position thus not only coincides with fetishism but also with what Freud called cultural hypocrisy: the universality of castration (e.g. everyone's subordination under a law, whether religious, economic or paternal) is grounded on the fictitious hypothesis of a non-castrated exception (God, capital, Freud's primal father)—but men are exempted from this universalism. In turn, the feminine position, and hence the position of the subject in general, is that of the symptom: there is no non-castrated exception (the law exists but is unstable and inconsistent). Consequently, it follows that the not all subject is subjected to the phallic function (the presumable law of sexuality). Hence, not all enjoyment is

reducible to the signifying regime of the phallus. In other words, there is no normative, unified and stabilised sexuality. The subject is nothing other than a point of inconsistency in the phallic function.

The twofold signifying operation—the production of lack of enjoyment and the production of surplus enjoyment—aims at a split in the subject and an ongoing tension in discourse. One can recall at this point Freud's reflections on the "constitutive bisexuality" of the sexuated subject, which implies that in every subject sexuality is internally redoubled on masculinity and femininity, hence on the contradiction between the tendency to constitute itself as One through the rejection of femininity and the tendency to constitute itself on the impossibility immanent to *all* sexuality. If in the predominant sexual framework masculinity were to be defined on the basis of resistance to femininity, then femininity would not simply be resistance to the masculine resistance to femininity. If this would be the case then such "negative femininity" would indeed remain caught in the masculine *dispositif* and stand merely for the return of the repressed. Instead, feminine sexuality more generally involves an effort of working through the paradoxes and the deadlocks of sexuality, and not merely working through the resistance of masculinity. If we again take into account Lacan's formulas of sexuation, then this dimension of femininity is formalised in the matheme of the non-all that reads: not all subject (or alternatively: not every subject, Lacan's corresponding formula remains ambiguous here) falls under the binary regime of "plus" and "minus" or "having" and "not having".

The conflict around the signification of the phallus obtains a further complication in the question of the organ of enjoyment. As soon as the logic of the signifier intersects with the reality of anatomical body, it amounts to the (masculine) confusion of the phallus with the penis. This confusion reflects the masculine rejection of femininity and also the subject's resis-

tance to castration. There is thus the specifically male “misunderstanding” of femininity, a masculine fantasy of femininity as being constituted on the basis of the lack of penis and thus understood as the paradigmatic case of castrated subjectivity.¹⁵ Freud argued that for a man castration takes the privileged form of the lack of the penis and can only subsequently be displaced on other types of lack. That women are not immunised against this mechanism—and consequently can constitute themselves also on the terrain of masculine sexuality—is pinpointed in Freud’s no less controversial idea of “penis-envy”, through which a woman affirms the masculine mystification of castration in the guise of the absence of the penis.¹⁶

The confusion of the phallus (*the* signifier of enjoyment) with the penis (*an* organ of enjoyment), and consequently, the absence of the penis with castration, comes in combination with an entire masculine “theory of sexuality”, which attempts to reduce all sexuality to anatomy only in order to sustain the fantasmatic relation between symbolic or libidinal sexuality and anatomical sexual difference, and in the last instance, between the phallus and the penis. As Frank Ruda argued in his reading of “Freud’s fatalism” (epitomised in the sentence “anatomy is destiny”), the masculine position in matters of sexuality can be broken down to the division of humanity into “men” and “castrated men”.¹⁷ Consequently, “anatomy is destiny”

¹⁵ This point is also addressed in the notion of “male protest” that Freud adopted from the psychoanalyst Otto Rank, the masculine obsession with castration in the guise of the penis-loss.

¹⁶ Here it should be added that Lacan’s approach to the logic of the lack was significantly less anatomically fixated: when it comes to lack and loss, what matters is not the organ, whether penis or any other part of the body, but the way a subject relates to this loss.

¹⁷ Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press 2016, p. 159. For men humanity is thus literally *mankind*, composed of presumably non-castrated bearers of the phallus reduced to the penis, and castrated bearers of lack, whose closest anatomical equivalent to the male “organ of enjoyment”, if we pursue this male fantasy, would be the clitoris. This is where the male obsession with the length of their sexual organ turns out to be yet another expression of castration

would be the masculine take on sexuality, which reduces the Other sex to the sexual fantasy sustaining masculinity—the fantasy, according to which women stand for sexually weak, castrated or passive men.¹⁸ This reduction is ultimately at stake in every “yin-yang” or “active-passive” principle, that is, in every assumption of sexual relation, harmony or homeostasis. To this logic psychoanalysis opposes the axiom, for which Lacan argued that it directly addressed the real of sexuality: *il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*, there is no sexual relation (and not simply “the sexual relation does not exist”, since this would still sustain the hypothesis of its potential existence, whether past or future.¹⁹

While the masculine position forces the reduction of sexuality to anatomy as its formal envelope, and in this respect resists the polymorphous character of sexuality, sexuality as a form of instability in the subject, the feminine position exposes the impossibility of the integral reduction of sexuality to anatomy, the persistence of contingency in the encounter between sexuality and anatomy, and finally the non-relation between the anatomical and libidinal body. Next to “there is no sexual relation” comes “anatomy is contingency”. The point here is not so much that there is no overlapping whatsoever between the anatomical sex and the libidinal sexual constitution; rather, this overlapping always leaves a conflictual remainder, which Freud explained in his recognition of the prematurity of sexual development and the two-phased constitution of sexuality in the speaking being. Of course, this prematurity is triggered by the symbolic (language, discourse) and not by the biological (genes, hormones). Moreover, for Freud and Lacan all human troubles

anxiety: small size is already a sign of castration, so it is not enough to have a penis in order to be immunised against castration; you have to have the right size. For men, castration can be measured.

¹⁸ This may sound like a caricature but it still remains the predominant cultural position, as the massive return of toxic masculinity in global politics attests.

¹⁹ For a well-pointed discussion of Lacan’s axiom of non-relation, see Zupančič, *What Is Sex?*, pp. 23–24.

ultimately derive from the fact that humanity is subject to a twofold prematurity: on the one hand, premature birth, which exposes “ontological lack” or “biological weakness”, and premature sexuality, which introduces “ontological surplus” or “discursive enjoyment”.²⁰ The subject can master neither the lack nor the surplus that mark its existence. What is certain, however, is that this twofold prematurity is effectively exploited. Indeed, it provides the foundations by means of which exploitation can ultimately be anchored.

As Freud demonstrated in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, sexuality first begins in the enlarged sense, as polymorphous infantile sexuality, which then undergoes a phase of latency, until biological sexual development is triggered with puberty.²¹ Symbolic “excess” precedes the apparent “anatomical norm”, discursively produced sexuality precedes apparent anatomical destiny, its biological program. To complicate matters further, the symbolic imposes its own necessity in the form of the compulsion to repeat. This is also why Freud spoke of the *destinies* and *fixations* of the drive, which, in spite of everything, remain anchored in contingency and can undergo gradual transformation—precisely by means of the form of labour that Freud called working-through. The plurality of the drive’s symbolic destinies—in distinction from the “masculine” insistence on the anatomical character of sexual destiny—sufficiently indicates the peculiar intertwining of contingency and necessity in the process of the constitution of sexuality on the background of the junction of the mental (or rather the symbolic) and the bodily (the biological or anatomical). From this double-phased sexual development, Freud does not draw the conservative conclusion, according to which anatomy would

²⁰ In this respect psychoanalysis introduces a critical twist in Adam Smith’s thesis on the premature birth of the human subject (discussed in Chapter 1).

²¹ This point has been further enforced in Jean Laplanche, *Sexual. La sexualité élargie au sens freudien*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France 2000.

bring about the stabilisation and normalisation of sexuality. For Freud, by contrast, there is no sexual norm: sexuality in the enlarged sense precedes sexuality in the narrow sense. Once triggered, genital sexuality becomes one fixation or destiny among others for the drive, even if apparently the most common or predominant one; instead of narrowing the sexual field, it is added to it as yet another libidinal economy.

