

**In the beginning...was the Act:
Žižek, Marx, and the question of form**

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Abstract

In almost all commentary on the work Slavoj Žižek the question of his relationship to the thought of Karl Marx is either ignored or indirectly addressed in terms of his relationship to contemporary thinkers. This is best exemplified in discussions of what is Žižek's most significant contribution to today's growing swell of left-wing political theory: the critique of ideology. Against those who find its root elsewhere and who consequently offer various critiques of the positions Žižek takes, understanding the root of ideology to be the material practice of commodity exchange enables one to see the overall coherence of his work. After differentiating Žižek's position from many of his contemporaries and arguing that Žižek's 'parallax view' can be best understood as a development of Marx's 'commodity fetishism' the author goes on to use this as a means to get at the idea of form as it appears in Marx and Žižek. On this basis the last half of the study takes up contemporary history and theory on the formation of psychoanalytic associations and radical party politics to substantiate the claim that while both owe their existence to capitalism, capitalism could owe to them its destruction.

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Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; – they are the life, the soul of reading! -- take them out of this book, for instance, -- you might as well take the book along with them; -- one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer; – he steps forth like a bridegroom, -- bids All-hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail.

– Lawrence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*

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Introduction: From money to... materialism?

The reform of consciousness consists *only* in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it out of its dream about itself, in *explaining* to it the meaning of its own actions.¹

– Marx to Ruge, 1843

It is quite possible for a thought from waking life to play the part of an *entrepreneur* for a dream. But the *entrepreneur*, who, as they say, has an idea and thirsts to put it into effect, can nevertheless do nothing without capital. He needs a capitalist to meet the expenses; and this capitalist, who can supply the psychological outlay for the dream, is invariably and inevitably, whatever the thought from waking life may be, *a wish from the unconscious*.

– Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*



What follows² is in many ways a dissertation on freedom and a treatise against modern liberal notions of politics and the subject. Both these points can be made clear by beginning with a reference to modern liberalism as exemplified by John Stuart Mill in his *On Liberty*. Here Mill asserts that the principle of freedom is such that one can not give it away – doing so would violate the very principle. In a move similar to that used by Paine to defend the rights of man against the conservative attacks of Burke, Mill asserts that one can not tie oneself to one single historical decision – in his example, selling oneself into slavery – because that would undermine the very justification of freedom: one’s ability to voluntarily remain in a position that one finds desirable, or at least endurable. Formally speaking, if one gives away one’s liberty, one cannot latter renege as to do so one would have to be free. He readily admits, of course, that there are limits set against this purity by reality: one finds oneself in associations from which it might be best to remove oneself for one’s own wellbeing, but in so doing do harm to others. Mill’s exemplar in this case is the family: abdicating one’s responsibilities to one’s dependants might bring them harm (Mill did, of course, allow for divorce). This is not an absolute limit in Mill’s thought, however, but a legal one, at the extremities of which we find the

question of moral freedom. The *real* limits to Mill's version of freedom are to be found in the economy: '...there are perhaps no contracts or engagements, except those that relate to money or money's worth, of which one can venture to say that there ought to be no liberty whatever of retraction' (Mill, 2006:116). A contract that one can not possibly renege on is no law backed by human freedom, but a *natural* necessity. That is, here Mill naturalizes the economy, makes its outcomes inevitable, thereby himself undermining freedom. Heller-Roazen puts it this way:

Because of the absolutely unconditioned freedom of their will, human beings can always, in every condition, fail to keep their word. Were it otherwise, promises, pledges, and contracts would be not commitments but natural laws, physical and logical necessities shorn of ethical and moral significance. They might be true, even compelling; but they would not be deeds of free agents (Heller-Roazen, 2009: 188).

The corollary to this conception of freedom and its limits is Mill's assertion that despotism is a justifiable form of government when 'dealing with barbarians' and its aim is the improvement of its subjects. This because 'liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion' (Mill:16-17). This is perhaps not surprising coming from a man who in the same volume asserts that the greatness of England was not the product of the collective work of the toilers in the English countryside and England's many factories, but the great men of industry; this is the same man who worked for a company that had a significant role in the brutal colonization of India and the Opium Wars in China, the latter conducted in the name of market liberalization. What it shows, however, are the limits of his conception of freedom: it poses an 'outside' into which it can not encroach and leaves out a discussion of where freedom might come from in the first place. Mill's account of freedom cannot, for example, be used to explain a

slave revolt such as that in Haiti in 1791 – which was not only a rebellion, but a revolution.

A similar take on freedom, though one seen through the glass of religion, can be found in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, with an important addition: the central premise of one of its most well known parts – the tale of the Grand Inquisitor – is that once freedom is bestowed by God it can never be taken away. The bulk of the tale revolves around the Grand Inquisitor defending the freedom given by God against the threat that He had returned to, in effect, snatch it away. Once the friendly dictator bestows freedom it cannot be *taken* – God cannot ungive his gift – but according to the Inquisitor it can be *given* away – to the Inquisitor and the Church. Weak, frail, and afraid, God's people willingly give their freedom up to those above them that they might be cared for.

Like Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, one of Žižek's fundamental assertions is that we are free but terrified into denying it.³ This freedom isn't bestowed by a benevolent dictator, nor a god, but is instead the product of the openness of the material world *per se*, materialized in the form of money. Freedom is thus inherent to the material, but only begins to be fully realized in the capitalist forms of the means of exchange. To fully realize it one need not only destroy capitalism as a mode of production, but eliminate all forms of mastery.⁴ He develops this point over multiple years in multiple books and articles and not – as one might expect – through a single, concentrated line of argumentation. Though a perusal of his work might not produce such an expectation, considering three of the authors to whom he is deeply indebted might, as each slowly builds concepts to arrive at a theory of freedom to then show how it is possible to make it

worldly, make it material. First in the list is Kant, who explores the antinomy of freedom in his first critique to in the second show that to make it exist in the world is to include a universal maxim in our actions. This is continued in his third critique where Kant argues that freedom is to be found in artistic creation. Similarly, Hegel deduces freedom in his *Logic* to show how it's made material in *The Philosophy of Right*. So too in his *Being and Event* Badiou attempts to prove that truth is possible to later, in *Logic of Worlds*, show how that truth can exist in 'worlds.' Žižek, by contrast, does not have a magnum opus that sets out a set of 'first principles' from which he can conduct the further development of his concepts. The way he writes and argues can be better understood by turning to a comment he makes in a footnote in *The Ticklish Subject*:

[...] it would be interesting to elaborate the concept of unfinished philosophical projects, from the early Hegel to Michel Foucault [...]; this non-accomplishment is the obverse of the procedure of those philosophers (from Fichte to Husserl) who never got further than the establishment of the founding principles of their edifice – that is, who repeatedly (re)wrote the same grounding and/or introductory text (1999: 67, n18).

Anyone who has read a few of Žižek's books gets the impression that they are reading the same 'introductory text' over again, that they are encountering the same 'universal notions' and examples, the same jokes and the same references to Hegel and Lacan. Here, a short list: *objet a*; empty signifier; death drive; 'Kant *avec* Sade'; 'Spirit is a bone'; self-relating negativity; the Rabinovitch joke; chocolate laxatives; Gilliam's *Brazil*. It is not completely without reason, however, and can be understood by looking at a comment Žižek makes to describe what he does:

A materialist... tends to repeat one example, returning to it obsessively. It is the particular example that remains the same in all symbolic universes, while the universal notion it is supposed to exemplify continually changes its shape, so we get a multitude of universal notions circling like bugs around the light, around the single example (Žižek, 2006b, 200).⁵

While the examples may remain the same, their place within any particular argument might give it a different cast. This sort of logic is explicitly approached in several places

in his work: in his response to one of Alain Badiou's papers on 'the idea of communism' in *The New Left Review* of May/June 2009, for example, he evokes Lenin's 'Notes of a publicist' to assert that one mustn't cling to one's gains as the root for each political/theoretical step forward – a procedure which might be said to be present in the three authors mentioned above – but instead repeatedly return to the level of founding principles. This is also the mantra of *In Defense of Lost Causes*, made with reference to Becket's 'Try again. Fail again. Fail better' (2008a: 210; 486, n78).⁶ These are of course later works, but this theme also appears in comments he makes in regards to Benjamin, Hegel, and revolution in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* – his English-language breakthrough: '...so-called 'dialectical development' consists in the incessant repetition of a beginning *ex nihilo*, in the annihilation and retroactive restructuring of the presupposed contents' (1989: 144). The return to the same is not only the logic of materialism, according to Žižek, but also of dialectics.

Why this is so is to be found in part in the question of 'retroactivity', which should not be overlooked here. It deserves a brief moment of elaboration, which can be done with reference to the *Grundrisse*⁷ and *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Where Marx asks what accounts for the universal appeal of the great works of the ancient Greeks, Freud answers that they stage of the fundamentals of desire – i.e. the themes presented in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Freud also takes another step: this 'universal notion' (to use Žižek's formulation) can also be seen in *Hamlet*, and its appeal explained with reference to the telling of the same drama, though in different form because of historical circumstance – the enlightenment, the birth of capitalism, and modernity. Žižek goes yet another step, claiming that while *Hamlet* historically proceeds *Oedipus Rex*, the truth

about desire that it reveals is logically prior (2004b). That is, history creates what was not yet possible: Hamlet's hysterics are able to reveal the logic of desire and the anxiety produced by social demands and 'symbolic mandates' only after the birth of the modern and of capitalism. That is, only 'retroactively.'

This is a theme that will be explored in more detail below and in the chapters that follow. Of present concern, however, is the first of two alternatives to theoretical system-building that Žižek endorses: in place of the (more or less) complete philosophical systems of (for example) Kant, Hegel, and Badiou, Žižek constantly re-writes his fundamental premises. This alternative can be seen by looking at one of the 'bugs,' one of the 'universal notions' that Žižek lets fly: money. First, a short list of where it appears in Žižek's work: The first chapter of *Parallax View* (2006a, 55-60); the first chapter of *Tarrying With the Negative* (1993: 28-9); the first chapter of *For They Know Not What They Do* (2008 [1991]: 21-31); and the first chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989: 11-26). The first and last in the list are the most significant: in them he elaborates the link between Marx and Freud – between capitalism and the Subject – at length. As will be repeated throughout this study, the commodity form (the 'highest' form of which is, for Marx, money) and the form of the dream are homologous, each marking the possibility of achieving freedom.

The modern subject – another of Žižek's constant points of return – is the 'fundamental fantasy' that belies each of these forms: the logical assumption that there is something called 'value' in every commodity, the twisting and turning of which can never reveal value's presence; the 'construction of analysis' that makes sense of an analysand's symptoms but can never be recollected because it probably never happened.

That is, the Subject exists only insofar as it is supported in a material object outside the body. In the case of the *Cogito*, the thinking self devoid of thoughts is nothing but the form given in any particular thought, and cannot be had directly; For Marx, the value of one commodity is only realized in the material body of another commodity; for Freud one's desire is only revealed in one's symptoms (dreams, slips of the tongue, jokes...). According to Žižek these three work together as different manifestation of the subject, with the added twist that capitalism makes it possible by materializing the abstract 'void' of subjectivity as money:

[...] there is no S without its support in *a*: the subject can arrive at its being-for-itself, can free itself from all substantial ties and appear as the point of pure negativity, only by being posited as equivalent to its absolute antipode, money, that inert piece of metal that one can hold in one's hands and manipulate freely... (2008b [1991]: 57, n22).⁸

This is to say that 1) it is not *merely* that these three operations share the same logic, but that this logic is shared because it has its root in the same material practice (commodity exchange); and 2) the openness of the material world is at the root of human essence. These can be understood more readily by turning to Marx.

It is Žižek's relationship to Marx that sets him apart from many of his contemporaries, a good example of which is one of Badiou's English-language commentators – Bruno Bosteels. Taking a position similar to Žižek's, in his contribution to *A leftist Ontology* he offers that there is no division left/right because the ontological root of our world is undecidable – what was above called the openness of the material world (Bosteels: 241). There is no 'division' between the two because they stand on two different levels of the ontological playing field. He takes the position that what is right-wing is of the order of 'Being', and what is left-wing is that which is excluded from it (242; 248). His worry, however, is that this division risks being ontologized (i.e. reified):

the ‘excluded’ or ‘empty’ element might be taken as a thing rather than a possibility or a ‘generic’ (discussed below) (242). Here Bosteels briefly turns to Marx. He holds that the young Marx argued that the most radical approach to the world was to chase things to their essence, in his case the essence of human being. ‘What, then,’ Bosteels writes, ‘could be more radical than in the name of contemporary ontological interrogations to forego all humanist anthropologies so as [to] unconceal the uprootedness of the human essence that is its absent ground?’ (243). He then turns to Foucault as a way past Marx, as the way of an ‘ontology of actuality.’⁹

It is with the ‘generic’ that the problems begin, as it stands cheek-to-jowl with Kantian regulative ideas. It is, according to Bosteels, the third of three ontological positions. The first is that of ‘constructivism,’ which subordinates ‘openness’, the new, and the impasses of being to what is known; it is the translation of everything into what already exists. An example here might be the evolutionary biologists discussed by Gould in *Wonderful Life*: instead of seeing the completely new in the fossils discovered at the Burgess Shale in British Columbia, all that was seen was taken as just more of the same, thereby obfuscating a completely different understanding of the workings of evolution. The second ontological position discussed by Bosteels is that of ‘transcendentalism’, in which a beyond is posited in order to solve certain logical impasses. The obvious example here is Kant’s moral theory, in which he has to postulate God, heaven, and freedom itself to solve the problems posed by the good. The last position, the generic, is described as follows:

...the generic orientation postulates the existence of an indiscernible with which to interpret the impasse of being as the effect of an event within the situation at hand – thus neither collapsing the event into the sum total of its constructable preconditions nor elevating the impasse to the level of a miraculous or monstrous-sublime Thing, as it were, taking the place once occupied by God (239).

It is unclear, however, how this is any different than Kant's 'regulative ideas' – e.g. God, a generic idea with no discernible content (and not a 'monstrous-sublime Thing'), merely a formalism that enables the overcoming of the impasses of the Good and happiness. That is, rather than an 'ontology of actuality' Bosteels offers a Kantian formalism.¹⁰

While offering what looks like a nod to Marx, Bosteels is instead taking a *shot* at him, where the mention of 'humanist anthropologies' is a clear reference to a theme common to an approach to Marx that comes through an Althusserian lineage (Badiou was Althusser's student, and much of Bosteels' work is derived from Badiou). What Bosteels misses, of course, is that 'the young Marx' *himself* went past this anthropology, that he already 'unconcealed the uprootedness of the human essence that is its absent ground explicitly' (Bosteels), saying that the way past it was to look at alienation, *particularly that engendered in capitalist money*.¹¹ Not only did Marx already point out that the essence of 'man' was dissolution, but that the actuality of capitalist exchange also engendered the 'actuality of the present' – capitalism melts all into air, but it also, in Marx's words, acts a social *cement*: a hard, *human-made ground* if ever there was one. This is to say that the particularity of Marx's analysis is completely missed. The historical, non-essentialist mediation between subject and system – the commodity form – is ignored in favour of cheap shots at Žižek, though without naming him.¹²

Bosteels' attempts to outline the move away from Marx's supposed essentialism (i.e. human essence as rooted in some substantial ground outside of history) in political theory and philosophy, describing it as an 'ontological turn' – so dubbed to mirror what has been called the linguistic turn (though he leaves the relationship between the two unexplored). This move, as described by Bosteels, saw the base/superstructure metaphor

in effect replaced by Heidegger's 'ontological difference' – the difference between Being as such (as 'base') and any collection of particular beings (the 'superstructure', the sphere of politics, culture, etc., as conditioned by the base). This 'left Heideggerianism,' as rooted in the work of Carl Schmidt and Hannah Arendt, has been transmitted through theorists like Laclau and Rancière, appearing in the work of the latter, for instance, as the difference between 'the political' and 'politics.' This is in part seen as progress because it moves away from the base/superstructure model and its supposed essentialist ontological presuppositions, where 'the ontic can never be a derivation or simple application of the ontological dimension' (Dallmayr in Bosteels, 2011: 67) – as if the base/superstructure metaphor itself should so easily be dismissed as being so coarse.

According to Bosteels, as an attempt to overcome leftist essentialisms the 'ontological turn' also includes a critique of the political subject, itself rendered in new ways to make it compatible with anti-essentialist ontologies. Bosteels, however, concludes by siding with critiques that see even the notion of the Subject as itself the production of anti-democratic dynamics and domination, himself preferring to see the 'ontological turn' as a symptom of 'a truly emancipatory politics' having been missed. His chosen response to this 'turn' is revealed in his use of 'subjective fidelity' versus 'subject' in the final volley of his paper: he asks whether or not 'every subject [is] necessarily enmeshed in the history of politics as a history of sacrificial violence, or can there be a form of subjective fidelity to the very traumas and anxieties that bear witness to those vanquished and sacrificed?' (2011: 73). Against the background of an only half-acknowledged dismissal of Žižek's work in the same paper, this can only be read as a dismissal of Žižek's arguments against Althusser and Badiou to the effect that there is

never subjectivization without the subject and the death drive, and a siding with some form of Badiou's arguments for 'subjective fidelity.'

While at the level of terminology it might appear that Žižek follows the 'left Heideggerian' route – at times making reference to the politics/police distinction, for example – his distance from it can be seen by taking Marx into account while comparing his position to those of Laclau and Rancière. That is, Žižek does not miss this link between subject and system as founding the commodity form, and the importance of it for his thought is what occupies much of the work that follows. Taking Marx into account also reveals Žižek's distance from the position of Bosteels, showing how the death drive can be taken to itself be a mode of capitalism, resulting in the creation of the free, Cartesian subject that can be used against the capitalist exploitation that led to it. A preview of what's to come can be seen by briefly taking up some of Marx's early writing: In 1844 he wrote that 'Man is a species being, not only because he practically and theoretically makes the species [...] but also [...] because he looks upon himself as the present, living species, because he looks upon himself as a universal and therefore free being' (1992: 327). That is, people are free because they think of themselves as free, and actively reproduce themselves. Marx then goes on, of course, to show precisely in what way freedom does *not* exist in the world: under capitalism the worker is *vogelfrei* – which his translators note means 'literally "as free as a bird," i.e. free but outside the human community and therefore entirely unprotected and without legal rights' (Marx, 1977: 896). What needs to be pointed out here is the means by which human beings *are* universal, according to Marx – and yet alienated. This means is money. In the section

directly proceeding his critique of Hegel in the 1844 manuscripts – ‘Money’ – is found the following:

If man’s *feelings*, passions, etc., are not merely anthropological characteristics in the narrower sense, but are truly *ontological* affirmations of his essence (nature), and if they only really affirm themselves in so far as their *object* exists *sensuously* for them, then it is clear: [...] (4) only through developed industry, i.e. through the mediation of private property, does the ontological essence of human passion come into being [...] (Marx, 1992: 375).

Against Bosteels’ assertions to the contrary, it is clear that Marx argues against an anthropological¹³ understanding of what it is to be human and instead holds that we reach our ‘ontological essence’ ‘through the mediation of private property.’ Money stands as this mediator, and does so because it ‘destroys’ of all our particular properties and replaces them with an infinite number of others. Earlier in the manuscripts Marx describes our universality by comparing us to animals. Among other things, ‘...man is capable of producing according to the standards of every species ...’ (329) – and of course, labourers are free as birds. Perhaps not incidentally, one of the properties that Marx shows can be made human *via* money are those of animals: by way of Goethe’s *Faust* Marx illustrates that when we use money we don’t merely use a horse and carriage; the power of the horses feet and legs become our own (377). It is in this way that human essence is ‘not merely anthropological’ nor the product of an eternal or external essence, but historical: the universality achieved by the human animal comes to fruition only in capitalist money, which is also, however, the complete alienation of that essence.

It’s worth noting that the words to which Marx turns in *Faust* are not those of the protagonist but those of Mephistopheles. Marx uses the word ‘destroy’ to describe what money does to each individual’s qualities, which can perhaps be substituted with ‘negates’ as this is the name Goethe gives to his devil – ‘the spirit that negates’ (Goethe, 1961:161). Money is thereby also ‘the spirit that negates.’ Marx puts it this way:

If *money* is the bond which ties me to *human* life and society to me, which links me to nature and to man, is money not the bond of all bonds? Can it not bind and loose all bonds? Is it not therefore the universal *means of separation*? It is the true *agent of separation* and the true *cementing agent*, it is the *chemical* power of Society (Marx, 1992: 377).

Capitalist money has both a positive and a negative side: for the first time human ontological essence is realized; but it is so via the complete alienation of that essence in the commodity form. As noted above, in money people are *vogelfrei*: free to sell their labour, but also free of all unalienated bonds to others.

Similarly, in Žižek's work money is said to function as a 'master signifier' that establishes the relationship between all commodities and is described in terms similar to those just quoted from Marx: '...it is precisely the new 'suture' effected by the Nation [as master signifier] which renders possible the 'desuturing,' the disengagement from traditional organic ties' (Žižek, 2008: 20). This, in combination with Žižek's comments on the subject and money above, shows that these two thinkers share very similar views of the importance of money in relation to what it is to exist as a universal subject, one still living under the cloud of capital – one lined with a 'pound' of silver.

To return to the point where the present discussion began, here arrives the second component of the second type of system-building Žižek alludes to: the constant rewriting of a system's foundation is the product of a *necessarily* incomplete philosophical project. István Mészáros argues that all of Marx's major theoretical projects – from the 1844 manuscripts to *Capital* – are unfinished, and this precisely because they are historical materialist projects: because they are the attempt to show how all aspects of the material world dialectically mediate each other in reality and not just in thought, because knowledge is constantly being expanded and history continues to flow, a materialist project can not be the work of one person but only of groups of people – *successive*

groups of people – as time passes (Mészáros, 1972a: 240-1). Because history is open ended (114-8) materialist theory and practice can never cease.

Not only are Marx's projects unfinished, left to generations of critical scholars to further develop them that they might change the world; many of Marx's works are also the reworking of the same project. Mészáros central argument in *Marx's Theory of Alienation* is that the 1844 manuscripts are Marx's theory *in statu nascendi*. Marx keeps coming back to, among other things, money. And it's not until 1859 that the project *finally begins from the beginning*: in the 1844 manuscripts money appears as the next-to-last section (and Mészáros writes that it was in fact written *after* what is now the final section); in the 1857-8 *Grundrisse* the first chapter is about money, and the manuscript breaks off with the discovery of the commodity form; in 1859 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* begins with the commodity; this is rewritten as the first section of *Capital Volume I*, which was itself repeatedly rewritten by Marx.

All of this is a means to set the co-ordinates undertaken in the present study, which takes these two points as its central pretences: first, Žižek constantly returns to the fundamental premise that the commodity form and the subject are one, using it to help him develop different arguments. Chapter one in this study is an attempt to show that leaving this out of a discussion of his work and building upon it without taking the commodity form into account inevitably leads to mis-readings, misunderstandings, and false conclusions about his work. That chapter deals explicitly with some of the major works in the secondary literature, but references to secondary sources appear throughout what follows for the same reason. The first part of this study, continuing from this initial point, is used to lay out some of Žižek's other central theoretical premises and

demonstrate how they can only be properly understood when Marx is included in the equation: these include *objet a*, parallax, Bartleby politics, the Act, and freedom.

This involves – in chapter three – contrasting Žižek’s work first with that of Marcuse, who also uses Marx and psychoanalysis to base his political and philosophical writing. Where one might expect this to bring them close together, it actually demonstrates their distance from each other: they have quite different conceptions of psychoanalysis and the role that reason plays in a life ruled by the pressures of capital accumulation. This discussion largely hinges on showing the importance of the role of the work of Alfred Sohn-Rethel in Žižek’s thought, which helps to explain the different political endpoints that he and Marcuse come to. Beginning with a ‘maternal-eros’ that is sundered and distorted by capitalism Marcuse ends by positing the need for a dialectical return to the lost ‘whole’ by means of removing those fetters and letting creative forces reign. Where art is to be both the means and the ends of this overcoming of barriers, Marcuse is left in a catch-22. By contrast, starting from the commodity form as the frame of our thought and activity, but as an enabler as well as a barrier, leads Žižek to the form of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Leninist party – which in specific ways share the form of capitalism – as the political solution to capitalist exploitation.

This end point serves as the starting point for the next set of theorists with whom Žižek is then contrasted: Ernesto Laclau and Jacques Rancière, each of whom appear to take positions close to those of Žižek but who in actuality are quite distant from him, largely because of the importance that he puts on Marx’s labour theory of value. Where Laclau offers transcendental conditions to political action – including ‘the enemy’ and a universal political space that can be hegemonized – and Rancière offers ‘lot’ as the

condition for democracy, Žižek instead argues for an assessment of capitalism as the precondition for the form of the universal in Western democracies and a particular form of lot as a counter to it: these are, again, the commodity form as that which makes ‘all that is solid melt into air’ and the Leninist party as ‘lot’. This emphasizes the importance of form in Žižek’s thought, and opens the door to the two final chapters of this study – an investigation of the two forms that he suggests offer a solution to the problem of capitalist exploitation.

Chapter five is a discussion of the role of professional organizations in developing professional psychology and psychoanalysis. The Canadian Psychological Association enabled the differentiation of psychology from the work of that of other professionals – social workers and religious leaders, for example – and thereby created a *marketable* service. This was done by defining what a person could learn and how they could be trained. As a liberal, individualist, and capitalist organization this precludes certain ways of approaching problems – like the social genesis of illness and ways to actually combat it. The development of psychoanalysis in France is offered as a possible contrast: if the endpoint of analysis is the creation of another analyst, and an analyst is one who no longer believes in the ‘big Other’ – i.e. a natural substance that guarantees social and other outcomes – one has a group of people whose profession not only by definition challenges their clients on social relations, but a group that is based on that principle being turned upon itself in its own organization. Looking at Lacan’s tussles with the International Psychological Association shows that this school of analysis developed with the organizational question – the question of form understood as activity – at the forefront.

Where Žižek draws a link between this form and that of the revolutionary party, chapter seven and eight are attempts to show the links between the form of capitalism, psychoanalysis, and the party, as well as some of the historical work done on Lenin and the Bolsheviks to show that as opposed to a form that leads toward the accumulation of value or the accumulation of totalitarian power it is one that attempts to counter these tendencies. Where thought is not separate from the physical world but also one of its elements, the ‘objective’ social world can only be because it includes the ‘subjective.’ That is, just as capitalism only works from the subjective engagement that is commodity fetishism, political intervention *a la* communism must also come from a particular subjective point and not one of neutrality – i.e. that of the proletariat. Žižek formulates this most directly with reference to Lukács, who ‘...doesn’t distinguish the neutral objective social reality from subjective political engagement, not because, for him, political subjectivization is determined by the “objective” social process, but because there is no “objective social reality” that is not already mediated by political subjectivity’ (Žižek, 2011b: 662). Where capitalist money can be argued to lie at the root of the possibility of the psychoanalytic relationship – one relying on an alienated relationship between analysand and analyst – its flip side also lies at the root of party organization: the social relationship, the ‘real connections,’ between all who live under capitalist imperatives already exist ‘objectively’ but not yet ‘subjectively’, and it is this subjective stance that needs to be encouraged to overcome capitalism.

These final three chapters may appear to fall into a curious inversion: the discussion of what is largely considered an individual relationship (that between the analyst and analysand in the clinical setting) is taken up almost completely at the level of

its social organization (i.e. the professional associations), while the discussion of a social organization (i.e. revolutionary political parties) moves largely at the level of the individual psyche. This is not simply a matter of ‘bending the stick’ in each case, emphasizing an element that might be considered under-emphasized in other accounts. It is instead a necessary outcome of the questions posed: if the wider social implications and possibilities of treating psychological pathologies are to be interrogated it must first be asked in what ways that practice is already social, already part of the social fabric that generates the problems it seeks to address. Similarly, if one assumes that one must answer the question of who educates the educators it makes sense to ask in what way an organization that seeks to make social change and thereby create a new sort of person relates to already existing forms of consciousness. That is, one must ask how the present composition of the individual lends itself to a form of organization that will in turn transform that individual. The last three chapters then necessarily overlap at the level of capitalist money and the modern subject, which sits as the form common to psychoanalysis and radical politics, a form that can be used against itself.

A similar inversion appears in regards to what is ostensibly the central question to which what follows is the answer – that of form and its importance in Žižek’s philosophy and politics. Only a brief discussion of its precise meaning appears just below; this because it is generated throughout, perhaps most clearly by the time of the work’s conclusion.¹⁴ This is in part to allow the ‘content’ to set the stage for form’s appearance, allowing it to be revealed after all the pieces have been laid in place. A provisional understanding, however, can be taken from the work of Evald Ilyenkov, a Soviet Hegelian and Marxist writing in the 1960s and 70s. The central argument in his most

famous book is that what should be considered concrete is not simply the material world, but instead a system made up of many internally related determinations. Tracing the development of this sort of thinking from the empiricist thinkers on up to Kant, Hegel, and Marx he pauses on Spinoza and the influence his work had on the German Idealists. Emphasizing Spinoza's materialist inclinations and their influence on Kant and Hegel he argues that against some sort of transcendental notion of a form that exists *a priori* and outside the material world, form should instead be understood as one material element among many, but a privileged one in that it holds the key to understanding the relationship between all the others. The example he takes from Spinoza is the radius of a circle, from which can be deduced all its other properties (its diameter is $2r$; its circumference is πr^2 , etc.). The example he took from Marx was of course the commodity. In Žižek's work this principle appears in his reference to 'oppositional determination', where one species among many also appears as those species' genus.¹⁵ To avoid a misunderstanding, it should be noted that the above presentation of Ilyenkov's first example is deceptive in that it perhaps masks two further important points: first, that this one element is not so much an object as an activity, and second that this form becomes revolutionary once something is 'subtracted' from it. This is to say that the 'commodity' is less an object and more that act of exchange itself, and that subtracting from it the exploitation that it brings but maintaining the extent of the social relations that it engenders is potentially liberating. At the moment this sounds obscure at best, ridiculous at worst. Developing the themes above, however, should at least make it clear that it is worth seriously pondering.

The central idea behind what follows is that taking into consideration the work of Marx shows that Žižek is a more consistent thinker than many of his commentators take him to be, making it possible to elaborate on certain themes or comments that are left largely unexplored by Žižek himself, and do so in a way that is consistent with his fundamental positions. As a consequence one is able to begin to address another complaint that commentators take time to make about Žižek: that he has much to say about what is going wrong but little to say about what to do about it. Here it's interesting to note the similarity with the way some people approach the political work of Noam Chomsky: after hearing a lecture in which he lists all the terrible things the American government has done, someone in the crowd who has heard it for the first time asks, in utter shock, what is to be done about it. While Chomsky deals mostly with empirical information and Žižek largely with theory, both have more or less the same answer: i.e. nothing explicit to offer, only a call to get involved. Žižek's addition, however, is not to get involved just for the sake of alleviating one's anxiety about not doing anything, but to think before acting. And while the present study revolves around Žižek's thinking, it does have some basis, however small, in an attempt to put that thought to work: the political activity of its author.¹⁶



Chapter 1 – Whither Marx?

Bourgeois class consciousness, in other fields just as much as in economics, came to mean, not false, but falsified consciousness. This kind of class consciousness (the only one that vulgar Marxists seem able to grasp) is, to Marx, a subject not of critique but of contempt. Being no longer necessary false consciousness it is useless for his methodological purpose.

– Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*



Sublime objects of ideology

While many have written of the relationship between Žižek’s thought and that of Kant, Hegel, Lacan, and Badiou – all of which make up important touchstones in Žižek’s work – few if any have written of its relationship to the work of Marx. This is especially egregious considering the foundation of Žižek’s system lies in the homology he finds in the commodity form as described in Marx’s *Capital* and the form of the dream as described by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Focusing on the relationship between the work of Žižek and Marx can elucidate where theorists who have taken up Žižek’s thought have missed the mark and correct some of the distortions that have been introduced by focusing solely on his relationship to German Idealism.

The red thread that runs through Žižek’s work and makes sense of many of his claims is his attempt to further Lacan’s assertion that Marx’s ‘surplus-value’ is homologous to ‘surplus-enjoyment’ (Lacan, 2002; 2007). As a consequence, in Žižek’s work psychoanalysis is not a supplement to the work of Marx, but tied to its central concepts. By linking the commodity form as described by Marx and the form of the dream presented by Freud, Žižek finds an ideological ‘subject’ that is rooted in the relationship between capitalism and the individual. This link lies at the base of Žižek’s theoretical logic: it opens his first full-length English-language publication (1989’s *The*

Sublime Object of Ideology), can be found again in a book that he once called his magnum opus (2006's *Parallax View*), and is peppered throughout his work (See, for example, the appendix to 2003's *The Puppet and the Dwarf*). Just as Marshall Berman (1988) argues that it was only under industrial capitalism that modernism could reach its apex, Žižek argues that the Cartesian subject could only be fully realized in Kant and Hegel's re-working of it because it is a product of the generalization of the 'exchange abstraction.' This is a thesis he develops with reference to Alfred Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, in conjunction with the work of Freud and Lacan (Žižek, 1989: 19-21). That is, it is only with this generalization that all that is substantial of the human experience 'melts into air,' that the subject is *materially* realized – not as one subjectivity amongst others, but as the zero-level of human existence in its universality, upon which all subjectivity relies.¹⁷

The failure to account for the importance of Marx's thought in Žižek's theories can be seen in many of the shorter commentaries on Žižek's theory when 'the suture' arises as a topic of discussion. This is a concept that is central to Žižek's work on ideology, but commentators often miss that he located the most fundamental of these sutures in capitalist forms of money. In its place we find a variety of different 'sublime objects', each taken as equivalent in importance in terms of their structural role in the critique of ideology. Sharpe and Boucher, for example, make a short list of 'sublime objects' that includes 'freedom', 'the Soviet Cause', and 'the American people' (2010: 56). Glyn Daly writes that 'with today's predominant neo-liberal discourse the category that performs this function of suture is, of course, the market' (2007: 12) – by which Daly doesn't mean the unconscious nature of 'the exchange relation' as does Žižek, but the

overt (i.e. conscious) neo-liberal ideology of market liberalization. Similarly, in a paper that he claims is a discussion of Žižek's thoughts on capitalism, Levi Bryant writes that 'it is within the field of immaterial labor that ideology proper is to be located' (2008: 29). By this he means the theory of capitalist empire as advanced by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, which clearly flies in the face of Žižek's arguments that locate the 'sublime object of ideology' in capitalist exchange and the commodity form. In the same vein, Ian Parker writes that 'a most potent "sublime object of ideology" is surely the elevation of democracy itself to some exalted position, so that it assumes such inexplicable and incomprehensible importance that it cannot be criticized' (2004: 85). While Žižek himself makes this claim,¹⁸ what need be asked is not what 'a' sublime object might be, but what Žižek describes as *the* sublime object of ideology.

Rather than locating the root of ideology in any of these things, Žižek instead ties ideology directly in the capitalist economy and Lacan's 'symbolic order.' That is, *the* sublime object of ideology is *money*, particularly that as Marx describes it in the first volume of *Capital*. This is in contrast to someone like Althusser (1971) – to whom many of Žižek's contemporaries are indebted – who instead locates ideology at the level of the State and Lacan's 'imaginary order.' Unfortunately, this shift in approach and emphasis is by and large missed by those who comment on Žižek's work, even when Marx and Althusser are the primary topic of discussion. Sean Homer, for instance, sidesteps the question of Marx's own work and asserts that Žižek ascribes to an Althusserian Marxism, albeit one Žižek tries to move beyond (2001: 9). Even in this claim, however, Homer works at a remove: rather than discussing Žižek's ideas in relation to Althusser he focuses on Žižek's relationship to the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In so

doing he fails to show in what specific ways Žižek moves beyond Althusser. Where Althusser strictly rejects commodity fetishism and Žižek grounds his thought in precisely this, a discussion of Marx would have done far more to further Homer's thesis.¹⁹

To emphasize the importance of this idea in Žižek's thought it is useful to look in more depth at various commentaries on his work, beginning with a brief reflection on one of the most significant ones, written by his student Adrian Johnston – significant in that it is the only book length study that tackles Žižek's relationship German Idealism to the point of engaging not only Kant and Hegel, but also Fichte and Schelling. This touches on one of Žižek's basic ontological principles and opens the space to show where a discussion of Marx *should* fit in to Johnston's work, though it is largely absent. A similar failure to take Marx and commodity fetishism into account can be seen in how ideology is understood in some of the shorter commentaries on Žižek: following the discussion of Johnston's thought is a discussion of authors who have more directly taken up the question of Marx – or at least Marxism and capitalism – in their work. One of the most direct engagements with the question of capitalism and surplus is that of Özselçuk and Madra. The problem with their work is they overlook the question of different forms of surplus, and take a Kantian turn in order to correct what they see as Žižek's failings. This is shown to be a consequence of turning to Badiou as a way of 'correcting' Žižek, where Badiou offers not only a Kantian understanding of communism and ideology, but also one rooted in an Althusserian framework. Reference to Kant also presents a problem in Sharpe's reading of Žižek, as it leads him to wrongly assert that Žižek posits a neutral 'outside' from which to critique dominant ideologies. This also makes it impossible for him to understand why Žižek makes so prominent a place for class-struggle in his

understanding of capitalism and ideology. To begin to show why class struggle fills the place it does, several authors who agree with Žižek's stand – Rex Butler, Heiko Feldner, and Fabio Vighi – are discussed in order to show that even they misconstrue the reasons why class is relevant to Žižek. Rex Butler, for instance, simply accepts it, and Vighi ultimately focuses on consumption at the expense of production to in the end open himself up to the charges leveled by Sharpe: he posits an outside to capitalism by which it can be overcome. This is all to show that many of the conclusions that are drawn in the secondary literature are fundamentally flawed precisely because they fail to fully approach the role of money and the commodity form in Žižek's thought. This opens the possibility of discussing what it is that putting greater emphasis on the role of Marx's theories can reveal about Žižek's work, which is taken up in the following chapters.

'Transcendental materialism': Adrian Johnston

In his *Žižek's Ontology* (2008) Johnston argues that 'one of Žižek's central concerns in his deployment of Hegelian philosophy is the vexing question of how the very split between the noumenal Real and the phenomenal Ideal emerges in the first place – of how a presumably monistic ontological sphere internally splits itself into a series of incommensurable "parallaxes"...' (155). That is, Johnston argues Žižek's primary aim is to discuss how the mind comes into existence from out of the material world, as well as the relationship of the mind to that world. Johnston's answer is that the material is not a homeostatic, balanced whole complete in itself, but an internally contradictory monad that spins itself into differentiated, conflicting parts. In Lacanian terms, this is to say that the material world is 'not-all': it is neither whole nor lacking, but a 'one' that is internally 'barred.' Johnston uses various terms for this internal split, including contradiction,

tension, scission, strife, loophole, and antagonism.²⁰ These different types of split lead to the formation of consciousness. Johnston argues – *via* Žižek on Schelling – that...

first, the processes of subjectification are set in motion when the loopholes or short circuits generated by conflicts within substance prompt or support contractive investments into operators of subjectification; and second, these operators of subjectification, in their function as concrete universals, introduce an asymmetrical ordering of the field of phenomena, an unbalanced new synthesis of reality (196).