To return at this point once again to male fantasy and its resistance to femininity, the infamous Lacanian phrase “The Woman does not exist” could be interpreted in the sense that it targets the fictitious femininity postulated by male “mono-sexualism”, the impossibility of integrating the female body and feminine sexuality into the male fantasy of castrated man. A double thesis can be deduced from this Lacanian phrase: there is no such thing as “castrated man”, which would be opposed to “non-castrated man”—both terms of the opposition, as well as the opposition itself, are false—and there is only a castrated subject. The reduction of sexuality to anatomy and of the phallus to the penis is a fetishist operation, which disavows the universality of castration, the birth of the subject out of the cut that the signifier introduces into the body, thereby producing the surplus materiality of libidinal body. The notion of castration thus stands at the core of the materialism of the signifier. Castration stands for something entirely different than the lack or the loss of an organ of enjoyment: it is the birth of sexuality out of the scission of the body and the inexistence of *the* Organ of enjoyment. The feminine position would thus entail the affirmation of the universality of castration, thereby exposing a universal negativity—or “shared negativity”²²—

²² I am borrowing the term from Manuela Ammer, Eva Birkenstock, Jenny Nachtigall, Kerstin Stakemeier and Stephanie Weber, “Klassen-Sprachen. Some Preliminary Theses,” in: *Klassen-Sprachen*, Berlin: Archive Books 2017. It is around this negativity that, according to Freud and Lacan, an equally shared effort of working-through should be organised.

binding all subjects. In doing so it rejects the “monosexual” segregation, which imposes on the sexuated subject the male mystification of castration and the double fantasy of the castrated female subject and non-castrated male subject.

Freud's late writing *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* explicitly addresses the masculine character of resistance to psychoanalysis as resistance against castration. After discussing two expressions of castration, penis-envy (*Penisneid*) or striving for manhood (*Streben nach Männlichkeit*) in women and male protest (*männlicher Protest*) or rejection of femininity (*Ablehnung der Weiblichkeit*) in men, or differently, the resistance to the passive relation to another man—which are, again, two *masculine* reactions to castration—he confronts the problem of resistance in the following remark:

At no other point in one's analytic work does one suffer more from an oppressive feeling that all one's repeated efforts have been in vain, and from a suspicion that one has been “preaching to the winds”, than when one is trying to persuade a woman to abandon her wish for a penis on the ground of its being unrealizable or when one is seeking to convince a man that a passive attitude to men does not always signify castration and that it is indispensable in many relationships in life. The rebellious overcompensation of the male produces one of the strongest transference-resistances. He refuses to subject himself to a father-substitute, or to feel indebted to him for anything, and consequently he refuses to accept his recovery from the doctor. No analogous transference can arise from the female's wish for a penis, but it is the source of outbreaks of severe depression in her, owing to an internal conviction that the analysis will be of no use and that nothing can be done to help her. And we can only agree that she is right, when we learn that her strongest motive in coming

for treatment was the hope that, after all, she might still obtain a male organ, the lack of which was so painful to her.²³

It would be all too simple to read this fragment as the ultimate expression of Freud's defence of masculinity and patriarchy, of his misogynous attitude toward women and his approach to femininity exclusively from the phallogentric perspective, from the recentralisation of sexuality to the male sexual organ (if nothing else, this would contradict his theoretical and clinical efforts and goals, which depart from the recognition of the constitutive decentralisation of sexuality that admit that resistance is a failed attempt at recentralisation and a mystification of libidinal exploitation). Nevertheless, I would like to argue here that this excerpt could indeed be mobilised for a thorough critique of masculinity: Freud recognises in the imposition of male fantasies of femininity the paradigmatic example of repression and oppression of women, as well as of subjectivity in general. At the same time he registers universal subjective suffering resulting from the attempt to fantasmatically anchor sexuality in the masculine rejection of castration, or rather in the masculine projection of castration to the Other sex; and, consequently, allowing this Other sex to exist only in the guise of castrated sex or in the guise of the small other, *a*, where the subject of the Other sex is reduced to the object of enjoyment or the object of value.²⁴ All subjects suffer from the maladies of fetishism. In this respect, the contradiction between the two structural positions, male and female, should be envisaged not only from the perspective of the anatomical difference between the sexes, but also as a tension immanent to all subjects, whether male or female. It would be vain to convince the

²³ Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 23, p. 252.

²⁴ In the lower level of Lacan's formulas of sexuation we find on the masculine side the barred subject, \$, aiming at the object of enjoyment and the object of desire, *a*, on the feminine side. See Appendix II.

subjects caught in the fantasmatic scenario that castration has always-already happened, albeit in an entirely different sense than the male fantasy insists.

For psychoanalysis, the penis is clearly not the Organ of enjoyment. If such an organ indeed exists, it is coextensive with the whole body and is as metonymic or nomadic as enjoyment. For this reason, Lacan eventually described the organ of enjoyment as unreal: "The libido is the essential organ in understanding the nature of the drive. This organ is unreal. Unreal is not imaginary. The unreal is defined by articulating itself on the real in a way that eludes us, and it is precisely this that requires that its representation should be mythical, as I have made it. But the fact that it is unreal does not prevent an organ from embodying itself."²⁵ Unreal is a modality of the real, which means that the organ of enjoyment is corporeal but at the same time does not exist, at least not as One organ. It can only be associated to a bodily region in a contingent way, through the intervention of the signifier of enjoyment, which, contrary to the Organ of enjoyment, does exist, but in the same move signifies lack of enjoyment. The critical signification of the phallus as a signifier with a signified that is double (enjoyment and lack) concerns the impossibility of bringing sexuality into agreement or into relation with anatomy. This is why the presence and absence that the phallus signifies cannot mean the presence and absence of the penis or any other anatomical organ (this would be the signification of the phallus for the masculine subject). By contrast, it is the presence and absence of the unreal Organ of enjoyment, as well as the dynamic of presence and absence, appearance and disappearance,

²⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1998, p. 205.

emergence and fading that marks the subject's being, its constitutive incompleteness and castration, its *Sein* as *Fort-und-Da-Sein*.²⁶

The main lesson that Freud finds so hard to communicate both to his male and female patients is that the “masculine notion” of sexuality (“monosexuality”) is impossible to sustain, that there is no such thing as One normative sexuality, or to use Lacan's ambiguous neologism, that sexuality is not *hommo-sexuelle*, “malesexual”. The echo of male homosexuality that Lacan's neologism plays with is not coincidental, but it is also not without risk. It points out that “malesexuality”, hence the way male subjects conceive the sexual relation,²⁷ comes down to the couple of male and castrated male. Men desire castrated men. They put the desired subject in the position of “weak subjectivity” in order to assume for themselves the fictitious position of non-castrated subjectivity. Within this framework, which is indeed socially predominant, misogyny inevitably becomes a systemic factor. It is not surprising that Lacan occasionally remarked that, structurally speaking, the term “heterosexuality” would have to be used for describing all subjects, who love or desire women—again, not women in the anatomical but in the structural sense, where “woman” no longer stands for the male fantasy of “castrated man”, but for the Other sex. The relation

²⁶ Far from being equivalent to the penis, the phallus dethrones the penis as the Organ of enjoyment and demonstrates the stupidity of the masculine reduction of the presence and absence of the Organ of enjoyment to the anatomical presence and absence of penis, as well as the stupidity of reducing sexuality to anatomy or to the biological function of reproduction. Phallus as the signifier of enjoyment reveals that there is no one and universal Organ of enjoyment, there are only organs of enjoyment, which materialise in the multiplicity of erogenous zones. Hence, the phallus stands for the action of the signifier in the body, which transforms the biological body into a factory of enjoyment. The predicate *irréel* suggests that the Organ of enjoyment is situated in the grey zone between existence and inexistence. It migrates in the subject's body like the uterus in Plato's fictitious theory of hysteria.