Johnston is here arguing that the internally contradictory nature of the human animal and the material world lead to symbolic- and ego-identifications (‘investments into operators of subjectification’) that attempt to subdue or ‘gentrify’ these contradictions, which he and Žižek take to be consubstantial with the possibility of freedom. These gentrifications are then the new way in which people interact with the world, a new imbalance that leads to further contradictions and changes. From this point of departure Johnston argues that the Cartesian subject – as the basis of these identifications – is revealed ‘*après coup*,’ that the contradiction or ‘not-all’ at the heart of human subjectivity is only manifest as ‘death drive’ when these identifications fail or change due to the individual’s encounter with external influences. The contradictions – also labeled ‘negativity’ – that lead to identifications can only be grasped with reference to their outcome; otherwise they remain only a ‘virtual potentiality’ latent in the material world.²¹

Herein lies the reason Johnston calls Žižek’s theory one of ‘transcendental materialism.’ Arguing that Fichte holds an important key for understanding Žižek’s thought (2008:17) he takes this label from the politically minded German Idealist’s speculations on the role of the scholar: ‘The assertion that the pure I is a product of the not-I expresses a transcendental materialism which is completely contrary to reason’ (Fichte, 1987: 4). Johnston’s position is precisely to prove this inversion, to prove that the ‘pure I’ as Žižek develops it *is* a product of the material world: ‘One could call this

theory “transcendental materialism,” defined as a doctrine based on the thesis that materiality manufactures out of itself that which comes to detach and achieve independence in relation to it’ (Johnston, 2007a: 6; see also xxv, 155);²² ‘In Žižek’s view, a core component of his own philosophical materialism is this inversion of idealism’s prioritization of transcendence over immanence’ (2008:143). This is to say that Žižek does not eject transcendentalism from his views on materialism, but aims to show that the transcendental is the product of the material, and not the reverse.

In all this resonances with Marx’s comments that the Paris Commune was ‘discovered,’ that it was the product of human activity, but only produced under particular historical circumstances, can perhaps be seen.²³ Johnston claims that it is only under capitalism that Žižek’s Cartesian subject as death drive is properly uncovered, later adding that ‘Žižek refuses to treat the negativity of anonymous, faceless, subjectivity as an invariant transcendental constant, a timeless structural function unaffected by the hustle and bustle of the empirical-phenomenal world’ (Johnston, 2008: 227). Rather than timeless...

...this hole [the Cartesian subject²⁴] is gradually hollowed out through the increasingly apparent contingency of all operators of subjectification, a contingency that becomes apparent solely through the rise and fall of various temporarily hegemonic master signifiers of identity jostling with and displacing one another. [...] To paraphrase Marx, when all solid identities melt into air, the subject as devoid of any solid identity begins to emerge... (Johnston, 2008: 231).

Significantly, this is one of the few references to Marx that Johnston makes.

While his accomplishments are impressive, it is here that it should be noted that Johnston – not without good reason – limits Žižek’s project to a ‘carefully calculated interweaving of modern philosophy and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis’ (xix), the former clearly referring to German Idealism in particular (20). Indeed, Žižek himself emphasizes this link. Johnston is correct in justifying this by pointing to the philosophical

content of Žižek's oeuvre against what he sees as the tendency to focus on its less significant aspects – i.e. the myriad cultural references found in all of Žižek's books. What is important to note here, however, is that this is part of his *own* project to begin elaborating a 'transcendental materialist theory of subjectivity,' for which 'Žižek's work is shamelessly and unapologetically used' (xix). This is to say that the title of the book (*Žižek's Ontology*) need be viewed with a critical eye. Its author too quickly passes over something that he should not.

Johnston never directly approaches what, precisely, makes up the contradictions of material reality that lead to subjectivity, instead making vague references to meme theory, evolutionary biology/psychology, and physics. At one point he turns to the functioning of money and the loopholes generated by the expansion of tax law to try to illustrate his point. What *actually* fills this explanatory gap in 'Johnston's ontology,' as noted above, is a discussion of Schelling and the 'contraction' of the Real. What Johnston fails to emphasize in all this is an identifiable, actual contradiction that has led to the modern (Cartesian) subject and the potential for actual rather than formal freedom: the commodity form as the 'cell' of capitalism. Žižek argues that it is precisely this that made German Idealism, *via* Kant as its grand-daddy, possible (Žižek, 1989: 16-17). That is, Johnston links Žižek's discussion of the subject to capitalism and Marxism too casually, a gap that is not remedied in his follow-up book *The Cadence of Change* (2009), which instead focuses on the relationship between the thought of Žižek, Badiou, and Lacan.²⁵

As noted above, Johnston uses Fichte as a transitional figure in *Žižek's Ontology* to begin to describe in what way he thinks Žižek is a materialist. In a work published four years after Johnston's study Žižek more explicitly provides the means by which to make

a link between Fichte and an explicitly Marxist materialism possible. As Johnston notes Žižek has done in the past, in the third chapter of *Less Than Nothing* he argues that Fichte held (in opposition to Kant) that practical activity is the presupposition of the subject.²⁶ What he adds to this argument in this iteration is that in the end he sees two solutions to the problems Fichte runs into: one coming from Hegel and the other from Lacan. In place of Fichte's positive notion of the I Hegel provides that of 'self relating negativity'; in place of an I that seeks a ground in itself, 'anstoss' or the impetus/blockage to action is not only an other (as it is for Fichte), but the big Other – the social world, as understood by Lacan (2012: 183-6). The link to be made with Marxism is clear when it is understood that the big Other in question for Žižek is capitalism and that it's Sohn-Rethel's discussion of commodity exchange that informs his understanding of not only capitalism, but also Lacan's 'symbolic.' Rather than turning to Sohn-Rethel or real abstraction, however, Johnston's discussion of the 'revelatory' importance of Fichte's philosophy for understanding Žižek's work (Johnston, 2008: 16-20) sees him turn to Žižek's discussion of Kant and Lacan.

No less casually than Johnston links capitalism to the Cartesian Subject does Žižek himself explicitly link Schelling to capitalism in *The Indivisible Remainder*, his first major piece on Hegel's contemporary:

...one is tempted, in a 'reductionist' historico-materialist vein, to anchor Schelling's mega-narrative of the divine Ages of the World to a very precise and constrained 'ontic' event: the passage from the traditional, pre-modern community to the modern capitalist society. This is to say, what Schelling proposes is a narrative of the 'ages' of the Absolute itself; this narrative, this most anti-Lyotardian, the largest possible, offers itself as the ideal testing ground for Frederic Jameson's provocative idea that all narratives are ultimately variations on one and the same theme, that of the passage from the 'closed' organic community to modern capitalist society [...]. Is not the Schellingian passage from rotary motion to linear progress, therefore, this same story of the emergence of modern capitalist society elevated (or inflated) to the level of the Absolute? (Žižek, 1996b: 42-3).

Žižek can perhaps be forgiven for the spurious link he makes between capitalism and the thought of Schelling²⁷ – he himself labels it a temptation – given that the opening volley of his (English) career is to establish the link between German Idealist thought on the transcendental subject and capitalism through the work of Sohn-Rethel. What can at least be said is that it relies on the assumption of a previous argument and is not simply an empty aside. Indeed, the same underlying thinking appears later in the same text, where he writes that...

[...] it is, paradoxically, the *worker* who occupies the place of the subject in the antagonistic relationship between worker and capitalist: as Marx emphasized again and again, from *Grundrisse* to *Capital*, the worker is a subject, that is, he delivers himself from the last vestiges of substantiality the moment he offers himself – his productive force, the kernel of his being – on the market, and can be bought for money' (Žižek, 1996b: 114).

Tied to this is the idea that what Schelling develops in the 'second stage' of his thought is the move from '*antagonism* to the Hegelian *contradiction* between S and S₁, between the subject and its inadequate symbolic representation' (Žižek, 1996b: 46). Where the 'antagonism' of the 'rotary motion of the drives' is pre-symbolic and unpredictable (Žižek, 1996b: 28-30), is the push and pull of contraction and expansion which achieves neither, the introduction of a master signifier achieves both in contradiction: in an 'external' element one finds one's 'internal' being. As he puts it elsewhere in the same piece, 'S is simultaneously, in the same respect, S₁ and *a*', which he calls '*contradiction* itself' (Žižek, 1996b: 85, n53). As seen just above and in more detail in the next two chapters, the best example of this is capitalist money.

A Kantian Žižek: Badiou, Özselçuk and Madra, and Sharpe

In a more direct engagement with Žižek's relationship to economics, Özselçuk and Madra argue that Žižek implicitly holds the position that capitalism will never be

overcome because he misreads Lacan's thesis that 'surplus-value' and 'surplus-*jouissance*' are homologous (2007: 90-91). It is their position that he wrongly concludes that surplus-value/*jouissance* is only to be found under capitalism. What they miss, however, is Žižek's particular development of Lacan's thesis: they fail to see that Žižek places the homology at the level of the *form* of surplus and not at the level of surplus itself. That is, Ötselçuk and Madra rightly claim that surplus appears in different economic systems – they use the examples of feudalism and capitalism – but fail to see the different forms that it takes, remaining content to see surplus as equivalent in all possible worlds. Instead, they mis-frame the question by focusing on the state under feudalism and ownership under capitalism, which leads them to argue that economic history is the history of the class struggle over the distribution of the surplus.

This is not of itself incorrect. What they fail to do at this level of analysis, however, is ask in what way domination by one class over others differs in each situation. Žižek offers that the difference lies in the different ways fetishism is put to use: where the feudal lord appears as someone who naturally dominates another and thereby appropriates a surplus produced by peasants, the capitalist does so while claiming that no domination is happening at all. Here fetishism moves from one between people to one between things, from a 'lord' who is treated as if they are so by virtue of their existence (Marx's King who thinks he is directly a King) to 'free' agents who instead fetishize commodities (1989: 25-6). Extrapolating from here, it is possible to see that this is further manifested in the *form* taken by surplus in each economic system: overtly unpaid surplus-labour as *corvée* and covertly unpaid surplus-labour as wage. That is, in contrast to Žižek, Ötselçuk and Madra overlook Marx's insight that 'what distinguishes the various

economic formations of society [...] is the form in which the surplus labour is in each case extorted from the immediate producer, the worker' (Marx, 1977: 325).²⁸

Failing to see this, Ötselçuk and Madra's political assessment of capitalism becomes decidedly Kantian rather than Marxist: in place of a political program determined by the historical conditions of an economically specific class structure they offer the categorical imperative that 'no one can have exclusive rights over the appropriation of surplus' (2007:100; see also 2005: 93; 2010: 336).²⁹ They come to this position after critiquing Laclau's position on class to then repeat it at a different level: where Laclau ends up rejecting the labour theory of value to instead focus on the 'founding crime' of capitalist social relations, Ö and M focus on the 'exception' found in every historical period – the class that receives all the surplus but does none of the work. In their take Marx makes a 'chain of equivalences' between wage labour, slave labour, and serf labour, and so rather than differentiating between these three positions and *how* surplus is created/extracted in each case, they instead offer their categorical imperative (2010: 335-6). They openly acknowledge that this is abstract and ahistorical, writing that this axiom 'displaces the agent of class transformation from a social group to an abstract principle that could insert itself into every occasion in which decisions over the use of surplus are being instituted' (2007: 101). Where they argue that Žižek takes capitalism to be self-reproducing rather than the product of labour, it is significant that they make the mistake of turning class struggle into an idea that 'inserts itself' into every situation. They look at the wrong exception: where they focus on an ahistorical notion of a ruling class that stands as an exception to all the others, Žižek's work points in the other direction – towards that 'exceptional'

commodity that is not a commodity and instead human freedom: labour power. In missing the importance of Žižek's reliance on Marx's discussion of the commodity form they slip from a declared materialism to an overt idealism.

In the case of Özselçuk and Madra the 'categorical imperatives' and axioms that appear do so with reference to Badiou's thought. That is, part of the problem in some commentators' work on Žižek comes from reference to Badiou as the supposedly elucidating or corrective supplement. The problem stems in part from Badiou himself and his dedication to Althusser's thought. This can clearly be seen in a sort of unintended caricature of Žižek found in the chapter on the 'Idea' in his *The Communist Hypothesis* (2010). Here Badiou translates his own system of political thought into Lacanian terminology, where he first presents a Kantian-style Real – one existing independent of the Symbolic – then an Imaginary realm which is one's misrecognized relationship to this Real (i.e. Althusser's ISA argument), and finally offers bourgeois history as the Symbolic. The twist Badiou gives this is that the 'Real' he is talking about are new political practices (i.e. 'truth-procedures') and the imaginary relationship to them as he describes it acts as a compliment to Althusser's ISA position: rather than being 'hailed' by the state, one 'decides' in an act of 'will' to take a position on them. This generates an 'Idea,' which Badiou equates with an Althusserian theory of ideology in that he places it in the realm of the Imaginary. This 'Idea' re-orders bourgeois history (the Symbolic) into one compatible with the truth-procedure.

The problem with this (to be discussed more below and in the chapters that follow) is that 1) Žižek gives a convincing alternative to Althusser's ISA position, showing some of the flaws in it; 2) the Real is for Žižek not a Kantian Noumena

independent of the Symbolic; 3) Badiou's 'Idea' clearly lines up with Lacan's S_1 – aka the master-signifier, aka the *empty* signifier. The 'idea of communism' is thus a regulative idea rather than a discussion of concrete problems and contradictions, and as in Özselçuk and Madra's paper we get a utopian 'ethical socialism.' In this way Badiou flattens the 'idea of communism' to a discussion of the state and the Party, rather than making any reference to economic life – i.e. capitalism itself.³⁰ Making reference to his thought on politics in relationship to the work of Žižek is thus problematic.

While these authors end up making statements that run counter to Žižek's own assertions and do so in line with Kantian thought, and while Žižek himself castigates Badiou for his hidden Kantianism, in his *Little Piece of the Real* Mathew Sharpe argues that 'underlying Žižek's inability to "decide" on what capitalism and "class struggle" is today is his deployment of the category of the [Kantian] *antinomy* to try to renew the practice of immanent critique' (Sharpe, 2004:15; see also 206, 209). Where Özselçuk and Madra in the end try to correct Žižek by introducing Kantian themes, Sharpe accuses his thought of being fundamentally flawed because it is too Kantian. From this he draws the conclusion that his politics suffer as a consequence.³¹ While Sharpe does offer many insights – into, for example, Žižek's theory of language, the role of the 'maternal super-ego' in consumer ideology, the significance of Hegel's discussion of tautology – his central thesis is mistaken. This can be seen by approaching the forward Žižek wrote for Sharpe's book, entitled 'The Parallax View,' which consists of some material that would two years later become the introduction to his own book of the same title. As he does in his afterward to Marcus Pound's work (discussed in the following chapter), Žižek uses these pages as a platform to make a point of his own rather than approach Sharpe's

arguments directly. He concludes by disagreeing with Sharpe in a somewhat backhanded way, writing that...

If I see it correctly, it is this topic of the parallax view and its interstices that is central for Sharpe's perspicuous rendering and critical remarks to my work. And it is in the spirit of the shared participation in a MARXIST 'world-civil-society' that I admire Sharpe's book as a key engaged contribution to an ongoing debate which concerns the deep crisis of the contemporary left (Žižek, 2004a: xiii; emphasis in original).

There are three things to point out here. First is the reference to the category of 'parallax'; second is the question of 'engagement'; and last is the reference to Marxism.

'Parallax' is indeed a Kantian term, one akin to antinomy, which is developed by Kojin Karatani in *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*. While Žižek takes the title of his 'magnum opus' from Karatani, in its first chapter he castigates the latter for being limited by his Kantianism. Žižek chides Karatani for coming very close to falling into the trap of positing the possibility of defetishized 'labour money' (for which Marx derides Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy*), and positing exploitation as a function of 'buying cheap and selling dear' rather than as a function of the commodification of labour³² (Žižek, 2006: 57). Žižek does not explain *how* Karatani's Kantianism leads to these shortcomings, but what is important here is that Žižek is thus compelled to counterpose his own ideas on 'parallax' with those of Karatani. According to Žižek, Karatani posits parallax as two exclusive, incompatible views of the same object (i.e. an antinomy). In distinction to this, Žižek proposes that these two poles are asymmetrical, with one holding the key to the existence of the other (Žižek, 2006: 29; 42). In this way he argues that 'parallax' is another way of understanding Hegelian 'concrete universality': against a universality that stands as an empty, formal, transcendental principle, he holds that one element of reality holds the truth of its other. Universality is thus the embodiment of a struggle or antagonism inherent in every particular element of a series, and not a neutral

container that contains all elements. Elaboration of this point will be made in a later chapter of this work. What is important to note here is that, against Sharpe, Žižek rejects the idea of using the category of Kantian antinomy as a central principle.

This can be further seen in a footnote to his critique of Karatani, where Žižek points to what he sees as a major omission in Karatani's study of Marx: Alfred Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labor* (Žižek, 2006: 394, n84). Here Žižek notes that Karatani and Sohn-Rethel move in opposite directions: where Sohn-Rethel uses Marx to explain Kantian epistemology, Karatani uses Kantian categories to explain Marx. It's important to note the asymmetry of this opposition. Whereas Karatani (according to Žižek) uses Kant's theories to understand Marx's, Sohn-Rethel uses Marx to write a history of how Kantian thought was possible in the first place. According to Sohn-Rethel, the act of commodity exchange involves treating objects as if they were timeless and indestructible – i.e. as pure forms. He argues that Kant's *a priori* transcendental subject is thus not simply *a priori*, but the product of a material practice: the generalization of the 'exchange abstraction' under capitalism. From this ground Sohn-Rethel goes on to argue that the neutral position assumed in the sciences is historically produced and can be overcome in the socialist organization of society.

This leads directly to the question of engagement, as raised in Žižek's closing comments on Sharpe's study. Where Sharpe claims that Žižek needs to find a neutral ground outside of ideology in order to critique the status quo,³³ Žižek argues that one can only come to the truth from an engaged position.³⁴ In Žižek's version of parallax, one does not approach an object from a neutral position and thereby see both sides at once. Instead, one can see *either* one side or the other; and where from one side the other

appears to be incomprehensible, from the other the truth is revealed (this will be developed more in the proceeding chapters). That Sharpe's book was written before the publishing of *The Parallax View* does not excuse him from missing this point, however, as it is also offered in an earlier essay – one that Sharpe himself references: the postface to Lukács' *Tailism and Dialectic*. In this essay Žižek discusses how Stalinist 'Diamat' reduced Marxism to a 'scientific' epistemology, thereby 'depriving it of its directly engaged, practical-revolutionary attitude' (Žižek, 2000: 154).³⁵ What need be noted here is that Sharpe attempts to substantiate his argument by pointing to what he thinks Žižek sees as that neutral point: the 'lack in the Other.' By contrast, in his essay on Lukács Žižek writes that 'the [Leninist] Party addresses the proletariat from a radically subjective, engaged position of the lack that prevents the proletarians from achieving the "proper place" in the social edifice' (Žižek, 2000: 170).

This is not to say that Sharpe is wrong when he argues that Žižek doesn't offer a substantive description of latter-day class exploitation or heed his own calls to return to political economy by actually doing some. To his detriment, Žižek does not do either of these things. This is substantially different than arguing, however, that to do so is impossible from within Žižek's theoretical framework, or that this framework is itself faulty for not having done so. As noted above, Sharpe argues (much like Laclau³⁶) that Žižek has no grounds to turn to 'class struggle' as a central political category. Combined with what has just been argued around Žižek's position on Marx's labour theory of value and parallax, it is possible to see how this is not the case by looking at how some of Žižek's other commentators have taken up the idea of class.

‘Class struggle’: Butler, Feldner, and Vighi

The work of Rex Butler (2005) as well as that of Vighi and Feldner (2007) include at their core Žižek’s references to class struggle. In both of these books the authors approach this question with reference to *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, a written dialogue in nine parts between Žižek, Laclau, and Judith Butler. It is worthwhile to begin by pointing out that in this book J. Butler, in particular, also misses the point of convergence between psychoanalysis and Marxism in Žižek’s thought:

...if a theory of capital and a theory of the psyche are not to be thought together, what does that imply about the division of intellectual labour that takes place [in Žižek’s work] first under the mantle of Lacan and then under the mantle of Marx, shifts brilliantly between the two paradigms, announces them all as necessary, but never quite gets around to asking how they might be thought – or rethought – together?” (Butler et al, 2000: 139).

Soon after this remark J. Butler moves on to another topic and cites *The Sublime Object of Ideology* to make her point. This is the book, of course, in which the first two chapters deal precisely with the question she raises.

Rex Butler, however, does not himself ask this question, instead siding with Žižek over J. Butler and Laclau in his argument that class, rather than any other particular struggle, is that which colours all other struggles.³⁷ R. Butler points out that in doing this Žižek 1. ceases to simply except that there is a void to be hegemonized by some particular element/struggle and begins to question what makes this void appear in the first place; 2. does this by quoting Marx’s *Grundrisse* to the effect that class functions as an ‘oppositional determination,’ a concrete universality, a species that is also its own genus. What R. Butler does *not* do, however, is ask *why* it is that class serves this function – he too quickly asserts that Žižek’s use of the *Grundrisse* is correct, but does not give an answer to the question of why the ‘void’ exists. Instead, he remains content in implying

that Marx's fundamental insight is that class is nothing but the struggle over its 'existence' as class – i.e. that it itself is not 'whole' or readymade.

This conception of class can be seen in the work of the 'early' Marx in pieces like *The German Ideology*, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *The 18th Brumaire*, and arguably also *The Communist Manifesto*.³⁸ It is pertinent to point out however, that Lenin, in his *State and Revolution*, made famous Marx's letter to Weydemeyer in which he (Marx) wrote that class struggle was not his own invention, but something he inherited from bourgeois historians. It is not that R. Butler is incorrect to assert that 'class' is not something that exists merely 'in-itself' in a book about Žižek: Žižek endorses this position. It is that Žižek does this with reference to Lukács rather than in a discussion of Marx.³⁹ This is important because of what Marx thinks he has added to the question of class, and the problem it points to in Butler's discussion of Žižek: 'the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular historical phases in the development of production*' (Marx, 1987:139). The 'historical phase' in which worker and capitalist find themselves is, of course, that of wage labour and capital. That is, *commodity fetishism* is the fundamental logic of capitalism, its 'cell form,' and *this* is what makes class struggle the 'concrete universal' of our 'conjuncture.'

This can be seen a little more clearly by briefly continuing with Žižek's position on the Leninist Party. R. Butler argues that Žižek's version of ideology can best be understood by looking at the role of the shark in *Jaws* or the role played by 'Jew' in Nazi ideology. Indeed, Žižek argues that these are exemplary of ideology. However, looking at (the poorly translated) 'The Fetish of the Party' in *Lacan, Aesthetics, Politics* (Žižek, 1996a) an important nuance can be added. Here Žižek argues that there are different

‘fetishes’ (for which could also be substituted S_1 , Master-signifier, suture, etc.) for different ideological arrangements. For the Nazi it is the Jew. For the Stalinist it is the Party. With reference to texts referred to above, as well as *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, two more fetishes can be added: in the liberal West it is democracy, and under capitalism it is commodity fetishism. The twist here is that all of these are to be understood by the final one: for Žižek each is a reaction to the fundamental deadlocks of capitalism. That is, one ‘species’ of fetishism is also the ‘genus’ of these other three, the one that explains the existence of the others⁴⁰ – what was above called an ‘oppositional determination.’ In Žižek’s terminology, this could also be called the difference between constitutive and constituted ideology (discussed in the following chapter): the ground of ideology needs to be distinguished from any particular ideology.⁴¹ R. Butler is thus *correct* when he says that one of the best examples of the master-signifier is the Jew in the Nazi’s ideology system. However, because he displaces Marx in favour of Spielberg (i.e. the director of *Jaws*), R. Butler’s book, by his own admission, revolves around repeatedly failed attempts to grasp the relationship between master signifier and *objet a*. He constantly iterates that S_1 is the *a* understood from a different perspective, but he never gives a clear description of how this is so. This is because he misses the clearest, most fundamental example of it: money, surplus, and profit.

This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, as will the question of how all this leads to the ‘void’ that is to be hegemonized – which, as noted above, R. Butler writes is one of the central points of contention in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. Before getting there, however, it is instructive to look at the work of Vighi and Feldner (2007), who also rely on Žižek’s discussion of class struggle

as found in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. The problem is here less that of acknowledging that the commodity form is at the root of the crux of capitalism, but that they do not fully emphasize its importance or explain its relation to surplus. They are also unclear on the Lacanian ‘mechanism’ involved, constantly conflating ‘disavowal’ with ‘repression’ and ‘foreclosure,’ each of which serve a different function in Lacan’s discussion of neuroses and psychosis.⁴² In Vighi’s recent *On Žižek’s Dialectics* (2010), however, the question of capitalist ‘surplus’ is more prominently placed. Here Vighi proposes two interlocking theses that generally correspond to the two halves of his book: first, he follows Žižek’s assertion that without surplus-value as the driving mechanism of economic production the productive capacities of capitalism disappear. This is in part based on the (unreferenced) assertion that Marx held that in a communist society ‘surplus’ would be made available to workers who would in turn ‘use it for the good of the whole society’ (Vighi, 2010: 41). This, he argues, is done at the expense of seeing labour-power as the foundation of a new society, a mistake that Vighi wants to correct. He argues that this problem arises as consequence of Marx’s (supposed) reduction of labour-power to labour-time: not understanding the deadlocks of desire and the unconscious as built into labour-power, Marx thought that surplus could be rationally comprehended and put directly to use.⁴³ To correct this apparent oversight, Vighi turns to Lacan’s 1968-9 seminar *The Other-Side of Psychoanalysis* and Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s *Intellectual and Manual Labour* to argue that part of what is most characteristic of the capitalist mode of production is the separation of explicit, abstract, conscious knowledge of how to perform various acts of labour and ‘know-how’, conceived as an unconscious spontaneous knowledge:

The knowledge in question is not merely “work”, i.e. it does not simply coincide with skills we can describe, learn and put to work. Rather, it has to do with the fact that ‘getting to know something always happens in a flash’ [...]. As children discover through experience, knowledge is unconscious before being pedagogical: without knowing why, things, or the objects children play with, all of a sudden “start making sense,” and from that revelation a piece of conscious knowledge is produced [...] (Vighi, 2010: 43).

In Vighi’s take, this ‘know-how’ is just another name for Lacan’s *jouissance* – i.e. the basic energy of human life. What is characteristic of capitalism in regards to ‘know-how’ is that it is taken from workers *via* the commodity form, transformed into exchange-value or ‘*erstaz-jouissance*’, and sold back to them. This not only prevents ‘know-how’ from developing outside the circuit of capital and capitalist forms of knowledge production (i.e. outside the separation of intellectual and manual labour), but also limits the revolutionary potential of *jouissance*. In Vighi’s reading, enjoyment must be traumatic to have transformative political potential and the pleasures of Western consumer culture are a gentrification of enjoyment (hence the appendage ‘*ersatz*’) to such an extent that they instead propel capital forward: no single commodity can satisfy desire, and so more and more are sought out. From this Vighi concludes that consumption is ‘the only point from which we can subtract and begin anew’ (Vighi: 35). This is because ‘our being coincides with our being consumers’ – a statement apparently so important it originally appears italicized (Vighi: 26). That is, Vighi puts great emphasis on Žižek’s ruminations on the ideology or ‘enjoyment’ at the level of consumer society.⁴⁴

This is not the whole of Vighi’s first thesis, however. Where he equates ‘know-how’ with Marx’s labour-power, he also asserts that it is how work is organized that needs to be in the end politicized, with consumption as the realm in which to begin that process (77). The means by which to do this, however, is not along the lines of showing workers that they are exploited by capitalism, as Marx (for example) intended with his ‘Wage Labour and Capital,’ his workers’ survey, the communist manifesto, the work

done with first international, etc.; instead, Vighi sees the ‘surplus’ of knowledge inherent to ‘know how’ linked to the production of ‘surplus’ populations in the form of the people who make up the inhabitants of the world’s monster-sized slums. That is, while he asserts that he still adheres to the labour theory of value,⁴⁵ what he aims to do is ‘theorize a new link between production and the human surplus engendered by the mad escalation of capitalist dynamics’ (78). What Vighi does *not* do, however, is precisely that: he doesn’t show this link, nor describe the link between the disavowal of labour-power and the ‘reproduction’ of this surplus in the form of so-called ‘human waste’ (i.e. slum-dwellers). This leads him to his second thesis: the sphere which will produce the ‘Act’ or ‘Event’ – large-scale social change – is not that of practice but that of theory.⁴⁶ Against the view that theory can only engage with an Event after the fact (Vighi: 145)⁴⁷, and against an Act that comes *ex-nihilo* (Vighi: 5;111), Vighi takes a position that is perhaps akin to Lukács’ thesis that the ‘revolution is actual.’

He begins by giving a slight twist to Žižek’s thesis that freedom exists because reality is incomplete, or itself contradictory (an idea taken up above with reference to the work of Adrian Johnston): the deadlocks of theory are also the deadlocks of material reality. Rather, theory can only posit its internal limits as ‘coincidental’ with reality (145), and therefore must turn to the ‘symptomal points of our socio-symbolic order in the attempt to seize the Benjaminian “revolutionary chance” coincidental with history’s sudden openness’ (Vighi: 149). This is why he turns to the slum-dwellers of South America and beyond: like labour-power or ‘know-how’ – which is in Vighi’s view in excess of capitalism – he sees these people’s position in the capitalist economy as ‘the external remainder of capitalist dynamics,’ as an ‘external surplus, which is fully

detached and meaningless from the perspective of capital itself' (Vighi: 77). They are thus a symptom of capitalist production.

The obvious attack to make here is to point out that Johnston's version of this thesis – that deadlocks in reality have a relationship to theory – comes out in the positive: what appears to be a deadlock is in fact the 'truth' of the situation. In this vein Žižek often turns to Adorno: the inability, in the social sciences, to side with either the thesis that society was a group of atomized individuals or an organic whole, was not the product of an antinomy but instead best seen as the proper definition of society: "what first appeared as our inability to understand what society really is [the conflict between the individual and the whole] turns out to be the fundamental feature of social reality itself" (Žižek, 2005d: 333). Vighi instead proposes that theoretical problems can be blamed on the object of theory rather than theory itself. Vighi's reference to the world's slums might then instead best be inverted and taken as a symptom rather than a solution. Throughout the book he argues that Žižek's theory is deficient in that it relies on an Event or an Act to happen in order to make theory possible, but at the same time Žižek calls for thought to come before action and revolutionary change; it therefore ends in an impasse (e.g Vighi: 113). It is here that the echoes of Lukács begin to ring: according to Vighi, the slum-dwellers are already 'subtracted' from the circuits of capitalism and its enjoyment (Vighi: 141) and therefore they merely need to be theorized in order to actively work towards creating an Event/Act. This is not merely a relation of a subject to an object, however, but of a subject to its 'Real', and as such transforms that object in confronting it – the Real can never be approached directly (in this case, the proposal is to confront it *via* the symbolic.) This is, incidentally, Lacan's definition of 'sublimation,' tied as it is to drive:

...sublimation is the satisfaction of the drive with a change of object, that is, without repression. This definition is a profounder one, but it would also open up an even knottier problematic, if it weren't for the fact that my teaching allows you to spot where the rabbit is hidden.

In effect, the rabbit to be conjured from the hat is already to be found in the instinct. This rabbit is not a new object; it is a change of object in itself (Lacan, 1997: 293).

Sublimation is thus not simply the Freudian substitution of one object with another, but the transformation of the same object by changing one's relation to it – part of what Žižek refers to as the 'parallax view.' This is also the move from 'desire' to 'death drive': from desire as an unchanging relationship to a plethora of objects we move to drive and a change in the object itself. In this way, then, theory is neither the application of an axiom to a multitude of objects, nor does it blame its faults on its object; instead, it transforms its object while also transforming itself.

There is nothing wrong with this thesis – that revolutionary theory can develop a revolutionary subject – *per se*. What this instance of it does not do, however, is solve the supposed deadlock in Žižek's theory. As noted above, Vighi argues that a link between labour-power as surplus and the creation of 'surplus' populations needs to be re-conceived in order to achieve this change. In order to do this he has to carve out a place for theory that is independent from practice, or at least not reducible to it. That is, he posits a place outside of capitalism from which he can draw 'an unconscious knowledge that awaits its moment to emerge, take shape and shatter the coordinates within which we make sense of the world,' one that 'lies in wait of a chance to be translated into a fearless vision of society to come' (Vighi: 164). In this way he claims to take a position against the idea – attributed to Žižek – that one must wait for an Act to occur *ex-nihilo*. That is, rather than waiting for an 'Event', there already awaits a revolutionary portion of society outside of capitalism that can be transformed into a revolutionary agent by theorizing it.

There are several further problems to be pointed to here. To begin, Vighi's own theory demands at minimum that one start with a series of propositions that enable one to conceive certain objects (i.e. the world's mega-slums) as symptoms of capitalism rather than simply the products of human nature or accident.⁴⁸ The theory in this case is, of course, Marxism. Here the problems in his formulations become clearest. To begin, Vighi must assert something about the world's slums that Žižek does not. While Vighi posits their inhabitants as necessarily produced by capitalism, he also posits them as *external* to its enjoyments – i.e. capitalist exchange and exploitation. Žižek, on the other hand, offers – with reference to Davis' 'Planet of Slums' (2004) – that they are integrated into it:

Although this population is made up of marginalized labourers, redundant civil servants, and ex-peasants, they are not simply a redundant surplus: they are incorporated into the global economy in numerous ways, many of them as informal wage-workers or self-employed entrepreneurs, with no adequate health or social security cover (Žižek, 2006: 268).⁴⁹

There are two things to be noted here. First, what Sharpe has attributed to Žižek can instead be seen in Vighi: where Sharpe argues that Žižek needs a neutral external point from which to critique ideology, Vighi argues that one can only discuss the transformation of capitalist world if there is something outside of it, a place from which to think that transformation. Second, it is the apparent existence of this 'outside' that drives Laclau to post-Marxism, and comprises the root of many of the major differences between him and Žižek (a subject taken up here in a subsequent chapter). While not tackling some of the other problems with Vighi's text,⁵⁰ having considered his position in some detail makes it possible to show where all the above commentators have gone awry: when Vighi posits that it is the level of work that needs to be politicized and gestures towards consumption as the means to do it, he fails to mention that by virtue of the commodity form labour-power becomes wage labour – i.e. a commodity sold on the

labour market. Ignoring this, Vighi returns to a formulation of the immiseration thesis, to the assertion that one must turn to those with nothing material to lose but their chains in order to foster social and political change. That is, the corollary to his assertion that '*our being coincides with our being consumers*'⁵¹ is that the loss of being results in the potential politicization of enjoyment, and not before.⁵² As pointed to in the introduction to the present study, Žižek by contrast asserts that...

there is no S without its support in a: the subject can arrive at its being-for-itself, can free itself from all substantial ties and appear as the point of pure negativity, only by being posited as equivalent to its absolute antipode, money, that inert piece of metal that one can hold in one's hands and manipulate freely... (Žižek, 2008b: 57, n22).

This is to say that our being coincides with money, rather than our being consumers. To formulate this slightly differently, in place of one's labour-power – one's ineffable being as a productive individual – one receives not commodities but cash. As such, 'traversing the fantasy' and 'subjective destitution' do not necessarily mean becoming materially impoverished or identifying with others who have become so; instead, it means identifying with one's own non-being, universality, and freedom as embodied in the highest form of the commodity. As will be discussed in the next chapter, in Žižek's thought the prerequisite for consumer identifications (a.k.a. imaginary and symbolic identifications) is the creation of the Subject *via* money. This is to say that class struggle comes not solely at the level of consumer consumption, nor at the level of identities, but precisely at the level of one's social relationship with others *via* the commodity form as *the* embodiment of the 'split' subject.

Against Vighi's assertion that there is a deadlock in Žižek's thought – he needs a revolutionary act to theorize, but also theory to help foster a revolutionary act (an attribution of circularity regarding revolution perhaps better leveled at Marcuse, taken up

here in a subsequent chapter) – what is proposed here is that the ‘Act’ can be *thought* precisely because the Subject is the product of capitalism. As will be developed as this study progresses (see in particular the final chapter of this study), what this means is that the ‘Act’ *is* in fact a creation *ex-nihilo* – not in the sense that it comes from nowhere and with no relation to material existence, but in the sense that it is a product of human freedom stemming from the world as it exists: where capitalism is ‘perverse,’ psychoanalysis is possible because it shares that form (with an important difference), and it is on this basis that freedom is possible. What Žižek has not done does not revolve around how to theorize an ‘Act’, but how to think what comes after. That is, is a ‘master signifier of a new type’ possible, or are we doomed to repetition automatism? If money is not only the paradigmatic master signifier, but that which sutures the subject in a capitalist economic system, and if that money is not the direct embodiment of wealth but the alienated embodiment of human freedom, then the answer to the former question is ‘yes’, and that to the latter ‘no.’⁵³

The failure to take this link – that between commodity and Subject – into account is evident in many of texts that engage with Žižek’s politics and philosophy, as has been demonstrated above with reference to several of the major studies that have been produced to date. It’s amusing to note that in many of these texts, rather than having its bar set at a 45 degree angle, the typographic symbol for Lacan’s barred subject (S)⁵⁴ is replaced with one whose bar stands completely upright. The effect is such that one gets a version of the symbol for North American money ‘circulating’ throughout the secondary literature, without much discussion of money’s actual import in Žižek’s work. In the

chapter that follows, Žižek's use of the commodity form is taken up in more depth in an attempt to remedy this gap.



Chapter 2 – Žižek, Marx, and political ontology

Why should you want to confuse the material with the activity which forms it? If you do, what advantage have you over those who only knew the product of the activity and could not explain where it came from or how it was made?

– Freud, *Introductory Lectures*



No ontology without politics

Although Žižek's imitators and commentators mimic them without comment, it's no mistake that Žižek's work is laden with phrases like the following: 'I am tempted to...', 'what if...', 'we should hazard a step further...', 'my wager is...', 'we should take the risk and...'. These are not mere flourishes, but instead directly related to one of his fundamental premises: one is not external from one's world but an active part of it, and there can be no change in any determinate form of existence without what appears to be a 'leap of faith' into activity that receives no guarantees from the existing order of things. This is what is accomplished, according to Žižek, in an 'Act' – his version of the concept of 'Event', found in different forms in the work of Martin Heidegger (*Ereignis*), Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, and arguably Georg Lukács (*Augenblick*).⁵⁵ Žižek's particular inflection of this concept is largely adapted from the work of Lacan, and as such is closely tied to the concepts of death drive, symptom, the unconscious and the Real. It is also indebted to Lacan's version of Saussurian linguistics, which includes concepts like 'master-signifier' and 'the symbolic.'

Crudely put, the Act can be understood in the following way: every period of history (or 'symbolic universe') is organized around an excluded unconscious element (the Real). The eruption of this Real in the form of a 'symptom' has the potential to reorganize the symbolic universe that excludes and creates the Real in the first place. This eruption is

what Žižek calls the Freudian death drive, the push to return to a zero-point from which the world can be reorganized, a place from which to produce ‘creative sublimations’ and a new symbolic universe. This does not necessarily mean the *physical* razing of the existing world, however. Instead it refers to the re-organization of the social connections between people and between things.⁵⁶ The Act is what he considers to be at the root of ontology and the political *per se*, and is the culmination of Žižek’s philosophy.

Lacan is not the only root of Žižek’s thought, of course. He claims that his project is primarily to rethink the death drive as described by Freud and Lacan by reading them through German Idealist philosophy (Žižek and Daly, 2004: 61). As discussed above, this has most impressively been developed by Adrian Johnston (2008) who shows the importance of German Romantic thought to his project. It is significant, however, that work such as that of Johnston focuses on the philosophical content of Žižek’s to the detriment of its political edge. This is not to say that Johnston or others simply pay no attention to the political dimensions of Žižek’s work. What they do, however, is neglect the particularity of what could be called Žižek’s critique of political ontology (i.e. of the work of the theorists of the ‘Event’ listed above, among many others). Where Johnston emphasizes the points in Žižek’s work where he argues that the material world is an incomplete, open system rather than a closed homeostatic whole, Žižek argues that it is not this openness that is to be stressed. Rather, it is the consequences of this for a theory of the subject and *politics* that are of real interest: where this openness is the condition of freedom, the Subject is not the openness of material reality but the action that gives it ‘ontological consistency’ (Žižek, 1999: 158). This ‘consistency’ is not only ‘ontological,’ but in being based in *action* is also political: ‘in this precise sense every ontology is

“political”: based on a disavowed contingent “subjective” act of decision’ (ibid; see also Žižek, 2008: 95-153). As explored in the previous chapter, there is no neutral place from which to assess the ontological; there is only an engagement with the world from an internal/excluded position. And while Žižek here speaks of ‘every ontology,’ it need be emphasized that his development of this argument is fundamentally rooted in an understanding of capitalism as developed by Marx. That is, where he plainly says that his project is to read Lacan through German idealism and *vice versa*, he also plainly says that ‘the roots of philosophical speculative idealism are in the social reality of the world of commodities; it is this world which behaves “idealistically”’ (Žižek, 1989: 32).⁵⁷ This is of no small significance. And it is, of course, often Marx’s explanations of this world that Žižek relies on.

Leaving out the question of Marx leads assessments of Žižek’s politics to run the gamut from charges of tailism (Dean, 2006; Brockelman, 2009) to purism (Stravarakakis, 2010) and the titles of Jacobin voluntarist (Boucher, 2010) and closet dictator (Sharpe, 2010). As belaboured above, this is surprising considering that his introduction to the English speaking world was with a book that proclaims to bring together Marxism and psychoanalysis at the level of the labour theory of value (*via* the description of commodity form and money in the first volume of *Capital*) and Freud’s description of the form of the dream in the founding text of psychoanalysis. Ian Parker – mentioned briefly above – is typical in this regard, making the mistake of focusing almost exclusively on Žižek’s past political activity⁵⁸ when discussing his Marxism, spending rather much less time examining the theoretical arguments Žižek makes with reference to Marx.⁵⁹ He thereby neglects that one of the main reasons Žižek can discuss the social world in terms

of what is often considered a theory of the individual (i.e. Lacanian psychoanalysis) is because he links it directly to Marx's political economy: not only does he argue that psychoanalysis is precisely the question of how the individual and the social constitute each other (i.e. there is no subject without an 'other,' big or small), he takes the further step of arguing that the subject of psychoanalysis is also the subject of capitalism.

Overlooking the role Marx's thought plays in Žižek's work leads to an under-appreciation of his contribution to theories of ideology. An important part of this is the attempt to move beyond Althusser's use of Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁶⁰ Althusser locates ideology in 'Ideological State Apparatuses,' which include churches, schools, unions, and other institutions, each of which interpellate people at the level of the ego and misrecognition, developed in Lacan's work as 'the Imaginary.' By contrast, Žižek locates ideology at two other levels of Lacan's theory of the psyche: 'the Symbolic' and 'the Real.' Doing so, Žižek argues that the capitalist economy – rather than the different aspects of the capitalist state – is the root of ideology. This is not merely a passing fancy, but is at the root of Žižek's thought and apparent throughout his career. Take, for example, this (somewhat lengthy) quote from a paper published in 2010:

When Althusser claims that ideology interpellates individuals into subjects, 'individuals' stand here for the living beings upon which ideological state apparatuses work, imposing upon them a network of micro-practices. By contrast, 'subject' is not a category of living being, of substance, but the outcome of these living beings being caught in the ISA *dispositif*, or mechanism; in a symbolic order. Quite logically, insofar as the economy is considered the sphere of non-ideology, this brave new world of global commodification considers itself post-ideological. The ISAs are, of course, still here; more than ever. Yet insofar as, in its self-perception, ideology is located in subjects, in contrast to pre-ideological individuals, this hegemony of the economic sphere cannot but appear as the absence of ideology. What this means is not that ideology simply 'reflects' the economy, as superstructure to its base. Rather, the economy functions here as an ideological model itself, so that we are fully justified in saying that it is operative as an ISA – in contrast to 'real' economic life, which definitely does not follow the idealized liberal-market model (Žižek, 2010b: 92).

Two or three major themes are present here: first, Althusser is wrong to limit ideology to the state and the 'Imaginary.' There is not only subjectivity or identification according to

Žižek, but also the Subject. This leads to the second major theme: the Subject is a *product* of material existence, while also being its logical precedent – this was alluded to in the introduction to this dissertation with reference to ‘retroactivity,’ as well as to the work of Johnston in the previous chapter, and will be taken up in more detail shortly. Lastly, the core element of capitalism – Marx’s description of the commodity form – is the form of the ideological *per se*. Or, as he puts it elsewhere, it is ideology ‘in and for itself’ (Žižek, 1994: xx) – neither a thought without an action (a doctrine, ‘in-itself’), nor an act without thought (a ritual, ‘for itself’), but an act that embodies a thought, which will be approached in greater detail in chapter seven.

In Žižek’s account, ideology is at root commodity fetishism in which people *act* as if money was magic (i.e. as if it intrinsically possess qualities that make it exchangeable for other commodities) although they *know* it is not. This is where the link between Freud and Marx becomes salient: Žižek argues that what is most important in understanding the work of Freud and Marx in relation to capitalism is that they point to the *form* of thought rather than any particular thought as that which determines consciousness. For Freud, it is neither the latent nor the manifest content of the dream that unlocks its secret, but the dreamwork itself (i.e. condensation, displacement, etc). The dream is a particular form of thinking, one that reveals desire as the distortion of particular thoughts as presented in a dream. For Marx, it is not any particular commodity that enables the exploitation of labour and the creation of surplus value under the rule of capitalism, but the commodity *form* that transforms labour power into abstract labour.

This is key for a discussion of ideology in that it is not one’s conscious thoughts that are the most important aspects of ideology (e.g. expressions of liberal or conservative

ideologies in a newspaper), but the *form* of thought itself that is most relevant: ‘one should distinguish between constituted ideology – empirical manipulations and distortions at the level of content – and constituent ideology – the ideological form which provides the coordinates of the very space within which the content is located’ (Žižek, 2008c).⁶¹ For Žižek, all conscious ideologies are dependant on a form that excludes (i.e. disavows, represses, or forecloses in a psychoanalytic sense) certain ways of formulating social (or other) problems.⁶² Liberal ideologies, for example, leave out a discussion of the necessarily exploitative nature of capital when talking about equality, leaving freedom at the level of the ‘cult of abstract man.’

Losurdo (2011) discusses that which liberal ideology leaves out with great force in his *Liberalism: A Counter-History*. Here he argues against theorists like Arendt who see slavery, racism, classism, and the like as an accidental appendage to liberalism, instead making the case that these ‘deviations’ were a necessary part of its development: freeing oneself from domination and instating self-government meant not only throwing off absolutist power but also creating a ‘sacred sphere’ of white, bourgeois liberals against the ‘profane’ sphere of ‘savages’, inferior ‘races’, and working people – all of whom, of course, create the bourgeois’ wealth. This was by no means repressed in an unconscious sense, as Losurdo demonstrates at length, but instead disavowed: shuttled off to the colonies in the case of England, or declared outside the pale of politics in the case of theory. Here he quotes Marx: ‘In its most developed form, the bourgeois state limited itself “to closing its eyes and declaring that certain *real* oppositions do not have a *political character*, that these do not bother it”’ (Marx in Losurdo, 2011: 196). Otherwise put, ‘I know very well that the oppression of the “lesser races” and the poor are a political

problem and will suggest political solutions to solving them (from miscegenation- to poor- laws, enforced by the state!), but nonetheless I treat them as if they are not part of the political sphere!’⁶³

What still needs to be done is develop a point that was first presented earlier: when one takes into account that Žižek posits that the Subject *is* money – the embodiment of the social relations that make up capitalist wealth – it becomes possible to better comprehend some of Žižek’s central concepts and their relevance for a ‘political ontology’: the subject, *objet a* and surplus, formal conversion, the Party, and the Act. It is first necessary to show how psychoanalysis, *Capital*, and the *Cogito* relate to one another to under-gird Žižek’s conception of the subject. From there it becomes possible to show the relevance of Marx’s thought in understanding Žižek’s take on ‘the parallax view’ and political change. The homology between the three lies in their all being ‘real abstractions’ – the activity of individuals that creates a logical operand that appears in the world in the guise of the relations between things. The basic premise that follows from this discussion is that only from the engaged perspective of the disavowed (in the Freudian sense) can politics become visible as such. The paradigmatic case here is that of surplus and profit: from the perspective of capital, profit is a consequence of the activity of the capitalist in a relation of fair exchange. From the perspective of labour, profit is instead surplus extracted by virtue (rather, the vice?) of the commodity form. It is not that coming to this political position is something inherent to being the object of disavowal, however. Instead, it too can only be reached through the process of mediation through an other: the psychoanalyst *cum* Party, which leads to the ‘revolutionary Act’ that establishes a new ‘symbolic universe.’ All of this is done relatively quickly, but serves something of a

double function: first, it provides the means to re-read some of the secondary literature on Žižek and reveal how operating without some comprehension of Marx leads commentators astray. This is done in the latter half of this chapter in relation to the work of Marcus Pound as a way to not only show that reading Žižek with Marx can correct some misunderstandings, but also that this way of thinking is present across the many spheres in which Žižek engages himself. In this instance, the sphere is that of religion. Secondly, reading Žižek through Marx demonstrates the logic of ‘parallax’ and symptom: with Marx as a reference point, the entire landscape of Žižek’s work appears to transform into the opposite of how others approach it. Where Pound sees Žižek as a consummate idealist, it becomes clear that the reverse is in fact much closer to the truth.

Three abstractions: fantasy, money, subject

Psychoanalysis and Marxism, and thus the individual and the social, overlap at a particular point. Based on observable phenomena both Freud and Marx deduced a purely logical ‘object’ that could never be directly observed, but whose existence had to be assumed to account for people’s behaviour. In the case of Freud this is a ‘construction of analysis,’ an unconscious event in an analysand’s life must be assumed to have happened based on their symptoms, but one that is impossible to remember (Freud, 1979).⁶⁴ Similarly, based on the fact that people trade different commodities using a single measure (i.e. money), one must deduce that there is something equal in them that makes that trade possible. For Marx this is, of course, the abstract labour in each commodity. Like Freud’s constructions of analysis, it cannot be directly observed: ‘Not an atom of matter enters into the commodities as values [...]. We may twist and turn a commodity as we wish; it remains impossible to grasp it as a thing possessing value’ (Marx, 1977: 138).

That is, both of these assumptions are based on a close examination of people's actions in the world – either the analysand's speech and actions, or the theories of the political economists, economic history, and the act of exchange performed in a capitalist market-economy. The patient's unconscious *is* their 'slip of the tongue' (their symptom); the value of any commodity is only realized in the body of another commodity (eventually money) in the act of exchange.

Before describing in more detail these special 'objects' (constructions of analysis; value) it's first worth noting one last major difference that Žižek sees between his work and that of Althusser: based on the non-observable but logical necessity of these 'objects' Žižek holds fast to the difference between 'subjectivization' and 'the subject,' claiming that Althusser only accounts for the former. According to Žižek, Althusser's focus on subjectivization refers only to a particular content and ignores the possibility of their being a 'content' in the first place.⁶⁵ This is because Žižek holds that the misrecognitions that occur at the level of the *imaginary* ego are dependant on *symbolic* identification: in Žižek's take on Lacan's topology of the psyche, one can only misrecognize oneself by seeing oneself from the position of a social-symbolic mandate. This is to say that one can only misrecognize oneself as a citizen of a particular state by first seeing oneself from the perspective of the state.⁶⁶

This still demands an answer to the question of what, precisely, is being given a symbolic mandate. In a final step away from Althusser, Žižek turns to Alfred Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labour* and the concept of 'real abstraction.' Sohn-Rethel argues that the generalization of the 'exchange abstraction' – i.e. the near impossibility, within capitalism, of accessing subsistence or wealth outside of commodity

exchange – is what created the abstract, Kantian subject of science. In his account, commodity exchange is not an abstraction that is consciously thought, but one that is unconsciously *enacted*: trading materially different objects as if they were equivalent (as in the discussion of Marx and exchange-value above) *led* to thinking of objects and eventually the self as self-sufficient entities. He locates the beginning of this in Ionian Greece (i.e. in a pre-capitalist formation), and its culmination in Kant’s critical philosophy (i.e. within a capitalist formation). Žižek endorses Sohn-Rethel’s position against Althusser, writing:

The ‘real abstraction’ is unthinkable in the frame of the fundamental Althusserian epistemological distinction between the ‘real object’ and the ‘object of knowledge’ in so far as it introduces a third element which subverts the very field of this distinction: the form of the thought previous and external to thought – in short: the symbolic order (Žižek, 1989: 19).

Here can be seen where Žižek’s critique of Althusser aligns with Dolar’s, who writes that ‘the subject, prior to recognition in the Other, is not simply the individual. There is an “intermediary” stage in that passage from the (real) individual to the (imaginary) subject, the stage where the process of symbolization opens an empty space, a crack in the continuity of being – a void that is not yet filled with the imaginary subjectivity’ (Dolar, 1993: 88). Before moving on to a discussion of the symbolic order, it must first be noted that following this line of thought Žižek advocates for what he sees as Kant and Hegel’s development of Descartes’ *Cogito*. Just as in the logic above, where a particular action can only be understood by assuming a logical yet unobservable form, the Cartesian ‘I’ must be assumed based on the existence of any thought. That is, there is an empty, formal subject that thinks any particular thought. He quotes Kant to the effect that...

Through this I or he of it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts = X. It is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever (Kant in Žižek, 1993: 15).

Again, it is not that the subject is here a substantial being, nor simply a deduction from the fact that there must be something that is thinking, but instead the realization that the *form* of thought itself is that ‘which accompanies every representation of mine’ (Žižek, 1993: 15). This is the corrective that Žižek offers to Kant: the ‘I’ is not a noumenal thing-in-itself – which would mean that we are completely determined by some other-worldly realm – nor the content of any particular thought, nor the *a priori* categories that make thought possible. Nor is it simply thought turned upon itself, ‘abstracting’ any possible content from itself and revealing instead the form of thought. Rather, it is also the activity of thought/negativity *per se*.⁶⁷ This is the argument that Žižek outlines in great detail in the first chapter of *The Ticklish Subject*, and which he repeats in many other places (e.g. 2012: 188): Kant’s ‘transcendental imagination’ is best understood not only as putting sensations together in a way that we can understand them, but primarily the *activity* of tearing apart sensations in order that they *can* be put together. It is this subject that is able to take on a symbolic mandate and ego identifications. Not incidentally, this is also the link that enables Žižek to draw psychoanalysis and Marxism together: reference to people’s actions is the only way to access their ‘unconscious’ world. Differently put, any individual unconscious *is* the external, social world. The logic of the unconscious, the economy, and the Cartesian subject are all homologous, leading Žižek to conclude that the commodity form and the formal, Cartesian subject are one and the same.⁶⁸

This is to say that the ‘special objects’ that were described above – constructions of analysis, value, and the *Cogito*, each embodied in an object as the symptom, money, or a particular thought – are abstractions in the sense that they are the products of relationships between things, and not an intrinsic property that can be observed in

isolation. Further, as has been stressed again and again, they share this logic *because they are the product of the exchange abstraction.*

Money's parallax: equivalence, and 'profit' versus 'surplus'

Zizek conceptualizes the relations between 'things' in terms of Lacan's theories of language and the symbolic order. He develops this line of thinking in the first chapter of *For They Know Not What They Do*, which he considers the companion piece to *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Interestingly enough, he doesn't do this simply with reference to Lacan, nor simply with reference to Hegel, but by explaining Lacan's logic of the signifier with reference to Marx's discussion of the development of commodity exchange. To put it succinctly, there is one commodity – money – which enables all the other commodities to be set up in a chain of equivalences. That is, each is worth a different amount of the same thing, and are linked to each other by virtue of being compared to it. This one thing (money) is fundamentally different from all the others in that it is nothing other than the embodiment of a social abstraction. Whereas all the other commodities are use-values that embody exchange-values such that when they are taken home by their purchaser they play a completely different function, money is a pure exchange-value without use-value: it has no function of its own. It exists only to make all the others exchangeable within a certain market (i.e. one that uses a specific currency).⁶⁹ As such, it is equivalent to what Lacan calls the master signifier, the empty signifier, S_1 , or the phallus.

Another aspect of Lacan's theory that Žižek focuses on is the *remainder* created by the establishment of a chain of equivalences. In Lacanian terminology this is the Real, 'objet a,' *jouissance*, or surplus-enjoyment. During the seminar that Lacan delivered in

1968-69 (*From an Other to The other*) he claimed that this concept was homologous with Marx's conception of surplus value. Žižek, of course, acknowledges this. It is again possible, then, to again turn to Marx's discussion of commodity exchange to understand it.

Captains of industry legitimate exploitation by explaining that the purchase of labour is an act of fair exchange where the worker is given the full value of their labour in the form of a wage. Labour is taken as a commodity like any other, one that is purchased outright from an individual who freely sells it. The problem arises when one considers that there appears to be more value coming out of the system than going in. Marx rejects the claim that surplus value comes from anywhere but the 'fair exchange' of wages for labour, explaining that the political economists before him had already unknowingly come upon the answer: where the value of a commodity comes from the cost of its production, so too must the value of labour. This value is not the cost of the production of any particular labour, however, but of the *worker as a worker*. What is truly valued in the transaction between the capitalist and the worker is the worker's labour-*power*: its reproduction – *not* the value of the abstract-labour worked into commodities – is what is measured in a day's wages. And so Marx argues that labour-power cannot be properly understood as a commodity: a commodity must exist before it is sold; it must exist independently of the person who sells it... and labour does not. Living labour *is* the worker. Labour has no value, but is given the *appearance* of value when taken as a commodity. *Effectively*, labour *is* a commodity – this appearance is socially concrete. Surplus value is thus the product of the functioning of an abstract system that registers a material reality in such a way that reformulates its expression.

To make this clearer, it is useful to turn to what Žižek calls the ‘parallax view’⁷⁰ – what he earlier labeled ‘looking awry’ – which can be used to better understand not only the *objet a* but also the relationship between the *objet a* and the master signifier. To explain this earlier formulation (i.e. ‘looking awry’) Žižek sometimes turns to Hans Holbein the Younger’s (surprisingly large) painting *The Ambassadors*,⁷¹ which adorns the cover of the French edition of Lacan’s eleventh seminar and can be seen on the website of the National Gallery, London. Standing in front of the painting, a spectator sees not only two figures and various cultural and scientific paraphernalia from the 16th Century but also what appears to be nothing but a grey smear. The same viewer standing almost directly next to the painting’s right-hand side will see the smear become a discernible figure: death’s head. In this way an object that appears nonsensical becomes sensible, only to reveal mortality. The *same* object has two different appearances. This is also true of money as a measure of value. The bourgeois economist, the capitalist, and Marx agree that money is the measure of surplus, but they disagree on what kind. For the capitalist and the bourgeois economist it appears as simply more of the ‘general equivalent’ (or ‘master signifier’) and economic growth is the result of their own work,⁷² their own knowledge and ingenuity returning in the form of *profit*.⁷³ For the Marxist, speaking from the position of the proletariat (see for instance chapter ten of the first volume of *Capital*, where Marx ventriloquizes from a worker’s pamphlet) economic growth comes in the form of *exploitation* and is expressed in *surplus value*. That is, profit is not just more money, but value created at the cost of the *mortification of the worker*; it’s a death’s head produced by – and at the expense of – those who toil for the capitalists. Both parties agree that money functions as a general equivalent or master signifier, but

one side sees this as a means of the freedom of exchange and the other as a means of domination.

Here we have the ‘parallax view.’ The ‘views’ are not equivalent, each one half of a story that when put together create a whole. Instead, one is the necessary appearance that keeps a system of equivalents functioning while the other is ‘negative’ in the sense of undermining that order, while maintaining its existence when left unexamined.⁷⁴ This is the means by which Žižek – against Althusser’s comments in his ISA essay – can assert that Marx does indeed have a theory of ideology.⁷⁵ Indeed, the first section of the third volume of *Capital* is dedicated to showing how surplus value, in ‘the ordinary consciousness of the agents of production themselves’ (Marx, 1993: 117), necessarily appears as profit in order for the capitalist system to function.

It is in this way that Žižek is also able to assert that class struggle or class antagonism is the ‘Real’ of capitalism. The commodity form enables the ‘symbolic’ as market exchange to function as if it were complete, as if there was nothing to disturb its functioning. Class struggle is Real in the sense that the exploitation engendered in the commodity form cannot be registered within that symbolic without appearing as something external to it, rather than constitutive of it. Instead, those opposed to worker-revolution describe class struggle from below as anti-democratic, selfishness, worker’s greed, or a mere demand for more wages and benefits. It is in this way that the link between ‘constitutive ideology’ (i.e. commodity fetishism as the form of thought necessary within capitalist production) and ‘constituted ideology’ (particular ideologies that occur within this frame) can be understood: constituted or particular ideologies are attempts to explain or ‘hegemonize’ the way class struggle is understood, without

challenging the fundamental premises of the economic system in which the struggle is had. Both right-wing and social-democratic ideologies can thereby be considered challenges to each other's 'constituted ideology' rather than challenges to capitalist ideology *per se* – that engendered by the economy. This also shows that one can include class struggle in one's political orientation without necessarily being anti-capitalist. As noted above, Marx famously pointed out in a letter to Weydemeyer that he did not invent the concept of class struggle; he was instead the first to show that class struggle took on certain inflections based on particular modes of production. Put in Žižek's terms, it can thus be understood that 'the class-and-commodity structure of capitalism is not just a phenomenon limited to the particular "domain" of the economy, but the structuring principle that overdetermines the social totality, from politics to art and religion' (Žižek in Butler *et al*, 2000: 96). Each constituted ideology – whether as 'politics, art, or religion' – parasitizes on a failure to examine capitalist exploitation. Žižek's discussion of class struggle can thus be read as referring to challenging capitalism *per se*, and not just a competition between formally equal interest groups over shared resources (e.g. a fight for higher wages or legal recognition).

Capitalist ways of thinking are 'reproduced directly and spontaneously, as current and usual modes of thought' (Marx, 1976: 682). The commodity form as 'free exchange' is the lynchpin of everyday capitalist ideology because it hides the fact that labour is something invaluable. Understanding labour as something other than a commodity is thus 'outside the frame of reference of everyday consciousness' for classical political economists and workers alike (Marx, 1976: 681). In Žižek's terms, the *form* of thought remains unconscious. The decades old question arises, then, as to *how* to make this

parallax not only visible to people, but to also change the exploitation based on it. Žižek's answer is to turn to Lacan's description of 'the Act.'

Formal conversion, the Party, and the Act

The 'Act' as Žižek describes it also centres around form. It's predicated on the assertion that one can ascertain the truth only from the perspective of the 'negative.' Žižek approaches this in his essay on Georg Lukács (Žižek, 2000) and in his discussion of Sophocles' *Antigone* in the final chapter of *Sublime Object*: it is not that Sophocles knew the true meaning of what he wrote; nor is it that each successive reading of the play, from Hegel to Butler, can be added up to give a full picture of that meaning; nor is it that each reading reveals a truth particular to the age in which it was made. Instead, the truth of the play is that which eludes every successive reading. This can be made sense of with Žižek's turn to Lukács' assertion that relativism (the idea that each take on a subject is its own truth, independent of any others) isn't relative enough because it relies on a particular ground against which to measure. Rather than asserting that there is a *neutral* universal perspective from which to determine truth, or asserting that all truths are true from their own perspective (which implies a neutral framework in which this 'multitude' can appear) Žižek – *pace* Lukács – argues that there is a single, universal, *engaged* perspective from which it can be asserted. (Think again to chapter ten of *Capital* where Marx speaks with the voice of the workers against their exploiters.) In Žižek's theory, this perspective is that of the Real. Under the exploitation engendered in the commodity form, this is the perspective of the proletariat – the death's head of capitalism.

As noted above, 'misrecognizing' oneself in what Althusser called the ISAs was in Žižek's view predicated on first identifying with the state *per se*, viewing one's ego from

that perspective (i.e. ‘imaginary identification’ is predicated on ‘symbolic identification’). Žižek takes Hegel’s description of the constitutional monarch in *The Philosophy of Right* as the model of how this happens: there is one element which makes the state appear to be whole, and does so by providing the embodiment of the ‘general will’ in the form of a singular will. Hegel’s monarch is one that merely dots each ‘i’ and cuts through indecision by choosing one course of action over another. They are a mere figurehead that confers formal authority on the other elements of the state (in Canada, for instance, the Queen’s representative is officially the head of government, and yet only signs legislation and represents Canada in a public-relations role). Hegel’s monarch is thus a ‘master signifier’ which confers formal consistency upon the rest of the state.

This is what Lacan, in his *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, called ‘the master’s discourse.’ In contrast to it Lacan proposed ‘the analyst’s discourse’: against the idea of a master who confers truth, the analyst serves as a means to convert one’s symptoms into a means of understanding one’s role in the social edifice. This is what Žižek calls ‘formal conversion’: by letting the analysand speak through their symptoms,⁷⁶ these symptoms become a new way to view a situation and one’s role in it. Rather than standing as an aberration that needs to be eliminated, the symptom becomes a new master signifier that re-orders how the symbolic is approached; it is the means by which the entirety of the system which produced it can be understood.

In Žižek’s terminology this is what is also known as ‘identifying with the symptom.’ ‘Formal conversion’ is the ‘engaged’ viewpoint in that one must see from the perspective of enjoyment, or surplus, and is thus a major step towards the Act.⁷⁷ It is accomplished *via* the role of the psychoanalyst, and he ascribes an analogous formal position to the

Leninist Party: against the caricature of the Party as a dictatorial ‘master’⁷⁸ he views it as a means by which the exploited and their allies gain new perspective on their role in the social system. Thus we find on the cover of *The Parallax View* an inverted reproduction (of a reproduction) of *Lenin at the Smolny Institute*, which gives the impression that Lenin is in the psychoanalyst’s place, facing an empty chair representing the ‘empty’ (formal) Cartesian subject of the unconscious.⁷⁹

Given all the above, the Act is an ‘identification with the symptom’ – with the excluded Real of a social arrangement embodied in one of its elements – and the establishment of a *new* master signifier, one beyond even the symptom. During the Winnipeg Strike in Canada in 1919, for instance, between 20,000 and 30,000 striking metal-trade workers were joined by public employees, thereby completely shutting down the city. In their fight for safe work conditions, livable wages, etc., the metal-trades workers stood as the excluded element, the symptom, with which the rest of Winnipeg could identify. It was not merely that the city was shut down, however. Delegates from the many unions formed the Central Strike Committee, which was the means by which the city began to function again, though under a new master signifier: the Central Strike Committee gave ‘permission cards’ to workers so that they could function without being accused of scabbing (McNaught and Bercuson, 1974: 53-55). In this way the Act can also be understood as a ‘parallax’: from one perspective it appears as a withdrawal from social life, from the other it appears as a new form of collective living and action – what Žižek has called ‘Bartleby politics.’⁸⁰ Similarly, From the perspective of the state, bankers, and capitalists, the strike was a disruptive withdrawal from capitalist life.⁸¹ Rather than the workers seeing themselves from the perspective of the capitalist economy – as discussed

earlier with reference to Althusser – the state and the capitalists saw themselves from the perspective of the worker: the cards pointed to the destruction of the existing order and the establishment of a new organizational principle. Hence the brutal putting down of the strike with the help of the Royal North Western Mounted Police.⁸²

So understood ‘Bartleby politics’ has nothing to do with what some have called either ‘political retreat’ or a ‘wait and see’ attitude (Sharpe and Boucher, 2010: 85). This is the ‘political parallax’, which Žižek describes as

... the social antagonism which allows for no common ground between the conflicting agents (once upon a time it was called “class struggle”), with its two main modes of existence [...] (the parallax gap between the public Law and its superego obscene supplement; the parallax between the “Bartleby” attitude of withdrawal from social engagement and collective social action’ (Žižek, 2006a: 10).

‘Bartleby’ is thus the overlap of ‘act and inactivity’ (Žižek, 2010a: 401). In similar fashion two moments of Žižek’s theory with which this chapter began – ‘death drive’ and sublimation – are not two separate acts that succeed each other in time but the same activity taken from two perspectives. Remember that death drive is not necessarily the destruction of things but the destruction of the links that exist between them. Remember also – as discussed in chapter one with reference to Lacan’s rabbit and the work of Fabio Vighi – that sublimation is not simply taking an object and bestowing upon it some special significance but the transformation of both object and subject. ‘Death drive’ is thus sublimation viewed through a glass darkly, rather than from the perspective of what has been created.⁸³ This is what is missed by Sharpe and Boucher when they link Bartleby to the death drive to assert that Žižek can offer neither a political theory nor an orientation to ‘emancipatory politics’ (Sharpe and Boucher, 2010: 82).⁸⁴

To this, however, should be added the following comment:

...the proper moment of subjective transformation occurs at the moment of declaration, not at the moment of the act. This reflexive moment of declaration means that every utterance not only

transmits some content, but, simultaneously, *determines how the subject relates to this content* (Žižek, 2010a: 226).

This is again ‘formal conversion’, which results in a change of object (which Žižek aligns with consciousness – in the sense of class consciousness *à la* Lukács – rather than Hegelian ‘knowledge’). This is to say that objects are not only not wholly independent of each subject, but also not independent of *other* subjects – one must ‘transmit some content’ to others before any socially transformative ‘Act’ can occur. Just because one person approaches the class struggle differently than they did the day before does not mean the social has been transformed. Formal conversion is thus a necessary but not sufficient element of the ‘Act’, a point that can be clarified with reference to Žižek’s discussion of Lukács: the same political factors, found in both Russian and Hungarian revolutions, coupled with different subjective (or ‘ideological’) conditions resulted in different outcomes. Blockades and treasonous officers brought down the Hungarian revolution and not that in Russia because Party work had not secured the activity of the masses (Žižek, 2000: 164-165). This is to say that there need be a collective subjective change or ‘formal conversion’ rather than a subjective ‘Blanquism’ in order for there to be a revolutionary ‘Act’ – the ‘seizing the right moment’ to effect fundamental social changes (ibid). This does not simply mean the development of ‘conscious workers,’ but of the Russian Social-Democratic *Praktiki* – ‘purposive workers’ or ‘activists’ who not only were active in the worker movement (‘purposive workers’) but also possessed socialist political ‘awareness’ (Lih, 2011: 58-9; 2008: 335-384).⁸⁵

A critique of critical criticism: the case of Marcus Pound

This reading of Žižek is very short but to the point: using Marx as a lens the ‘sublime object of ideology’ comes into proper view. The implications, however,

reverberate far into the readings given to Žižek's work by many of his commentators. What follows is a full-length instance – added to those of the first chapter – of how failing to take this into account can lead to a misreading of his work. It falls under the heading of a 'critique of critical criticism' as there are at least four books published in the last decade that share a title that revolves around the words 'Žižek: a critical introduction': one by Ian Parker, which was touched on above; another by Sarah Kay, published in 2003; a third written by Sharpe and Boucher, touched on above and approached in more detail in the following chapter; and a fourth written by Marcus Pound in 2008. While Parker writes that '*The Sublime Object of Ideology* is still Žižek's best book, and his reading of Marx and Freud on commodities and dreams outlines an approach to ideological fantasy that is descriptively rich for those working in cultural studies or film theory', he does not take the time to explain this reading, nor explore the implications it has for Žižek's thought as a whole. Instead, he writes that 'whether it is politically useful is another matter, for there is no way out of the forms of ideology Žižek describes' (Parker, 2004: 83). He then goes on to criticize Žižek by, for example, citing the politics of his (Žižek's) past mentor Jacques-Alain Miller and asserting that he must share them, concluding that Žižek abandons 'the collective project of class consciousness and revolutionary change envisioned by Marxism' without taking up an in depth discussion of Žižek's position on class or the Leninist Party (Parker, 2004: 97). As discussed above, these are approached in 'Lenin's Choice' and *Contingency, Hegemony...* – which Parker cites – as well as in Žižek's work on Lukács – which Parker does not, though it was published around the time of 'Lenin's Choice' and revolves around similar concerns.⁸⁶

Like many commentators (including Parker), Kay falls back on the assertion that Žižek lacks of explicit political program as proof of his lack of Marxism. In her offering she writes that Žižek's thought is 'Marxism without much Marx' (Kay, 2003: 130), and limits herself to citing Laclau – who largely rejects the labour theory of value (Laclau, 2006a: 659; 2006b:104) – as proof of 'Marxists who find his program not Marxist enough' (Kay: 132). This she does in place of giving a full account of Žižek's engagement with Marx and Marxism, and so nothing more will be said about her book here. Taking an in-depth look at Pound's contribution, however, will prove instructive in that in so doing it can be shown how 'Žižek's ontology,' tied as it is to Marx's labour theory of value and the commodity form, permeates his thinking on many topics and how leaving out this aspect can lead commentators astray. In this case, the topic is religion – more specifically, Christianity – and it's worthy of note that Pound's religious position sees him invert some of Žižek's basic arguments. Most significantly, Pound leans on religious arguments to assert that Žižek is not a materialist, but in so doing misses that the 'transcendentals' that Žižek relies on are coming through the work of Sohn-Rethel. This discussion will also set the stage for another that will appear at the end of this study: the homology that Žižek claims he finds in the Leninist Party, the psychoanalytic setting, and Christ.

Pound's fundamental premise finds root in his assertion that 'for psychoanalysis to provide a successful critique of social relations [...] one has to be able to show how the structure of society corresponds to the structure of the psyche. Lacan and Žižek do this ably by showing the relation between the Oedipal law and Language' (Pound, 2008: 43). He claims that this is in part accomplished by showing that it is possible to move beyond

the sacrificial logic of Oedipus (44). However, Pound argues that Lacan and Žižek ultimately ‘remain secretly wedded to the logic of sacrifice, which leads to an impasse in their work’ (44). In the case of Žižek, Pound locates the problem in a misquotation of Jesus’ words on the cross (misquoted as ‘Father, why have you forsaken me?’), which causes him (Žižek) to miss that He (Jesus) serenely gives himself over to ‘the Father’ in Luke 23:46. From this Pound concludes that...

By misquoting the passage Žižek is able to give the last word to abandonment, and this has profound moral and political consequences for his work as a whole. Chiefly because it confirms the subject as the subject *qua* victim, i.e. *the one abandoned*, which undermines the possibility or potential for political action, the very obverse of Žižek’s stated aim (Pound, 2008: 49).

It becomes clear that Pound has missed a fundamental point if one looks at the central premises of *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003a) – Žižek’s third book on religion at the time Pound was writing his ‘critique.’ Here Žižek asks: ‘Is symbolic castration the ultimate horizon of his thought, beyond which there is only the inaccessible abyss of the (M)Other, the Real of the ultimate night that dissolves all distinctions?’ (2003a: 62). The answer to this is no, and that the Real is instead the product of the symbolic: ‘...the Lacanian Real – the Thing – is not so much the inert presence that ‘curves’ the symbolic space, (introducing gaps and inconsistencies in it), but, rather, the effect of these gaps and inconsistencies’ (2003a: 65). Further:

The Real is the Symbolic itself in the modality of non-All, lacking an external Limit/Exception. In this precise sense, the line of separation between the Symbolic and the Real is only a symbolic gesture *par excellence*, but the very founding gesture of the Symbolic and to step into the Real does not entail abandoning language, throwing oneself into the abyss of the chaotic Real, but, on the contrary, dropping the very allusion to some external point of reference that eludes the Symbolic (2003a: 69-70).

This is to say that, first, Pound misconstrues the nature of the Real. This is important in that Žižek’s description of the Real is homologous to the final volley of the book, its final thesis. In place of victimhood as the product of a gift that provokes infinite debt (i.e.

Love in the mode of the caprice of power, or Jesus' 'self-sacrifice' as burdening all of Christendom with the debt of his death)...

The point of this book is that, at the very core of Christianity, there is another dimension. When Christ dies, with him is the secret hope discernible in "Father, why hast thou forsaken me?": the hope is that there is a father who has abandoned me. The "Holy Spirit" is the community deprived of its support in the big Other. The point of Christianity as the religion of atheism is not the vulgar humanist one that the becoming-man-of-God reveals that man is the secret of God (Feuerbach et al.); rather, it attacks the religious hard core that survives even in humanism, even up to Stalinism, with its belief in History as the 'big Other' that decides on the 'objective meaning' of our deeds (Žižek, 2003a: 171).

This 'other dimension' is neither the 'abyss of the Real' as abandonment (which Pound accuses Žižek of embracing) nor the pleasure of transgressing the law. Instead, Christ's death on the cross is a 'parallax split' (though Žižek doesn't use the term – this book was written several years before *Parallax View*), which moves beyond the false choice between the two by revealing the alternative presented in one of the poles: one can *either* take the crucifixion to be an act of sacrifice that incurs abandonment and debt and thereby maintain the status quo, *or* one can read it as the death of God and the birth of a new community.

This is to say that rather than showing how Žižek fails to make his own argument, Pound has given us the other half of it: Žižek takes the position that 'Why have you forsaken me' is supplemented by 'into thy hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23: 46), thereby covering over the atheist core of Christianity. It is precisely this latter half that Žižek wants to purge from the Christian legacy. Central here is that Pound misses that the 'perspectivalism' of the parallax view just mentioned is that of an 'uncanny "interpellation" beyond ideological interpellation, an interpellation which suspends the performative force of the "normal" ideological interpellation that compels us to accept our determinant place within the sociosymbolic edifice' (Žižek, 2003a: 112).⁸⁷ As discussed above, interpellation is for Žižek not in its Althusserian mode, but modified

with reference to the commodity form and the difference between ego-ideal and ideal-ego. Althusserian imaginary interpellation can only work if there is an S_1 , or symbolic ‘master signifier,’ from which to see that imaginary image.

In the final chapter of *The Puppet and the Dwarf* Žižek writes that the establishment of a new S_1 , one that is beyond the deadlock of ‘law and sin,’ is what the revolutionary ‘Event’ or ‘Act’ is:

It was God himself who made a Pascalian wager: by dying on the Cross, He made a risky gesture with no guaranteed final outcome, that is, He provides us – humanity – with the empty S_1 , Master-Signifier, and it is up to humanity to supplement it with the chain of S_2 . Far from providing the conclusive dot on the I, the divine act stands, rather, for the openness of a New Beginning, and it is up to humanity to live up to it. It is as in Predestination, which condemns us to frantic activity: The Event is pure-empty sign, and we have to work to generate its meaning (2003a: 137).⁸⁸

The ‘uncanny interpellation’ that defeats the law is brought on by the establishment of an S_1 . Rather, the ‘Act’ is the transformation of the ‘excess’ into an S_1 . This ‘uncanny interpellation’ is that of the excess itself: ‘...in Judaism and Christianity, it is directly this excess itself which addresses us’ (113). In this case, that excess is Jesus. Why this is important will become clear in a moment.