²⁷ Even if these subjects are anatomically speaking women. To repeat Freud's point, some women remain unconsciously caught in the masculine fantasy of sexuality and reproduce the divide on active non-castrated man and passive castrated woman.

to the Other sex is then what exposes the subject to “heterosexuality”, that is, to the Otherness of sexuality—both of the subject’s own sexuality and of the sexuality of their partner. To avoid every misunderstanding, it should again be pointed out that Lacan’s structural reading gives to *homosexualité* (homosexuality written with two *m*, which gives the word “malesexuality”) and “heterosexuality” an entirely different meaning. Heterosexuality stands for sexuality, which is not anchored in the fantasy of non-castrated subjectivity; such fantasy inevitably leads to “malesexuality”.²⁸

The resistance to psychoanalysis that Freud detected both in individuals and in culture intertwines with the resistance to the instability of sexuality as well as to the persistence of negativity (castration) and Otherness (alienation) in the sexual field. It exposes the impossibility of reducing sexuality to anatomy or of abolishing the discrepancy between biological sexuality and libidinal sexuality, the anatomical body and the speaking body, the contingent “destiny” of anatomy and the fixated “contingency” of libidinal economy. No wonder then that for Lacan psychoanalysis, which remains at the level of its critical tasks, inevitably assumes the status of a (social) symptom, whose theory and practice registers, conceptualises and works with a notion of sexuality, which sharply contradicts the one that is socially imposed: sexuality that contains castration and stands, on the one hand, for the non-relation between anatomy and sexuation, and on the other hand, for the non-relation that is sexuality in the extended sense as such. The Freudian imperative “Where It was, there I shall become” implies that the intricacies of sexuality as well as its general submission to

²⁸ Structurally speaking a gay or lesbian couple can either be heterosexual or reproduce the male fantasy of non-castrated subjectivity. Lacan places the whole accent on *heteron*, Otherness, not of the partner’s anatomical sex, but of their sexuality, as well as on the Otherness of the antagonism that traverses my own sexuality or libidinal economy and makes it Other. Heterosexuality in the Lacanian sense would thus involve a process of working-through, the becoming Other of my own sexuality.

repression (libidinal exploitation, rejection of femininity) require a process of working-through, not only in the guise of psychoanalysis but also in the form of a radical emancipatory politics.

Another problematic phenomenon, which can quickly turn from the condition of psychoanalysis into its obstacle and transform the analytic discourse into its structural opposite, the master's discourse, is immanent to psychoanalysis: transference, the libidinal bond between the analysand and the analyst, which reveals that in ideal yet precarious circumstances resistance is converted into an immanent driving force for the cure.²⁹ However, this conversion is possible only under the imperative of working-through, which transforms unconscious labour into analytic labour, or what comes down to the same, the force of the drive into the force of the cure. This is also what is fundamentally at stake in what Freud and Lacan targeted with sublimation: "[S]ublimation is the satisfaction of the drive with a change of object, that is, without repression ... not a new object; it is a change of object in itself. If the drive allows the change of object, it is because it is already deeply marked by the

²⁹ See Rebecca Comay, "Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel," *Research in Phenomenology* 45 (2015), pp. 237–266, notably p. 258, where Comay detects "the central paradox of psychoanalysis, which also happens to be the essential paradox of the dialectic and part of its ongoing provocation. On the one hand, resistance is the fundamental obstacle to analysis. With their incessant digressions, diversions, and prevarications, the resistances to analysis are always on the verge of derailing it forever. On the other hand, without resistance, without delay, there would be nothing but 'wild analysis'—which is to say there would be no analysis at all, only the shadow cast by the all-knowing authority of the analyst or even by analysis itself qua personified subject-supposed-to-know". And further: "In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud describes analysis as a process of *travailler comme une bête* ... a 'beastly,' inhuman project, undertaken without regard for a final result or answer." *Travailler comme une bête*, to work like an animal, also perfectly describes unconscious labour. The new conflict that psychoanalysis introduces in mental life and thereby into the life of the drive contains progressive displacement of the imperative, from repetition of the same to differentiating repetition, which triggers the process of becoming in the object-fixated libidinal economy.

articulation of the signifier.”³⁰ Sublimation thus breaks the vicious circle of repression and the return of the repressed that sustains the fixation of the drive and its resistance to change. In the regime of repression the only change possible is the change of objects, but not “the change of object in itself”, in other words, the change as object. Analysis ultimately targets the displacement from changing objects (desire) or object fixation (drive) without structural change to structural change as object (and as objective): the shift from the libidinal economy of repression, grounded on the mutual conditioning of repression and return of the repressed, to the libidinal economy of sublimation, anchored in the contradiction between resistance and working-through, or between the structural force of fixation and the structural force of becoming. This is where the plasticity of the drive, its polymorphous and manipulable character turns out to be part of the solution. The drive is indeed contradictory: once fixated it appears impossible to move, but at the same time its capacity to change the object leaves space for displacement, which will not merely reproduce the fixation of pleasure for the sake of pleasure, but actually initiate a double transformation of the drive’s libidinal object and of the labouring subject. Again we come across the imperative “Where It was, there I shall become”: Where there was the compulsive economy (of the drive), there a becoming (of the subject) should be initiated.

Next to the subjective and the cultural-political register, the phenomenon of resistance also operates in the epistemic field. Subjective resistance assumes the most general and basic expression of ambivalence directed notably against the new, which is according to Freud directly associated with the feeling of unpleasure. Every disturbance of the established order is

³⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 1992, p. 293.

inevitably accompanied with the production of unpleasure, the privileged signal of novelty or event at the level of affect. Moving on to the level of knowledge, Freud detects the main expression of epistemic resistance to psychoanalysis in the blindness of medicine for the psychic and socioeconomic factors in the aetiology of neuroses. The question of causality is central here because it unveils a proper *Materialismusstreit* at the core of the confrontation between psychoanalysis and medicine, or more generally between psychoanalysis and the hard sciences. A major problem lies in reductionist empiricism and scientific positivism, which insists on exclusive neurobiological aetiology and seeks the causes of neurotic illness under the microscope, as Freud mockingly remarks. This reductive materialism of the natural sciences runs the risk that anatomy will be reaffirmed as destiny. There is yet another aspect of this epistemic conflict, which concerns philosophy, more specifically the philosophy of consciousness and analytic philosophy that refuse to recognise the notion of the unconscious or the inmixing of sexuality and enjoyment in thinking. In Freud's view, psychoanalysis has no place; it belongs neither to the natural nor to the human sciences:

So it comes about that psychoanalysis derives nothing but disadvantages from its middle position between medicine and philosophy. Doctors regard it as a speculative system and refuse to believe that, like every other natural science, it is based on a patient and tireless elaboration of facts from the world of perception; philosophers, measuring it by the standard of their own artificially constructed systems, find that it starts from impossible premises and reproach it because its most general concepts (which are only now in process of evolution) lack clarity and precision.³¹

³¹ Freud, "Resistances to Psycho-Analysis," in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, p. 217.

Psychoanalysis is thus a “bastard” child of the modern epistemic revolution. It extends the subversive consequences of modern science and its experimental innovations into the realm of human objects, but this extension is met with organised resistance and rejection. For science, psychoanalysis is too speculative, for philosophy it is too unclear and imprecise, the perfect opposite of the Cartesian imperative that all ideas and concepts must be grounded on clarity and distinction. Surplus of speculation, on the one hand, lack of clarity, on the other: both amount to the reproach that psychoanalysis violates the rules of logical thinking. Indeed, did not Freud openly admit that the unconscious knows no contradiction? To claim this means as much as to reject the logical foundations of thought, or at least what has been admitted as such since Aristotle: the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of excluded middle. The unconscious appears as the realm of sophistry that neither science nor philosophy would tolerate. However, there might be another, more fundamental scandal to psychoanalysis, namely that it openly declares its continuity with Plato, another excessive position in the history of thought: “Moreover, what psychoanalysis called sexuality was by no means identical with the impulsion towards a union of the two sexes or towards producing a pleasurable sensation in the genitals; it had far more resemblance to the all-inclusive and all-preserving *Eros* of Plato’s *Symposium*.”³² On the terrain of sexuality—or the sexual aetiology of neuroses, which admits the signifier among the material causes of nervous illnesses—Freud’s self-proclaimed Platonism places psychoanalysis in sharp conflict with the scientific and philosophical “Aristotelianism” in epistemological and psychological matters. The psychoanalytic clinic is, in this respect, an “experimental proof of Platonism”,³³ insofar as it

³² Ibid., p. 218.