Where this cannot be properly understood unless the difference between Althusser and Žižek is taken into account, it should come as no surprise that in his discussion of Althusser and belief (59-64) Pound completely leaves out a discussion of the commodity form and commodity fetishism and thereby misses the fundamental difference in the modes of interpellation as described by Althusser (Imaginary, via state apparatuses) and Žižek (Symbolic, via the commodity form/money). By the same token Pound also misses the core of Žižek’s ontology, which he states is the main object of his criticism: against Sharpe (discussed above), who Pound argues thinks Žižek doesn’t do enough to inspect material conditions in his critiques of ideology, Pound asserts that ‘...Sharpe fails to

really take the question of ontology into account' (Pound, 2008: 64). Pound claims that at the level of ontology Žižek commits to a 'Gnostic rejection of the material' (2008: 93). It is his contention that Žižek is, first, unable to 'affirm the priority of something over the nothing' and 'second, where the "presymbolic" is felt in its negativity, it is always excremental, i.e., impure or unaffirmed in its ontological goodness' (69). He goes on:

Regarding the first, it should be noted that despite Zizek's criticisms of the "Gnostic dream of the immaterial" (OB [*On Belief*], 33-35), he retains just such a Neoplatonic shift *away* from matter to the immateriality of the sign. This makes a lie of his "materialist" theology: there is no materiality, only the negativity of the *real*, i.e., the body, present only in its absence, and which over and against stands the symbolic (Pound, 2008: 69).

In regards to the second point, Pound again misses the nub of Žižek's argument because he conceives of the Real as existing outside of the Symbolic rather than an immanent part of it. The veracity of the latter position was established above with reference to *Puppet and the Dwarf*.⁸⁹ In addition, Pound does not see the relationship of master signifier and excess as one of 'parallax.' For Žižek, 'good' is just 'evil' from another point in the dialectic: 'Evil is *substantially the same* as Good, simple in a different mode (or perspective on) it' (Žižek, 2003a: 88). At the end of the book we find this similar formulation: '...the two sides of *objet petit a*: shit and the precious *agalma*' (Žižek, 2003a: 151).

In regards to the first point, Pound misses that, *via* Sohn-Rethel as discussed by Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, it is material action that comes first and the void of the subject that comes second. The 'real-abstraction' of the commodity form and generalized commodity exchange is the symbolic as material, as the *something*, which *precedes* the Real as Subject, as *nothing*. This line of argumentation is not limited to *The Sublime Object*, however, but can also be found in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*. The appendix to this book opens with a discussion of how commodity exchange is directly

related to the void of the subject, where we find comments like the following: ‘...is there not a clear homology between this structure of the commodity and the structure of the bourgeois subject?’ (Žižek, 2003a: 148); ‘Along these lines, the thing to bear in mind is that the dawn of Ancient Greek Philosophy occurred at the same time (and place) as the first rise of commodity production and exchange...’ (Žižek, 2003a: 147). These are clear allusions to Sohn-Rethel.

This point can also be approached with reference to *On Belief*, another of Žižek’s books on religion available to Pound at the time of his book’s publication. Here we find Christ made directly homologous to the commodity form, or more precisely, its highest development – money. For Žižek, Christ is to man what money is to commodities:

...in the same way money as universal equivalent directly embodies/assumes the excess (“Value”) that makes an object a commodity, Christ directly embodies/assumes the excess that makes the human animal a proper human being. In both cases, then, the universal equivalent exchanges/gives itself for all other excesses – in the same way money is the commodity “as such”, Christ is man “as such”; in the same way that the universal equivalent has to be a commodity deprived of any use value, Christ has taken over the excess of Sin of ALL men precisely insofar as he was the Pure one, without excess, simplicity itself (2001a: 100).

In this way it is not that Christ as man is the embodiment of God, but that God (Christ) is the embodiment of man in his most immortal aspect. A similar position is taken by Marx in 1844, who writes the following in his notes on James Mill: ‘But Christ is God *Alienated* and *man* alienated. God continues to have value only in so far as he represents Christ, man continues to have value only in so far as he represents Christ. Likewise with money’ (Marx, 1992: 261).⁹⁰ Remember, too, that in the 1844 manuscripts, what makes ‘Man’ universal – though in an alienated fashion – is his relationship to capitalist money.

Pound’s fundamental objection is that Žižek is Gnostic in that he chooses nothing over something, thought over being, the symbolic over the body. It is his contention that Žižek misses that there is a ‘divine’ element to the material world. Quoting Conor

Cunningham, he asserts against Žižek that ‘...being is not beyond thought; it is the beyond *of* thought’ (Cunningham in Pound, 2008: 67). What this misses is that Žižek does not contend that the symbolic raises a material object to the level of the divine (i.e. the usual understanding of sublimation), but that there is one object that embodies the ‘divine’ split (one might say contradiction) inherent in the material (what Žižek here calls ‘desublimation’): ‘The drive does NOT “elevate an (empirical) object to the dignity of the Thing” – it rather chooses as its object an object which has in itself the circular structure of rotating around a void’ (Žižek, 2001a: 98). The model exemplar of this object is, of course, the commodity, which is split between its use-value and its circulation on the market, the ‘void’ or excess (this is again a *parallax* split: what from one perspective is a void is from the proper vantage an excess – this is taken up in more detail in regards to perversion in chapter seven of the present study) around which this circulation rotates is value. Value is, of course, also the immaterial thing that, no matter how one twists and turns the commodity, cannot be directly (immediately) observed. This is why Pound’s use of Cunningham cited a few lines previous is significant: Žižek makes *the same point*, quoting Sohn-Rethel on the commodity form: ‘The exchange abstraction [i.e. real abstraction – a material practice] is not thought, but it has the form of thought’ (Sohn-Rether in Žižek, 1989: 19). That is, real abstraction is the form, the unconscious, the ‘beyond’ of thought.

This is all to say that Pound’s assessment of Žižek’s take on ontology is fundamentally flawed and leads him to the wrong conclusions. As noted above, Pound begins his argument by writing that ‘for psychoanalysis to provide a successful critique of social relations [...] one has to be able to show how the structure of society

corresponds to the structure of the psyche...' (Pound, 2008: 43). What psychoanalysis need fundamentally do is not discuss the link between Oedipus and Language, as Pound asserts, but more fundamentally that between commodity form (capitalism) and Subject. Pound has ignored why Benjamin's 'thesis' is the title of Žižek's book: '...the time has come to reverse Benjamin's first thesis on the philosophy of history: "the puppet called 'theology' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the service of historical materialism, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight'" (Žižek, 2003a: 3; see also 2008b: 1). Or, more clearly:

My claim here is not merely that I am a materialist through and through, and that the subversive kernel of Christianity is accessible also to a materialist approach; my thesis is much stronger: this kernel is accessible *only* to a materialist approach – and vice versa: to become a true dialectical materialist, one should go through the Christian experience (2003: 6).

In addition to being reversed Benjamin's thesis has 'historical' materialism replaced with 'dialectical' materialism, which is to say the empirical side of materialism is replaced with what Žižek takes to be the *ontology* of materialism – which Johnston has identified as the question of how the material becomes subject in the first place (see above; see also Žižek, 2006a: 6). So, Pound is perhaps right to argue against Sharpe about the proper level of critique. He is incorrect, however, in that he forgets to hunt down the source of this 'Diamat' in order to understand what Žižek is saying about religion.

All this is to show that failing to take Marx into account gives a different picture of what Žižek writes, to the extent of making completely opposite conclusions. In a slightly different direction, in what follows Žižek's thought is compared to that of Laclau and one of the leading theorists of 'radical democracy' – Jacques Rancière – to show how they can take very similar and yet fundamentally different positions because of their differing positions on Marxism. Where both Žižek and Laclau rely on Lacanian themes,

the former embraces Marxism and the latter outright rejects it and thereby ends up positing transcendentals at the root of his thought. As a consequence the two thinkers appear to often speak the same language, but in fact come to very different conclusions. Similarly, Rancière develops a concept to which Žižek often refers – ‘the part of no part’ – to argue in favour of democracy, but does so in such a fashion that transforms it into a trans-historical transcendental. This ‘part of no part’ is directly related to the choosing of democratic representatives through the process of ‘lot’. Taking into account the inflection Žižek gives ‘lot’ – relating it to Hegel’s monarch and ultimately the Leninist Party – it is possible to show how Žižek’s Marxist bent fundamentally transforms the concepts he borrows from his contemporaries. Together, these two lines of thought allow for a return to and a further development of a topic that was presented earlier but at the time largely set aside: the question of where Žižek sees the ‘void’ at the heart of politics coming from, and not just how it is ‘hegemonized’ by different political movements. This too is done with reference to Marx and the commodity form, and in the end serves to answer some of the critiques leveled at Žižek’s politics by demonstrating the consistency – as well as the roots – of some of his positions. First, however, further developing the relationship between Žižek’s position and that of Sohn-Rethel will help further delineate his reliance on Marxism. In the chapter that follows this is done in contrast with the work of one of the Frankfurt School theorists who has most explicitly attempted to conjoin Marxism and psychoanalysis – Herbert Marcuse.



Chapter 3 – Battle of the giants: Žižek and Marcuse on love and death

... the meaning of the development of civilization is no longer obscure to us. This development must show us the struggle between Eros and death, between the life drive and the drive for destruction, as it played out in the human race. This struggle is the essential content of all life; hence, the development of civilization may be described simply as humanity's struggle for existence. And this battle of the giants is what our nurse-maids seek to mitigate with their lullaby about heaven.

– Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*

And finally, with an effort of concentration bordering on madness, it came upon me that in the innermost core of the commodity structure there was to be found the 'transcendental subject.' Without need to say so, it was obvious to everybody that this was sheer lunacy, and no one was squeamish about telling me so!

– Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*



Much of the above discussion has shown that ignoring the influence of Marx's work in Žižek's thought leaves one with a partial or distorted picture of his ontological and political arguments. For the most part this has been done with reference to those who are non-, anti-, or post-Marxist in their orientation. From this it should not be concluded, however, that all those who have sought to bring Marx and psychoanalysis together are all of a kind. Quite to the contrary – and as one would expect – many divisions and controversies come when the two bodies of thought are brought into contact (see chapter 4 of Jacoby, 1975 for a brief overview). Rather than position Žižek within the myriad ebbs and flows of this movement what follows is a discussion of the few convergences and major divergences with the work of 'Frankfurt School' member and 1960's radical theorist Herbert Marcuse,⁹¹ whose 'non-repressive desublimation' sets the stage for Žižek's critique of the Frankfurt School as found in the opening chapters of his *Metastases of Enjoyment*.⁹² Taking up the grounding positions of the two theorists serves not only to show how their respective understanding of psychoanalysis and Marxism

differ, but also how these differences lead to different positions on what would constitute effective political activity in the liberal-democratic West. Ultimately this sets the stage for offering a further theoretical and an historical investigation of the legitimacy of Žižek heading where many popular contemporary theorists would prefer not to tread: towards a rethinking of the Leninist political party.

The divergences discussed below – between love and death, total gratification of the pre-ego id and the fantasy of ‘Maternal *Eros*’, rationality and capitalism – are not those discussed by Žižek in *Metastases...* but provide the means to show what pushes Marcuse towards Marx’s ‘general intellect’ and the ‘aesthetic dimension’ as the solution to the crushing onslaught of the capitalist mode of production, as well as what moves Žižek towards psychoanalytic practice and the Leninist party. Where Marcuse sees a division of head and senses – one created by capitalism – being reconciled in aesthetic/artistic ‘play’ as made possible by increased automation and the potential creation of free time, Žižek takes capitalism’s form as the form of the subject (and thereby the ‘psychology’ of people under the rule of capital) and the means to change it an alternative historical form – that of the psychoanalytic community or the Party. What follows is as a result a comparison in three parts. The first revolves around the different readings of psychoanalysis each offers, the second the different positions they take on ‘the subject of science’, and the final an assessment of how their political conclusions rely on these points.

The initial point of difference between Marcuse and Žižek revolves around their respective positions on the ‘pre-oedipal’ stage of an individual’s development. Marcuse offers a ‘maternal-eros’ in which mother and child form a utopian whole that is sundered

by social processes. It is to a sublated version of this whole, according to Marcuse, that we need to return. Revolution thus involves removing the barriers that hinder the productivity of capital in order to provide its potential wealth to all in order that creative sublimation might be allowed free reign. By contrast, Žižek argues that the ‘maternal-Thing’ is a retroactive projection. In recognizing this – that this wholeness never existed – *Thanatos* is uncovered as ‘death drive’ (rather than mere aggressivity, as Marcuse would have it), an ‘excess’ of life as life’s essence rather than a product of ‘the fall,’ rather than the product of the destruction of a homeostatic whole. As a consequence, for Žižek sublimation is understood as the activity of revolution itself rather than the activity to come after it. That is, death drive and sublimation form a ‘parallax’ where each is the same process, but viewed from different vantages – in Marcuse’s language, those of ‘is’ and ‘ought.’

The second major divergence of thought discussed below comes in relation to the development of the ‘subject of science.’ Where Marcuse uses Heidegger and Husserl to argue for a self-development of the inner necessity of science that leads to technological rationality as an aid to social domination, Žižek’s work rests on Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s development of a very different account of the origin of the subject and its make-up as presented in *Intellectual and Manual Labour*. In Sohn-Rethel’s account the introduction of coined money whose value is independent of its actual material content leads to particular forms of abstract thinking and eventually Newtonian science and the transcendental subject as developed by Kant. The generalization of ‘real abstraction’ – i.e. trading commodities as if they existed outside of time and space, and as if they contained something capable of being equated (i.e. exchange value) – not only affected

the development of science and fostered class division, but also created a new type of subject. Rather than a subject that is destroyed and in need of being overcome as in Marcuse, Sohn-Rethel offers the *creation* of a whole new subject – one which the world had never before seen. It is upon this basis that Žižek develops his critique of Althusserian ideology and develops his theorization of the modern subject and its radical possibilities (as discussed in chapter two). Briefly summarized, ideology and the subject are the creations of capitalist exchange as the ‘symbolic order’, a Subject that is at the same time held in check by that order. Where in this earlier discussion Sohn-Rethel was touched only in general terms, his work is here dealt with in more detail and his significance becomes even clearer as a consequence.

These two differences – an embrace and a rejection of ‘maternal-eros/the maternal-Thing’; different accounts of the development of capitalism and the nature of the modern ‘subject’ – have direct implications for the political conclusions drawn by both Marcuse and Žižek. For the former, technological rationality has sundered maternal-eros and separated imagination from the rest of rationality, and as a consequence the task of the revolutionary is to rekindle the (Kantian) imagination as a world-transforming force. This leads Marcuse to a double-bind where one must be freed from capitalism in order to have one’s needs adequately met in order to develop imagination – the imagination that is needed to liberate us from capitalism in the first place; he is unable to offer a mediation by which this might happen. By contrast, because Žižek sees the root of human potential as the negative force that is the subject as embodied in capitalist exchange, the task of the revolutionary is to develop that potential and thereby transform the world. Given that it is the commodity *form* that creates this potential, it is an alternate

form that will be able to develop it. This form is that of the Leninist Party/the psychoanalytic situation. Where Marcuse relies on individual psychology and makes empirical arguments against the Party form (i.e. he relies on the 'is' and 'positive' thinking) Žižek develops a socio-ontological argument for it (i.e. he relies on the 'ought' of 'negative' thinking).

Dialectic, not antinomy

While not his final word on the question (Marcuse, for instance, shows some of the vicissitudes of these ideas in chapter two of *Eros and Civilization*), Freud's comments on the 'battle of the giants' in *Civilization and its Discontents* offer something of an antinomic view of the drives: an image of two opposing forces locked in an eternal battle that only a fantasy – a regulative idea – can bridge.⁹³ Where forever the giants battle, the only option left is a story proffered by the hired help⁹⁴ (today paid at the minimum wage, or a migrant worker tied to their 'benefactor's' home...) to kindle our adjustment to it. Marcuse, by contrast, makes the Hegelian move of finding the higher principle in which these two others are found, thereby demonstrating that they're not truly at odds. Rather, they *needn't* be at odds but *are* when found pulsing within the material realities of capitalism. This principle is the conservation of satisfaction: where the pleasure principle of *Eros* seeks to make more libidinal connections and extend gratification, it also seeks to conserve those connections; on the other side, *Thanatos* as 'Nirvana principle' seeks gratification, seeks its conservation, by means of the destruction of anything that introduces libidinal tension. And so within capitalism *Thanatos* is the 'innermost obstacle' to *Eros*: where satisfaction is fleeting, where a limited mode of existence is inherent in each aspect of life, *Thanatos* further undermines the making of links.⁹⁵

Capitalism raises the biological fact of death to the level of an ‘ontological essence’ that prevents the proper essence of being – *Eros* – from developing (Marcuse, 1966: 26-29; 222-237).

Given a new mode of production, however, where necessities are no longer posed as objects of competition, where gratification *is* rather than *ought*, life ‘absorbs’ death’s objective. And so Marcuse sees an end – a life of gratification – that is static. It is, however, a stasis ‘that moves in its own fullness – a productivity that is sensuousness, play, and song’ (Marcuse, 1966: 164). Alienation from oneself, from one’s labour and its product, from others, is replaced by the preservation and development of the ‘alienation in which pleasure originates – man’s alienation [...] from mere nature’ (ibid: 227). In this move, nature itself is rid of its own forms of oppression and pain and becomes properly itself: the final cause – the *Telos* – supplied by human *Eros* and the overcoming of technological rationality ‘moves [nature] to partake in joy’ (ibid: 166).⁹⁶ And so Narcissus’ transformation into a flower takes the place of Freud’s death drive as a return to inorganic matter. This is the return to a ‘libidinal morality’ implied in Freud’s theory, according to Marcuse (delivered *via* the work of Hans Loewald). It is the development of the ‘maternal *Eros*’ that predates the superego and ‘castration fears,’ where the ‘pre-ego’ was one with all of ‘reality’ (Ibid: 228-30).

Žižek provides a somewhat different Hegelian solution to the ‘antinomy of the giants,’ one that places emphasis on *Thanatos*. Rather than a return to inorganic matter, rather than a *pulsion* towards the homeostatic balance of nature, the death drive as understood by Žižek *via* Lacan is an inhuman, ‘monstrous’ excess, the internal limit of each particular drive,⁹⁷ one that can flip into overdrive and the universality of negation. In

Žižek's view of things, in his ontology, desire and drive are of a kind but able to operate in a different mode. In the realm of desire libidinal attachments assume the constant replacement of the object of the drive with yet another object, where each stands in 'metonymically' for the fullness of the 'lost' 'maternal Thing.' Drive itself functions slightly differently, standing instead as the fixation on a process itself, the derivation of pleasure in the failure to attain an object. Žižek offers the example of a hand simply squeezing the air. (My own anecdote involves lifting a coffee cup to my lips two or three times after it's been emptied.) In this sense drive is still within the logic of desire, according to Žižek, by virtue of adhering to the pleasure principle, by virtue of garnering pleasure. Here, however, Žižek sees 'the "death" dimension of every drive':⁹⁸ it is the transformation of a process that itself has no intrinsic value into an end in itself that for Žižek separates humanity from other animals (Žižek, 2006a: 62). One example is, of course, fucking – which is taken up below. More fundamentally, humanity pertains to the nature of the human animal at birth. Born prematurely and incomplete (or 'disaptated' – see the first chapter of Chiesa's *Subjectivity and Otherness*), there is no 'full gratification' of the id, but only its ability to become learned in the myriad ways of gratification – from sex to work.⁹⁹ This is why, for example, that in his lecture on femininity Freud asserts that although the genitals are made for reproduction there is nothing guaranteeing that that will in the end be the use to which they are put. This is the difference between 'instinct' and 'drive': Where the need to eat is an instinct, chewing gum (for example) is an instance of drive – the 'sexualization of instinct,' the oral pleasure of chewing without taking in any nourishment.

What makes up the ‘death dimension’ of each drive is its fixation ‘beyond the pleasure principle,’ where one continues with a process regardless of it becoming *unpleasant*, and even painful, where it threatens the existence of all other libidinal ties and even one’s life. Here one must remember the reason, in Freud’s account, that the pleasure principle falters: it takes itself as immediately the world and the presence of the breast the effect of its own need; or it takes its fantasy as substitute gratification (think of Buddy Holly’s ‘all I have to do is dream’) – but this can only last so long. The reality principle and the ego emerge as a development of the id in response to the fact that the pleasure principle *mistakenly* takes itself as the entirety of being when it in fact relies on others for its gratification (Holly’s protagonist doesn’t realize this, and so ‘dreams his life away’ – he dies). A reflexive return to the id – one that remarks its initial mistake – is for Žižek the ‘undead,’ ‘immortal,’ the disruption of homeostasis, the refusal of the fantasy of total fullness. That is, this is a refutation of the existence of the maternal ‘Thing,’ Marcuse’s maternal *Eros*.¹⁰⁰ This is the true ‘beyond’ of the pleasure principle, one stemming from the principle itself.

There is *Eros* here, though Žižek doesn’t make it explicit. It is more akin to one half of the contradictions of *Eros* that Marcuse pulls from Freud: pursuing pleasure too far – spending all one’s time with a lover in Marcuse/Freud’s example – ends in the destruction of one’s libidinal ties to the community and potentially even oneself (Marcuse, 1966: 42). One need only again take into account the ‘parallax view’ to understand how this plays out in Žižek’s work. Following in the footsteps of Lukács he rejects the idea that history can be understood as unrelated moments that need be understood on their own terms – Žižek holds that such a position assumes a common,

universal space in which contingencies appear and disappear. He argues that Laclau, for example, assumes that there always was and always will be a universal to be hegemonized. In place of this he argues that history need not be understood as a succession of particularities, not as contingent play in a unified continuum, but written from the perspective of the excluded element that makes the ‘ontological consistency’ of a period possible. Coupled with this he argues that the universal as a material element of everyday life didn’t appear until the generalization of the exchange abstraction – i.e. capitalism – became a reality. Remember here Marx’s comments in the *Grundrisse* that ‘...the money system is in fact the system of equality and freedom, and that the disturbances which they encounter in the further development of the system are disturbances inherent in it, are merely the realization of *equality and freedom*, which prove to be inequality and unfreedom’ (Marx, 1973b: 248-9). And this is, of course, made possible by the exclusion/repression of labour-power from capitalism’s own ‘self-understanding’ and operation. The capitalist sees only profit because labour-power disappears in its commodification to re-appear as labour-time, as wage. From the perspective of labour-power profit is instead surplus-value extracted from the worker, as the difference between what it costs the worker to produce themselves and what they are able to themselves produce. This is the parallax view: the same ‘object’ viewed from two different perspectives takes on two different characters – one conservative, the other radical and disruptive. Wage-labour keeps capitalism going; together *acting* upon the knowledge that capitalism is exploitation of labour-power, the system would be transformed.

This same logic can be applied to Žižek's take on *Thanatos*: what from one perspective appears as destruction or death is from another creation and *Eros*. To briefly rehearse a chorus sung above: from the perspective of capitalism and the state that protects it, a workers' strike is destruction – the cessation of production, the loss of profits, dissolution of the social pact, the potential loss of power over the state. From the position of the strikers it is an act of creation: the development of new social structures, of new relations between workers, between workers and capitalists, between workers and the state. It is in this way that one should take Žižek's version of 'Bartleby politics,' which is not simply standing back and staging a 'Great Refusal.' It is both the 'attitude of withdrawal from social engagement and collective social action' (Žižek, 2006a: 10), the overlap of 'act and inactivity' (Žižek, 2010a: 401). Death drive and *Eros* as expansive sublimation are thus not two separate acts that succeed each other in time but the same activity taken from two perspectives. The death drive is for Žižek not necessarily the destruction of things but the destruction of the links that exist between them, and in this way death drive and sublimation form a 'parallax': sublimation is not simply taking an object and bestowing upon it some special significance, nor the redirection of energy that is repressed, but the transformation of both object and subject by changing the links between them. 'Death drive' is thus sublimation viewed from the perspective of what *is*, rather than from the perspective of what has been (or could be) created. This again points to the historical dimension of Žižek's version of the death drive: it is not simply destructiveness as unleashed by scarcity or the one-sidedness of life under capitalism as in Marcuse, but *the Faustian logic of capitalism itself, lived as 'subject.'* This is to say

there is an historical difference between ‘aggressivity’ or ‘aggressive instincts’ and ‘death drive.’¹⁰¹

The subject of science – Marcuse; Žižek and Sohn-Rethel

To understand the (Marxian) historical dimension of the difference between mere aggressivity and the death drive as it appears in Žižek’s work, to understand how the ‘self relating negativity’ of the Cartesian subject can be taken as the substance of capitalism as subject, it is necessary to turn to the history of the development of reason as it appears in the theories in question. It’s worth first noting, however, that in the parallax of death drive there is perhaps an inkling of a potential meeting of Žižek and Marcuse:

Where repressive sublimation prevails and determines the culture, non-repressive sublimation must manifest itself in contradiction to the entire sphere of social usefulness; viewed from this sphere, it is the negation of all accepted productivity and performance (Marcuse, 1966: 208).

The following might also be taken in such a spirit:

In a world of alienation, the liberation of *Eros* would necessarily operate as a destructive fatal force – as the total negation of the principle which governs the repressive reality (Ibid: 95).

If Fredric Jameson is to be believed, Adorno also comes upon a similarly vision-inspired notion – which Jameson dubs ‘stereoscopic thinking’ – where one must attempt to maintain two competing thought processes at once to properly understand the matter under discussion (Jameson, 1990: 28; 46). There is, then, potentially a link between Marcuse and Žižek where the latter begins to argue (in the first chapter of *Metastases of Enjoyment*) that he diverges from the Frankfurt School: although Marcuse does argue that civilization *has* progressed *via* repression, in the discussion of the move from sex to *Eros* at the end of *Eros and Civilization* he points to moments in Freud’s work where repression’s alleged necessity is contradicted, and the possibility of non-repressed socially-necessary work is asserted in its place (Marcuse, 2006: 213). Here Marcuse

opens the door to the notion that the ‘self-sublimation’ of drive is possible. Taking into account what was said above and given wide berth, a similarity can be found in the idea that for Žižek ‘there is no such thing as an unsublimated drive’ (Johnston, 2005: 372).

This might, however, best be put down to the Hegelian concerns of the authors in question as the contours of the gap that separates Žižek’s ontology from Marcuse’s demonstrate an incompatibility at many other significant points. Where Marcuse sees *Eros* as the essence of being, one impeded by capitalism’s ‘perversion’ of *Thanatos*, Žižek takes each drive to potentially be that of death and negation and thereby a *product* of capitalism; Where Marcuse’s death drive is homeostatic, for Žižek not only is the death drive not oriented towards homeostasis, neither is the universe; Where Marcuse offers the sublated return to the unity of mother and child, Žižek rejects the ‘maternal Thing’ as a fantasy to be overcome. In addition to this list needs to be added another potential divide between these two theories, one that has to do with the relation – within their respective systems – between capitalism and the ‘subject of science.’

It is this that makes up the middle section of Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*. Over the course of two chapters he puts together a picture of the rise of rationality and its slippage into ‘positive thinking’ and domination *via* technological rationality. The underlying premise is that ‘the science of nature develops under the *technological a priori* which projects nature as a potential instrumentality, stuff of control and organization’ (Marcuse, 1991: 153). This is to say that while the Cartesian subject appears as a neutral vantage point from which everything is quantified, seeing the world in this light is a particular historical product. The question then is, for Marcuse, how this comes into being, and so he progresses through several possible ‘interpretations’ of the

relation between science and its application. Rejected outright is the notion that there exists anything like an ‘elective affinity’ between industrialization and scientific logic where the latter retains its neutrality in the face of its domineering application in late capitalism (Ibid: 154-5). Instead he offers that science ‘preserves the interrelation between subject and object in a given universe of discourse and action’ (Ibid: 160), where theory proceeds by abstracting or negating the context in which it is found and is thereby limited by it. That is, thought cannot overstep its material conditions (Ibid: 158). This leads him to two possible options to explain the birth of this relation: that of Piaget and that of Husserl, where the former stands as an individualist account and the latter a social-historical one. Piaget is understood to argue that the subject is neither simply the eyeball at the end of the scientific instrument that registers ‘mere objects,’ nor pure reason. Theory is instead the product of activity, where ‘all scientific knowledge presupposes coordination of particular actions’ (Ibid: 162). What Marcuse doesn’t like about this is that our child psychologist raises this to the level of an a-historical biological fact. Husserl, by contrast, performs a ‘genetic epistemology’ that focuses on the ‘socio-historic structure of scientific reason’ (Ibid). In this account ‘pre-scientific practice’ serves as the basis for making mathematical models of nature that correspond to empirical reality. This becomes hidden, however, because math serves as a veil that both reveals and conceals. (These are themes later developed by Heidegger – Husserl’s student and another of Marcuse’s teachers: the event of Being opens a new ‘world’ and then recedes into the background, thereby concealing what, precisely, Being is.) The example Marcuse briefly turns to is geometry: its classical form is a development – the ‘idealization’ – of its originally practical horizon.

It is here that the gap that separates Marcuse from Žižek becomes apparent, and the lever to make it more so is the work of Alfred Sohn-Rethel. Marcuse's description of the development of reason in many places reads like an intellectual history or an 'adventure of ideas': over and over again he writes that it is the internal logic of reason that drives it towards positive rather than negative thinking. In the above example, this is attributed to the (Husserlian/Heideggerian) Being of mathematical thought. Granted, Marcuse does often include economic realities in his account. When looking back to the beginnings of Greek philosophy, for instance, he writes the following of Aristotle:

Paradoxically, it is precisely the critical intent in philosophic thought which leads to the idealistic purification – a critical intent which aims at the empirical world as a whole, and not merely at certain modes of thinking or behaving within it. Defining its concepts in terms of potentialities which are of an essentially different order of thought and existence, the philosophic critique finds itself blocked by the reality from which it dissociates itself, and proceeds to construct a realm of Reason purged from empirical contingency (Marcuse, 1991: 135).

The social world of the Greeks acted as an 'historical barrier' to the development of the idea of freedom because the division of labour in Greek society was raised to an ontological condition; because freedom is limited to the upper classes and philosophy couldn't challenge that fact, truth was elevated 'safely above the historical reality' (Ibid: 129). That is, because the function of reason is to negate the existing world, it also in the end dissociates itself from that world and continues to run on its own internal logic, though constrained by the empirical world in which it is lived. Because economic realities are purged from philosophy class dominates one's thought unconsciously. The problem is that in Marcuse's account the question of *where* reason comes from is left largely unanswered. The appearance of reason in ancient Greece, the appearance of two dimensional thought, of both 'is' and 'ought' is explained as '[reflecting] the experience of a world antagonistic in itself – a world afflicted with want and negativity, constantly

threatened with destruction, but also a world which is a *cosmos*, structured in accordance with final causes' (Ibid: 125). The question is, of course, why this particular society sees reason not only flourish, but has it develop in the first place. That is, why didn't all societies threatened with 'want and negativity' develop reason in the fashion of the Greeks? Class division is not enough, nor is the availability of idle time created for an aristocracy by a slave economy (the latter is suggested not by Marcuse but Whitehead – with whom Marcuse shares the term 'Great Refusal'¹⁰²). The latter assumes what it is to explain (i.e. the impetus behind the actual *development* of reason, versus the assumption that the human animal is rational and will self develop given the chance), and the former must hold some particularity or it would have the same effect elsewhere. That is, what need be asked is 'who educated Meno's educator'? The answer is not that thought somehow of itself developed practice, but that practice in some way enabled certain forms of thought that were in turn reflected in practice.

This is why geometry is important. In his turn to Husserl, Marcuse reports that modern scientific reason (Galileo, Newton, Descartes) develops while 'concealing' the 'pre-scientific' practical ground from which it came. This ground is geometry:

Through all abstraction and its generalization, scientific method retains (and masks) its pre-scientific-technical structure; the development of the former represents (and masks) the development of the latter. Thus classical geometry 'idealizes' the practice of surveying and measuring the land (*Feldmesskunst*). Geometry is the theory of practical objectification (Marcuse, 1991: 163).

Marcuse asserts, with reference to Husserl, that modern science preserves the 'pre-scientific intent and content' of geometry – i.e. measurement and domination (Ibid). The problem is iterated in Marcuse's review of Husserl's *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*, which is an extended version of Marcuse's commentary on Husserl in *One Dimensional Man*. Here Marcuse relates that the

pre-scientific validating ground of mathematical science [...] is originally in geometry as the art of measuring (*Messskunst*) with its specific means and possibilities. This art of measuring in the empirical reality promised and indeed achieved the progressive calculability of nature, subjecting nature to the ever more exact 'foresight' in mastering and using nature (Marcuse, 2002: 472).

In this account, geometry is the practice that develops the abstraction ('calculability') and domination of nature. With the arrival of Galileo this reaches its apex, where science 'establishes' (i.e. creates) the 'general objectivity', the 'de-individualization' of the world – i.e. the objects of the world are treated as on an equal plain of abstraction (Ibid: 471). There here exists, however, the burden of explaining *why* geometry was developed in such a way. It's not enough to demonstrate – as Kellner attempts – that Marcuse did not merely hold 'technological rationality' to be the end all and be all, but emphasized the role that class domination and the mode of production plays in the use of technology. Kellner's discussion remains at the level of description (completely sidelining the role of Heidegger and Husserl) and fails to take up the burden Marcuse placed on his own shoulders – to historically explain the genesis of this rationality (See Kellner, 1984: 263-267). Feenburg also fails on this note. While pointing out that formal thinking vitiates dialectical thinking by completely removing any conception of potentiality or the 'ought'; while pointing out that this form of thought is not value-free precisely because of this bias; while pointing out that this bias only becomes clear when the products of a science based in formal thinking are brought into the lifeworld of any society (in our case a capitalist one); while pointing out that this formal thinking 'originates in the split between essence and appearance which results from the conditions of life in class society'; Feenburg does not answer the questions raised above (Feenburg, 1988a: 246-7).

Here Sohn-Rethel's work becomes relevant. His strategy involves comparing geometry as practiced by the Egyptians in the Bronze Age with that of the practice of the

ancient Greeks. In the former instance practitioners were trained to, for instance, survey land after the flooding of the Nile in order that surpluses could be calculated and extracted from the people by the state. This was done with reference to ‘the teaching and exercise manual of Ahmes’ and was purely practical in nature, so much so that Sohn-Rethel claims that the assumption – made by historians of math – that there likely also existed a theoretical manual that has been lost to history ‘must surely be nothing but a reflex of our own conceptions’ (Sohn-Rethel, 1978: 102). While there is class division here there is for Sohn-Rethel no true separation of head and hand, of intellectual and manual labour. Such a division did not come into being until ‘the manual operation became subordinated to an act of pure thought which was directed solely towards grasping quantitative laws of number or of abstract space’ (Ibid). This is the type of geometry he sees in classical Greece: one separated from practice, concerned with grasping laws and taking place in abstract space, etc. His answer as to why this difference existed has to do with coined money: not until the eighth or seventh century B.C.E., when Greek states guaranteed the worth of a coin independent of the actual amount of metal it contained, did the possibility of such abstract thought occur.¹⁰³

That is, the ‘development’ of geometry – that referred to by Marcuse above – is made possible not by thought alone, nor by the power of math to ‘reveal a world,’ but is instead made possible through a widespread social practice of abstraction. This is what Sohn-Rethel calls the ‘real abstraction’ of commodity exchange, an abstraction that ‘has no existence other than in the human mind, but it does not spring from the mind’ (Sohn-Rethel, 1978: 57). That is, geometry did not transform into something other than practice of its own logic, but was so transformed by another social force. As this force the ‘real

abstraction' of commodity exchange enabled the separation of head and hand in that in its everyday practice it possesses the qualities of abstract thought, ranging from practical solipsism, abstract notions of quantity, abstraction from time and space, and abstract movement (Sohn-Rethel, 1978: 35-57). Sohn-Rethel briefly traces the introduction of coined money, through usury, debt, and slavery, to account not only for the root of abstract thought but also the class division particular to the Greeks. All this is to say that these abstractions come to be in material practice before they can be grasped by 'the educators,' before geometry can become 'abstract' and oriented towards the technological rationality that Marcuse holds it to ground. Where for Marcuse it is class division and practical geometry that explain the origin of our treating the world and those in it as an object of domination, Sohn-Rethel explains the development of these two factors by a third. As capitalism comes onto the scene – with the 'generalization of the exchange abstraction,' where participation in the capitalist market is almost unavoidable – the division of head and hand develops into Kant's transcendental subject and the scientific observer. It is, of course, from this starting point¹⁰⁴ that Žižek opens his critique of Althusser, develops the links between Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxism, and upon which his theories rest. That is, it is *via* Sohn-Rethel that Žižek is able to claim that the Cartesian subject (as developed by Kant and Hegel) is not concomitant with technological rationality, and Sohn-Rethel's work supports Žižek's claim that the Frankfurt School is insufficiently historicist when discussing such rationality. Therein is one more fundamental difference between Žižek and Marcuse, which has implications for understanding their diverging political conclusions.

Art or Party?

While the above take on the history of reason may in fact be compatible with or complimentary to Marcuse's account of the development of reason – Adorno, for example, in places appears to share Sohn-Rethel's position¹⁰⁵ – in the end it is not wholly compatible with the assessment of capitalism and the political solutions for overcoming it that Marcuse offers. This is because it stands as a very different version of the subject of reason. This can first be seen in the question of 'second nature.' For Sohn-Rethel,

Second nature finds its external expression in money, and in it the specifically human element in us finds its first separate and objectively real manifestation in history' (Sohn-Rethel, 1978: 60).

It is for Sohn-Rethel the social element that separates us from animals, from a life of instinct. This second nature is the abstract social relation embodied in the exchange of commodities – i.e. the relationship established between people as money. Marcuse also turns to the commodity form and describes it as 'second nature,' but it is of a completely different sort than that offered by Sohn-Rethel. In his account, 'commodity form' refers to consumer products *per se* rather than their 'form', and the second nature is the creation of new biological needs – i.e. the enjoyments of consumption (Marcuse, 1969: 11).

In addition, in Žižek's thought Sohn-Rethel's study becomes the basis for the thesis beleaguered throughout the present work as being central to Žižek's:

[...] there is no S without its support in *a*: the subject can arrive at its being-for-itself, can free itself from all substantial ties and appear as the point of pure negativity, only by being posited as equivalent to its absolute antipode, money, that inert piece of metal that one can hold in one's hands and manipulate freely... (2008b [1991]: 57, n22).

As argued above, for Žižek the appearance of the Subject – of 'pure negativity' – is brought about by capitalism and serves as the kernel of freedom that could enable its (capitalism's) overcoming. Where Sohn-Rethel asserts that this subject – the 'subject of science' – is Kant's transcendental subject, Žižek develops this idea to assert that it is

also the subject of Hegel, which – in many ways following the work of Robert Pippin¹⁰⁶ – he holds is still that of Kant, though taken where Kant, Fichte, and Schelling could not quite go.

Marcuse, too, turns to Kant and German idealism for his revolutionary subject, but it is again one completely different in character. For Marcuse it is one left mutilated by capitalism and tied to the lost ‘unity’ of mother and child. For him ‘the memory of gratification is at the origin of all thinking, and the impulse to recapture past gratification is the hidden driving power behind the process of thought’ (Marcuse, 1966: 31; see also 143). This remainder of the past is able to make links to the present world, to the world of consciousness, as fantasy/imagination – which manages to survive the ‘mutilation of the mind’ wrought by the reality principle (Ibid: 141). According to Marcuse, fantasy...

...links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of the consciousness (art), the dream with the reality; it preserves the archetypes of the genus, the perpetual but repressed ideas of the collective and individual memory, the tabooed images of freedom (Ibid: 141).