³³ Alexandre Koyré, *Études d'histoire de la pensée scientifique*, Paris: Gallimard 1971, p. 195. Koyré uses the formulation in his reading of Galileo’s relation to Plato.

proposes a reinvention of Plato's theory of ideas in terms of the material causality of the signifier, as well as of Plato's theory of Eros in terms of an extended notion of sexuality as a real consequence of the signifier in the living body. The Freudian notion of sexuality is speculatively extended beyond the scientifically admitted anatomical and biological borders and enthroned as the privileged entry point in the aetiology of nervous illnesses. Rather than being the source of some presupposed harmonious relation (union of two sexes), sexuality is marked by a fundamental non-relation, instability and dynamic ("there is no sexual relation", as Lacan never got tired of repeating). There is no fusion of the Two into One on the level of sexuality. Instead there is a division of the One into Two,³⁴ or to repeat, there is something like a class struggle between the sexes.

³⁴ And not even into Two but rather into One plus a conflictual remainder, for which Lacan proposed different names: "object *a*", "the signifier of the lack in the Other", "Other enjoyment" etc. In any case, the speculative dimension of sexuality is more than evident in the dialectical character that Freud discovered in sexuality, and which was from the very outset more compatible with Plato's doctrine of ideas than with Aristotle's sound scientific reason, also because Plato grounded his philosophy on a crucial *materialist* insight that the signifier (*eidos*) is endowed with the power of causality. In Plato, this insight lays the foundation of his ontology: ideas-signifiers produce rather than sustain reality; they are the actual *material* causes behind appearances. It is this ontological causality that Freud reproduces in his theory of sexuality and aetiology of neuroses.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

THE IMPOSSIBLE CURE

If this volume was introduced with Lacan's framing of the intrusion of psychoanalysis into politics, it should be concluded with a thought that brings Freud's critique of culture to its most central point: "[S]ociety maintains a condition of cultural hypocrisy which is bound to be accompanied by a sense of insecurity and a necessity for guarding what is an undeniably precarious situation by forbidding criticism."¹ The word "hypocrisy" should in no way be taken lightly here, since it stands for significantly more than a mere attitude of individuals or institutions. Freud targets a much more fundamental, objective hypocrisy, which ultimately overlaps with the cultural condition as such. There may be some sort of "definition" of the human being as a hypocritical animal at stake here. What is even more important, however, is that Freud detects in this hypocrisy an involuntary dimension directly associated with the mechanism of repression. The hypocritical animal is at the same time a duped animal. Freud more or less explicitly suggests that culture could be ultimately compared with flight into illness (*Flucht in die Krankheit*), a maintaining of the "pathological" status quo, in which society refuses to know anything about the subjective, social and environmental damage caused by its exploitative social mode of production and its corresponding mode of enjoyment.

At the core of this underlying cultural discontent, which is first and foremost a malaise in capitalism, Freud encountered the same problematic force as Marx before him, the drive. Under

¹ Sigmund Freud, "The Resistances to Psycho-Analysis," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19, London: Vintage 2001, p. 219.

the pretention of sustaining order and preventing the regression to some uncontrolled and raw natural state or authoritarian condition, where drives would presumably regain their untamed rule, cultural institutions impose the fantasy that outside the existing order there is nothing but savagery. Freud recognised in religion the ultimate expression of this hypocrisy, since it openly demonises the libidinal forces its institutions rest upon. Instead of correcting the damage done by the cultural condition, it engages in the mystification of its causes. This is why Freud occasionally called religion an illusion and all too quickly predicted the demise of its cultural influence. In contrast to religion, capitalism displays a different hypocrisy. While religion pretends to protect, capitalism feigns to liberate—in the first place the “creative potential” of the drive, which it transforms into the drive of self-valorisation. In doing so capitalism pushes for the deregulation and globalisation of exploitation. Thus aside from being an entirely new form of cultural hypocrisy, capitalism is also a system of organised crime.

Freud never promoted either the repression or liberation of drives since both views would imply their misconception, a return to biological materialism and naturalism. This would inevitably abandon the critical perspective implied by the recognition of the problematic juncture of the “psychic” with the “bodily”, the material causality of symbolic structures, which stands at the root of the drive. The polymorphous character of sexuality and the constancy of the drive can only be explained by means of this junction, and more specifically, by recognising that the “union of the biological and the symbolic” is ultimately dysfunctional and conflictual. What Freud did promote on the background of this malfunction was the abolition of repression in order to counteract the damaging consequences of the insatiable character of the drive. The latter obtained in the capitalist libidinal and social economy an entirely new dramatisation.

Under the pretext of liberating the creative potentials of the drive (“desublimation”), capitalism ended up installing a regime of imposed enjoyment (repression).² Contrary to this regime of libidinal exploitation, psychoanalysis should, according to Freud, aim at transforming libidinal economy by means of sublimation, which stands precisely for a process of working-through. Here, however, psychoanalysis confronts its impossible task: it needs to intervene in the very conditions of possibility of repression, thereby touching both the foundations of the capitalist social link and the malfunctioning of the symbolic order in general. In other words, by having to intervene in the junction of the mental, hence symbolic structures, with the body, psychoanalysis inevitably stands in opposition to the capitalist vicissitude of the drive, its dependency on the mechanism of repression (even if in the guise of repressive desublimation) and its fixation on surplus enjoyment in the guise of surplus value, this modern enjoyment of the system. It is for this reason that Lacan spoke in *Television* of the psychoanalytic search for a “way out of the capitalist discourse,”³ hence from the capitalist vicissitude of the drive. The other aspect of impossibility arises from the insight that the interdependency of resistance and production of enjoyment characterises other discursive structures. To repeat Lacan’s phrasing, every discourse is a discourse of enjoyment: social links always come with an excessive surplus, which is impossible to master and which leaves room for libidinal exploitation.

The name “Freud” undoubtedly stands for a battleground, where the conflicts and the struggles traversing the space of politics are reproduced in the guise of competitive and often

² Herbert Marcuse famously spoke of “repressive desublimation” in order to address the capitalist anchoring of power in the demand of pleasure for the sake of pleasure. For the notion of repressive sublimation as a way of linking pleasure and exploitation, see Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston: Beacon Press 1991 [1964], pp. 56–83.

³ Jacques Lacan, *Television*, New York: Norton 1990, p. 16.

irreconcilable doctrines. The main conflict surely evolved and, for those who do not question the ongoing importance of Freud's work, continues to evolve around the determination of the social tasks of psychoanalysis and its clinical goals. To repeat, Freud pointed out these tasks in his phrase: "Where It was there I shall become", whose extreme ambiguity is emblematic of the conflictual history of psychoanalysis, a condensation of the conflicts in one single phrase. Lacan never got tired of returning to this Freudian imperative in order to reclaim it for the orientation of his own teaching. According to his reading analysis targets a structural transformation, which concerns the subject of the unconscious and the object of enjoyment, as well as the overall relation between the social structures and the drive. Should analysis remain at the level of its task, it must refrain from adapting individuals to the existing order or reshaping the drive in accordance with "cultural ideals". Both scenarios would remain within the mechanism of repression.

Freud himself consistently spoke of the necessity of analysis to bring about a change of the ego (*Ichveränderung*). The phrasing may make one think of the view, according to which the cure should end up strengthening the ego or solidifying its "narcissistic" shell. The main obstacle against such a reading lies in the very concept of the ego in Freud, which remarkably deviates both from the psychological understanding and from the ideological role the "strong ego" plays in capitalism. Far from standing for some kind of thinking substance, the ego in Freud's theory designates a most frail and problematic *surface*: "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface", and correspondingly, "consciousness [too] is the *surface* of the mental apparatus".⁴ *Oberflächenwesen*, surface being, could also be translated as surface essence or superficial essence, thus

⁴ Freud, "The Ego and the Id," in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, p. 26 and p. 19.

allowing the ego to be defined as a being whose essence lies entirely on the surface. Even if Freud's spatial framing of the problem differs from Lacan's, who entirely rejected the dichotomy of surface and depth, it leaves room for an alternative reading to the one undertaken by so many post-Freudians. Being a conflictual process, resistance stands for anything but a stabilisation or strengthening. It is not by chance that Freud's final writings extensively thematised the splitting of ego in defence mechanisms such as neurotic repression, fetishist disavowal or psychotic foreclosure. Lacan rightly recognised in this final move the decisive step from the subject anchored in the surface dynamic (imaginary projection) to the subject anchored in the dynamic of language (symbolic metonymy). The centrality of the split and instability, as well as the corresponding marking of the subject's being with fading, *Fort-und-Da-Sein*, remains a common feature to both theories of the subject, the Freudian and the Lacanian.