And, ‘as artistic imagination, it also links the perversions with the images of integral freedom and gratification’ (Ibid: 50). This is where Kant and German Idealism become important: in Kant’s work thought and practice are linked by aesthetics; developed into the ‘play impulse’ this would be the means to transform capitalist society (1966: 174; 189). This is important for Marcuse for the same reason that Feenberg (2011) argues the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger was important: convinced that class consciousness as understood by Lukács could not be relied upon to foster social and political revolution, a new – or at least different – form of sensation/consciousness had to be understood. As suggested above, phenomenology might even *take the place* of reification/commodity fetishism as the explanation for the development of the form of capitalist ideology. In this instance, Kant and the aesthetic theory he finds in German

idealism take the place of Lukács' ontological arguments for the Communist (or perhaps more properly, Leninist) Party. In this fashion Marcuse finds himself in a vicious circle where one must have access to one's imagination in order to negate the (capitalist) needs that one currently has – to realize that 'another world' – and yet one is to realize the imagination *via* total automation where one's basic needs are adequately satisfied (hence automation's constant return in *Eros and Civilization*). I.e. One needs freedom from capitalism in order to fight for freedom from capitalism: given free time by the increased productivity of capitalism¹⁰⁷ the revolutionary 'play impulse' will develop. Thus Marcuse has to himself admit that the working class of the industrialized West is trapped within the constraints of consumer capitalism (Marcuse, 1969: 18; 1970: 80; 99).

Before discussing what Marcuse sees as a possible solution to this problem, it's important to note that while he focuses on the 'aesthetic Form' as the outcome and possible means of socialist revolution in the West, the Leninist party also has a role in his thought. In his '33 Theses' he wrote that the development of capitalism (this was written around 1947) 'has confirmed the correctness of the Leninist conception of the vanguard party as the subject of the revolution' (Marcuse, 1998: 227). Feenburg notes that as a suggested program for the re-establishment of the Institute for Social Research, these theses – which have much to say about the role of the party – were 'stillborn for at that point in time his colleagues wanted nothing whatsoever to do with this kind of analysis and a program of studies based on it.' Further, '...by the 1960s there was almost no one in the West – including Marcuse – who did not regard this proposition [that the Communist Parties of the West could urge the working class to revolution] as either unlikely or, worse yet, intellectually and morally bankrupt' (Feenburg, 2007: xxvii;

xxxvi). Given his position on the party in 1947's 'theses' and later in 1969's *Essay on Liberation* its place in his thought is important because it can be used to re-open the question of its relevance.

His analysis in 1947 centred around the proposition, as just mentioned, that the party was an important – and even correct – means of revolution. The problem was that in the face of the growing militarization of capitalist countries – both liberal-democratic and fascist – it was a means that had been distorted into a dominating military apparatus: Confronted with barbarism the Soviet apparatus itself became barbarous. In the final of his theses he reveals a strand of optimism, however, writing that 'the political task then would consist in reconstructing revolutionary theory within the communist parties and working for the praxis appropriate to it' (Marcuse, 1998: 227). While it didn't seem to him that the Soviet parties could be so recaptured, he proposed that the communist parties of Western Europe and West Germany might. Later, in his 1969 *Essay on Liberation*, the question of communist parties enters with the problem of how political consciousness might be raised in capitalist countries. Given that revolution still depended 'on the class which constitutes the human base of the process of production' (i.e. the industrial working class), and given the 'one-dimensionality' that Marcuse saw in the capitalism of his day, it was only through a 'catalyst outside its ranks' that revolutionary political consciousness and practice could come (Marcuse, 1969: 53-4). This is, of course, the role traditionally attributed to the party, which in 1947 Marcuse held was paramount as it preserved the revolutionary tradition, a tradition that could again become a revolutionary goal. By 1969, however, Marcuse reported that the communist parties of the West had succumbed to the one dimensionality of capitalism and were forced to 'parliamentarize'

themselves and integrate into the bourgeois-democratic processes (though he leaves the forces responsible in obscurity). Similarly, he wrote that though the party was a legitimate form in the peripheries, it wrongly relied on policy oriented around popular fronts rather than holding to the doctrine of seizing and transforming the state (Ibid: 79-80).

As a consequence Marcuse saw the radical, non-conformist intelligentsia and the ‘ghetto populations’ and “‘underprivileged” sections of the labouring classes in backward capitalist countries’ as the ‘catalyst outside the ranks’ of the working class (Marcuse, 1969: 56). The crux of the matter in 1969 was for Marcuse the following: the working classes of the global North (Marcuse writes ‘the advanced capitalist countries’) were so well integrated into the processes of capital that they had become a conservative force; the burgeoning movements of the oppressed within the North were too disorganized and too weak to reap social and political change; the ‘predominantly agrarian proletariat’ of the global south (Marcuse writes ‘third world’) were ‘unable to mount any concerted economic and political action’, and so resorted to guerilla military action – a form of warfare that could easily have been quashed had imperialist powers not been prevented from using nuclear arms by fear of the other nuclear powers. This drives him to the conclusion that it was only through the weakening of the capitalist North that the South could be liberated, and this would only come through economic crises and the ‘impact of the growing contradictions within the society’ (Ibid: 81; 84). Rather, radical social development could only be the ‘result of political education in action’ whereby the exploited would have not so much their consciousness raised but their *needs* changed – i.e. they would have their imagination re-kindled. And so while Ché, Castro, and the party

of which they were part were legitimate for their own revolutions they were not to be a model of revolutionary action for the North. They were to instead stand as an ‘image’ of ‘elemental, instinctual, creative force’ (Ibid:88) – what Marcuse calls ‘solidarity.’

This takes form in a strange suggestion, earlier in the essay, that revolution might in fact arise as a replacement of one ruling elite by another, the capitalist being replaced by the ‘dreaded intellectual,’ where the later is coupled with the increased productivity of capitalism (Ibid: 70). This is an image of a parliament or house of representatives (or some new form – Marcuse doesn’t develop the idea very far in this essay) full of artists and intellects directing an economy already capable of feeding its many poor, but prevented from doing so by class interests. It is also a reversal of Freud’s ‘Zuider Zee’ comments in the *New Introductory Lectures*:¹⁰⁸ For Marcuse it is the imagination (akin to the unconscious and the id) – the faculty abused by capitalism and one dimensional thinking – that will come to replace the performance principle (the realm of the ego): ‘[...]it would mean the ascent of the Aesthetic Principle as Form of the Reality Principle: a culture of receptivity based on the achievements of industrial civilization and initiating the end of its self-propelled productivity’ (Marcuse, 1969: 90). Kellner shows that this becomes more pronounced several years later in *Counter Revolution and Revolt* where, quietly distorting the work of a Soviet theorist, Marcuse suggests that one must consider ‘Plato’s “educational dictatorship of the intelligentsia” and Rousseau’s dictum that people must be “forced to be free”’ (Kellner, 1984: 311).

In this discussion Marcuse leans too far towards the ‘is’ while not considering the party in the mode of ‘ought.’ That is, his discussion relies primarily on the failures of the communist parties¹⁰⁹ – their actualities – rather than negating them with another version

of what they could be. Instead, Marcuse begins at the level of the individual, where the faculties have been sundered – here fantasy and negation have been forgotten. The division between what capitalism can produce and what it provides to the many gives birth to the great refusal, the recollection of the lost promise of social revolution. Or as Moore puts it: ‘This revolutionary subjectivity is born of aesthetic revulsion, social marginalization and political disconnection [...]’; ‘Marcuse agrees with Whitehead that the great refusal arises from an aesthetic alienation rather than anything exclusively economic or political’ (2007: 84; 89). In light of the elitist overtones this takes on in Marcuse’s work, it might be worth remembering that while (according to Moore) ‘Great Refusal’ only appears once in Whitehead’s work, it is akin to the latter’s discussions of ‘*noble discontent*’ in the ongoing ‘adventure of ideas.’ In place of a discussion of a social practice that generates individual ‘psychology’ Marcuse offers an individual form of psychology that could develop into practice.

In the central essay of *History and Class Consciousness* one criticism that Lukács levels at the German Idealists is that they replaced political practice with artistic practice, that they were unable to make the leap accomplished by Marx: away from aesthetics and towards Aristotelian ‘praxis’ – activity done for its own sake and proper to the ‘political animal.’¹¹⁰ The trajectory of *HaCC* follows the reification of the world *via* the commodity form such that the remedy comes in the form of the party, a form of practice that begins the overcoming of the limited or one-sided activity imposed on workers by capitalism. The Party concerns itself with the development of people’s many political (and other) potentialities in service of overcoming the socio-political ‘is.’¹¹¹ In this way, Jacoby (1975) – in his brief history of the role of psychology, psychoanalysis, and critical

theory in the Western world – misses the point when he alludes to arguments that Lukács has no proper theory of the psychology of the subject backing his positions on class consciousness. What is instead of primary importance is the *form* of everyday activity, which makes ‘psychology’ what it is. In addition, Lukács makes explicit that his purpose is not simply to describe the empirical existence and importance of the Party but to think through its logical necessity. That is, in his view Party activists had good instinct but lacked a consistent understanding of the ontological importance of the form. It is precisely these two things – form and ontological necessity – that drives Žižek’s political theory towards psychoanalytic practice and the Leninist party: they stand as *necessary practical forms of thought*, just as the commodity form is not any particular object but the way objects are treated in the social realm, and necessary for the existence of capitalism. Without suffering the problems of chicken and egg introduced by Marcuse in his attempt to outline a new form of consciousness that had yet to come into being, and without privileging the individual, the ‘party as psychoanalyst’ is for Žižek a *new* form of thought,¹¹² one already found *within* capitalist reality, and thereby able to fill the role Marcuse attributes to fantasy and imagination. It is to the historical form of psychoanalysis and the Leninist party that the following chapters are dedicated. First, however, the role of form is further emphasized by taking on the theoretical formulations offered by Laclau and Rancière, thereby showing how this question sets Žižek apart from many of his contemporaries.



Chapter 4 – From ‘lot’ to Party

What if democracy, in the second sense (the regulated procedure of registering the “people’s voice”) is ultimately *a defense against itself*, against democracy in the sense of the violent intrusion of the egalitarian logic that disturbs the hierarchical functioning of the social system, an attempt to re-functionalize this excess, to make it part of the normal running of things?

– Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes*

But why the hell would one want today to associate that with ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ or communism?

– Stavrakakis, *On Acts, Pure and Impure*



Not two, but one

In the wake of his *Little Piece of the Real* Sharpe’s 2010 collaboration with Boucher revolves around the creation of an ‘antinomic Slovenian’: a younger ‘radical democratic’ Žižek and an older, voluntaristic, dictatorial, German Romantic/tragic Lukácsian one. The pair locate the shift in perspective in the 1990s and Žižek’s encounter with Schelling. As alluded to in the first chapter, Adrian Johnston argues that Žižek’s turn to Schelling was an attempt to describe how the immaterial is birthed from the material, where the antagonisms in the latter lead to the gestation of the former. Where Johnston fails to put this in terms of any actually existing contradictions, the work of Sohn-Rethel fills the gap in Žižek’s work: the generalization of commodity exchange (a material practice) in capitalism leads to the abstract subject of science (the immaterial *Cogito*). Sharpe and Boucher, however, make no reference to Johnston’s argument, though it is the central thesis of his book and reference to it can be found in their bibliography. Nor can it be said that they give Sohn-Rethel much more ink than to denounce him as akin to Lukács. Instead, they offer that Žižek’s engagement with Schelling leads him to a German-style romanticism where the ‘subject-object’ of history projects itself onto the world in an act of

voluntaristic violence. That is, Sharpe and Boucher accuse Žižek of offering a psychotic view of the world which suffers the further illegitimate application of the categories of psychoanalysis to the social. At one point they offer the following:

[...] Žižek simply tells us that the relations between economics and politics are logically the same as those between the latent and manifest content of dreams in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. There could hardly be a more direct statement of Žižek thinking of political societies as 'subject-objects' than this (Sharpe and Boucher, 2010: 130).

What they fail to see here is that the quote they use is a reference of the opening chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: it is the form of the dream that holds its secret, and not its particular content. And, of course, Žižek does not 'simply' state this, but spends dozens of pages arguing that there is a homology between the dream and the cell-form of capitalism, as discussed in chapter 2 of the present work. Grabbing their bootstraps in this way Sharpe and Boucher go on to argue that Žižek can not offer a plausible account of social change in capitalist regimes because he stops at the level of the commodity fetishism, and that in place of one theory he needs at least two: using Habermas as an example, they hold that Žižek needs a theory of the economic 'system' and a separate theory of 'lifeworlds' (Sharpe and Boucher, 2010: 134). That is, they fail to present what might act as a mediating link between these two 'spheres' and disagree with one of the central aims of Žižek's entire project: showing that one need not supplement the theories of Marx with those of psychoanalysis because they move on the same terrain. When they complain that Žižek errs when he applies to the social world theories that were developed to treat individuals they miss that the psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan is not in the mode of the psychology presented in the DSM-IV (soon to be V) where categories with checklists are developed and used as if they existed as rigid elements that existed in every individual independent of their social environment; the work of Freud and Lacan are

instead theories of how the social creates the individual and how the individual lives within the social. In the same vein, they miss that commodity fetishism is not simply (as they claim) found in the first section of *Capital I*, one left behind for the purely economic analysis of accumulation, crises, and the like, but the core of the argument that *ideology is at the heart of the economy* and that it can not be understood without it – hence fetishism’s return in the first pages of *Capital III* and the discussion of interest-bearing capital, as well as at the end of ‘volume IV.’¹¹³ What Sharpe and Boucher can not see is that Marx and Engels, too, posed the question they are asking:

Individuals always started, and always start, from themselves. Their relations are the relations of their real life. How does it happen that their relations assume an independent existence over against them? and that the forces of their own life overpower them? (Marx and Engels, 1973: 80).¹¹⁴

Marx’s answer is that within capitalism the mediation between individual and economy is commodity fetishism. Žižek emphasizes not only that you can’t have one without the other, but that where they overlap is where one finds the Subject.

This is to say that there are in fact not two Žižek’s, but one. In tracing Žižek’s move away from ‘radical democracy’¹¹⁵ the continuity between his earlier and later positions comes clearly into view. The key to this continuity is what Rancière has called the essence of democracy – lot – and Žižek’s discussions of the Hegelian monarch. Against Boucher’s claim¹¹⁶ that Žižek’s ‘otherwise unintelligible references to the Hegelian Monarch’ can only be explained by the monarch being ‘beyond democracy’ and thereby amenable to Žižek’s irrational will to ‘destroy democracy’ (Boucher, 2008: 212), a closer examination of Žižek’s treatment of the Monarch shows its intimate link with democracy through the tradition of filling the positions of government by means of lottery.

In his early work Žižek uses Hegel's description of the monarch to, in effect, agree with radical democrat Claude Lefort's position that the 'democratic invention' consists of a gap between the place of power and they who occupy it. This is not the end, however: this conception develops as Žižek's work progresses and can be seen even early on in the then unexplored suggestion that it is not the horizon of left politics and must be challenged. Towards the time of his self-proclaimed 'Leninist turn' he further pushes the position that this democratic 'gap' must itself be challenged as it more closely resembles the psychoanalytic logic of the fetish rather than the logic of 'drive' or negation, which he sees as more fruitful. Below is outlined how this entails replacing Hegel's monarch with the Leninist Party, which is done with reference to 'radical democrat' Jacques Rancière and 'post-Marxist' Ernesto Laclau, each of whom appear to share positions with Žižek but who are in fact quite different: Žižek might accept Rancière's position that equality is the violent assertion of difference, but with the caveat that such an assertion needs an 'external' element to make it an effective progressive force; and where Laclau offers that this element need be an enemy, Žižek posits it as the psychoanalyst. To outline the differences between these positions it's necessary to make reference to Marx in order to demonstrate that the universal is not simply a form full of promise that is corrupted by capital, but actual alienation for all (capitalist and worker alike) that none the less offers emancipation as the 'spirit of negation': *changing* forms of the universal. In this case, that universal is that of democracy as embodied in the tradition of choosing government by means of 'lot.' Where Rancière posits it as the mode of democracy and politics *per se*, Žižek offers a specific form of lot: that of the psychoanalyst and the Leninist Party. This is because Žižek goes where Rancière does not. While asserting that the scandal of

democracy lies in its challenge to the maintenance of property relations, Rancière does not adapt the notion of lot to the particularity of the property relations of capitalism. Contrariwise, Žižek – as someone who adheres to the basics of Marx’s theory of value – asserts that lot as chance takes on a particular form in radical anti-capitalist politics. That form is not only that of a political organization, but a form of thought. Against both Rancière and Laclau, Žižek offers not timeless transcendentals but historical change.

The horizons of democracy

As an example of a ‘true democratic’ experiment Yannis Stavrakakis offers *One and Other*, a public art project by Anthony Gormley in which people were chosen by lot to stand on an empty plinth in Trafalgar Square for sixty minutes at a time. What draws Stavrakakis to this example is first that it recalls Lefort’s argument that democracy is fundamentally the split between the locus of power and its temporary occupation, second that it ‘created new forms of subjectivity, new forms of fidelity to the event of participation,’ and lastly that it acts as a step towards the revival of the democratic tradition of lot (2010: 23-4). Stavrakakis sees all of these as defenses of radical democracy and as rebukes to Žižek’s arguments – particularly those found in *In Defense of Lost Causes* – for communism. He is able to do this because he avoids an in-depth discussion of precisely why Žižek takes a stand against Lefort, why Žižek refuses some sort of ‘fidelity’ to democracy as the temporary power given by occupying the empty place of power. That is, rather than exploring the reasons why Žižek takes issue with Lefort Stavrakakis limits himself to asserting that he doesn’t find Lefort’s position objectionable (2010: 29, n15). The question, *as* a question rather than as mere rhetoric or

an angry outburst, is *precisely* ‘why the hell’ Žižek would align democracy and ‘lot’ with the dictatorship of the proletariat.

To be precise, it is not Žižek who aligns the dictatorship of the proletariat with the practice of determining, by lot, who will take part in any further democratic decision-making. It’s instead the position of Kojin Karatani – quoted by Žižek at the end of *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*. This is to say that it is not wholly accurate to imply that Žižek holds this to be an adequate definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Rather, the quote serves as more of a passing remark, a moment of applause for Karatani for avoiding the technocratic trap of reducing democracy to voting for the most qualified candidate.¹¹⁷ What is more interesting – and what will enable a better understanding of what Žižek is getting at – is his remark that in Karatani’s discussion of democracy lot ‘fulfills the same function as Hegel’s theory of monarchy’ (Žižek, 2009a: 152; See also 2006a: 57). To uncover what this means it’s instructive to turn to the end of Žižek’s *For They Know Not What They Do*, a book in which Žižek still pledges some allegiance to the insights of Claude Lefort and which Sharpe and Boucher call his most radically democratic book.

Hegel’s constitutional monarch appears from time to time in Žižek’s work, but at this particular moment in his thought he argues that it stands as a solution to the problem the Jacobins faced at the moment of ‘democratic invention’ in France: anyone who steps into the place of power is immediately forced to accomplish some feat or another and thereby betray the formal equality established by the revolution by transforming the universal into a particular. That is, one cannot rule innocently, but at the same time one cannot live by terror alone. Hegel’s monarch stands as a solution to the problem of terror,

according to Žižek, in that they (the monarch) stand as the means to ensure that the place of power and anyone who occupies it do not become one and the same: the monarch is the personification or materialization of the inability to fully occupy the position of democratic power (2008b: 269-70). This is akin to lot, according to Žižek, in that the monarch is the intervention of the irrational within Hegel's rational totality (i.e. the state): the cutting of indecision within the state by means of the monarch's tongue is not the product of calculation but of arbitrary will. Where rational discussion spins off into an unending torrent of reasons for and against, the knot can only be undone with a knife. Lot fills this function too: in the endless debate over which candidate might best fulfill a particular role within a democratic institution, in a discussion where no definitive reason can be given, random selection – lot – makes the decision for you (2008b: 277, n54).¹¹⁸

As noted, Žižek quotes Karatani to the effect that this is akin to the dictatorship of the proletariat. This leads to the question of whether or not Žižek advocates for constitutional monarchy (as in Canada, for example, where the Queen's representative must sign all legislation for it to become law, can prorogue parliament, etc.) as *the* form of democratic. While he ends *For They Know Not What They Do* after making the points just outlined, this is in fact not the position Žižek advocates. These comments are followed by a short, final, unmarked concluding section. It begins with the following question: 'Is today's Left therefore condemned to pledge all its forces to the victory of democracy?' Žižek's answer is, of course, that no, we're not. From here he tacks in a way that echoes the opening pages of Marx's *18th Brumaire* – from which he gets the title for *First as Tragedy...* – but with some Badiou spun in: the present (i.e. 1991) is generating new movements that cannot be understood from the perspectives offered by

contemporary political understanding, and so the task of the left is to find new names for these forms of activity. This doesn't mean renouncing the past, however, but keeping alive all the 'lost causes' that liberal-democracy and capital would rather see forgotten (2008b: 271). As Marx put it, the left must enable the past to rise in living spirit and not as a ghost or nightmare left to haunt the consciousness of the present.

This is to suggest that a name can be put to the currently nameless finale to *For They Know Not What They Do*, and doing so will help clarify what Žižek comes to later make more explicit in regards to his position on the 'democratic invention.' Such a title can be devised with reference to a quote from Trotsky, taken from a book Žižek edited as part of Verso's 'Revolutions' series:

In the hands of the party is concentrated the general control. It does not immediately administer, since its apparatus is not adapted for this purpose. But it has the final word in all fundamental questions. Further, our practice has led to the result that, in all moot questions, generally – conflicts between departments and personal conflicts within departments – the last word belongs to the central committee of the party. This affords extreme economy of time and energy. And in the most difficult and complicated circumstances gives a guarantee for the necessary unity of action.

What is striking about this passage is the similarity between these comments about the Party in *Terrorism and Communism* (2007 [1920]: 102) and the role Hegel gives to the constitutional monarch: it brings unity, does not directly administer, and cuts through indecision. This is not to say that the logic is the same, however. The most obvious difference is Trotsky's comment that the Party has 'the final word in all fundamental questions.' What this hopefully points to, however, is that after the year 2000 or so Žižek replaces the monarch with the Party. The final section of *FTKN* might then be dubbed 'From Hegel to Lenin,' or 'From Monarch to (Leninist) Party.'

It's important to note that while the two are not homologous – the Party is not just another name for the Monarch – nor are they completely different. This can be

understood by looking at Žižek's objections to Ernesto Laclau's ideas on populism as found in a debate between the two in *Critical Inquiry*, had around 2006, which became the core of a chapter in Žižek's *Defense of Lost Causes* (2008a). This is also, incidentally, the chapter to which Stavrakakis raises the objections alluded to above. The central point relevant to the present discussion revolves around two different versions of the universal: that of order and that of excess; that of the 'general equivalent', the empty or Master signifier, and that of a potentially explosive exclusion, or *objet a*. It is 'not just about which particular content will "hegemonize" the empty form of universality, but a struggle between two exclusive *forms* of universality themselves' (Žižek, 2008a: 285). In terms of the current discussion, this is the difference between the Monarch and the Party.

Žižek versus Laclau: universality as excess

While Žižek makes much of the difference between his position and that of Laclau, the two of them say many of the same things. Both think that Lefort needs to be rethought in that the 'empty place of power' does not merely exist, but is created¹¹⁹; Both think that 'political will' need not simply be heard and implemented, but actively developed¹²⁰; Both think that democracy is the exercise of power – perhaps even 'dictatorship' – rather than a neutral exercise of technocratic know-how.¹²¹ Both make a distinction between two types of universal. This latter point is, however, where they start to diverge. For Laclau, the form of the universal to be avoided is that of an 'unmediated universal' that he describes as a 'tainted particularized universality' in which the attempt to make a homogenized political space is belied by particularism (Laclau, 2001: 4; 11). This is merely another way of saying that formal equality is belied by actual systemic inequality: people are equal except at the level of property, where some are more equal

than others. Žižek, too, holds a similar position, using Hegel's 'universal class' – i.e. the state bureaucracy – as an example, along with the United States as the 'direct agent' (remember that Laclau uses the term 'unmediated universal') of the worldwide protection of human rights and liberal democracy (Žižek, 2008a: 285).

The other universality that Laclau proposes is that of a particularity that purges itself of that particularity, empties itself of its own demands, as it comes to embody the demands of more and more social grievances. This is the point where Žižek and Laclau finally part ways and where their projects fundamentally diverge.

In Laclau's account, this second universality – the transformation of one particular group into an empty signifier – always leaves a remainder of particularity (Laclau, 2001: 11). This prevents, for him, the total coincidence of the universal and particular, ensuring that democratic power is always acknowledged as contingent, ensuring that there is always a distance between those who exercise power and their legitimacy in doing so. Where this democratic agent is contingent so too, by *necessity*, must be that against which they raise their fists. Their enemy, against which they galvanize the community, is simply a particular regime, a particular government, which embodies some 'notorious crime' that it likely did not itself commit. In Laclau's words, the enemy '... has to be seen as the symbol of something different and incommensurable with it: the obstacle which prevents society from coinciding with itself, from reaching its own fullness' (Laclau, 2001: 9). For example, while today's Canadian Government did not colonize the dominion or institute residential schools, while it neither interned the Japanese during the second World War nor instituted the Chinese head-tax, it is taken as

responsible for those actions and redress demanded from it, and consequently it has issued apologies and money in an attempt to offer that redress.

Herein lies the problem with this alternative version of the universal: where there is no reason for any group to trump any other in the political arena, where there can be no ‘substantial’ or ‘essential’ grievance, but only contingent ones, an enemy is needed to make political organization possible: the only way one’s political activity can be seen as ‘contingent’ is if ‘essence’ lies somewhere else – in something that prevents the community from being harmonious. Translated into the terms of the present discussion, what Laclau sees as the essence of politics is problematic in that it only works if one assumes that one’s own demands are ‘contingent’ – that any number of grievances can be aligned, without priority – while the enemy as enemy is *not*. Otherwise we get the common-sense reproach that payment for the sins of the father should not be visited upon the son: this government had nothing to do with those ‘notorious crimes’ of the past (colonization, residential schools, Japanese internment, racist immigration laws), so why should it be expected to redress them? They were voted into power, and only recently; they were not the wielders of the gun. The correct answer to this is, of course, is that such ‘notorious crimes’ are *ongoing* and are so because they are *systemic*. Each Canadian Government, regardless of how progressive or reactionary it might be, is sustained by this past: there can *be* no Canada without stolen land. This past is also the root from which to repeat itself with new racist immigration laws and migrant worker programs, colonizations (think of Canada’s role in Honduras and Haiti), and internments (Omar Khadr and Guantanamo): under capitalism, maintaining ownership of property demands its expansion, accomplished *via* the usual suspects associated with accumulation.

What Laclau is unable to do is show the relationship between the ‘notorious crime’ and the system founded upon it. This is approached by Žižek in *Less Than Nothing* as the question of the relation between trauma and law. The first chapter opens with a discussion of how the truth need not be exposed in some sort of raw, empirical fact to be truth, but that truth can instead be found in form – that is, truth can be found in appearances. He uses Jorge Semprun's *The Long Voyage* as an example: in the case of the representation of the Shoah, this means that an aesthetic piece depicting the trauma of the events need not be a realist masterpiece, but would be better served by a fragmented, inconsistent presentation that demonstrates the effect of the trauma on those affected. This is closely tied to what is ostensibly the basic question of many of his books: what is the relationship of the 'immaterial' (i.e. freedom and the subject) to the 'material'? (e.g. 2012: 144-5). This is what 'Vacillating the Semblances' (the title of chapter 1) and the reference to Plato is all about: the ideal – the forms – exist, just not in the way that Plato understood (or that we usually take him to have understood). That is, 'appearance is essence' – there is not necessarily an empirical easily understood 'trauma' hidden behind the appearance; nor are the forms hidden away in some other plane or world. Instead, the truth of trauma is already with us as the form of the ‘symbolic universe’ that is the present.

It should come as no surprise that this is very close to Marx's discussion of the commodity/value form: regardless of how you twist and turn a commodity you'll not find an ounce of value in it, and yet value's there. The truth of capitalism's supposed self-valorization is not in the empirical fluctuation of prices as brought on by supply and demand, but in the form of the commodity itself; or, more accurately, in the highest

development of the value-form – (capitalist) money. Because of the social relations of capitalism commodities become the embodiment of the 'real abstraction' that enables us to compare unequal things (use values) as if they all contained something equivalent (exchange value).¹²² For Marx, of course, this form hides that it is labour-power that drives capitalism forward, instead making it appear (and in so appearing actually is) that value is the subject, the free agent, of capitalist societies (as he writes in the last few pages of chapter 4 of *Capital*).¹²³ This is the alienation, the inverted world, that must be overcome. Just as for Žižek the fragmented timeline of Semprun's novel renders the truth of the horror of the Shoah, in taking the appearance seriously – in looking at form – Marx realizes that the 'inconsistencies' of capitalism (i.e. crises) are not the product of some outside influence disturbing the smooth flow of the economy, but inherent to the thing itself.

The trauma of the concentration camp can not only be located in that used by the Nazis. As Žižek notes in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* the concentration camp was first used by the British. This is to say that while the Shoah is unquestionably awful it should not be treated as the 'absolute evil' – i.e. a big Other that is to be left un-inspected so it can stand as a guarantor of our (liberal, western democratic) being: it's symptomatic that when one wants to point to an unchallengeable horror one turns to the Nazi concentration camp and the Gulag (Žižek is at times guilty of this – see e.g 2012: 33). These have become fetishes, the 'last thing we see' before we discover what's behind them – that the concentration camp and the GULAG (properly speaking it should be all-caps as it's an acronym for the name of the prison – something most people likely don't know because of the role it has come to play in ideology) are the outcomes of a liberal-democratic

civilization based on brutal colonization and slavery. As Ward Churchill points out, the Nazi's based a lot of their racial policy on the way the Americans wiped out American Indians; similarly, in his *Liberalism: A Counter History* Losurdo argues against the historicist reading of liberalism that puts all its horrors down to deviations from its true nature to assert that it's fundamentally based on a master-race ideology.

In this example, then, the immaterial is the system of coping with the Real/the trauma – i.e. the Symbolic. The question that needs to be answered is then the status of that trauma. In the conclusion of *Less Than Nothing* Žižek writes that '..what the law ultimately hides is that *there is nothing to hide*, that there is no terrifying mystery sustaining it (even if the mystery is that of a horrible founding crime or some other form of radical evil), that the law is grounded only in its own tautology' (972). This comes after he argues that one should not take the Real/trauma to be the thing-in-itself and reduce the Symbolic to mere semblance. Rather, the only way to change the Real is *via* the semblance, *via* the Symbolic. Turned slightly, this is also to say that the actual hold the trauma has on us is not because of some inherent quality of that trauma but because of our relation to it (and thereby the creation of it's specific character) *via* the Symbolic.

Laclau is correct to the extent that there was a founding crime that helped birth capitalism – the brutal ousting of the peasants from the land, colonialism, etc., such that 'capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt' (Marx, 1977: 926). The solution, however, is not to find an 'enemy', or for the capitalist and the colonialist to make amends, but to destroy the logic that has come into being and now exists independently of it. Amends are of course offered in the form of mere verbal apologies... and, of course, money. Giving First Nations peoples tort money for being

forced into residential schools and giving band councils some share of the profits from the exploitation of their land will to some degree improve their living conditions. It will not, however, give their ancestors back their lives nor will it allow traditional ways of life to be reborn, prevent further exploitation of their land, or address the myriad other problems with the Reserve system. Rather, it pulls them further into the circuit of capital. Likewise, the solution to the trauma of the concentration camp is the historical destruction of the liberalism and capitalism that lead to it. This is all to say that it is not some empirical disaster/crime/trauma that is the focus of Žižek's or Marx's analysis (even though the latter takes great pains to show how capital destroys the body of the worker, the planet, other nations...). Rather, the central focus is on how the immaterial functions and how it can be used to change the world.¹²⁴ That is, the trauma lives on in the law/symbolic, and the only way to overcome the trauma is to understand the system that it gave rise to and destroy *it*.

This is not where Laclau takes his thought, however. In a paper written as a description of the fundamentals of his project, he begins with the assertion that Marxism is an essentialist discourse that needs to be rejected. Thereafter he concerns himself with looking for the *transcendental* conditions (he lists four) of hegemony as *the* logic of the political, as the internal limit of 'the principle of representation,' by which he means both language and politics (Laclau, 2006b: 105). This is to say that while he castigates Žižek for having no political program, he bases his political theory not on the historical examples he presents but on the transcendental principles that he derives from Gramsci and Lacan. What he provides, then, is more-or-less an abstract treatise on the relationship of the universal and the particular in which he tries to find the moderate middle between

the two – hence the assertion that any particular political agent cannot wholly ‘empty’ itself of its own content, but must retain some leftover (Laclau, 2001: 11). The question, for Laclau, is not one of institutions, but (transcendentally constituted) identities: while Lefort focuses on actual liberal-democratic *regimes* and the emptiness to be found in them, Laclau offers that ‘for me, emptiness is a type of identity, not a structural location’ (Laclau, 2005: 166).

The two differences that separate Žižek and Laclau are as follows: first, Žižek asserts that ‘the gap between empty universality and its distorted representation... can be overcome’ (Žižek, 2008a: 294). That is, the universal need not be ‘impossible,’ need not be tainted with a leftover as Laclau describes it. Part of accomplishing this demands asserting the following:

...we cannot accept the empty place (of the impossible Universality, the place to be filled in – “hegemonized” – by contingent particulars) as the ultimate given; we should hazard a step further and ask how – through what cut in the texture of the living body – this empty place itself emerges (Žižek, 2006: 108-9).

This is to say that it’s not enough to simply except that emptiness or lack is how democracy functions, adding to it the caveat that emptiness is produced (as noted above). Instead, asking how lack comes to be might provide grounds for rejecting lack or emptiness as the horizon of democracy and the political. The answer to this question follows from the other element that divides Žižek from Laclau: Žižek does not begin with the transcendental conditions of identity, but with the *material conditions of that transcendentalism*. This is key for Žižek’s entire oeuvre – though it is given less attention than it deserves – and demands a brief return to Karatani. The above quote comes from *The Parallax View*, in which Žižek takes up Karatani’s Kantian development of Marxism. As noted above, he points to what he sees as an omission in Karatani’s work: the thought

of Alfred Sohn-Rethel. Where Karatani uses Kantian categories to explain Marx, Sohn-Rethel uses Marx to explain Kantian epistemology. According to Sohn-Rethel, the act of commodity exchange involves treating objects as pure forms. Kant's *a priori* transcendental subject is thus not *a priori* at all, but the product of a material practice: the generalization of the 'exchange abstraction.'

Žižek and Marx against 'radical democracy'

This is important because central to Žižek's thinking is the argument, presented in the first chapter of his first book, that it is the commodity form (as described by Marx) that precedes the transcendental categories that make up much of his (Žižek's) oeuvre; it is the commodity form that stands as the form of thought and ideology under capitalism. In terms of the present discussion, what it points to is the genesis of, first, the 'empty place' of democracy, and second, the auto-generated means of 'overcoming' it.

Where Lefort offers that the place where king and citizen overlap is the empty one of power, for Marx that form is capitalist money and exchange: 'A worker who buys commodities for 3s. appears to the seller in the same function, in the same equality – in the form of 3s. – as the king who does the same. All distinctions between them is extinguished' (Marx, 1973b: 246). From the feudal 'no man without a master' we come to capitalism's 'money *sans maître*.' For Marx, this equality is based on difference: because each has their own needs and possesses something that others do not, the labourer and the prince come together in the market. Here abstractly equal commodities change hands between equal individuals of their own volition, without recourse to force, to theft, to lying and cheating. Here we have the juridical Person, so derided by Hegel. Thus, 'the exchange of exchange-values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and

freedom,’ where the latter is the content, the former the form: the self-interest of one presupposes the self interest of all the others; ‘the general interest is precisely the generality of self-seeking interests’ (ibid: 245). While Marx is critical of this – having different needs and different objects to exchange presupposes the division of labour; this is simple exchange, and forgets the realm of production and the ins-and-outs of money as capital by substituting money as means of circulation, measure of price, etc. – it is not simply an illusion, a fake, or a lie. Against the Marxist vulgate, this is not an assertion that there is actual inequality in the face of formal equality, a division that must be overcome. Rather, equality *is* inequality; freedom *is* social determination, and so Marx derides French socialists (Proudhon in particular is named) who think the purity of the freedom found in exchange has simply been corrupted by capitalism. For Marx it is its culmination.¹²⁵ Only when exchange meets capitalism is its essence realized, albeit in its opposite. Only with the development of the division of labour, of complex needs, etc., can exchange fully manifest. Note, too, that the conception of the universal that Marx derides is similar to that Laclau offers as the logic of the ‘unmediated universal’: a universal tainted by particularity (in this case, Proudhon’s rejection of the particularity of capitalism as that which corrupts the purity of freedom and equality).

It’s important to reiterate that Marx is not here talking about what Rancière – in his *On The Shores of the Political* (2007)¹²⁶ – diagnoses as that which has corrupted democracy through the work of ‘socialists,’ ‘communists,’ and ‘social science’: the argument that there is an illusion of equality (or, formal freedom as a lie) opposed to the reality of inequality. Instead, what Marx is opposing is what Ilyenkov (1982) has called the ‘abstract’ and the ‘concrete,’ where what is abstract is the one-sided and the concrete

the many-sided. In this way, what is generally called abstract – something like mathematical systems, for example – is concrete in that it includes the development of the links between all its elements. Likewise, something that is generally called concrete – a sensory perception, for example – is abstract in that it is severed from the plurality of its connections (an object presented without reference to how it was produced, for example). Marx does not argue that formal equality and market freedom is a lie, but that the ‘apologists of bourgeois democracy’ take only one aspect of the totality – simple circulation – and treat it as the whole, leaving out the mediations it shares with the sphere of production.¹²⁷ Taking this into account, as just argued, shows that freedom and equality thus only fully become themselves in unfreedom and inequality. There is no lie here; there is instead a dialectical reversal.¹²⁸

But this is not the end of the dialectic: the universality of exchange as realized under capitalism is only the first part of a Faustian bargain. Everyone knows that in the 1844 manuscripts Marx posits capital as alienating, but what is almost never noted is that money is the mediation of one’s ‘species being,’ is the material ground of one’s (*not* anthropological, but historical) universality.¹²⁹ ‘Faustian’ is used here more literally than figuratively: it is in the words of ‘the spirit of negation’ – i.e. Goethe’s Mephisto – that we learn that money is the means by which we as humans are able to take on the properties of any other species: the power of six horses attached to a carriage, for instance. Under capitalism, of course, it’s also the means of taking on the abilities of any other person. Herein lies our alienation: from the means of production, from others, from ourselves, from the products of our labour. The problem with capitalism, for Marx, is not the myth of a past unity destroyed by capitalism, which Rancière has called the

‘counterrevolutionary thought’ ‘so generously bequeathed to socialism and social science’ (2007: 43-4). Instead, it is the assertion that capitalism has wrought the material means of the universal, but in a form that need be *transformed*. And it’s important to note that this is so not only for the worker, but also for the capitalist.

Remember that all this is the key to understanding Žižek’s discussion of the possibility of overcoming the division between universality and particularity. Like Marx, he rejects the notion that the universal is simply corrupted by its content. Instead, he offers that for every place without a proper object – the place of democratic power filled by any contingent person – there is an object without a proper place. This is the division between the master signifier, or S_1 , and the *objet a*: for every system of equivalence there is one thing that cannot be made commensurate. In Marxian terms, the apex of the commodity form – capitalist money as general equivalent – can be exchanged for any other commodity except one: labour power. Only in taking the form of a commodity is labour power confused for the act of labouring and surplus produced. Only in leaving labour power out of the discussion of political economy is capital able to continue to reproduce itself through accumulation. Only in treating labour as one more instance of the universal (something to become money in the practice of exchange) does capitalism function.

Since at least 2005 Laclau has ceased to argue, as presented above, that a social agent takes on the role of the empty signifier only partially, maintaining some of its particularity as a leftover, and thereby ensures a democratic split between power and its exercise. Instead, Laclau relies on Joan Copjec to assert that in place of this formulation of the political role of the *objet a* one must instead see it as a partiality that becomes a

whole (Laclau, 2006b: 110) – a position very similar to that held by Žižek. While the difference between their use of Lacan may have become narrower (the divide remains in their exchange in *Critical Inquiry*, for instance, where Žižek complains that Laclau confuses the master signifier and *objet a*), their position on Marxism still remains irreconcilable. Leaning on a Kantian understanding of the weaknesses of Marx's thought, Laclau poses political 'antagonism' as veritably noumenal from the perspective of capitalism: 'resistance' can not be derived from the extraction of surplus because the rest of the worker's life – food, clothing, education, etc. – happens outside the relations of production (Laclau, 2006b: 112). This is what enables him to argue that the political struggle is not necessarily class struggle: the conditions of capitalism come from outside itself, and so are 'articulated' with it in hegemonic formation rather than overdetermined by the mode of production (Ibid: 110).

The problem with this is that it elides the fact that workers have to reproduce themselves *via* the capitalist market (by *purchasing* food, clothing, etc., rather than growing it, weaving it, themselves...) and must work to do so. It is the difference between what Ellen Wood calls the ideology of opportunity versus the reality of necessity: the worker has very little choice as to how they reproduce themselves once capitalism becomes the dominant mode of production; the market is not one choice among many. Perhaps more importantly Laclau misses that Marx does indeed logically derive resistance from the extraction of surplus: 'between equal rights, force decides' (Marx, 1977: 344). Within the logic of capital the worker has the right to determine the price of their commodity (labour) just as much as the capitalist has the right to decide what they buy (the length of the workers' day). When the two disagree, 'resistance' raises

its head on both sides. Thus we get a Kantian antinomy – Marx uses this term – within capital, rather than a noumenal realm outside it. There is, of course, an ‘outside’ of capital in Marx’s discussion, and this is labour-power – which is indeed more-or-less synonymous with the reproduction of the worker. It is ‘inside’ for Marx, however, in that it must be included to make sense of where profit comes from. Profit is properly understood only as surplus, generated by eliding labour power in favour of labour time. It is thus ‘outside,’ too, in that it is necessarily left out of the account of profit because of the commodity form. Where Laclau places this Real (Labour power)¹³⁰ as external/heterogeneous to the Symbolic, Žižek argues it is ‘extimate’ – generated by, constitutive of, and potentially fatal for it.¹³¹

Because it is generated by capitalism the *objet a*, the object without a place, is thus the means of *transforming* the universal rather than simply taking part in its functioning. This is why Žižek derides democracy as described by Lefort as succumbing to fetishism: taking the place of general equivalency merely confers upon any contingent object the power of the place. This can be seen more clearly in a personal anecdote: during the strike organized by CUPE Local 3903 at York University in 2008, people repeatedly argued that the bargaining team should simply be left to their work because they had been voted into their positions. Neither the abilities, experience, nor the actual *activity* of these bargaining members was ever mentioned. What makes this fetishism even more stark is that several of the bargaining team members had in fact been *acclaimed* – that is, they occupied a place that could have been filled through democratic election but were there without having been selected by the community they were to represent. The mere fact that the bargaining team could have been democratically elected

was enough for them to be treated as outside any accountability, as benevolent representatives of democratic will. In this way they filled the role of a fetish, which arises where the lack in the big Other aligns with the lack in the subject as a means to gentrify *jouissance*.¹³² If the lack in the big Other – the social world – is the democratic gap in an institution, and the lack in the ‘subject’ is the incompleteness of ‘the people’ because of social antagonism (Laclau and Mouffe’s ‘society doesn’t exist’), the democratic representative is the fetish that covers the lack they share. As in Marx’s description of the Executive of the state in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, the elected representative is simultaneously the people against the democratic institution and the democratic institution against the people. Here Žižek’s famous Marxist refrain presents itself: the ‘they know it, and yet they are doing it.’ Even *if* Laclau’s ‘people’ thinks of itself and its enemy as contingent, in its actions it proves itself to believe in its enemies and itself as essence. Even *if* people know a contingent person fills the place of power by virtue of accumulating votes, they treat them as people of a different sort.

Democratic ‘lot’ as Leninist Party

This description of the fetish – arising between the incompleteness of both the social and the individual, the Other and the subject – is also a description of the type of universal Žižek rails against: ‘the dimension of the universal thus emerges when the two lacks – mine and that of the Other – overlap’ (Žižek/Schelling, 1997: 50). This is what makes Žižek write what he does about ‘registering of the people’s voice’ in the quote that stands as the epigraph to this chapter: ‘the regulated (more or less) universal procedure of choosing those who will exert power’ (Žižek, 2008a: 265) stands as a way of gentrifying true democratic action, action that disturbs the smooth flow of a system that seeks

precisely to flow smoothly, a system that functions at the price of making a fundamental exclusion. That is, it makes a mockery of acclamation. Mladen Dolar makes this clear in his monogram on the voice. The vote serves to break a protean collective action into discreet, individual elements:

...it has to be done one by one, so that the collective outburst of the acclamatory voice is broken down, nipped in the bud, seemingly deprived of its essential qualities and its spectacular effects. It is the voice measured and counted, the voice submitted to arithmetic, the voice entrusted to a written sign, a mute voice deprived of any sonority, but no matter how hard they try to dismember it, it is still a voice (Dolar, 2006: 112).

The reference to voice here is crucial, as is the assertion that regardless of being ‘registered’ it is still a voice. This is to say that it is still a threat: Scott Walker may have been voted in, but this hasn’t stopped working people from storming the Winter Palace; they haven’t accorded him special due by virtue of his being their official representative, nor simply relied on their other statesmen. This voice – along with the gaze, the breast, shit... – is one of the incarnations of Lacan’s *objet a*. And herein lies the overcoming of the division of the particular and universal: the *objet a* as the object of drive rather than the object-cause of desire functions as the direct embodiment of antagonism as such.¹³³ This is of course the death drive: the force inherent in all desire that threatens to explode it from within, and it’s here that Žižek, Rancière, and Marx both converge and depart. None are talking of a lost unity; all discuss the violent assertion of antagonism¹³⁴; all assert the destruction of ‘class’-ification;¹³⁵ Indeed, Žižek begins his debate with Laclau in *DoLC* with reference to Rancière’s ‘part of no part’, though for him it refers to the working class¹³⁶ (2008a: 286): the generalization of commodity exchange under capital places them ‘in but not of’ society, counted as labour time but never as labour power, counted for what they have done and not what they are capable of doing.

The difference between Žižek's position and that of Rancière lies in that 'strange object'¹³⁷ called 'lot': for Rancière it effectively stands as an a-historical transcendental, while for Žižek the form of the Party is a particular development of lot, one appropriate to the capitalist present.

In his reading of Plato in *Hatred of Democracy* Rancière argues that lot is the moment of politics proper. This for two reasons: first, it is a means to ward off tyranny, the rule of those who search for power. That is, it does not open up government to an infinite number of qualified candidates or the excesses of individual desire, but instead fulfills the negative function of helping prevent the rule of those who *seek* power (Rancière, 2006b: 43). Second, politics proper is for Rancière the moment when the ability to govern is separated from one's wealth or birthright – i.e. separated from nature as kinship, but tied to nature as chance, fortune, divine intervention. That is, 'the "title that is not one" [i.e. government by lot] produces a retroactive effect on the others, a doubt concerning the legitimacy they lay claim to' (Ibid: 44): the introduction of lot demonstrates that all claims of legitimacy to rule are based on contingency – of birth, of age, of wealth. According to Rancière, for Plato to have his moral government and not mere plutocracies he must in the end rely on the notion that 'the power of the best cannot ultimately be legitimated except via the power of equals' (Ibid: 47), where this equality is not the formal equality given by the law but that given by chance.

This is, however, all news to Plato. Though he doesn't spell it out explicitly, Rancière's 'creative' reading appears to rest on Plato's comments in *The Republic* in regards to the 'noble lie' taken in combination with the Myth of Er. The latter is one of the only places where lot is mentioned in the whole work – otherwise it appears only

briefly during Plato's discussion of democracy. While Plato suggests the guardians must provide a foundation-myth to guarantee the unity of the state, he has no proposals for means to make people believe the one he initially proposes (that each person has a particular nature – either of gold, silver, or iron and copper – each with its proper place in the order of things). Socrates and his interlocutors thus leave it for the future to decide (Plato, 1993: 119-20). At the dialogue's end, however, The Myth of Er appears and could be taken as another stab at a foundation story: taking turns as decided by lot, the dead decide what their next life will look like. Here is where the 'legitimacy' Rancière refers to appears to come from: one is not to blame the outcome of the process on lot but on one's own choice, which is baptized as necessity by passing under the spindle at the centre of the universe. The archetype here is Odysseus, who declares he would have made the same choice regardless of his place in the lottery. This is to say that the equality bestowed by contingency is also a 'noble lie' used to legitimate inequality, as contingency – of being born into wealth, for example – is not merely contingency but also one's own doing.¹³⁸

Similar to Sohn-Rethel's argument that Kant could only come up with the transcendental subject because of the existence of commodity exchange, in Rancière's eyes Plato is only able to even pose the question of a government that is neither justified in the name of natural right nor a means for the cunning to seize power because actually existing democracy had already furnished the answer.¹³⁹ It is, however, a scandalous answer that births hate – hence Plato's derision of it. It not only provides a means of legitimation but also a challenge to two supposed goods: the government of the best and the preservation of the order of property, which are in the end the same thing (Ibid: 2;

44). This is not particular to ancient Greece, however, but holds across all time. Rancière claims that although Plato's anti-democratic diatribes come from a time and place that no longer resembles our own they resonate in the throats of the haters of democracy precisely because of this challenge. Democracy is thus 'not a type of constitution, not a form of society' (Ibid:46). It is instead the political *per se*, and the drawing of lots its essence.¹⁴⁰

Strictly speaking, according to one of Rancière's own sources – Bernard Manin – lot is not the *essence* of democracy but a *corollary* of a more basic 'cardinal' principle: rotation of office. *Via* Aristotle Manin argues that to be considered a virtuous or excellent citizen in Athens one had to be at one point ruled, another ruler. That is, 'democratic freedom consisted not in obeying only oneself but in obeying today someone in whose place one would be tomorrow' (Manin, 1997: 28), the idea being that one must know private life to rule, and *vice versa*. Manin makes the case that lot served as the best means to achieve this end: leaving this rotation up to election meant possibly limiting the principle of election – i.e. allowing people to chose who they wished to rule, a principle which would include the possibility of choosing the same person more than once, and thereby undermine the circulation of offices. He argues that the Athenians recognized this in that the positions for which they did hold elections were not limited in the number of times or the length of time the seats could be filled. Making such limitations does not in any way run counter to the logic of lot, however, making it the proper corollary of the fundamental desire of Athenian democrats to see the rotation of offices (Manin, 1997: 28-41). With this as his starting point Manin goes on to argue that the representative *governments* that follow in the footsteps of the American and French revolutions do not

include the principle of lot, so to call them representative *democracies* is at best misleading.¹⁴¹ Along the way he shows how what Rancière calls the essence of democracy takes on a different character given the context in which it is used: ‘Unlike the Athenians [...] the Romans did not use lot for its egalitarian properties. In the census-based Roman republic, lot chiefly had the effect of drawing votes together and promoting political cohesion, first among the propertied classes and then among the people as a whole, because of its neutrality and the religious interpretation that was placed on it’ (Manin, 1997: 51).

What Žižek does in regards to the Hegelian monarch and lot Manin does for the *podestà* or ‘single executive magistrate’ of the eleventh and twelfth century Italian commune: ‘there is a striking formal analogy between the institution of *podesteria* and the practice of lot, even though the *podestà* was elected and not selected by lot. The common element is that in both cases recourse was made to something external and neutral to overcome factional strife’ (Manin, 1997: 52). For Žižek Hegel’s monarch is lot embodied in a constitutional (representative) monarchy, the embodiment of the fact that ‘society doesn’t exist,’ the material realization that it is impossible for there to be a direct correspondence between power and those who wield it. It must also be remembered that he disputed that this was the final horizon of democracy for the left, and that the Leninist Party comes to take its place. For Žižek the monarch is a limited response to the problem of democracy that doesn’t allow room for radical progressive political change. Similarly, ‘lot’ may be the essence of democracy but it is not enough to challenge the root of capitalism. In terms of Žižek’s thought, two things need to be noted to make sense of the role of lot: the transition from monarch to Party as figures of lot, and the difference

between those two figures. First, because there is no social group that is either homogeneous or closed, it can have no unmediated agency. That is, each subject is ‘split’ and can thereby only encounter its ‘will’ by encountering this split in a object – that is, the analyst (2002: 187-188). Second, unlike Hegel’s monarch, which is supposed to be separated from the rest of society by having no other class position than its own (i.e. having wealth independent of any particular estate), the Party is not a neutral outside observer but an engaged actor that picks sides: because not even the material world is closed, complete, or ‘all’, a singular ‘partial perspective is inscribed into the very material existence of things’ (2002: 181; see also 2000: 174). This is the ‘parallax view,’ and the ‘*a*’ is this perspective. The embodiment of loss itself is thus the Party as psychoanalyst – subject to the necessity of the subjective engagement that is the transference – rather than the monarch. Where capitalism excludes the worker as labour-power, only a worker’s Party/analyst can stand in as the mediation that will ideologically reconstruct the nature of our particular ‘symbolic universe.’

A comparison can here be made to what Rancière calls an ‘*auctor*.’ For Rancière an important part of democracy is the violent act of making the invisible visible. The essence of this is to ‘make words audible where only noise was perceptible before’ (2007: 85), of making division where before there was a supposed unity. A similar function is played by an *auctor*, the ‘master of words,’ but in the opposite direction. The *auctor* pulls sense from ‘the noise of the world’ and thereby ‘augment[s] (*augere*) the power of collective being’ but in so doing pacifies (ibid: 10). This figure, this ‘master of words,’ is a psychoanalyst gone wrong; there is a more progressive half to this figure, one that does not pacify and unite but provokes division. Here can be seen the two sides of the Party as

well, the Stalinist Party of objective knowledge and queller of dissent, and the Leninist party that spreads the good word of the coming revolution¹⁴² and aids in the creation of an organization, a separation, apart from the State and the Duma. The *auctor* is a guarantor, as is the objective knowledge of the Party, as is the analyst for the patient that still expects the *analyst* to make them better (an impulse obliged by the American analysts that Lacan often derided). As the embodiment of the analysand's own split, the analyst can be a new agent of the master's will (Lacan's 'discourse of the analyst' is also that of the pervert – the agent of the desire of the big Other) or the means of the analysand releasing themselves from that which binds them. This release is for Žižek that of which a progressive universality consists:

The obverse of the Universal as the pacifying neutral medium/container of its particular content is the Universal as the power of negativity that undermines the fixity of every particular constellation, and this power comes into existence in the guise of the individual's absolute egoist self-contraction, his negation of all determinate content (1999: 91).

This is also Marx's universality, that pronounced by Goethe's spirit of negation: the universal is that first step that dissolves all substantial ties.

This is where the beginning returns. Stavrakakis' asserts that the drawing of lots – as embodied in Gormley's *One and Other* – is worthy of respect as a democratic tradition. Where Rancière offers a trans-historical form of this tradition Žižek offers one that changes over time – the move from lot to Party, a form appropriate to capitalist exploitation. In place of the state-sponsored art project, the plinth lauded by Stavrakakis, the empty container in which a series of random individuals ('content') asserted their individuality independent of one another, one can counterpose Peter Watkins' 1999 *La Commune*.¹⁴³ In place of the empty place (a *preserved* form of emptiness – the plinth was intended for a particular statue, but no longer holds any) filled by lot, Watkins offers a

challenge to form, what he calls the media's 'monoform.' Watkins put together an almost six hour film on the Paris Commune of 1871 that, like 'One and Other', was composed of 'ordinary' citizens – 220 people from Paris and the provinces, mostly non-actors, who were 'enlisted' (perhaps the militaristic overtones are not accidental) to join the project. It, too, has generated a group of people 'fidelious' to it, *Le Rebond*, which promotes screenings of the film and organizes discussions around it. But the difference is stark: these actors were asked to research the commune themselves, form groups to discuss how their sets of characters would think and act, and ponder the links between the commune and present-day French society. This continued throughout the shooting of the film, leading to moments of confusion for the viewer when it is unclear whether the actors are in character talking about the commune or making links to contemporary society as French citizens. Rather than the collection of individuals offered up on the plinth in Trafalgar Square (Marx and Gramsci's 'sack of potatoes'), Watkins produced a collective voice that brought the spirit of history together with the problems of the present.

Watkins himself admits the limits of the project, but what he offered was a means to speak in a collective voice that not merely challenged contemporary forms of communication but also created the reflexivity that produced a change in the people itself. In this way perhaps Lukács' words can be used to ponder the function of the psychoanalyst and the communist Party as a challenge to form, and universality as activity: 'it is necessary to gain a correct theoretical understanding of it in its twofold dialectical relationship: as both the *form* of this consciousness, and the form of *this* consciousness, i.e. both an independent and subordinate phenomena' (1971: 330). There can be no radical democracy without a form in which it can develop, and no form in

which to develop without an analysis of the concrete social, historical, political, and economic world that made that form a possibility.

This points to the next move in the present discussion. Against a-historical forms as figures of emancipation (particularly ‘lot’) Žižek offers a particular form, that of psychoanalysis and the Party. This demands that at least two questions be answered. The first is that of the actual form of analysis and the Party and why they are significant and homologous. The second is that of form and its actual meaning. The chapters that follow are thus a discussion of form as it is found in Žižek’s work and its relation to that of Hegel, various Marxists, and psychoanalysis, and the historical role of psychology/psychoanalysis and the Party with the question of form in mind.



Chapter 5 – Psychoanalysis: the political organization of a discipline

Organization is the form of the mediation between theory and practice. And, as in every dialectical relationship, the terms of the relation only acquire concreteness and reality in and by virtue of this mediation.

– Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

There's absolutely no reason why we should make ourselves the guarantors of the bourgeois dream.

– Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*



These two quotes – one from a practicing Marxist, the other from a practicing psychoanalyst – are a way of articulating a thesis: it's not merely a question of how a patient is treated or cured, or of the theory that informs what is done in the clinical setting; It is also very much a question of how the profession and therefore the psychological disciplines are organized. The question of organization is precisely the question that helps properly formulate these other two. This is so because it is tightly tied to the problem of ends. It's tied to the problem of *political* ends.¹⁴⁴

The ends of psychological practice are indeed political in that they do not involve merely the individual but also the individual's constitution through their social world. This is largely implicit, as will be shown. They are overtly political as well, and so as not to completely neglect this aspect of the practice of the psychological disciplines it is briefly discussed below. This is followed by a look at the work of German psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel and his suggestion that psychoanalysis could serve as a basis for the creation of a dialectical materialist psychology – not as a replacement of other psychological practices, but as a means to explain their effectivity and their relation to society at large. This is done to open the question of how, in addition to the explicit

political aspects of the psychological sciences, their organizational form is also very much a factor to be considered. Fenichel's position is useful for introducing this problematic, but it leaves out a discussion of how the prevention of neuroses could be achieved *via* the practice of psychoanalysis, of how the clinic and the rest of the social world might be mediated in such a way to effect each other. As a means to elaborate how this might be the case, the history of the Canadian Psychological Association is taken up to show that the way the discipline of psychology is organized at the national level in Canada affects what the discipline *is* and how it is practiced. This is largely based on the work of John Dunbar, in which he suggests the introduction of the CPA's *Code of Ethics* in 1977 transformed the CPA and what it meant to be a psychologist in Canada. While acknowledging some of the progressive elements of this development, it too has to be critiqued for its limitations. Based as it is in the discourse of human rights the CPA's *Code* does introduce the question of the social role of psychology into the practice of the profession; without acknowledging the limits of this liberal discourse, however, and the way it is put into practice, these rights can never actually be achieved. As Žižek has recently argued, placing the ethical question before the question of political inherently limits any project by basing itself on the guarantees of a big Other rather than in the uncertainties of the freedom to transform the social world.¹⁴⁵

A potential Marxist alternative to the question of organization and the outcomes of psychological practice are revealed in the process of exploring how the organization of the discipline affects what it is and how it is practiced. That is, the real political limits to the efficacy of liberal forms point to an alternative. Here enters the work Lacan. It was Lacan's contention, made with reference to the thought of Marx, that the ends of analysis

were not to integrate people into the bourgeois world and help them achieve the ‘American dream’, but to have them confront the truth of their existence. The end of the analytic treatment was thus, for Lacan, the creation not only of an individual who did not rely on the ‘big Other’ to furnish the elements of the ‘good life’, but also thereby another psychoanalyst who would work to help others achieve the same approach to the world. The end of analysis was thus the creation of a new sort of individual *and* a new sort of community. This is evident not just in Lacan’s theory, but also the history of his tussles with the psychoanalytic associations of his day. All of this suggests that an alternative to liberal-democratic organization is possible and worth serious consideration when discussing the practical and theoretical issues that arise in the psychological disciplines, and helps give historical credence to Žižek’s claims that there is an explicit link between the ‘form of analysis’ and the ‘form of the party.’

Psychoanalysis, psychology, war, and politics

To assert that the ends of any psychological endeavour are political is not something particularly new. This is most clearly discernible in relation to war: in an Austrian court during the First World War Freud testified against the nationalist commitment of army doctors whose analyses were used as a means to send soldiers back to the front or deny them their pensions. Freud wrote that in this way ‘medicine was serving purposes foreign to its essence.’¹⁴⁶ That is, rather than helping soldiers – who today might be diagnosed with PTSD – overcome their traumas, German and Austro-Hungarian army psychologists ‘aimed above all, at restoring his [the soldier’s] fitness for service.’ In the hands of the state the psychologist becomes a weapon: ‘[T]he physicians

were put into a role like that of machine guns behind the front, of driving fugitives back’ (Freud in Brunner, 2000: 311).

In another better known example, French psychiatrist Frantz Fanon offered analyses of colonialism that didn’t separate the questions of political domination, liberation and the psyche, but articulated them as a complex whole. In his *Wretched of the Earth*, for example, his treatment of France’s colonization of Algeria culminates in a discussion of its psychological effects in terms of both the colonized and the agents of colonization. It was his contention that the task set for the psychiatric institutions that proliferated with the colonial project in Algeria – the task of ‘making him [the colonized subject] thoroughly fit into a social environment of the colonial type’ – was ‘difficult’ because the colonial project reduced the colonized population to objects, to a humanless part of the environment that was no different from land or camel (Fanon, 2004: 181-2). The answer to curing the psychological afflictions wrought by colonialism was thus not simply psychiatry or psychoanalysis, but revolution and the overthrow of the European occupier. This was not just Fanon’s analysis – in the course of his work he joined the national liberation movement. (For a short overview of Fanon and some of his contemporaries, see Hook, 2005; see also Teo, 2005).

More recently, an American psychoanalyst attempted to organize against the unethical involvement of members of the American Psychological Association (APA) in the ongoing torture of political prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. He reported that psychologists are there being used not to ensure that prisoners are being properly treated, but aiding in the torture of detainees. Here the question of organization starts to become clear: while the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association

publicly urged its members to refuse to do such work, the APA fought to protect its members' ability to participate in such matters of 'national security' (Summers, 2007). As a result, the Pentagon reported a preference for members of the APA for its interrogations (Soldz, 2007).¹⁴⁷

In a related and uncanny example – uncanny in that it stands as an inverted image of the myriad attempts of Marxists, psychologists and psychoanalysts to bring the two together – Naomi Klein (2008) argues that the work done by American psychologist Ewen Cameron at McGill University in Montreal became the psychological backbone of American economic and military imperialism. In her account, the psychology pioneered by Cameron and used by the CIA is homologous to the logic underlying the neoliberal economic theories of the likes of Volker: raze the economy, raze the individual, and rebuild them to your liking. She outlines how the US has used this vicious method – what she calls the 'shock doctrine' – all over the planet, from Eastern Europe to South America to the Middle East.

But the politics of the psychological disciplines are not limited to its relationship to colonialism, imperial projects and war: Morawski (1982) discusses how some of psychology's early practitioners and theorists – G. Stanley Hall, Hugo Münsterberg, and John B. Watson in particular – saw their work as consistent with and part of a larger project to transform their own societies. It is only more recently that psychology's political role has been neglected. Speaking of this forgetfulness in relation to post-modernism and the rise of evolutionary biology, Conway (2010) explores the political economy of psychology to explain the turn away from an understanding of the social etiology of psychological disorders (i.e. poverty). He concludes that it is in part the result

of governments' unwillingness to see the social depth of the problem coupled with drug companies' interests in selling a cheaper, alternative individualist solution (i.e. medication) that allows it to be avoided in practice.

Further in this vein, in his discussion of the historical roots of psychology Danziger (1990) shows that the discipline's pretensions to scientism disguise its social nature and genesis. Danziger argues that psychology's roots in philosophy and its search for the causal mechanisms behind individual human psychology (as seen in Wundt's Leipzig laboratory) were displaced by functionalism and statistical analysis of aggregates abstracted from social reality in part because of the demands of the capitalist market: the development of statistical methods and their adoption by psychologists enabled them to 'convince their publics that they represented the sacred spirit of Science' (119), publics which in the 1920s in the United States were administrators who were looking for means of social control. In particular, this trend took hold in relation to education, which people in power wanted to transform in order to meet the needs of a burgeoning corporate industrialism. One of the major effects of this, according to Danziger, is that what were initially taken to be 'participants' in psychological inquiry quickly became 'subjects' – passive elements upon which the psychologist (experimental or otherwise) acted. This has had effects on psychological research that are still very visible today.

All of this points to the fact that the ends, theories, and practices of the psychological disciplines are an interrelated political problem. This is not just a scientific – or more accurately, technocratic – question, that of the correct pill or physical regimen, but also that of the relationship between the individual, the psychological disciplines *per se*, and the social.

Prevention = psychoanalysis + the professional associations

The work of psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel puts an interesting spin on this, one that takes us from the theatre of war and the economy to that of the clinic. He was a practicing analyst who wrote a highly influential textbook entitled *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neuroses* that was published in English in 1945. In its final chapter he outlines how treatments that do not take into account the relationship between the physician and the patient – a relationship, noted above, that has become one of expert and object – can lead to substitute neuroses that perpetuate, aggravate, or only temporarily alleviate the problem at hand (1945: 557-9). While focusing his discussion on transference effects, he also argues that the neuroses are not merely the result of the biological disposition of the patient but also the contradictions present in their social world. He takes several pages to note that the lived contradictions of capitalism are in great part what makes neuroses what they are. In decidedly Marxist fashion, he writes ‘it is characteristic of the present day society that many people are not able to satisfy their needs, although the means for their satisfaction are present’ (587). In this way he is able to say that neuroses are as such a ‘social disease’ (586).

There is perhaps nothing terribly original in this either, considering it appeared during the thirties and forties. As Harris (1996: 67-68) notes, in the United States at this same time psychologists from many orientations claimed their own theoretical bend as compatible with Marxism. The reason Fenichel in particular is given space here is because he held that while other psychotherapies could at times be more effective than psychoanalysis, it was only psychoanalysis that could give an account of ‘the effectiveness of *all* psychotherapies’ (Fenichel, 1945, 554). Knowing Fenichel’s Marxist

disposition (which he for the most part kept hidden – see Jacoby’s *The Repression of Psychoanalysis*), it’s not hard to take this in the spirit of a Marxist dedication to the understanding of ‘the totality.’¹⁴⁸ Psychoanalysis might be taken as the means to best understand human psychology because it is a conceptualization that sees the individual as constituted through the particular metabolism established between itself and the social and natural world.

This can more clearly be seen in another piece written by Fenichel around the time of the English release of *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neuroses*. In a paper unpublished in his lifetime Fenichel wrote that psychoanalysis was the only human science that ‘could be considered the nucleus of a dialectical-materialist psychology’ (1967: 300). His primary concern when he wrote this was to point out the need for ‘prophylaxis’ (i.e. prevention) at the social level rather than simply treatment at the personal level. However, while he raises the question of the economic interests of clinicians and their relation to this end, while he addresses the question of the applicability of a supposedly ‘bourgeois science’ to the working class,¹⁴⁹ while he raises questions about the organization of the state’s ‘ideology mills’ in relation to the psychology of those living under capitalism, Fenichel’s take is somewhat mechanical. He doesn’t answer the question of how prevention might actually be achieved in practice, how the clinic and the social world might be *mediated*. As such, he builds a door that opens onto an understanding of ‘the totality,’ but forgets to add the hinges.

The question of the relation of the clinic and the political can be posed in at least three ways. First, there is the question of political advocacy outside the clinic. A practitioner could be a member of a political group, even one composed solely of other

practitioners, and not have it directly affect their clinical practice in the least. Second, there is the question of how politics is approached within the analytic/clinical situation. This might mean including a *political* history of the patient in their overall history, and attending to transferences in this light. Thirdly – and this is the more dialectical option, the hinge on the door that will be taken up in the most detail – there is the question of how the psychological professions are organized. This last option opens the question of the profession's relationship to the economy, the state, fellow practitioners, different racialized groups, social classes, and last but not least their patients. As a result it also aims at what happens in research and clinical practice and the ends of that research and practice.

The first of these possible approaches is fairly familiar. Examples include Psychoanalysts for the Prevention of Nuclear War in Britain in the 1990s, Physicians for Human Rights today in the United States, or some such other group found in civil society. Here one's professional standing is used as a means to influence wider goings-on. This solution to the problem of prophylaxis is an external one: actions outside the clinic are aimed at changing society, which would presumably in turn positively affect all members of it and their psychological wellbeing. While such groups serve a purpose, here the clinic and the political world are separated from each other in practice; Here politics is 'outside' and bringing it in forbidden.

Politics *could*, of course, directly affect what happens in clinical practice, could be brought 'in' – hence its mention in the Canadian Psychological Association's code of ethics (see for instance article III.31). Here the vulnerability of the patient is at issue, as one's interests might influence clinical outcomes in negative ways: patients could be

unscrupulously manipulated by their physicians for the latter's own personal economic and political ends – consciously or not. As Botticelli points out in a review of *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics*, bringing politics directly into the clinic raises complications as the spectre of transference: in many of the clinical examples presented in the book, 'patients came to express views or act in the world in a way that moved them closer to the attitudes of which they might imagine their therapist would approve' (2007: 198). This is to suggest that the transference was not adequately dealt with, and as such the political outcomes of these analyses suspect.

A means of properly addressing this concern is proposed by Samuels in *The Political Psyche* (1993). He suggests that it's not only a matter of discussing political topics as they arise, but also constructing a *political* history of the analysand. In this way any particular political topic is tied into their psychological history, and provides a greater basis by which to work through the transference when it arises. In a discussion of an ad-hoc survey that he sent out to 11 psychological/psychoanalytic associations around the globe (including Brazil, Israel, Russia, The U.S. and Britain), Samuels shows that there are three approaches that analysts took to political question as they arose in practice: they either ignored the political content of analysands' statements and took them merely as symbolic grist for the transference, acknowledged the political concerns as such (e.g. the bombing of Iraq being a terrible thing), or did both. This suggests that political content in analysis could be dealt with progressively by 1) acknowledging that politics is not merely a sign to interpret but exists as a real concern outside of the clinical setting; 2) the analysand has a particular relationship with those political questions and events and this relationship is tied into the analysand's political history; 3) the analyst's

political position – both material (i.e. class, race, gender...) and theoretical ('I'm a Marxist') – and those of the analysand meet in the transference and must be taken into account when working through it.

There are some problems with this formulation, however: Samuels suggestions are conceptualized at the individual level (i.e. that between a clinician and a patient), and not that of the collective. In addition, Samuels announces his is a libertarian project (1993: 50), and so the outcomes of clinical practice are couched in terms of the 'development' of the individual's ego – yet another example of the importance of politics in relation to clinical ends. He does, however, point towards the possibility that group therapy is perhaps a better type of treatment in general, and gestures towards the question of organization in acknowledging that the training of professionals needs to take into account the political. He saw the lack of discussion on this topic at the level of the official organs of the discipline as particularly marked, often times calling psychoanalysis a conservative profession.

It is professional associations that in large part maintain the standards of training and practice in a discipline, and therefore what is practiced and how. This points in the direction of the third possible approach to the political ends of clinical and experimental/theoretical work: changing the professional organization of the psychological disciplines. With this in mind the next section is a turn to the history of an actually existing professional body – the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA).

Liberal organization, the market, and ethics

Dunbar (1992)¹⁵⁰ shows that in the beginning the CPA was a means to consolidate psychology as a profession *per se*, one that was separate from and no longer subject to

psychiatry. In post-war Canada there was an increase in the demand for psychological services by governments and private interests, but it was unclear what a psychologist did (as opposed to a social worker, teacher, or a member of the clergy...), how they were trained to do it, and who could rightly call themselves a psychologist. As a result, those who practiced psychology were subordinated to psychiatrists and paid substantially less. Professional organization was thus a means to secure not only the legitimacy of one's discipline and define its scope against other practitioners, but also the economic worth of that discipline.

As in other Western countries, Canadian professional associations and their stated standards of practice were a means to establish psychology as a legitimate discipline with a legitimate commodity to offer to the public.¹⁵¹ In Canada this took the particular form of using the American Psychological Association's standards and its ethics code, in part to secure a place for Canadian researchers and practitioners at home as well as in the marketplace and psychological journals south of the border.

Other particularities of the Canadian case include elements of the British North America Act that left the regulation of professional conduct to the provinces – thereby precluding a national association from doing this – and the Canadian government's financial support of psychological research in Canadian universities. While the former made it difficult to establish nationwide standards, the latter circumstance led to the privileging of pure rather than applied research. In effect, it encouraged the development of a theoretical psychology that had little or no relation to practical psychology. This in turn led to the marginalization of practitioners within the CPA and their concerns about training standards.

Practitioners, too, had a close relationship with the state that caused problems for them: where many worked in publicly run institutions (for example hospitals and prisons) there arose a conflict between practitioners' desire to aid their patients in terms of communication with multiple stakeholders and *community* welfare, and the state's bureaucratic machinery – a machinery that demanded more immediately measurable goals and outcomes.¹⁵²

According to Dunbar, the code of ethics devised by the CPA in 1977 addressed (though perhaps did not solve) all these problems, thereby ending the CPA's struggle to become the national representative of Canadian psychology. While provincial and territorial regulatory bodies are left to certify individual practitioners, the CPA has the role of accrediting training programs, publishing professional journals, and advocating on behalf of the discipline. The *Code* enabled this with reference to the discourse of human rights: where previous codes and of ethics were *reactive* in the sense that they outlined what not to do, this code was *productive* in that it could be used 'to actively generate new normative conceptions of what constitutes socially responsible professional practice' (Dunbar: 333-334). It can thus be used as a starting point from which to devise standards of practice, justify certain conceptions of psychology to both the public and the state, as well as solve particular ethical cases as they arise. What gives the Canadian *Code* this unique characteristic, according to Dunbar, is that it concerns itself with social responsibility. This is manifest in its inclusion as the last of its four principles.

A comparison with the code currently used by the APA is instructive here: the APA's code almost immediately asserts (in article 1.02) that in questions of ethics, the law and the state trump ethical considerations (APA, 2002). By contrast, the Canadian

Code demands that a psychologist speak out or act against laws and policies that are unethical (article IV.29); it includes the political injunction to ‘encourage others, in a manner consistent with this *Code*, to exercise responsibility to society’ (article IV.30); it demands that psychologists be aware of social and political climates (article IV.25), and that all research, service development, interpretation, information gathering and teaching material be ‘sensitive to the needs, current issues, and problems of society’ (article IV.20) (CPA, 2000).

What begins to become clear from this is that the question of organization affects not only the economic place of the discipline in society, but also its perceived goals, its research, and its practice. The work of Bazerman (1988) is further instructive on this point: he shows that the development of both the natural and social sciences is tied to the rise of the scientific journal and the forms and standards of knowledge production that it reinforces. Beginning with the publications of the Royal Society, for example, he shows the gradual move from the simple reporting of natural phenomena to the writing of tracts on particular theoretical problems and hypotheses, attributing the change – and the development of experimental science itself – in large part to the act of debating over results. Doing so demanded more precision in the reporting of scientific activity, thereby giving experiments ‘an argumentative function’ in place of the past practice of giving what were thought to be ‘transparent’ reports of phenomena (68).

This form of knowledge production was taken over by the social sciences, and in some instances rigidly codified. He argues that the extensive *Publication Manual* provided for authors who wish to write for the journals published by the American Psychological Association ‘offers a programmatically correct way to discuss the

phenomena under study; moreover, it stabilizes the roles, relationships, goals, and activity of individuals within the research community in ways consistent with the community's belief about human behaviour' (275). As noted above, journals produced by the CPA are a means to secure its legitimacy as a profession in the eyes of the public and the state. The implication to be emphasized in this regard is that to be considered a legitimate psychologist one must follow the rules set by the professional association and produce the types of knowledge that have been deemed fit by means of it (See also Danziger, 1990: 179-197).

In this light it should then be considered highly significant that in 1977 the CPA took an explicit turn towards the social and political in its newly minted code of ethics. Before patting the back of the CPA for doing so, however, there are several things to be noted, each of which point to the limits of liberal conceptions of the subject and reveal an opening that can be developed in a Marxian direction. First, there is the question how the *Code* is used. In a comparative study of psychologists' relation to professional ethics in Canada and Cuba, Rossiter et al. (2002)¹⁵³ attempt to show that the approach to ethics in the two countries differs widely: Canadian practitioners see ethics as a set of technical procedures that are used to solve ethical problems as they arise in clinical situations, and to maintain the 'reputation or the security of the organization' in which psychology is practiced (541). In this way ethics is limited to the clinical situation and separated from 'outside' politics and social problems. Cuban practitioners, by contrast, see the practice of psychology as itself an ethics, as the attempt to 'implement the values of the revolution in everyday life' (543). Where in Cuba the practice of ethics as the practice of psychology is seen as a contribution to national values of solidarity and social justice, in

Canada ‘outcome-based ethics constructs practice as a neutral professional endeavour’ (542). That is, in Canada ethics are subordinated to the logic of liberal ‘neutrality’ and the logic of the market.

Further, as Dobson and Breault (1998) suggest in their brief review of the regulation of ethics in Canada, the *Code* is not used to the same degree by each provincial psychological association: It is often used in conjunction with other codified standards and provincial laws, and in British Columbia has not been officially adopted at all. In their view, the *Code* functions mostly as a useful educational and training tool, an ‘aspirational document,’ and a minimum standard to consider in the event of complaints – legal and otherwise.

This is the point at which one need be reminded that the ethics developed by the CPA is used as a means to provide the CPA with legitimacy: the *Code* is used as a means to negotiate the way psychologists deliver their services for the government; the *Code* is an ethical basis from which to lobby for research monies; the *Code* provided the means of securing the unification of the national *market* for psychological services by establishing a set of national standards that could potentially replace the myriad, conflicting training and other standards set by the provincial associations. As such it is not a neutral tool that can do no harm, but a one that is used to further goals within a capitalist society.