There is another crucial feature of the subject that post-Freudians seem to have overlooked, if not actively resisted. For Freud, the ego and the id do not form two entirely differentiated instances of the mental apparatus, their border is provisory and questionable: "The ego is not sharply separated from the id; its lower portion merges into it [*es fließt nach unten hin mit ihm zusammen*: it flows downwards and merges with it]."⁵ Freud's attempts to provide a spatial model of the mental apparatus suggest that he found its best representation in the sphere: its surface would be equal to the ego and what the surface encloses to the id and the repressed. But the last quote contains a minor yet crucial detail that one might describe as Heraclitian: in the mental apparatus "everything flows". The ego is not only a surface (the result of a projection of the bodily surface, which

⁵ Ibid., p. 24; Sigmund Freud, *Das Ich und das Es*, in: *Studienausgabe*, vol. 3, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 2000, p. 292.

would be the spatial description of its dynamic) but also a flow (the result of the course of history, which would be the temporal description of its dynamic). The mental apparatus therefore cannot be considered a fixed atom containing inner tensions between sharply distinguished mental instances (the ego, the id, the super-ego), but is a “liquid” surface in which heterogeneous instances stand in mutual continuity. Nevertheless, ruptures, tensions and contradictions constantly traverse such continuity and expose the formation of heterogeneous instances within the unified flow. For instance, repression establishes the separation of the ego from the id, while the imperative of enjoyment sustains the continuity between the id and the superego. The static spherical model is insufficient for visualising the mental as flux, whose instances do not stand in vertical hierarchy to one another, but rather come forward as conflictual forces in the otherwise unified flow of thought. The technician connotation of the expression “mental apparatus” surely contributed to the underrating of Freud’s insight that the ego—or rather, the subject—stands for conflictual becoming rather than for a machine that dysfunctions.

Throughout his teaching, Lacan insisted that psychoanalysis requires another spatial model in order to think the unconscious and the relation between the imaginary (the bodily surface; Freud’s body-ego), the symbolic (the structure of language; Lacan’s subject of the signifier) and the real (the drive, enjoyment; Lacan’s *parlêtre*). Freud already exposed a spatial feature that the centralised spherical model of the mental apparatus cannot account for, the dynamic continuity between the ego and the id, or between consciousness and the unconscious, the impossibility of a univocal border or delimitation of both instances. The idea of flux points out a spatial order, in which the inside and the outside stand in mutual continuity. For this reason Lacan utilised non-spherical objects such as the Möbius strip, Klein’s bottle, cross-cap and others to provide a more

accurate spatialisation of the conflictuality of thinking. For Lacan, they operate within “dynamic space” and strive to link structure and history.⁶

The idea of flux also hints directly at the problematic constant force of the drive that traverses this dynamic. To intervene in the constellation of forces that constitutes this mental flux already means to intervene in the drive. We can again recall that for Freud the drive was a *hypothetical* force, an epistemic object, which cannot be observed or encountered directly. The drive can only be deduced from the conflict of instances that, however, can be observed, isolated and differentiated in the subject, as well as from the ongoing process of unconscious work to which the subject’s action can be reduced. Working on resistance already means attempting to shift the constellation of forces sustaining the libidinal economy anchored in repression. And this central role of work also shows that psychoanalysis stands for something significantly different from simple resistance to resistance. Only the process of working-through is capable of splitting the structural resistance from within and converting the labour of repression into the labour of sublimation.

Being affected by language, the individual comes down to a weak subjectivity, which could in no way be more contrasting than the fantasy of the strong ego that many post-Freudian doctrines took as the normative and normalising instance of mental life. Needless to recall that such development went against the critical perspective of Freud’s metapsychological theory and analytic practice and mistook something that he himself treated as a *fiction* for positive existence:

⁶ Lacan’s seminar from 1978–1979, during which he lost the ability to speak, was entitled precisely *Topology and Time*. The title could thus be read “Structure and History”, thereby rejecting the cliché, according to which structuralist thought excluded the historical dimension of structures.

As it is well known, the analytic situation consists in our allying ourselves with the ego of the person under treatment, in order to subdue portions of his id which are uncontrolled—that is to say to include them in the synthesis of the ego. The fact that a co-operation of this kind habitually fails in the case of psychotics affords us a first solid footing for our judgment. The ego, if we are to be able to make such a pact with it, must be a normal one. But a normal ego of this sort is, like normality in general, an ideal fiction. The abnormal ego, which is unserviceable for our purposes, is unfortunately no fiction. Every normal person, in fact, is only normal on the average. His ego approximates to that of the psychotic in some part or other and to a greater or lesser extent.⁷

The analyst strives for an alliance with a fragile entity, a damaged subject, whose ego stands for a supposed “normality” without a stable norm. Psychoanalysis must fabricate an ideal fiction, or rather, an epistemic object, something the analyst must assume, not in order to normalise the abnormal, but in order to be able to work with the analysand in the first place: to establish the analytic “pact” (Freud) or “social link” (Lacan), hence to ground the cure on a “work contract” or “division of labour”, which ultimately comes down to the imperative of working through resistance.⁸ In contrast to post-Freudian

⁷ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 23, p. 235.

⁸ If the ego was Freud’s hypothesis then this hypothesis must be linked with Lacan’s: “My hypothesis is that the individual who is affected by the unconscious is the same individual who constitutes what I call the subject of a signifier.” Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XX, Encore*, New York: Norton 1999, p. 142. Both hypotheses can be read as psychoanalytic variations of the Hegelian “identity of identity and non-identity”. In his formula of the analytic discourse (see again the Appendix I to the present volume), Lacan formalised the structure of the analytic social link with the vector going from object *a*, the libidinal object, to which the analyst is reduced in transference, to the subject of the unconscious, \$, the personification of which is the analysand. Ultimately, Freud simply says that by presupposing a “normal ego” the analyst assumes that the demand for the cure can be associated with a subject, or differently put, that the subject wants to be cured in spite of all resistance.

psychotherapies, in which the ego indeed plays the role of a mental norm or ideal to be attained, the Freudian “normal ego” points toward the subject of demand for the cure and the subject of the analytic work. In addition, the analyst’s assumption of the “normal ego” is the flipside of another supposition or ideal fiction, which is equally crucial for sustaining the analytic “pact” and coming from the side of the analysand (with the difference that this fiction remains unconscious for the latter): the hypothesis of the “subject-supposed-to-know”. If Lacan recurrently reminded his analytic audience that they must refrain from identifying with this transference fiction, since the opposite would compromise the analytic process (and transform the analytic discourse into a discourse of the master, working-through into resistance, sublimation into repression), the same can be concluded for the ideal fiction of the ego: the analyst must refrain from filling it with content or mistaking it for something analysis should actualise or impose on the analysand. This was the central error of the post-Freudians, which disarmed psychoanalysis of its critical potential and made it digestible for capitalism, given that the hypothesis of strong ego connected well with the figure of *homo oeconomicus*.

The “alliance with the ego” must be read together with the imperative “Where It was there I shall become”. What Freud describes with the fictitious normal ego is certainly no unsplit ego, but the individual who functions as some sort of personification or *porte-parole* of the subject of the unconscious, its externalisation in the individual’s speech or its inscription on the surface of thought. The analytic assumption of the “normal ego” uses the ideal fiction pragmatically as the working instance, through which the appropriation and the restructuring of the id can take place. Analysis clearly does not strive to make of the ego a master in its libidinal household but to make of the individual uttering the demand for cure the subject of a social bond, in which unconscious labour will be organised

around the imperative of working-through and around change as object (to refer again to Lacan's formula of sublimation). For Freud, the change of the ego implies the change of the libidinal object, and vice versa, since both instances are conditioned by the same structure. The crucial point is that analysis intervenes in a register, which triggers the analysand's resistance and which links back to the fact that illness itself already is a libidinal economy, even if a most problematic one; that is, illness is already a solution, a reaction to and an economisation of an underlying deadlock concerning the junction of discourse with the body. Since the analytic response to the analysand's demand *for* cure consists in a demand *of* the cure, which inevitably antagonises the ongoing labour of repression, the analysand sooner or later reaches the ultimate point of resistance, retreat into illness: "Thus we see that there *is* a resistance against the uncovering of resistances, and the defensive mechanisms really do deserve the name which we gave them originally, before they had been more closely examined. They are resistances not only to the making conscious of contents of the id, but also to the analysis as a whole, and thus to recovery."⁹ Resistance against recovery is the ultimate expression of the impersonal, structural character of resistance, and of the continuity between enjoyment and exploitation in the mechanism of repression, on which a psychopathological complex is grounded.

Not only the analysands, the analysts, too, are confronted with the imperative of working-through, which reflects both the impossible character of their profession and the fact that psychoanalysis in no way assumes a metaposition. The analysts possess no positive knowledge of the exit from the libidinal economy of repression and from its capitalist reinvention in terms of "repressive desublimation". So it should come as no surprise that the end of analysis implies the abolition rather

⁹ Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," p. 239.

than the realisation of the subject-supposed-to-know, as well as of the “normal ego”. Thus the stakes of the cure could also be described in terms of the progressive dissolution of the link between knowledge and normality. Or, better yet, the dissolution of the link between knowledge and mastery, which demands from every subject to live up to the imposed fictions of normality and normativity. Analysis is in the last instance not about accumulating knowledge or raising consciousness about internal and external conflicts, but about counteracting resistance to structural change. Because there is no metaposition, which would safeguard the analyst from resistance, abnormality and illness, because analysts are in no way actualisations of normal ego or normality in general, they cannot be exempted from the imperative of working-through, this core component of the psychoanalytic “pact”: “Every analyst should periodically—at intervals of five years or so—submit himself to analysis once more, without feeling ashamed of taking this step. This would mean, then, that not only the therapeutic analysis of patients but his own analysis would change from a terminable into an interminable task.”¹⁰ Here we come across another feature of Freud’s “Platonism”, in which his imperative sounds even more radical than Plato’s version of working-through, the construction of the ideal state. While for Plato the formation of the guardian-class, as presented in the *Republic*, is supposed to take fifty years and despite its *longue durée* amount to an end, for Freud the analytic working-through is virtually infinite, since it takes place in a cultural milieu that is necessarily hostile to subjective and social change and because no one can predict, what forms of organised resistance to psychoanalysis and to other forms of working-through the future might bring. In this respect Freud points out—it does not matter whether accidentally or not—a radical egalitarianism in the aims and the stakes

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 249.

of the cure, insofar as the latter ultimately comes down to the work on resistance. What is striking in Freud is that this infinite task confronts the analyst and the analysand with the same impossibility. Not only is analysis an impossible profession, but also the analysand is an impossible subjective position, an elevation of the suffering subject from the neurotic's position of impotence. The analyst and the analysand organise their work around the same impossibility and against the same resistance.

Freud's main critical point is that resistance is included in all discourses, and consequently, that psychoanalysis is anything but immunised against backlashes. Being a discourse of enjoyment every social link contains a fundamental ambiguity and tension. If we recall Lacan's four discourses (master, university, hysteric, analyst), it would be all too simplistic to say that the master's discourse and the university discourse are "in themselves" negative, while the hysteric's discourse and the analytic discourse are "in themselves" subversive. Lacan's notion of discourse departs from the recognition that every discourse, hence every social bond is structured around an immanent impossibility, which marks it with instability, incompleteness and antagonism. The fact that the four discourses can be deduced from one another allows remarking that they all together represent an *alliance of impossibilities*. Surely there is a constant tendency to reject their immanent contradictions, breaks and deadlocks, by providing fantasmatic support for their stabilisation.¹¹ The ambiguity of the four discourses can be best

¹¹ At this point I can only briefly touch upon the four fantasies corresponding to the four discourses: the fantasy of an unproblematic and stable relation between subject and enjoyment in the master's discourse (for instance, what Marx describes as the "automatic subject"), between enjoyment and knowledge in the hysteric's discourse (an extreme case of such fantasy would be Wilhelm Reich's "orogonomy", his fictitious science of enjoyment), between knowledge and the master-signifier in the analytic discourse (which would point toward the idea of complete or totalised knowledge without the unconscious) and between the master-signifier and the subject in the university discourse (this fantasy is at the root of every assumption of non-alienated subjectivity). For the formulas, see again Appendix I.

exemplified by referring to Freud's famous remark on impossible professions:

Here let us pause for a moment to assure the analyst that he has our sincere sympathy in the very exacting demands he has to fulfil in carrying out his activities. It almost looks as if analysis were the third of those "impossible" professions in which one can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfying results. The other two, which have been known much longer, are education and government.¹²

As others have already noticed, the three impossible professions can be associated to three Lacanian discourses: governing points to the master's discourse, educating to the university discourse and analysing, or more generally, medicating to the analytic discourse. What remains is the hysteric's discourse that Lacan occasionally associated with science, or more generally, with production of "revolutionary" or "subversive" knowledge.¹³ Freud openly acknowledges that all professions contain a dimension of failure and that they are impossible in the strong sense of the term. Ultimately, they deal with the inner contradictions and real consequences of the symbolic order. Because of this confrontation with the real of the symbolic, or with the real of social, subjective and epistemic structures, they also sustain the possibility of change. But they all require perpetual effort in working on resistance, which under modern historical conditions obtains the privileged form of commodification and valorisation—in other words, the submission of revolutionary, subversive or emancipatory potentials of governing, educating, analysing (or more generally, curing) and researching (or producing knowledge) to the imperative of the production of value

¹² Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," p. 248.

¹³ For further contextualisation, see Slavoj Žižek, *Incontinence of the Void*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2017, pp. 162–163.

(production for the sake of production rather than production for the sake of social transformation). More generally, every discourse remains subversive only as long as it sustains the immanent tension between structural disclosure (what Lacan calls “revolution”) and the tendency to fictitious or fantasmatic closure (what indeed deserves the name “fetishism”).¹⁴ To persevere in this tension is the endless task of every representative of an impossible profession and moreover of every subject. The impossible professions and the alliance of impossibilities that they can potentially establish shows, on the one hand, that there are no “good” and “bad” discourses but only immanently antagonised discourses, and on the other hand, that only an organised politics of the impossible, grounded on the uninterrupted pursuit of the imperative of working-through, can counteract the politics of fetishism, which pushes the subject into the position of impotence.

Freud’s writings on culture recurrently demonstrate that culture *is* organised resistance, that resistance must be understood as the fundamental force of social links, foundational for culture. The recognition of subjective, social and epistemic resistance as the key obstacle of psychoanalytic theory and practice explains why for Freud the aim of analysis was “to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organisation, so that it can

¹⁴ Lacan (*Encore*, pp. 41–43) used the term “revolution” quite carefully. On the one hand he recalls its astronomical origin, where it designates the circular movement of celestial bodies, hence return to the point of departure. Understood in this way, revolution does not stand for radical change, but rather for repetition of the same and ultimately coincides with the register of objective appearance (imaginary). On the other hand, in the theory of discourses revolution also stands for structural action. This can be exemplified in Lacan’s famous interpretation of May ’68 events in terms of the descent of structures to the street. One could say that in the sky revolution stands for structural stability, while on the ground, and most notably on the street, it stands for the exact opposite. The impossibility of politics is not unrelated to the necessity of mediating between the two faces of revolution, its imaginary guise as repetition and its real guise as rupture, without tipping over into yet another exploitative organisation of society and subjectivity.

appropriate fresh portions of the id".¹⁵ The first "emancipation" targeted by psychoanalysis concerns the relation between the ego and the super-ego, this seat of exploitative cultural imperatives, in the first place the imperative of enjoyment or the imperative of production for the sake of production. Strengthening strives to make the ego more independent from the resistance coming from the alliance between the id and the super-ego. The two main achievements of psychoanalysis—and Freud somewhat naively remains here a partisan of the Enlightenment—should be broadening the field of perception and building out its organisation, which would enable the reclamation of the space of thinking, presently occupied by exploitative libidinal and social economy. Here, the other seat of resistance is targeted, the id, libidinal resistance. This resistance turns out to be the true challenge because in the last instance it assumes the form of the death drive. All this makes working-through a task that must be continued on the structural level after the actual analysis has been brought to an end. This is what Lacan aimed at, when he included psychoanalysis among social links: the analytic discourse is not restricted to the analytic cabinet; its existence must be sustained outside the cure—outside psychoanalysis.¹⁶

Elsewhere Freud vehemently defends two features of psychoanalysis that its opponents find most scandalous and economically wasteful, its deconstruction of the ego and its *longue durée*—again in strong opposition to the predominant ideology of self-entrepreneurship and economic efficiency, which clearly

¹⁵ Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, in: *Standard Edition*, vol. 22, p. 80.