The second problem is that this is clearly an organization based on liberal ideals, and as a consequence suffers from liberalism’s failures. The CPA’s ethics code includes in writing what Badiou, in his *Ethics* (2002), argues is one of the limits of the liberal discourse of difference and human rights: it allows only differences that do not challenge the status quo, that do not really make a difference. The CPA’s ethics code constantly

calls for a respect of difference, including the political injunction to ‘encourage others [...] to respect the dignity of persons and to expect respect for their own dignity’ (article I.46). However, it also states that this respect need not be adhered to if doing so contravenes the *Code* (article IV.16). Where the *Code* is based on the liberal discourse of human rights, anything that is not compatible with it (i.e. different conceptions of what it means to be human in the first place; the idea of a collective or a non-liberal subject) are ruled out from the beginning.¹⁵⁴ In her critique of Ignatieff’s discussion of human rights, Brown makes the problem clear: in the end the liberal defense of rights translates into a philosophical endorsement of market capitalism and a negation of all collective decisions because it sees them as a form of external coercion antithetical to personal freedom: ‘human rights discourse [...] carries implicitly antipolitical aspirations for its subject – that is, casts subjects as yearning to be free of politics and, indeed, of all collective determinations of ends’ (Brown, 2004: 456).

This isn’t to say that the discourse of human rights is without a progressive element. For example, in his fight against the APA’s position in regards to the involvement of psychologists at Guantanamo (referred to above), Summers argues that the absence of any reference to human rights in the APA’s ethics code serves as a reactionary loophole. Similarly, István Mészáros argues that in capitalist society the discourse of human rights serves as a means of advocating for self-realization in opposition ‘to the forces of dehumanization and increasingly more destructive material domination’ and as such ‘remains a concern of paramount importance for all socialists’ (1986: 210). This because any Marxist must acknowledge the material effects of thought, ideology, and political institutions, and not brush them off as ‘mere’ components of the

superstructure. In part, then, the liberals have it right: the question of organization is an important one and the social needs to be included in any organizing principle. But the limits of the liberal discourse of human rights are very real, and demand a move beyond it.

There are at least three failings that can be seen in the CPA's *Code* in this regard. First is in the contradiction between reliance on the subject of science (i.e. the subject as object) and on the liberal subject of ethics (i.e. the autonomous individual). As noted above, Danziger makes much of this, showing that the move from Wundtian to Galton-stlye psychology involved the move from 'participant' to 'subject' (see also Walsh, 1985: 26-40; Walsh-Bowers, 1995; for a liberal attempt to overcome this division, see Martin et al, 2010). Second is the assumption that the individual is a separate, mechanical piece of a larger whole. For example, the *Code* talks about respect of other cultures and of politics, but not the social etiology of problems, and 'social responsibility' is the last in a hierarchy of four principles (i.e. it is subordinated to the individual). Lastly, it fails to account for the economic and class imperatives that undermine its ethical goals at the social level, and belie the discipline's practice itself: how can the dignity of the person be respected if they are left destitute by the society they live in? How can psychologists take into account political climates and problems when funding structures and the imperative to 'publish or perish' favour quantitative, positivist research over qualitative social and political research?

Understanding the importance of professional organization in regards to the discipline of psychology *as* a discipline and the limits of liberal forms demands that one

ask what a socialist psychology might look like at the level not only of its goals, but also at the level of its organization.

A socialist alternative?

The question of the potential social outcomes of psychoanalytic treatment were not only the purview of Marxist-inspired psychoanalysts, but also of its liberal adherents.

During the second world war Ernest Jones, for example, wrote that...

...it is striking to observe how little advantage is commonly obtained from psycho-analysis in comparison with what one knows must be potentially available. Analysts and other analysed persons often continue to hold heatedly the same convictions and to employ in support of them the same rationalized arguments as unanalyzed people in such matters as political controversy: the sacrosanctity of private property and the capitalistic system or, on the other hand, the panacea of communism [...]. (Jones, 1942: 4).

He then goes on to say that it would be worthwhile for someone to pioneer an approach that would deal with this question. Another actually existing theory and practice, also that of a non-Marxist, furnishes a potential answer: the ideas and career of Lacan. One commentator takes the possibilities opened by Lacan seriously enough to suggest that...

...in point of fact, an increase in the number of people who undergo Lacanian psychoanalytic treatment and ethically assuming the inconsistency of the symbolic order, *jouis-sans*, would inevitably increase the chances of the success of a political force which does not aim primarily at obliterating lack (Chiesa, 2007: 191).

To get to this point, however, it's important to show how this is present in the actual organizational problems of French psychoanalysis. Much as with the development of the professional associations of psychology, the question of the organization of psychoanalysis in France centred on the refusal to be subordinated to other disciplines and a differentiation from them. This included questions of who was allowed to practice, who was allowed to teach, and who should be doing any certifying. In France in the late forties and early fifties this revolved around the question of 'lay analysis.' Following in

Freud's footsteps, Lacan argued that psychoanalysis should not be reduced to a medical or neurological science, but include knowledge of the arts and humanities, and be a creative endeavour rather than simply a certified, acquired skill (Turkle, 1978, 104-5; Macey, 1988: 87-89).

This was no mere passing fancy. Lacan had much to say on these questions, and they appear throughout his *Écrits* and elsewhere.¹⁵⁵ To for a moment sing a rather familiar refrain through the chorus of Hegel and Marx, Lacan held that language stood as Moses and the Profits, the discovery that Freud had made but none of his followers (in Lacan's view) adhered to, at the peril of both psychoanalysis and its analysands. This was a problem not just at the level of theory or practice, but also of organization. In the latter half of 'The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956', for example, Lacan argues that in creating the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) before realizing the role of ego identification in group formations such as the army and Church (i.e. before the writing of *Group Psychology*), Freud undermined 'the objective of tradition and discipline in psychoanalysis', which is 'to call into question their [i.e. tradition and discipline *per se*] very crux, along with man's relation to speech' (Lacan, 2006: 397). He goes so far as to suggest that the setting up of the structure of psychoanalytic institutions as a 'democracy' of masters who decided who could become members of the community is what precipitated ego psychology: '...let us not forget that entry into the community of analysts is subjected to the condition of undergoing a training analysis; and there surely must be some reason why the theory of the end of analysis as identification with the analyst's ego first saw the light of day in the circle of training analysts' (398). This is to suggest that it is practice and its organization that

preceed theory, or at least have a hand that reaches deep into its genesis: ‘It is not, in fact, that conceptual rigor and developments in technique are lacking in psychoanalytic works. If they remain so sporadic and even inefficient, it is because of a more profound problem that is due to a singular confusion in the precepts of practice’ (386).¹⁵⁶ That is, an organization based on identification with a master’s ego (i.e. that of Freud) perpetuated a theory consistent with that organization and the stifling of growth. It is in this light that we should read Lacan’s remarks (as in, for example, the ‘Rome Discourse’) that psychoanalysis had come to resemble a Church.

The problems did not only lie with the organization of psychoanalysis and its theories. In his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* he takes aim at the demands of the *analysand* that they be provided with the means to properly enjoy commercial goods, that they be cured in such a way as to enjoy the fruits of capitalist society. In turn, he was critical of what he saw as American-style psychoanalysts (i.e. ‘ego psychologists’) who were willing to validate that expectation by strengthening the ego as a means to better integrate their patients into the American (or bourgeois) dream. In his view, the end of analysis was not happiness and integration, but a confrontation with truth. To push this point Lacan makes use of Marx: the ends of analysis are not ‘the good’ (Aristotle) nor ‘the goods’ (i.e. commodities) but instead a challenge to *jouissance* and power. Marx’s critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, said Lacan, was of interest because it showed that there was a structural limit that prevented such a idealist state from coming to realization (Lacan, 1997, 208-9). This limit is *jouissance* in its double sense of both affect and access to private property: not only does capitalism prove a limit to the achievement of utilitarian fantasies of ‘happiness’ and material wealth, to mistakenly associate

jouissance with objects rather than *relations* between ‘objects’¹⁵⁷ is to mistake the nature of human affect. It is not the object that provides enjoyment, but the processes of desire and drive that do so.

This line of thought is developed in different parts of Lacan's career. Whereas in his *Ethics* he argued that Marx misunderstood the elements of enjoyment that made up affect, in 1968-9 he argued that, in fact, ‘surplus-value’ and his own conception of ‘surplus-enjoyment’ were homologous (Lacan: 2002). It was also around this time that Lacan further elaborated his argument that the end of analysis is the end of subjection to both the master – ego psychologist and otherwise – and mastery *per se*. That is, the end of analysis is not an egoistic self-mastery, but the end of one’s belief in the big Other (institutions, assumptions, and guarantees – a list which for Marxists would include capitalism in its various forms¹⁵⁸) and the creation of a psychoanalyst (Lacan: 2007).

The trap to be spied here, however, is that pointed out by Jacoby in his survey of ‘conformist psychology’ and the English anti-psychiatry movement’s response to it. In his take on R. D. Laing Jacoby argues that the confusion of therapy and political practice leaves both ineffective, and therapy must know its limits:

there can be talk of therapy, but therapy as therapy – not as radical therapy or social change. The therapy accepts for the sake of the individual victim the distinction between the individual form of the illness and its social origin. In this way therapy becomes self-conscious, adequate to its notion; it does not mystify itself as radical cure or liberation while it responds to the emergency of the individual victim (Jacoby, 1975: 134).

To put in terms of revolutionary practice, Jacoby means to say that one can not leave aside the day-to-day needs of the revolutionaries and focus solely on revolution, nor mistake the maintenance of day to day needs as revolution. However, where he doesn’t give flesh to the alternative, Jacoby effectively leaves himself in the position of

advocating for *only* responding to the psychological ‘emergency’ and leaving the social context at the level of acknowledgement, and exterior to practice.¹⁵⁹

Given the preceding discussion, psychoanalysis potentially offers a different end. Perhaps the conservative line in which psychoanalysis aims to make the individual better adjust to their environment can be given a new twist: where this adjustment is based in the dissolution of a the belief in the big ‘Other’, one adjusts subjectively to the existing world but in what Jacoby would call a negative mode – with the knowledge that another world is possible. The end of analysis is the creation of a new sort of subject who is a member of a new sort of community, a community that is created/joined at the conclusion of ‘the cure’. Seminal to this is psychoanalysis as a ‘discourse’, a ‘social link’ that was different from any other to be found in society. Remember, too, that in the view of Lacan and Fenichel this cure need not exclusively include ‘the talking cure’, but also other elements of the psychotherapeutic toolkit.

As noted above, this is not only apparent in Lacan’s theory but also in his practice, infamous in its challenges to the organization of psychoanalysis as a discipline. This begins with a break with the IPA and the Psychoanalytic Society of Paris (SPP) in 1953 and continues with the repeated creation, transformation, and dissolution of new associations – all of which happened both for, with, and against Lacan. As Turkle points out, in this first break Lacan was not the driving force, but served as a flash-point for discontent in the French psychoanalytic movement. That is, not all those that left the SPP at this time did so because they agreed with his theories. Some did so because he represented a challenge to the medicalizing and bureaucratizing currents in the SPP, as well as its contradictions. Indeed, Roudinesco points out that a big part of the puzzle of

the original break was something of a student revolt (involving Roudinesco's mother) against the way the SPP was treating its trainees (1990: 244), rather than a move organized by Lacan. It was only after the break that he resigned from his position at the SPP. What all this points to is that once you conceive of analysis as something other than a means to strengthen the ego and integrate people into the 'bourgeois dream,' once you conceive of the ends of analysis as the challenging of power and its various masters, clearly you present a problem for an organization that does neither in theory nor in practice. More importantly for socialists, you raise the question of how to collectively organize those whose primary aim is to eliminate reified social systems.

Dolar (2008) takes up this point, arguing that the end of the belief in the big Other is *the* point that psychoanalysis becomes political. Where the end of analysis is the creation of an analyst who is part of a community of analysts who all challenge the Other, the question of the form of that community becomes unavoidable. He glibly asserts that this is the same logic that inheres to the Leninist Party. Žižek, Dolar's comrade, makes a similar comment, writing that Lacan's repeated reformulation of his 'schools' were a 'Leninist move' (Žižek, 2008b: xcvi; 2006a: 306). He goes so far as to argue that the form of the Leninist Party is homologous to the form of the analytic relationship. He argues, in a similar vein that has been suggested throughout this chapter, that the form of one's activity is not a neutral addition to a social and political horizon, but is instead the creation of a new kind of knowledge and interaction with the world that has transformative power (Žižek, 2002: 178-191).

This suggests a way of understanding Fenichel's remarks that psychoanalysis can be used to explain 'the effectiveness of *all* psychotherapies' and 'could be considered the

nucleus of a dialectical-materialist psychology,' raised above. This is so because psychoanalysis is at base the question of the relation of the individual to the social. 'From the very first,' Freud wrote in his *Group Psychology*, 'individual psychology [...] is at the same time social psychology as well' (Freud, 1959: 1). When placed within the context of a Marxist analysis of the social, 'social psychology' becomes the question of how to create a socialist community by creating a new relationship with the world we currently inhabit. Where conditions change, so too must organizations and ways of thinking. Here organizational means, social realities, and political ends mediate each other: a socialist organization must constantly modify its form in response to the immediate social and political contexts in which it finds itself. It must constantly ask and act on the following: what is to be the form of the organization through which we approach the world in order not only to change it, but to best understand it and ourselves in order to properly do so?

This was the question that Lacan posed in regards to psychoanalysis. Like Fenichel, he too asserted that psychoanalysis had something particular to offer the psychological disciplines: 'If psychoanalysis [...] is neither the only psychotherapy, nor applicable in all cases, it alone has brought a general theory of psychotherapies and ensures the psychotherapist satisfactory preparation whose basis is the training analysis' (Lacan in Roudinesco, 1990: 226). It mustn't be forgotten, however, that similar assertions were also being made in the United States. Shorter (1997) relates the following remarks made by a child psychiatrist who questioned the scientific basis of psychoanalysis at a medical educator's meeting in 1962: 'Just about every eminent figure present rose to defend the primacy of psychoanalysis as "the basic science" of psychiatry' (quoted in Shorter: 181). It was in the U.S., from the 1940s to the late 1960s, that

psychoanalysts held many of the major chairs in psychiatry, and ‘took over much of the apparatus of the American Psychiatric Association’ (Shorter: 172). These were the ego-psychologists against which Lacan railed, and who dominated psychiatry not by dint of their numbers but because they ‘wrote the textbooks, staffed the university departments, and sat on the examination boards’ (Shorter: 173). Shorter contends that this happened in no small part because of the desire to move psychiatry away from institutional settings into private, individual practice, and the popularity of psychoanalytic ideas in post-war America. He also excoriates psychoanalysis for dogmatism and an unwillingness to integrate scientific measure and discovery,¹⁶⁰ locating the cause in European émigrés who had close ties to Freud and who were unwilling to let go of the master’s ideas – against Freud’s own theoretical words (though not organizational actions) to the contrary, which encouraged a more limited role for psychoanalysis and an openness to new discoveries. Shorter thus labels psychoanalyst’s post-war hegemony a ‘hiatus’ rather than a development (See also Engel, 2008 on this history).

Lacan was perhaps then justified in his attacks on the IPA and ego psychology. By some accounts, however, Lacan’s own organizational answer to the role of psychoanalysis was a miserable failure: what began as an attempt to create a non-hierarchical organization ended in a tacit hierarchical valuation of theory and practice, and the instatement of Lacan as the ‘absolute master.’¹⁶¹ Even if this is the case, one shouldn’t draw the conclusion that the question was wrongly posed. Rather, it points to the difficulties of organizing the new within the context of the old, and the weight of the struggle.

Echoes of the history of the CPA are found in the history of the psychoanalytic movement in France: in both cases there was a fight for legitimacy of the psychological professions, in both the relationship between theory over practice was an issue, and in both cases organizational questions were part of the problem and part of the result. The work of Bazerman, Danziger, Dunbar, and Walsh-Bowers *et al* shows that an important factor in the history of the psychological disciplines more generally is their organization, and the French and the Canadian cases provide two possible directions that history can and has taken. In the case of the CPA, a liberal approach channeled through ethics and the discourse of human rights enabled the organization to establish itself as a national body that acts as a lever to ensure access to the psychological ‘marketplace.’ The inevitable problem in a capitalist society is that a nominal political dedication to human rights is subordinated to and stymied by this marketplace, making its realization impossible. The Lacanian case points to the possibility of countering the demands of a marketplace that creates ‘consumers’ who wish to be integrated into it and an organizational structure willing to accommodate that demand. It also points to the problems in creating a non-hierarchical body adequate to the task: an organization dedicated to the destruction of organizations as we know them runs the risk of becoming its own enemy.

Marx once wrote that ‘the world has long since possessed something in the form of a dream which it need only take possession of consciously, in order to possess it in reality.’ The bourgeois dream is impossible in that its individualism is based on collective production and the social nature of wealth, on the exploitation of communal existence. What we potentially possess are the means to human emancipation, against their

domination and inequitable division: immense wealth, knowledge, and passion. To transform this reality, organization must be considered not a secondary *element*, but a primary, necessary, *mediation* – one to be fought both for and with.

This is not only true of the discipline of psychology but of the social world more broadly – or so Žižek claims, linking the form of analysis to capitalist money and the (communist) party. It is these two points that are addressed in the next chapter.



Chapter 6 – ‘...But not always in perverse form’: the vicissitudes of capitalism, the Other, and the Party

Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. It is impossible to emphasise this thought too much at a time when along with the fashionable preaching of opportunism people are carried away with the narrowest possible forms of practical activity.

– Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*

Faced with a disaster over which we have no real influence, people will often say, stupidly, ‘Don’t just talk, do something!’ Perhaps, lately, we have been doing too much. Maybe it is time to step back, think and *say* the right thing. True, we often talk about doing something instead of actually doing it – but sometimes we do things in order to avoid talking and thinking about them.

– Žižek, ‘Don’t Just Do Something, Talk.’



The question of form is important not only because it focuses attention on the material world but also because asking *which* form to look to in order to precipitate revolutionary change is significant.¹⁶² This can be seen by turning to Rothenberg’s *The Excessive Subject*. In the final chapter she refers to Žižek’s turn to Bartleby as subject to ‘the parallax view’ as a means to approach a new type of radical political community: in her account Bartleby is a figure that has the potential to both maintain the *status quo* (he does, at the beginning of Melville’s story, actually do some work) as well as disrupt it. The Subject is for her both one more person amongst many – simply another part of the system – and a singular individual who is as such also an ‘excessive’ universal – that is, a potentially *free* individual with their own, idiosyncratic *sinthome*. The problem, in her view, is accounting for how one can move from one side of the parallax to the other and thus affect social change, both at the individual and the social level. She begins with the question of how to differentiate Bartleby’s masochistic acts from those of the pervert to then pass through the question of the practice of psychoanalysis, which in Lacan’s work shares the form of perversion: in Rothenberg’s account, the analyst is one who has

disinvested themselves of all their psychic defenses and thereby ‘decreases a given subject’s contribution to the affective storm in the social field’ (Rothenberg, 2010: 211). At the same time, someone who has accomplished such an act serves as a prompt for others to undergo the same change – this because their non-defensiveness enables others to reflect upon their own defenses and begin to work past them. To expand this idea she turns to the work of Felix Guattari – before his encounter with Gilles Deleuze – to argue for a praxis that leads to a radical group dynamic that relies on submission to castration and a master-signifier, but in a non-Oedipal way. The twist is that this form of castration does not subsume the singularity of the group members in that its master-signifier is non-hierarchical and does not rely on an Imaginary (in Lacan’s sense) group-image by which one ‘belongs’ (Rothenberg, 2010: 224).

Rothenberg does not fully explain these latter points and admits that she is in part giving her own interpretation of Guattari’s position, but they can perhaps be best understood as a question of Symbolic and Imaginary identification: first, each member of the group who might otherwise have authority must self-castrate in that they submit to the group-signifier created by the group itself (a form of symbolic identification); second, the group does away with Imaginary images of a complete/whole group, instead embracing the non-complete relation between each of its members (eliminating any Imaginary identification). Here it’s worth noting that Chiesa argues that for Lacan (with whom Guattari trained) castration is a Symbolic threat that results in the ‘resumption of the image of the fragmented body’ (Chiesa, 2007: 30). Given these two points Guattari’s assertion (quoted by Rothenberg) that this new social link is not castration but instead on the ‘threshold of castration’ can be understood to mean that one once again takes on an

understanding of oneself as fragmented but does not resolve this crisis by accepting the master's (Oedipus') signifier, instead creating a new one along with one's comrades.

While this is not antithetical to Žižek's position there are at least two problems here, neither having much to do with the abstract description of this new community that Rothenberg gives: this move doesn't accomplish what she wants it to – it doesn't explain *how* one might get to such a 'Bartleby' politic. The first thing to note here is that Rothenberg is describing the relatively closed, controlled conditions of a mental institution where the people in power who are to self-castrate are hospital employees who must 'accept' this castration (Rothenberg, 2012: 224) – why they would do this is unclear. There is also an ambiguity around how patients join these groups: in Rothenberg's words people are 'put' there (Ibid: 225), making it uncertain if all this relies on self-selection or a benevolent master imposing a pseudo-castration. Either way, neither is a terribly good solution to the problem she sets: if it is a master who sets this in motion it opens the question of 'who first castrates the castrator'; if it is self-selection there still remains the problem of why people would self-select.

This ambiguity directly flows from the second problem in this account: the link to capitalism is left unexplained. Her focus is instead on hierarchy *per se*: in the model she provides, the central aspect taken into account is the flattening of difference (i.e. the destruction of hierarchy), a hierarchy which on the surface has nothing particularly capitalist about it. This is where the problem of form comes in: it will perhaps come as no surprise that the patients in question are schizophrenic and this model relies on an attempt to 'actualize transcendental aspects of madness hitherto repressed' (Guattari in Rothenberg, 2010: 227). That is, madness as it exists provides the form by which radical

change can be made. This, then, is the answer to how one moves to one side of the parallax to the other: both sides *already exist*, and rationally comprehending them allows us to make use of the ‘other side.’ Rothenberg does not, however, give a clear indication of how schizophrenia fits in. She moves from Bartleby the pervert to Bartleby the analyst while relying on a figure of Bartleby the psychotic without explaining how or why this is the case. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari align capitalism with schizophrenia in their two most famous books, and granted, in Lacan’s account schizophrenia does rely on a different relation to the signifier, one in which it is ‘foreclosed’ and the castration threat is denied such that difference is flattened. If the task is to solve a problem that supposedly can be found in Žižek’s work, however, there is a far more cogent way to do it, one that is more consistent with Žižek’s own thinking. This can be understood with reference to Naomi Reed’s reading of ‘Bartleby the Scrivener’ that takes into account that Melville’s character worked on Wall Street.¹⁶³ Looking at the particular ways Bartleby’s employer is made to describe his ex-employee Reed argues that the Wall Street scrivener is both cadaver and spirit, ‘a strange admixture of the bodily and the ghostly’ – in other words an embodiment of use- and exchange-value (Reed, 2004: 250). His various refusals are also, in Reed’s take, the refusal to enter circulation – circulation in the labour market and circulation in space, for example (Ibid: 255-6). That is, Bartleby is ‘value’ that refuses to be so. Here Rothenberg’s understanding of excess becomes important: in her account it is ‘the medium of [the subject’s] connection to other subjects and the obstacle to that connection’ (Rothenberg, 2010: 206). To formulate this in terms of money: the commodity form is that which connects all labour under capitalism while also serving as the means of the exploitation of that labour.

This is perhaps the best way to read Marx's comments in a letter to Ruge that 'reason has always existed, but not always in a reasonable form': in a capitalist society reason as universal self-determination is at once made possible and obscured by the form of capitalist wealth-creation and exploitation – the commodity form and its fetishism. In this sense a position similar to Marx's appears in Lacan's work, as read by Lorenzo Chiesa. He shows that as Lacan's thought progresses 'the Other of the Other' as guarantor of certainty disappears, with the consequence that the Master-Signifier as Name-of-the-Father is reduced from a 'bi-univocal' or 'natural' sign to one '(perverse) Master-Signifier' among many – a move that Chiesa argues is tied to Lacan's discussion of the historically changing place of the Other in Western systems of thought, from Aristotle to Descartes, Newton, and Kant. That is, Chiesa shows that while Lacan argues that in the past the symbolic universe was guaranteed by the stars, then God, and then the Noumenal, a similar change is reflected in Lacan's own work: where once he held that there was an 'Other of the Other' that guaranteed the smooth functioning of the world – i.e. the 'Name of the Father' as a natural and universal necessity – in the course of Lacan's work the Master-Signifier is progressively revealed to be the product of a 'Symbolic act' – the activity of the subject. This is to say that Lacan is the end-point of a trajectory leading to the end of the belief in the big Other and the revelation that *jouissance* is instead (in a pun coined by Chiesa) *jouis-sans*: not something that we come into the world possessing and then losing with our entry into language, but the product of our free activity. That is, it is *perversion* as the form of our social relations that makes us potentially free.

What isn't made explicit in Chiesa's account, however, is the role that Marx's thought takes in Lacan's trajectory towards the death of the big Other: *jouissance* as Lacan understands it is what is described by Marx as surplus-value. The 'absolutisation of the market' and the creation of abstract labour, according to Lacan, bring surplus-jouissance into discourse, just as there is no energy in moving water without a dam and a turbine. That is, capitalist money is a perverse Master-Signifier as when it becomes *the* basic form of social interaction all guarantees 'melt into air' and the modern subject as such is born. And, according to Lacan, this is no mere metaphor: 'This *surplus enjoying* appeared, in my last talk, in function of a homology with respect to the Marxist surplus-value. Homology clearly means – and I underlined it – that the relation is not one of analogy. It is indeed the same thing that is at stake. It is a matter of the same stuff in so far as what is at stake is the scissors' mark of discourse' (Lacan, 2002: Lecture III-1).¹⁶⁴ What is left is the disavowed knowledge that money – and by extension capitalism – is the product of one's own activity, and thus stands as an inverted form of freedom. What appears as natural and unchangeable – castration as the immutable law of 'the name of the father'; generalized commodity exchange as seen in the capitalist marketplace – is in fact the product of history and human activity.

According to Žižek this flight from freedom appears in late-capitalism as the collapse of Master-Signifier and *objet a* – the 'Real-ization of the symbolic'; it appears as the supposed certainty and freedom of hedonism, where the 'Symbolic order' is directly infused with enjoyment and the 'superego injunction to enjoy' is generalized. The antidote to this 'development' of perversion is thus not to be found in madness and an abstract attack on hierarchy, but in the perverse form itself: not the 'perverse' Stalinist

version of the Bolshevik Party where (according to Žižek) reference to the laws of history stand as the big Other and a guarantor of the successful creation of communism, but in the emptied perverse discourse that is the discourse of the analyst – one Žižek claims is shared by the Bolsheviks of the Russian revolution. The Party is for Žižek not a particular knowledge but a different form of knowledge – one that can counter that of the commodity – based on the realization that there are no guarantees but only the freedom to change the world, for better or ill.

The importance of the question of form – as above, between the form of the Leninist Party and capitalist ideology as embodied in commodity exchange – was not foreign to Lenin, as can be seen in his ‘The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It’ (included in Žižek’s small, edited volume of Lenin’s writing). Here he argues that what was needed to fend off famine and continue towards socialism was already present in the Russia of 1917, though in an insufficiently democratic form to be effective. Whereas capitalists had to change the form of the struggle over capitalism’s existence from ‘monarchist’ to ‘republican-democratic’ to survive the attacks against it (and thereby fomented famine, disorganization, and general catastrophe for the workers and peasants of Russia), what was needed to destroy capitalism was a different form of democracy within the economic and political bodies of the country. Where ‘reactionary-bureaucratic’ regulation had led to economic disaster, ‘revolutionary-democratic’ regulation would lead to the renewed functioning of the economy. These democratic transformations – the nationalization of the banks and the syndicates such that they would be under the control of those who made them function, the abolition of commercial secrecy – could be made by simple formal *decree* and then carried out through the

initiative of those who worked in the institutions in question. Lenin was disparaging of those who didn't see the difference between the two forms as decisive, writing that 'This "little difference" is of major importance' (Lenin in Žižek, 2002: 78).

This is to say that critics like Robinson and Tormey¹⁶⁵ (2004; 2006) move all too quickly when they assert that Žižek is too abstract, formal, and idealist (as opposed to materialist) to be considered a Marxist, or to consider his work as having any substantial relation to Marx's thought and the historical reality of Lenin and the Russian Revolution, and in the end to struggle in the world in which we find ourselves. It is also to say that, as Rothenberg puts it, we have the problem and the problem is in a way its own solution: rather than turning to actually-existing madness and creating new institutions to find the possibilities of that madness, actually-existing social relations between everyone – both at the level of the economy and the state – can be seized in their 'parallax' moment in order to affect social change. That is, where money isolates workers by creating discreet 'things' that can be compared, it also unites in that each element is put into an actual relation with the others; Similarly, where political parties developed as a way to organize people as abstractly equal votes to be won in order to rule a state that is used to maintain economic and social relations, they can also be used to organize people against a state that treats them in such a fashion.

To approach this problem adequately, however, it is first necessary to reiterate how it is that a psychoanalytic concept can be applied to something social or collective, and through this vein shoot to the heart of how it is possible that capitalism might be considered perverse and how this 'perversion' may have changed over time. This means touching again on commodity fetishism and disavowal as the basis of 'perversion', as

well as approaching Žižek's discussion of neo-liberal capitalism as a further, different form of perversion. To put it briefly, there is no capitalist economy without the modern subject and commodity fetishism. This path flows into a discussion of how the form of capitalism, as perverse, also provides its own solution: where fetishism is the 'perversion of perversions' (Lacan in Evans, 1996: 139) the form of the Leninist Party is 'perversion without perversion' – a social relation between all that follows from an economy where all labour is related to all others, but is grounded on the principle that labour is not a commodity. Further, Žižek's claim that the Party shares the form of the discourse of the psychoanalyst can be understood by taking into account two points: first, psychoanalysis is not an ahistorical accidental appearance but fundamentally relies on capitalist exchange relations; second, its purpose – like that of the Party – is to give people the means to realize the connections between the elements of their lives that appear to be unrelated. Where in the previous chapter the form of analysis was considered in historical context, here it is argued that the form of the subject as understood by Lacan is a *free* subject, one both created by and antithetical to capitalist relations. Here this is approached at the level of theory, while in the following chapter this is taken up in historical context, where the development of party politics and the Bolsheviks of the Russian Revolution are considered to show that, contrary to what some critics attempt to argue, Žižek's claims may not be so removed from historical reality nor from the socialist goal of universal freedom and self-determination as they claim.

The Party form, from commodity and money

One of the most direct engagements with Žižek's political ontology is a book by Jodi Dean, the most significant shortcoming of which is that in the end she adheres to a

theoretical separation of Marxism and psychoanalysis. The result is that in the name of moving past economic essentialism she directs the focus of her argument away from the question of how, by further naturalizing capitalist market relations, ideology and the tendencies of capitalism have demobilized what was once considered revolutionary almost in its very nature (i.e. the working class or proletariat). Dean turns away from the question of what levers might exist to effect change in the existing system based on what it is today to train her eye on how to recognize a revolutionary or ethical ‘Act’ after it has already happened and thereby make it truly revolutionary. Where Marx originally looked at profit/surplus-value to understand how wealth is created under capitalism and how this knowledge might be used to transform society, and where Freud sought to understand the unconscious as a means to somehow eliminate the neurotic symptoms of his patients, Dean instead concentrates on looking for an already accomplished revolution or successful psychological transformation and nominating it as such. The focus of her argument can be found in the theoretical formulation that chases the claim that ‘class consciousness’ is the product of hard work. What is important, according to Dean, is not the hard work of preparing the ranks of leftist activists and their allies for revolution so as to make it happen when the opportunity arises. What is instead of decisive import is ‘...the Party’s role in retroactively determining an act’ (Dean, 2006: 197). While speaking of a Bolshevik-style vanguard party what Dean instead evokes is ‘tailism’ – a word that makes up the first half of the title of Lukács’ defence of *History and Class Consciousness*, a defense that (not insignificantly) has been published with an essay by Žižek between its covers.

Here it's worth remembering one of the central arguments of chapter four – that the logic of hegemony proposed by Laclau and Mouffe assumes a common symbolic system to be hegemonized, thereby leaving aside the question of how that system itself came about. Here Žižek intervenes, asking when abstract equality on the political plane became possible in the first place – the answer being with the birth of the logic of capitalism. Alan Shandro (2007) makes a similar argument against Laclau and Mouffe *via* Lenin's discussion of the role of the party around the time of the creation of the Petersburg Soviet (i.e. the revolution of 1905): the importance of the Soviet was not that it provided the means to show the proletariat, the peasants, the soldiers, the petty-bourgeois, etc., that it had revolutionary potential (i.e. it wasn't simply a educational opportunity), but that it presented an opportunity to change the form of the struggle itself – taking it out of the bounds of both absolutism and liberalism. That is, in Shandro's account 'hegemony' in the way Lenin used it did not mean simply bringing consciousness to workers, peasants, intellectuals, etc., nor dominating the Petrograd Soviet ideologically (i.e. taking over an existing structure), but also changing the *form* of the struggle itself.¹⁶⁶ It was not that the Soviet simply needed to be shown that it was revolutionary, but that it needed to be *further organized* to include revolutionary insurrection against the state as opposed to remaining simply an anti-state incubator: as an institution where workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals, et al., came together for the first time in transparent self-government, came together in an institution in which all the contradictions between the different classes and their demands would be made clear, the possibility of an *effective* mass Marxist (i.e. Social Democratic) Party was greatly increased. That is, it was not only that the Party was to 'teach' the revolution. The Party was also to be the student –

Shandro's complaint being that the Mensheviks would simply have the Party dissolve and the Soviet take its place rather than further develop the Party as a means to also develop the Soviet.¹⁶⁷ The Party needed the spontaneous creation of the Soviet to foment its own ability to function, and because of the transparent nature of the Soviet the Party would have to adapt to the circumstances that were thereby created.

Shandro at one point summarizes this position on 'hegemony' writing that it ...

figured earlier as a kind of generalized proletarian influence, liable to be confused in practice with the mere dissemination of Party propaganda; but with the emergence of an institutional form, the Soviet, capable of enacting the proletarian-peasant alliance and exercising revolutionary state power, hegemony could be conceived concretely as embracing the mass action of the working class (Shandro, 2007: 328).

As Žižek puts it, the question of hegemony is that of 'how to assert materialism not as a teaching, but as a form of collective life' (Žižek, 2012: 100). Hegemony is thus not simply an interpretation (retroactive or otherwise) of circumstances, nor simply the transformation of something that is 'impotent' (see below), but the active transformation of politics, the economy, etc. (in the case of Petrograd, not only the creation of the Soviet – which itself changed the ways politics were played out – but also the further radicalization of the Soviet itself) in order to maintain the power that it already possesses and, in the case of the Soviets of 1905, risked losing.

This is not to say that there is no role that 'retroactive interpretation' *can* play in Party activism.¹⁶⁸ For now it is important to explain how Dean comes to this position and in so doing make Žižek's clearer. One of his oft-repeated critiques of his contemporaries and of contemporary political movements more generally is that each treats capitalism as unassailable, as something that will never be overcome.¹⁶⁹ This amounts to the claim that the economic realm has been depoliticized or rendered the ignored background of other political battles. Dean agrees, but writes that 'Žižek's claim regarding the depoliticized

economy as the disavowed fundamental fantasy does not follow from his account of the arrangement of enjoyment in contemporary ideological formations' (Dean, 2006: 193).¹⁷⁰ To solve this apparent problem she suggests that there exists a 'parallax' whose two sides are Marxism (or class struggle) and psychoanalysis (or enjoyment), a parallax which takes as its object a pre-revolutionary or potentially revolutionary '*passage a l'acte*' – an 'impotent' outburst that has yet to be linked to its wider political significance. It is here that she suggests that the bridge between the psychoanalysis and Marxism must come at the level of Truth – the role of the Party and the psychoanalyst.

If one understands 'parallax view' to mean two perspectives on the same object, one of which is conservative (i.e. maintains the object, makes it possible) and the other progressive or at least disruptive (i.e. seeing what appears as normal as problematic and thereby leading to a change in the object), and where the 'Real' is the subjective movement from one side to the other, it is unclear how the Act as object can have Marxism and psychoanalysis as the two sides of a view upon it. The paradigmatic case here, as has been stressed previously, is that of profit/surplus-value: from the perspective of the capitalist profit is simply more money generated by the hard work of the capitalist. From the perspective of the worker profit is instead surplus-value extracted from the worker and usurped by the owner of the means of production. Class struggle is here the Real – the move from one side to the other – in that it is not an empirical division that can be measured in statistics and demographics (i.e. class as a 'sack of potatoes') but is the subjective leap from one perspective to the other. Where one perspective produces an image of continuity (in Žižek's terminology, 'difference' among formally equivalent elements), the other sees division (in Žižek's terminology, 'antagonism' or

incompatibility between two different forms). This brings the ‘parallax view’ close to Marx’s position in *The Holy Family*, where he writes ‘Within this antithesis [the estrangement seen in private property] the private property-owner is therefore the *conservative* side, the proletarian the *destructive* side. From the former arises the action of preserving the antithesis, from the latter the action of annihilating it’ (Marx and Engels, 1975: unpaginated). Where the capitalist side sees their work as one more type of work that is simply worth more than those of the workers, the side of the worker sees work as fundamentally different – as *generating* value rather than simply something exchanged for an equivalent value. This is to say that the master-signifier and the *objet a* are not conceived as two different things, but as two perspectives/approaches to the *same* thing. The fundamental difference between the two is that in the latter case the Real is revealed to be an intimate property of the Symbolic: the move here is from an understanding of the master-signifier as a simple empirical fact (‘money is wealth’) to rationally knowing that the master-signifier is subjectively mediated (‘money is the embodiment of abstract labour time and the exploitation of the worker’).

Understood this way a ‘parallax’ between Marxism and psychoanalysis would see Marxism as conservative and psychoanalysis as disruptive. This could indeed be considered the case if one took Marxism to mean economism and the Act therefore the inevitable product of the ‘iron laws’ of capitalism. Dean appears to suggest just that, posing Žižek as neither a post-Marxist nor someone who sees ‘ideology as rising directly from an economic base’ (Dean, 2002: 194). The problem is that this statement is only partly correct. Dean does not see the division between ‘constitutive ideology’ and ‘constituted ideology’ that operates in Žižek’s thought – the division between the form of

ideology (in the case of capitalism, commodity fetishism) and any particular ideology that might take on that form.¹⁷¹ That is, she forgets that ideology is not separate from the economy, that the economy requires commodity fetishism to function, that ‘reality itself cannot reproduce itself without this so-called ideological mystification’ (Žižek, 1989: 28). Where ‘difference’ based on formal equivalence is the ideology of capitalist market relations and the formal-freedom that these relations require it is easy to see the division of ‘constitutive’ and ‘constituted’ ideology at work in Žižek’s critique of ‘identity politics’ and liberal demands to have ever more groups of people considered equal: each liberal ideology poses itself in terms of difference that demands equivalence. In this way ideology as form *is* for Žižek generated by the economic ‘base’, while ideology as any particular thought comes to be understood in terms set by that form. In this way it can also be seen how conservative-liberal ideology fits the same mold: the ‘right to life’ is the attempt to extend formal equality to a fetus; immigrants, different races, religions, etc., are *too* different to be integrated and so must be expelled or repelled. Here Žižek/Badiou’s critique of multi-culturalism enters: this ideology attempts to eliminate any ‘Real’ difference (i.e. antagonism, an incompatibility of forms) and reduce cultural traditions to one potential choice among many.¹⁷²

That is, Dean’s fundamental premise about the role of the Party in Žižek’s thought (‘Žižek’s claim regarding the depoliticized economy as the disavowed fundamental fantasy does not follow from his account of the arrangement of enjoyment in contemporary ideological formations’) misses its mark. It is not that Marxism and psychoanalysis sit in opposition to each other in a parallax, but that they meet at the level of form: perversion. Dean is thus only partly correct when she writes that it is at the point

of the Party and the ‘discourse of the analyst’ that the two meet.¹⁷³ It is not only that the Party and psychoanalyst occupy the position of truth. The key point is that the form of psychoanalysis is borrowed from capitalism: as Žižek notes, ‘the link between analyst and the patient is not only speech, words, but also money...’ (Žižek, 2006a: 305).