¹⁶ That psychoanalysis can also turn into resistance against the analytic discourse is exemplified by the history of internal struggles, heresies and mutual exclusions. Lacan, for instance, described the International Psychoanalytic Association, the institution founded by Freud in 1910, with the term SAMCDA, *société d'assistance mutuelle contre le discours analytique*, association of mutual aid against analytic discourse. Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits*, Paris: Seuil 2001, p. 519. The English translation speaks of "professional insurance plan against analytic discourse, PIPAAD (Lacan, *Television*, p. 15).

demands an “ideal ego” in the guise of a strong-greedy economic man and instant therapy. Freud comments on the attempt of his psychoanalytic colleague and former pupil Otto Rank, whose work is best known for placing the source of neuroses in the trauma of birth:

It cannot be disputed that Rank’s argument was bold and ingenious; but it did not stand the test of critical examination. Moreover, it was a child of its time, conceived under the stress of the contrast between the post-war misery of Europe and the “prosperity” of America, and designed to adapt the tempo of analytic therapy to the haste of American life. We have not heard much about what the implementation of Rank’s plan has done for cases of sickness. Probably not more than if the fire-brigade, called to deal with a house that had been set on fire by an overturned oil-lamp, contented themselves with removing the lamp from the room in which the blaze had started. No doubt a considerable shortening of the brigade’s activities would be effected by this means. The theory and practice of Rank’s experiment are now things of the past—no less than American “prosperity” itself.¹⁷

Freud’s reflections demonstrate that there was never a time when psychoanalysis was not threatened by cultural resistance, in particular by the predominant economic doctrines and understanding of mental health. Psychoanalysis always had to confront and dismiss the same criticisms, which sought in its *longue durée* the proof of its therapeutic inefficiency, illegitimacy and failure. It was always facing the danger of falling into oblivion in contrast to other therapeutic techniques, which promised quick and efficient treatment, from afar resembled the Freudian method but actually regressed back to the pre--

¹⁷ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” pp. 216–217.

psychoanalytic understanding of thinking, sexuality and subjectivity. The problem with the end of analysis is that it contains an epistemological deadlock, which has direct political significance, the continuity between libidinal economy and social economy and, correspondingly, between subjective resistance and cultural resistance. If psychoanalysis indeed comes across the damaged subjectivity produced by the socioeconomic system, then its task is inevitably endless and reaches beyond any particular case. For this reason, the alliance of impossible professions and their engagement in a combined effort of working on the resistance of capitalism is a political necessity. Social and subjective change can be brought about only through the mobilisation and organisation of the same conflictuality of impossible professions, which are presently implemented in accordance with the imperative of economic efficiency and production for the sake of production.

Perfectly aware of the dilemmas that accompany the issue, Freud specified that three conditions needed to be fulfilled in order to speak of the end of analysis. Firstly, there was the overcoming of the suffering that initially took the form of symptoms, inhibitions and anxieties, which preserved the subject in the position of impotence. Secondly, there was the analytic working-through that managed to elevate a sufficient amount of repression, which brought the repressed material to consciousness and clarified the “mystified” aspects of the subject’s history. Finally, enough resistance has to have been managed so that the repetition of psychopathological processes can be avoided. In sharp contrast to all the psychotherapeutic techniques, which aim at adapting or reintegrating individuals into the socioeconomic order and the temporary renewing of their economic performance, psychoanalysis comes with the critical thesis that the analysand’s suffering signals precisely their *integration* in the socioeconomic order and the unbearable character of this integration.

The flipside of the change of the ego is the change of the structural order that sustains the satisfaction of the drive, hence the change of libidinal object. Freud describes this intervention of analysis into libidinal structure as *dauernde Erledigung eines Triebanspruchs*, permanent disposal of the drive's demand, which might create the misunderstanding that psychoanalysis works against the drive and targets its abolition. Instead, the aim is to achieve its displacement by mobilising its flexibility. To repeat again, there seems to be something fundamentally paradoxical about the drive, since its fixation creates the impression that it is unchangeable, transhistoric, an eternal return of the same structural problematic, whereas its polymorphous character, its variability in terms of forms and objects makes it most susceptible to change. Indeed, the drive is both flexible in its rigidity and rigid in its flexibility—which is both the core of the problem and a part of the solution. This is due to the fact that the drive does not exist outside its historical and structural destinies as an independent “transcendental” force, which would subsequently be embedded in one of its four destinies. The drive evolves together with the organisation of the social mode of production and the subjective mode of enjoyment. Freud's thesis may indeed be that all hitherto existing social modes of production and subjective modes of enjoyment have been grounded on exploitative destinies of the drive (notably repression). Nevertheless, he remains surprisingly optimistic, when it comes to the transformative aims of the psychoanalytic intervention in libidinal economy:

To avoid misunderstanding it is not unnecessary, perhaps, to explain more exactly what is meant by “permanently disposing of a demand coming from the drive”. Certainly not “causing the demand to disappear so that nothing more is ever heard from it again”. This is in general impossible, nor is it at all to be desired. No, we mean something else, some-

thing which may be roughly described as a “taming” [*Bändigung*] of the drive. That is to say, the drive is brought completely into the harmony of the ego, becomes accessible to all the influences of the other tendencies in the ego and no longer seeks to go its independent way to satisfaction.¹⁸

Bändigung des Triebes is yet another ambiguous expression, which could easily be understood in its most current meaning: cultivation, domestication, mastering or subordination of the natural drives to cultural goals. This would again imply that the human being becomes a being of culture on the basis of repression of natural drives or on their cultivation (as in Freud’s metaphor of the acquisition of land). However, *Bändigung* allows for an alternative reading, which evolves around an immanent conflict and contradiction within culture rather than between nature and culture. Here, then, the opposition between two destinies of the drive and its corresponding political implications enters the picture: the politics of repression versus the politics of sublimation, and accordingly, libidinal economy grounded on the satisfaction of the drive through the compulsive production of enjoyment, versus satisfaction of the drive through conflictual process of working-through. In the capitalist framework, the mechanism of repression stands for the conversion of surplus enjoyment into surplus value through its quantification.¹⁹ By contrast, sublimation would stand for an organisation of satisfaction, which would bend the drive’s demand in accordance with the demand of the cure, or to put

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 225. Transl. modified.

¹⁹ As Lacan remarks: “Something changed in the master’s discourse at a certain point in history. We are not going to break our backs finding out if it was because of Luther, or Calvin, or some unknown traffic of ships around Genoa, or in the Mediterranean Sea, or anywhere else, for the important point is that on a certain day surplus *jouissance* became calculable, could be counted, totalized. This is where what is called the accumulation of capital begins.” Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton 2006, p. 177.

it with Marx, in accordance with the demand of a social bond, in which the conditions of “full and free development of every individual” are worked on.²⁰ If nothing else, Freud’s own quotation marks indicate that he targets the second connotation permitted by the word *Bändigung*: diversion, reorientation, and most importantly binding, the gradual construction of a libidinal and social bond, which would overturn the alliance of the drive’s insatiable demand for surplus enjoyment with the capitalist socioeconomic imperatives (the drive’s fixation on surplus value).

Freud’s talk about the harmony between the drive and the ego may sound like a misfortunate formulation, suggesting that at the end of the analytic process there could be a reconciliation between the subject and enjoyment, perhaps even dealienation, which would renew or establish a homeostatic balance in the pleasure principle. If nothing else, the notion of the death drive spoils such a fantasmatic scenario. “Harmony” in Freud’s phrasing should be understood more in the sense of the aspired “alliance” of the ego and the id, which is supposed to counteract the parasitism of the infinite (the drive) on the finite (the subject), the exploitative and traumatic impact of the capitalist link between the “id” (absolute drive of self-valorisation) and the “superego” (the imperative of enjoyment). According to Freud, such a non-exploitative libidinal-economic alliance can be established and sustained only on the background of the investment of “mental energy” (libido) in the process of working-through. To bring the matter to its central point, Freud writes how “the real achievement of analytic therapy would be the retroactive correction of the original process of repression, a correction which puts an end to the dominance of the

²⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, London: Penguin 1990, p. 739. The context in which Marx drops the formula is the capitalist organisation of production around the “absolute drive of enrichment” (*Bereicherungstrieb*).

quantitative factor.”²¹ Again, the cure overthrows the imperative of enjoyment (“quantitative factor”) and in doing so finalises the infinite. Or rather, if repression stands for a parasitism of infinite on the finite and the exploitation of the subject’s alienation, then sublimation is grounded on an inverse parasitism, that of the finite on the infinite, which amounts to the bending of the drive.²² In the libidinal economy of repression, the subject remains a hostage of enjoyment, and moreover a hostage of the drive, and is effectively converted into enjoyment of the system (this is what exploitation ultimately stands for from the Freudo-Lacanian perspective). In the regime of sublimation, by contrast, the drive ideally becomes a *force of the cure*, which allows for converting the compulsion and resistance of the system into transformative labour and a process of becoming.²³

The critical insight of psychoanalysis, which in this respect goes hand in hand with Marx’s critique of political economy, can be summed up by the thesis that there is no revolutionary subjectivity, at least not in the sense of a pre-given being or agency. What exists is exploited subjectivity, “damaged life”, hence the social symptom, which is itself composed of multiple “personifications” that change their appearance depending on whether we approach them from the viewpoint of feminism, the critique of political economy, anti-colonialism, structural psychoanalysis, etc. The labour of analysis and the labour of critique ideally have in common the attempt to mobilise and organise this symptomatic subjectivity into a (potentially)

²¹ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” p. 227. Transl. modified.

²² This can only be achieved through the invention of a new signifier of enjoyment, a new effective fiction. At this point it may be worth recalling that in his formalisation of the analytic discourse, Lacan placed the master-signifier in the position of the product. The master-signifier is precisely such a signifying fiction, which sustains the transformation of one vicissitude of the drive into another—a signifier that encloses and sustains the virtual infinity of the drive.

²³ The cure is understood here in the broadest sense, standing for every register of action in which working-through can take place, whether analysis, political organisation, production of knowledge, art etc.

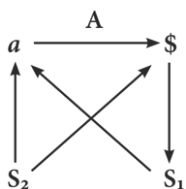
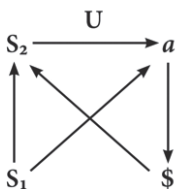
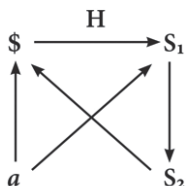
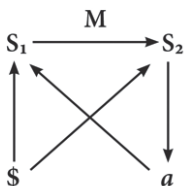
revolutionary subject. Through the progressive construction of a non-exploitative social link by means of the mobilisation of thought, labour and enjoyment against the resistance of the capitalist system, the political organisation of “damaged life” and something that one might call the collective management of alienation, in contrast to its systemic exploitation, introduces a new conflict into social reality and in the life of particular subjects. A subject is not born revolutionary, but it can become revolutionary, even though this becoming does not immunise him or her against regression and resistance. Revolution, too, in this case stands for something other than an event. Marx and Engels were perfectly aware of this, when they wrote: “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.”²⁴ If communism is neither a future state nor a regulative ideal, it can only be a conflictual process of working-through, in the concrete case of working through the capitalist organisation of work and through the organised resistance of the capitalist system as a whole. And if the imperative of analysis is *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, where It was there I shall become, then the imperative of radical emancipatory politics could be *Wo Ich war, soll Wir werden*, where I was, there We shall become. In other words, while psychoanalysis leads the analysand to the point where he or she can begin working on a transformation of the exploitative impersonal order, communism stands for a politics of working-through that establishes a continuum between individual working-through and the construction of an impersonal, non-psychological subjectivity. The latter consequently falls in the grey zone between the individual and the collective. This is what

²⁴ Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000, p. 187.

“We” essentially stands for: no longer an individual closed in a fixed identity and not yet a fully constituted and self-enclosed collective. Or better yet, it follows a wholly different logic as in the one sustaining the constitution of the individual and the collective, precisely the logic that Lacan addressed with the feminine formulas of sexuation. Just like *the Woman*, *the Subject* of emancipatory politics does not exist, the subject is not a being but a (conflictual) becoming. Correspondingly, if capitalism is today the privileged name of a cultural disease, then communism remains the only signifier of a potential political cure: the name of an emancipatory process and an impossible, because open-ended, political task. At the core of this stands a shared negativity that in the present predicament constitutes the subject. The subject could therefore be the name of a *negative commons* behind or underneath the proliferation of presumably positive cultural and subjective differences, which, however, remain politically inefficient in breaking the capitalist logic of segregation. Precisely for this reason, the psychoanalytic contribution to the contemporary critique of capitalism sets out from a thorough deconstruction of identity and of the ego. It affirms the immanent difference, inconsistency and dynamic that characterises the ego and the impersonal force of the drive. The central meeting point of psychoanalysis, understood as a critique of libidinal economy, with the critique of political economy thus lies in the materialist theory of the subject. This would definitively go beyond the idealism of identities and the even more persistent idealist confusion of capital with the fantasmatic figure of automatic subject.

APPENDIX I

Lacan's Four Discourses



Elements are:

S_1 – the master-signifier

S_2 – knowledge

$\$$ – the barred subject

a – the surplus-object

Places are:

Agent	Work
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-------	-------

Truth	Product
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APPENDIX II

The Formulas of Sexuation

$\overline{\text{E}}\text{X}$ VX	$\overline{\Phi}\text{X}$ ΦX	$\overline{\text{E}}\text{X}$ VX	$\overline{\Phi}\text{X}$ ΦX
<p>Diagram illustrating the relationships between the symbols S, A, a, L, and Φ within the table structure.</p> <p>The diagram shows the following connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S points to a. A points to a. L points to both a and Φ. 			

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you –

Lucas Ballestin, Pietro Bianchi, Nadia Bou-Ali, Nathaniel Boyd, Svenja Bromberg, Erik Bryngelsson, Andrew Cole, Katja Diefenbach, Mladen Dolar, Helmut Draxler, Oliver Feltham, Dominik Finkelde, Angela Harutyunyan, Alexandra Heimes, Dominiek Hoens, Mascha Jacobs, Sami Khatib, Karl Lydén, Amira Möding, Jenny Nachtigall, Morten Paul, David Payne, Lucas Pohl, Kerstin Stakemeier, Olivier Sured, Rebecka Thor, Wibke Tiarks, Joseph Vogl, Mai Wegener, Alenka Zupančič, Slavoj Žižek

– for support, engagement, feedback and constructive criticism in an ongoing process of working-through.

Thank you, Jan Sieber (†).

IMPRINT

© 2019 August Verlag Berlin and the author
Imprint im Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln

Design: Christoph Stolberg
Typesetting: Selitsch Weig, München
Editing: Morten Paul
Proofreading: Nathaniel Boyd
Printing: bookfactory, Stadthagen

Published by
August Verlag Berlin
Imprint im Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln
Ehrenstr. 4, 50672 Köln
Tel. +49 (0) 221 / 20 59 6-53 | Fax +49 (0) 221 / 20 59 6-60
Email: august@augustverlag.de
www.augustverlag.de

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

Printed in Germany

Distribution:

Germany & Europe:
Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln
Ehrenstr. 4, 50672 Köln
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verlag@buchhandlung-walther-koenig.de

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