To clarify this point there are two arguments that Žižek makes that can be pointed to, beginning with a somewhat dubious one found in *Parallax View*. Here Žižek suggests that against Foucault’s assertion that psychoanalysis springs from traditions of confession¹⁷⁴ as seen, for example, in the Roman Catholic Church, we could see the root of psychoanalysis in the literary figure of the Jewish money-lender – a person outside the social circuit to whom all one’s worries and secrets are told (Žižek, 2006a: 305). This comment serves more as a literary introduction to the actual substance of his argument – the relation between perversion and capitalist miserliness – which will be approached in a moment. It is first worthwhile to note a more convincing position in regards to the role of the exchange of money in psychoanalysis, one that appears in the 2002 preface to *The Know Not What They Do*.

Here Žižek describes psychoanalysis as being anti-capitalist precisely because of the role money plays within it, a role that possesses at least three components. The first is the impersonal exchange that it establishes: paying for a relationship with a person who hears all your troubles places them on the level of an abstract individual rather than that of a substantial other (a friend, for example, with whom you share experiences, emotions, social ties, etc.). This is supposed to help guarantee that a counter-transference (first discovered by Freud’s in the ‘Dora’ case, where it led to her leaving analysis) won’t take place, thereby stalling the analysis or forcing its end.¹⁷⁵ Second, one doesn’t pay for any

particular service (the interpretation of a dream, an analysis of a slip of the tongue), one doesn't pay for a commodity, but for the opportunity to *oneself* do some work: to speak to the analyst and figure out for oneself the truth of one's desire. Lastly, this means exchanging that which has an explicit value (i.e. money) for something that is beyond capitalist valuation: the core of one's being (rather, non-being) – the *objet a* that structures one's libidinal 'economy' (Žižek, 2008b: xxxviii-ix). In a section of *Tarrying With the Negative* titled 'money and subjectivity' he puts it this way:

This is how the subject qua [split subject] emerges from the structure of exchange: it emerges when "something is exchanged for nothing," that is to say, it is the very "nothing" I get from the symbolic structure, from the Other, in exchange for sacrificing my "pathological" particularity, the kernel of my being. When I get nothing in return, I get myself qua [split subject], qua the empty point of self-relating (Žižek, 1993: 28).¹⁷⁶

That is, *via* the Other we hand ourselves our freedom.

Are you now, and have you always been, perverse?

In this way psychoanalysis is not potentially a progressive political link because it shares the form of the party, as in Dean's account, but that it is able to share this form because it takes it from capitalism: in the analytic relationship commodity fetishism is used against itself to loose its hold upon us; the flip side of the creation of the individual under capitalist conditions is the creation of class and the potential of class consciousness (approached in more detail as the present argument develops). What then needs to be discussed are the different ways that capitalism and analysis can be said to share a form. Fetishism is one way. Another way, referred to in the 2002 preface of *FTKNWTD* as well as in the section of *The Parallax View* mentioned above, is at the level of the miser and the creation of surplus value – the 'perverse' act of counting 'nothing' (enjoyment; the 'self-activating capacity' that is labour-power) as 'something' (enumerating and owning people's pleasure¹⁷⁷; money). The two are of course related. As Fink points out,

perversion is subdivided into three categories: masochism, sadism, and fetishism (Fink, 2003: 44). What Chiesa reveals in his reading of Lacan is that these are not simply perversions in the sense of aberrations, but are instead at the very foundations of freedom and human existence. That is, to be a modern subject at all is to be perverse.

As noted earlier, Žižek's work relies on Marxist political economy, philosophies in dialogue with Descartes (i.e. those of the German Idealists), and Lacanian psychoanalysis sharing the logic of an immaterial moment that points to the logically necessary existence of something other than the simply empirical: for Marx it was the logical conclusion that if, in capitalist exchange, radically different use values are exchanged as if they were the same, there must be an immaterial stuff called value that they share to be commensurable; for Hegel the 'I' can not be had empirically, but for there to be any perception of the world at all we have to elucidate its 'self-relating negativity' by means of thought itself¹⁷⁸. In these two cases the potential for human freedom is fore-fronted: exchange value is the product of human labour power as transformed, 'accounted for', and exploited by the historically specific (i.e. human-made) form that is capitalism, and therefore points to the possibility of actual, rather than alienated, freedom; for Hegel, the world is not simply perceived by each of us by shuffling various stimuli into various categories of thought, but the product of the 'I' as the transcendental imagination actively tearing perceptions apart and putting them back together.¹⁷⁹ Chiesa's work can be used to clarify how this can also be said for Freud, *via* Lacan: the root of neuroses is to be found in the 'construction of analysis', a memory that can explain an analysand's symptoms but of itself will never be remembered, thereby standing as a logical assumption rather than an empirical fact.¹⁸⁰ Not only might this be

considered ‘freedom’ in the sense that the construction is the product of the dialogue between analyst and analysand; more significantly, Chiesa argues it is the product of the fact that we must choose to enter the social world – the big Other/language – by finding a master-signifier by which to order, to give meaning and effectivity,¹⁸¹ to the world in which we live.

In the last chapter of his *Subjectivity and Otherness* Chiesa outlines how Lacan’s position on enjoyment and the end/ethics of analysis changes as he (Lacan) reconceives the means by which meaning is guaranteed, from the ‘natural’ guarantee of the ‘Name of the Father’ – i.e. paternal authority and the threat of castration leveled against incestuous desire – to one that is historically variable and relative to the community in which one finds themselves. In this way Chiesa labels the master signifier as ‘ideological’ or ‘hegemonic’ by definition. Further than this, for Chiesa the choice of master signifier is not simply that chosen by the community, but the *masochistic* choice of the means by which one will relate to that master signifier and meaning – one’s ‘fundamental fantasy.’ That is, as a consequence of Lacan rejecting his earlier claim that ‘there is an Other of the Other’, as a consequence of rejecting the idea of a natural necessity for paternally administered castration that guarantees the symbolic order, what takes its place as the generalized model for the fundamental fantasy is the ‘perverse’ one described as a construction of analysis by Freud in his “‘A Child is a Being Beaten’”. One is ‘castrated’, one realizes that one is not able to give the Other what it desires (i.e. ‘minus little-phi’ or $-\varphi$) by beating oneself with a sign of authority (a whip, a stick – i.e. ‘big phi’ or Φ) (Chiesa, 2007: 160-161; 213, n. 205). That is, one establishes a fetish whereby one comes to identify with oneself through the symbolic order, consolidating one’s own image of

oneself (i.e. symbolic identification bringing together all of one's imaginary identifications) not because of some natural necessity for doing so, not because the 'Name of the father' is a natural or 'bi-univocal' sign, but because of one's own 'perverse' activity. As Freud notes in his discussion of the first of the three beating fantasies that make up "A Child is Being Beaten", the 'actual identity of the person who does the beating remains obscure at first' (1979: 170). Freud identifies this person as the father. Chiesa's thesis, however, is that the 'beating' is the work of masochism and drive.

The sense in which 'drive' can be considered masochistic can be understood by taking a detour through Laplanche and Pontalis.¹⁸² In their discussion of Freud and perversion, they point out that one could 'define human sexuality itself as essentially "perverse" inasmuch as it never fully detaches itself from its origins, where satisfaction was sought not in a specific activity but in the 'pleasure gain' associated with functions or activities depending on other instincts' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 308). This refers to 'anaclisis', which the pair see as fundamental to Freud's theory of the drives. It is the idea that sexual satisfaction at first only exists alongside natural need (for sustenance, for instance) as a 'bonus pleasure' or 'fringe benefit', and eventually derives its object from those needs (in the case of sustenance, the maternal breast) (Ibid: 30-31). The separation of the two, of need and sexual satisfaction, comes at the behest of primary masochism as the death drive – as the tendency to reduce all tension to zero and to return to an inorganic state (i.e. death) – which they take to be less a specific drive than 'that factor which determines the actual *principle* of all instinct' (Ibid: 102; See also Laplanche, 1976: 105; 124). It is 'libido,' or the sexual instinct, that pushes the death instinct outwards *via* 'the muscular apparatus,' thereby diverting the tendency for self

destruction – at least for a time. More properly, then, the ‘principle’ that is the death drive manifests as libido, the reduction of tension *via* self-directed bodily activity. In this way the development of sexuality, independently of natural need, begins as auto-eroticism (i.e. taking oneself as the object of desire) to only later return to its former object (again, the maternal breast). In this way ‘the finding of an object is in fact the refinding of it’ (Freud in L&P: 31).

If, as Laplanche and Pontalis point out, sexual pleasure was not originally dependant on the object but instead accompanied it, to ‘re-find’ the object is to mistakenly assume the source of the ‘bonus pleasure’ was the maternal object rather than one’s self. This is where Chiesa can be brought back in: he gives a very similar account, charting the vicissitudes of natural need, satisfaction, demand, desire, and love through to the end of a psychoanalysis. The major difference is that, *via* Lacan,¹⁸³ death drive is taken not as a principle of constancy but one of disequilibrium, a masochistic forcing of separation of self from world that like the ‘nirvana principle’ – which is supposed to bring tensions to nil – is conservative, but not in that it attempts to maintain an equilibrium or homeostasis, nor reduce itself to 0 as in the principle of entropy. For Chiesa the sexual instinct/death drive is conservative in that it repeats its original act of separation from need. He begins his explanation with Lacan’s famous discussion of need, demand, and desire, founded in what he calls the *dialectic of frustration* – which is ultimately the source of language acquisition and individuation.

In Chiesa’s account,¹⁸⁴ one is first passively alienated in the symbolic – understood as language and ‘the law of culture’ – at birth: one is spoken of before being born, and born into and part of a familial and social context. It is only through the process

of self-alienation that one becomes an individual with a personal relationship to that matrix, which until that point is, from the perspective of the new individual, opaque and meaningless. That is, one begins as an individual for others, but is not for oneself an individual: one's passive alienation is a complete subjection to the Other in the sense that there is no separation of self and world, but only the need for sustenance, etc., and its immediate satisfaction. From the perspective of the Other (i.e. the family, society) there is no such immediacy, of course: *they* deliver what is needed, and doing so always takes time. Neither, however, is this satisfaction completely immediate for the child. In Chiesa's account the symbolic is already at work in that the child is subject to a differential system (i.e. the symbolic order) in the form of the minimal difference that is the presence and absence of the mother. He notes two different sources of this couplet: first in the separation of the child from the womb; second in the coming and going of the mother as the agent of satisfaction, where this latter source is predicated upon the trauma of the first. That is, one can only be affected by the symbolic order after one has been subject to it in the form of being separated from the mother in reality. It is from this minimal ground that the dialectic of frustration begins: where no child can take care of itself, is 'dis-adaptated', no caregiver can satisfy their ward absolutely. At some point a need will not be fulfilled to the satisfaction of the child.

In this failure the mother ceases to be symbolic and is understood as an individual, and the object of the child's satisfaction becomes a sign of love. What was once the omnipotence of the child, the correspondence of self and Other, becomes a world that includes something the child can't control. The mother ceases to be a 'symbolic agent' that the child herself masters and instead becomes a 'power' of her

own. That is, Chiesa argues that there comes a dialectical reversal: where first the object was an actual satisfaction and the caregiver a symbolic function (a coming and going, a presence and absence, seemingly at the immediate moment of need and its satisfaction and thus at the behest of the child), the inability to heed the needs of the child leads to mother and object changing places: the caregiver becomes actual and the object no longer only satisfies a biological need but also becomes symbolic (a differential) – the presence and absence of love given by the now outside ‘power’ in the form of a gift. This is the ‘loss’ of the maternal Thing, the end of the non-separation of Other and child – from the perspective of the child. It is in this sense that it can be said that one has lost what one never had in the beginning: the perfect satisfaction of complete alienation in the Other, which only existed from the perspective of the pre-individuated infant. In these beginning stages of Lacan/Chiesa’s version of the Oedipus complex there is, then, the move from the omnipotence of the child to the beginnings of the loss of the Thing; the move from the mother as agent controlled by the child to a power independent of the child; and the move from the satisfaction of need to the demand for love.¹⁸⁵

In addition to these three changes there is also the move from satisfaction to libido (which returns the argument to that of Laplanche and Pontalis). This is the product of the movement just described: in Chiesa’s account that which kept the mother from satisfying the need of the child is another – a rival that can satisfy her desire in place of the child. That is, it appears that the child is not being satisfied because the ‘power’ that is the mother is controlled by another, that the mother desires something other than the child for her satisfaction. This other becomes an object of a narcissistic, imaginary identification. This identification and this rivalry occurs because of what Chiesa calls the phallic *Gestalt*

(Chiesa, 2007: 69-70) – a function that he sees playing a special role in Lacan’s thought. He argues that for Lacan the incompleteness of the human being at birth and our precocious visual abilities are coupled with an innate draw to particular images – images that resemble ourselves, and thereby enable human interaction and ultimately mating. This, he argues, is the only ‘significant biological reference’ in Lacan’s oeuvre (Chiesa, 2007: 17). These special images are of the imaginary and as such form the basis of the logic of the mirror stage: the rival is an image of the self with which one competes, as one can not match images of completeness because of one’s innate incompleteness. (Not only can one not take care of oneself as an infant: likewise, as one ages one can not match the static reification that is the Imago.) As a consequence they are the objects of aggressivity, a narcissistic lashing out. In addition, as actual people in the world the rival as phallic *Gestalt* shows that one can not satisfy all the desires of the mother, that the rival is themselves capable of satisfying the mother where the child is not. In this sense, then, the child approaches castration at the imaginary level, where it refers not to any actual threat of losing a part of one’s body but to the realization that one is not in fact complete, but a *fragmented* whole.¹⁸⁶ The rival thus precipitates the move from satisfaction to libido, the sexualization of need: what was for Laplanche and Pontalis a ‘bonus pleasure’ or ‘fringe benefit’ becomes a compensation for the frustration of love (Chiesa, 2007: 72-3). That is, just as the object of need became an object demonstrating love, the satisfaction of need is separated from need and becomes a pleasure of its own. In Chiesa’s account, then, there are not two affects that accompany the satisfaction of need (satisfaction of need itself and sexual pleasure), but satisfaction transformed by the cultural and social paths made in the service of reproduction. In this way Chiesa’s take on

jouissance as *jouis-sans* can be understood: it is the taking of pleasure from the failure to achieve total satisfaction.

All of this was to show that drive is the principle of separation from the world and a creation of the individual, and that the ‘enjoyment’ that comes from it is actually one’s own product, mistaking the ‘Maternal Thing’ which never existed (i.e. a ‘0’) as the source of the enjoyment one now feels (counting the 0 as 1). It needs to be noted that what has been described above is part of the ‘pre-Oedipal’ phases of the Oedipus complex and primarily subsumed under the imaginary – where the drive is primarily subsumed in the symbolic. Rather than discussing the transitions that he outlines to get to that point, however, it’s enough to iterate that Chiesa holds that Lacan’s claim to be discussing a dialectical process should be taken seriously. For example, where there were for Lacan once three imaginary complexes – the weaning complex, the intrusion complex (i.e. that of rivalry), and the Oedipal complex – when he begins to turn his attention to the symbolic they become part of an interrelated process (as was above partially described). Likewise, the death drive, as the principle of drive *per se*, is a repetition of the same process at a different level. In the pre-Oedipal stages ‘separation’ is in the sense of separation from the total subjection to the symbolic in which one is alienated at birth: that one does not have what the caregiver desires opens a space between the self and the symbolic as the material Thing by projecting one’s proto-self onto a rival as imago. Separation is thus initially the creation of the (imaginary) individual. Drive is just this process, but with a master signifier in place of an Imago/*Gestalt*: just as ‘the baby recognizes the fragmentation of his real body only when he starts to be attracted to the completeness of his specular image’ (Chiesa, 2007: 18), the fetish/master signifier

‘negates the fullness of the world of mere phenomena. That is, we could say that it adds the concept of lack, that its negation functions in a positive way’ (Rothenberg and Foster, 2003: 6). The imaginary and the symbolic are not biological certainties but the creation of ‘nothing’ (the immaterial effectivity of human freedom) at the same moment that one can come to acknowledge that there is also something (the ‘empirical’ world).

Lacan, with Marx and capitalism

The main purpose of the rather long diversion above was to establish in what way the basic functioning of the psychic life of the individual is like the functioning of capitalism: the creation of a surplus where once there was only satisfaction of need; the transformation of the ‘nothing’ (labour power; the maternal Thing) into the ‘something’ (value; *Jouissance*). Not only that – the process in question involves the creation of an ‘immaterial’ element that enables things to function: the fundamental fantasy and real abstraction. The problem that presents itself here is the question of how this has changed across time: Chiesa’s arguments have been presented above not as particular to capitalism but as the generic development of the self’s relation to itself and to others. What is to be remembered here is that Chiesa’s project is to chart the continuity of Lacan’s thought across its many changes. As noted above, this consists in the move from the assertion that the master-signifier was equivalent to the authority, the law, the ‘no’ of the father as a natural function, to the assertion that there is no such natural guarantee, there is no ‘Other of the Other’, that master signifiers are culturally relative and guaranteed by a fundamental fantasy. The overall arc of what Chiesa offers is an account of Lacan’s position on how this happens across history, from Aristotle through to modern science and Freud. It relates back to the question of need and demand.

Where need was natural necessity, demand was to desire what the other desired and to receive love in place of satisfaction. In the moment being analysed the objects of Lacan's drives – the breast, feces, the voice, the gaze – are pre-Oedipal love objects rather than the 'object cause' of desire that they will become. In Chiesa's account the difference is that an object of love is one that answers the call to receive something – an object in the place of the lack that is the unknown desire of the Other – whereas the object of desire is instead the embodiment of lack itself as an object, desire as such, without particular object – i.e. to desire nothing as such (2008:150), the problems and possibilities with which are approached just below. The difference between these love objects and the object cause of desire is that between desiring *something* and desiring someone to desire (whatever it is they may want) to desire. The pre-Oedipal breast gives food as love; feces is a gift in return; the voice is the call to note that you hear (*'j'ouis'* – I hear you/I enjoy for you); the gaze is not only seeing but also the demand to be seen. The 'object cause' of desire is by contrast a marker of desire as such – i.e. transformed by the master-signifier into miniatures of itself: where the S_1 becomes a sign of meaning as such, the objects become signs of desire and drive as such. This was in Lacan's earlier account the 'no' of the father – castration and the phallus – which transformed these from conscious objects of love to unconscious objects of desire (2008: 141-151). Chiesa's main thesis, however, is that this argument falls away as Lacan's career passes, and is replaced by an understanding that sees different master signifiers supported by culturally relative fundamental fantasies.

Chiesa sketches Lacan's understanding of the movement through Aristotle up to Kant, Sade, and Freud and the different ways the Other acts as a guarantee – i.e. what it is

that takes on the role of the ‘Other of the Other.’ To summarize very briefly: where Aristotle held, as an unmediated Real, nature (the celestial spheres) and the prime-mover (God) as the guarantee of knowledge and the good, the crisis of Aristotelian science saw the introduction of God as a symbolic *a priori* in the work of Descartes, one that was later replaced by the Noumena as untouchable ‘Real’ in Kant (Chiesa, 2007: 113-4; 171-2). It has to be admitted that Chiesa doesn’t give much detail here, instead only providing a hint. There are two important claims to note, however: first, each historical period and its symbolic order can not be understood as it was in-itself, but only from the vantage of the present. This implies, of course, that symbolic orders in different times and places work differently. Second, this does not eliminate a notion of the universal, but is based upon it: psychoanalysis was a science in Lacan’s view because it could identify, behind all these different forms of symbolic, the principle of guarantee behind them – i.e. castration, the threat that installs the prohibition of incest (Ibid: 114-5). Again, Chiesa does not give a full explanation of this, but gestures to Darian Leader’s (2003) discussion of the role of myth and structuralism in Lacan’s work.

Leader’s central problematic is to attempt to answer what Lacan means when he says that the truth can only be half said. Leader’s answer closely resembles Žižek’s discussion of ‘parallax’: the Real can only be had indirectly – by creating a relation between two different sets of relations, by creating an articulation where the latter relation develops a further relationship to the problem that was tackled in the former. The two sets of relations are thus asymmetrical rather than mutually exclusive or antinomic. In Leader’s account the paradigmatic case is the symbolic in relation to the imaginary, where the deadlocks of the former are (partially) solved by the contradictions in the later.

Where Leader refers to Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology and its role in Lacan's thought to make this clear, it's possible to refer to the discussion above: the fragmented totality of the body as resolved in the ego is further developed, is repeated, as the inconsistency of the self as embodied not only the 'lack' in the self, but also in that in the Other – i.e. the phallus or master signifier. The 'Real' that lies between these two positions, that which can only be 'half said' because it is the product of the relation between the two orders, is that of a 'whole' that never existed. That is, the same 'problem' finds some sort of solution only with the introduction of the second set of relations. (In Žižek's account this 'parallax' is seen as the possibility of undermining the problem altogether – i.e. using the second position as a critique to overcome the first, rather than 'suture' it).

This relates to the question of universality in the following way: Leader offers his piece as an account of how an 'historically contingent' occurrence can be taken as universal. In question here is not only Freud's myth of the horde father in *Totem and Taboo* but the Oedipus myth itself. That is, it is the question of how a historically limited family arrangement can be taken to account for the psyche in all historical periods. His answer is that it is not a question of content but one of form: Lacan is able to move beyond Freud's use of myth as a 'narrative to account for some contradictory or impossible real' (Leader, 2003: 48) because he applies Freud's insight about the form of the dream to the Oedipus complex. As Freud remarks in a footnote in the seventh chapter of the *Interpretation of dreams*, and later elaborates in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, and which Žižek makes the basis of the opening chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, it is not only the specific content of a dream that is to be taken into

account in dream analysis, but also the relation different contents are given by the dream work – the form of the thought that is dreaming itself. For Lacan the Oedipus myth is just such a form: a relation in which one element is made to make all the others make sense, the use of one element as a guarantee of meaning. As has been stressed again and again here, where he once argued that this structure was as the name/‘no’ of the father as a natural/biological ‘Other of the Other’ he later held that it was relative – understood to be the celestial spheres in Aristotle’s time and the Noumena in Kant’s (and ours – see below).

The question is, then, what it is that enables this looking back; it is the question of the current set of relations and the ‘real’ they reveal when compared to those of the past. Though Chiesa makes brief mention of Marx in the final pages of *Subjectivity and Otherness* he (Marx) is left out of the historical discussion of the changing role of the Other (the move from Aristotle up through to Kant and Freud). As noted above, Lacan does precisely that, pointing out that surplus-enjoyment and surplus-value are not just analogous but the same thing (see footnote 164 of the present study). That is, the modern subject *is* that of capitalism and is formed by it. Where the generalization of the exchange extraction rules, one has a different subjective relation to the world. That is, the modern subject is different than that of antiquity by virtue of the different master signifier and fundamental fantasy that accompanies it. Not only that, but the modern subject allows a judgment upon the subject of the past. Given what has been said above the conclusion on the status of the universal can be made clearer: one can only look upon the past from the now, but that does not mean that one does not find the universal in the past; it is only in comparing the contingent, historical present to the past that one is able to discern the

universal. Žižek stresses this point in his critique of Postone's re-reading of *Capital*: Marx of course knows that society has not always been divided into classes, but nonetheless history is the history of class struggle – i.e. the battle over the creation and distribution social wealth and power. Likewise, abstract labour only comes to fully exist in capitalist economies, but nonetheless it holds the key to understanding the role of labour in all of history (Žižek, 2010a: 196-7).¹⁸⁷ This is why Marx's method is necessarily historical: as Pilling argues with reference to Marx's letter to Kugelmann (made famous by Lenin), one can only understand 'value' by understanding that it is an historical product that changes across time. That is, there is no thing-in-itself called value that exists ahistorically as an unchanging essence, but only the thing-in-itself as present in particular appearances: 'The task of Marx's critique of political economy was *not* one which involved him finding a "constant" in terms of which everything could be quantified but of establishing the laws of mediation through which the "essence" of phenomena manifested itself as "appearance"' (Pilling, 1972: 284). Lacan's use of Marx, when taking Chiesa's work into account, can thus be understood as a discussion of the relation of the modern subject to capitalism, the former being generated by the latter. This is of course taken up by Žižek from the beginning.

This feeds directly into the distinction that he draws between the 'potential' and the 'virtual' (Žižek, 2012: 229-30), and can perhaps be understood with reference to a 'parallax view' on the Noumena. From one side it is a lost whole, reference to which leads to the assumption of the possibility of reclaiming it – what was once lost will be had once again. From another perspective the 'Thing' is 'always already lost' – i.e. a phantasm that never actually was – and when the new arises it does so as 'that which will

have always been': it was not a substantial essence that merely had to be revealed but the creation of something new where there was before nothing, but can retroactively be seen to have always existed in potential. That is, where it was once 'virtual' – impossible from the perspective of the present, of a logic completely foreign to it – it becomes a realized potential, something that could always have been had. There are several references that can be found in Žižek's work that can help make this clear, but here is one: Stephen J. Gould's *Wonderful Life*, to which Žižek makes reference in *Tarrying with the Negative*. In this book Gould argues that evolution is not a teleological, necessary unfolding, but contingent to the point that if history could be rerun the same outcome would never reoccur. He develops this idea with reference to the fossils found in the Burgess shale in the B.C. Rockies which, when found, were originally classified according to existing categories. Closer inspection, however, revealed that the remains found were of creatures that had no classificatory relation to those that had been known up to that time – they were species that had once existed but were totally wiped out by some contingent event. This presents a challenge for the theory of evolution: if evolution is the survival of the fittest, i.e. the doctrine that those who adapt best to the environment will outlive their competitors, the question is one of *which environment*. If contingency eliminates a certain environment one species' better adaptation to it comes to nil:

Perhaps the Grim Reaper works during brief episodes of mass extinction, provoked by some unpredictable environmental catastrophes (often triggered by impacts of extraterrestrial bodies). Groups may prevail or die for reasons that bear no relationship to the Darwinian basis of success in normal times. Even if fishes hone their adaptations to peaks of aquatic perfection, they will all die if the ponds dry up. [...] [Certain creatures] may prevail because a feature evolved long ago for a different use has fortuitously permitted survival during a sudden and unpredictable change in rules (Gould, 1989: 48).

From this Gould concludes that contingency *is* necessity, but viewed from the present: one can not guess beforehand which species will win out because conditions change, but once history has passed the story of a species' survival and change can be understood.¹⁸⁸

The same logic is also to be found in Marx: it is not that there was some initial, substantial and knowable potential within any specific person, but only the historical material development of human relations. This is present as early as Marx's 1844 manuscripts, where human essence is not 'anthropological' – i.e. predetermined by some particular set of human attributes – but 'comes into being' with a particular mode of production.¹⁸⁹

If man's *feelings*, passions, etc., are not merely anthropological characteristics in the narrower sense, but are truly *ontological* affirmations of his essence (nature), and if they only really affirm themselves in so far as their *object* exists *sensuously* for them, then it is clear: [...] (4) only through developed industry, i.e. through the mediation of private property, does the ontological essence of human passion come into being [...] (Marx, 1992: 375).¹⁹⁰

Similar comments can be found in *Capital* – for example in the chapter on co-operation, where Marx argues that the formal subsumption of manufacture by capitalism precedes its real subsumption in the form of concentrating 'free' labour in co-operative work that is directed by capital and the capitalist. Like the co-operative work of the past (one example he turns to is the construction of the pyramids) this increases the productivity of labour. Unlike the co-operative work of the past, capitalist co-operation relies on private property and workers who are 'free' to sell their labour-power (Marx, 1977: 452) and serves as the basis for new forms of the division of labour and the development of machinery. This does not happen of itself, but is instead 'not developed by the worker until his labour belongs to capital' (Ibid: 451).¹⁹¹

To be clear, this is not to introduce a teleology where capitalism is a necessary step in development: it too is an historically contingent formation. As Ellen Wood argues in her

Origin of Capitalism (via the work of Robert Brenner), it is not that capitalism was an essence hidden behind the ‘distortions’ of feudal relations that was released when these fetters were thrown off and the market allowed to be its ‘natural’ self; It is instead the product of the particular conditions found in England in the 16th Century. As one of her students has put it, had an asteroid hit Earth and destroyed England before the logic of capitalism came into being we would not now have it as a social or economic system. It is easy to hear echoes of Gould’s comments on contingency and necessity and the replaying of history.

While Chiesa does not take his argument about Lacan’s work all the way to the point of discussing Marx’s place in it, the work above has pointed to it and provides something of a further scaffolding for Johnston’s claim that an historical succession of master signifiers is what delivers the modern subject into (im)material existence.¹⁹² Chiesa also provides the means to understanding two further points. First are Žižek’s comments on what he sees as the self-reflexive, cynical, post-modern, hedonistic flight from large scale universalist radical political projects – collectively grouped under what he calls the ‘decline of symbolic efficiency’ – which often appears in Žižek’s work in the figure of a neo-Nazi skinhead who can cite all the sociological arguments about why his anger manifests in brutal violence to only continue what he’s doing.¹⁹³ The second are the political implications of seeing perversion as the root of freedom and the subject. Both these points relate to Chiesa’s claim that ‘what Freud called “erotogenic masochism” [...] Lacan rebaptizes *jouissance*’ (Chiesa, 2007: 165).

Chiesa shows that drive is masochistic in the sense that, if from the perspective of the individual to-be there is nothing but the self, any aggressivity is actually self related. The

implication of this is that drive does not involve enjoyment as a pre-existing energy which pushes it along, but that instead enjoyment and *drive itself* (as opposed to instinct) are the product of the fragmented whole that is the human body and the interaction of the individual with the social world (the Other) and desire – first in the form of the primary caregiver. Following from this, *jouissance* can be mistaken as a natural essence that has been lost and can be regained: because of one's initial subjection to the Other something, nothing, and freedom are misconstrued, thereby becoming *the Thing*, lack, and variously an 'acting out', 'transgressive' behaviour, symptom formations, etc.¹⁹⁴ Here, of course, enters the work of psychoanalysis – its 'ethics,'¹⁹⁵ Chiesa's discussion of which sheds light on Žižek's claim that as perverse, capitalism fills in what should be empty – i.e. the *objet a*, the embodiment of creation *ex nihilo* and freedom – with the call of enjoyment from the superego (Žižek, 2006a: 299-308). Involved here is what Chiesa calls the 'Realization of the Symbolic' – where the Real fuses with the Symbolic and is permeated with enjoyment – as exemplified in Lacan's work by Kant and the Marquis de Sade.

Following Chiesa's sketch of the changing place of the Other, which began with Antiquity, Kant is contrasted with Aristotle and presented as his inversion. Where the sovereign good was guaranteed by the immobile mover and nature in the form of the celestial spheres, Kant attempted to (in Chiesa/Lacan's account) 'found a new nature' and the good by making the Thing (Noumena) present in our actions as the categorical imperative. Where the Noumena could never be had, was an unknowable blank, the good became the empty, formal dictum of the categorical imperative (Chiesa, 2007:171; 173). The implications Chiesa draws from this are 1) that the Noumena as the basis of nature and the good becomes human law as nature, 2) there is a flattening, a destruction of any

hierarchy of ‘goods’, in that so long as it is universalized anything can be considered the sovereign good (thereby opening up the possibility of ‘radical evil’), and 3) Aristotle is in a sense inverted in that the categorical imperative becomes the guarantee of the Thing as ‘sovereign good’ in that it is not only the good, but also includes happiness (Kant, 1997: 104). That is, the highest good (the Thing) can not be had without Freedom, god, heaven, and soul as postulates, as the means of the infinite work in the afterlife to which happiness (read ‘enjoyment’) will accord. This is the ‘Real-ization of the Symbolic’ in that everything, every act, becomes a means of enjoyment (perhaps to be understood in the vein of ‘absolute actuality’). This may not seem sinister until de Sade is brought into the picture: he’s a good Kantian (according to Chiesa and Žižek) in the sense that he raises enjoyment as pleasure-pain to the level of a universal law, resulting in the infinite torture and debasement of his fictitious victims. The cost of making the good ‘immanent’ to one’s activity is to eradicate the good in a wash of solipsistic enjoyment.

In *The Parallax View* Žižek presents the collapse of the Real into the Symbolic – the ‘short circuit’ of S1 by *a*, the decline of symbolic efficiency as embodied in the cynical Skinhead – as ‘generated by the globalization of the Symbolic.’ That is, it is a product of capitalism transforming more and more of the objects of our lives into commodities to be enjoyed (‘enjoyed’ to be taken literally as legally possessed bearers of *jouissance*/value) and ‘correlative’ to the ‘naturalization’ of capitalism as a social system (Žižek, 2006a: 301-311). The link to Chiesa becomes clear when remembering Sohn-Rethel’s thesis that the Kantian subject is the product of the generalization of the exchange abstraction.¹⁹⁶ While using this argument to develop his position on money, thought, and ideology for the first time, Žižek also discusses cynicism: just because people know that money isn’t

magic, just because they know that it is a social product and mock it, doesn't mean that their actions don't prove the opposite. This was the initial 'perversion' of capitalism: the fetishism of the commodity is an act and the form of thought rather than any particular thought. Cynicism also points to a further, second-level perverse aspect of capitalism: the destruction of any hierarchy of morality, the waning of the idea that 'another world is possible,' and the 'Realization of the Symbolic' in the form of the hedonistic flight into consumerism.

At one point in *Capital, Volume I* Marx writes that a commodity is 'a born leveler and cynic' (Marx, 1976: 179), a comment that can be understood with the help of Peter Osborne's (2012) brief discussion of the historical relationship of money and cynicism. Remember that Sohn-Rethel argues that the coinage of money in Ionian Greece was the first step towards the abstract subject of science – that of Newton and Kant. In similar fashion Osborne points out that the archetypal cynic (Diogenes of Sinope) turned to the laws of nature in place of convention because he was told to 'debase the coinage' by the Delphic Oracle – which he initially took as a call to counterfeit money. Money was of course 'currency', the gold coins whose worth was guaranteed by the current rulers of the state. So, Diogenes came to understand the Oracle's words to mean to debase human authority and instead embrace only that of nature, which saw the most vulgar activities treated as objects of virtue. Starting here and then tracing some of the historical vicissitudes that cynicism takes Osborne comes to Simmel's discussion of the relation between capitalist money and cynicism: 'The concept of a market price for values which, according to their nature, reject any evaluation except in terms of their own categories and ideals, is the perfect objectification of what cynicism presents in the form of a

subjective reflex.’ That is, Simmel saw stock exchanges and other financial institutions as the ‘nurseries of cynicism’ because they partook in large turnovers of exchange-value which ‘brought about the most absurd combinations of personal and objective values.’ Not only this, the problem mollifies itself: money’s ‘enslavement of life in its means’ sees release from it ‘sought in a mere means which conceals its final significance – in the fact of “stimulation” as such’ (all quotes Simmel in Osborne, 2012: 21). That is, the generalization of the exchange abstraction, the formalism that is money, results in the attempt to escape it in any pleasure whatsoever. Like in Chiesa’s view on Kant’s categorical imperative, the ‘naturalization’ of capitalism – i.e. understanding it as the only possible social system – is the result of applying its universal form to everything and thereby making every object one of enjoyment.

In addition to helping understand Žižek’s position on capitalism and perversion, Chiesa’s account also makes the political implications of the masochism of drive clearer. For Chiesa masochism – perversion as such – as the logic of drive¹⁹⁷ is the means by which something is made from nothing, the means by which the subject comes to exist from a non-differentiated individual – the act of creation.¹⁹⁸ In capitalism this becomes explicit for the whole of society for the first time: all that is solid melts into air, traditional ways of life are destroyed replaced with new ones that are in constant flux. This masochistic self-beating finds a more clearly political expression in Žižek’s work in his discussion of a scene in *Fight Club* in which the protagonist (played by Edward Norton) beats himself up in front of his boss – while blaming his boss for doing it. In acting out his ‘symbolic identification’ in this way Norton’s character is able to free himself from the chains of work by realizing, in physical form, that it is instead himself

that gives the ‘master’ his power (Žižek, 2002: 252; 2003b). This happens three times in the film: first in the scene where Brad Pitt’s character – a projection of Norton’s mind that no one else can see – and Norton beat each other up and thereby invent ‘fight club’; second in the scene where Norton’s character beats himself in front of his boss; and lastly in the final scene where Norton shoots himself in the head (and survives) in order to rid himself of the master that still resides within – this is Pitt’s character, whom Norton mistakenly believes is the leader behind ‘Project Mayhem,’ an organization aimed at destroying consumerist ways of living. The positive element that Žižek sees in the second beating – the destructive/creative tendency that is drive, the principle of separation from the big Other – is lost in the fascist tones of the film: first is the focus on finance capital (i.e. the destruction of credit card companies in the final scene) which historically has led to questions of who controls finance and thereby corrupts it (i.e. racist ideologies; tales about the ‘elders of Zion’; the idea that destroying the financial sector will return the economy back to its ‘material’ roots) rather than the structure of capitalism as such; second, as Žižek notes, the film only manifests the destructive side of capitalism (Žižek, 2002: 258). The problem is in the move from the first form of violence to the third: where drive and capitalism are violent creative-destructions, *Fight Club* only gives successive violence: from the liberation from consumerist ideology to the creation of an organization that provides an ‘orgy’ of destruction rather than creation. That is, it involves the destruction of the object – which ends with a symbolic identification and the acceptance of a social mandate/role and Oedipalization – rather than a change in the form of the symbolic itself and thereby also the form of symbolic identification.¹⁹⁹ That is, Norton’s character can now have a relationship with his love interest, and everyone else (i.e.

society) gets to 'start over' – but within a capitalist universe; Norton has found a way to accommodate himself to the capitalist world.

This opens the question of what the alternative might be. In the essay in which Žižek discusses *Fight Club* he suggests that this alternative is the Party – this because it shares the form of the practice of psychoanalysis. All the above was an attempt to argue that because a subjective mediation lies at the heart of capitalist economies capitalism can be inspected from a psychoanalytic perspective. Further, it was argued that psychoanalysis is a relevant means to look at that subjective mediation because it itself relies on capitalist exchange relations in order to function: because it is a practice that is not so much concerned about the internal, psychological motivations or capacities of atomized individuals but about the processes by which people are able to interact with others and the world at all, the categories of psychoanalysis are not simply the tools for an individual's therapist but also critical categories for understanding the social world. It was argued that the Subject is the product of capitalism and that capitalism needed this subject to function. It was also argued that the modern subject is also the means of destroying capitalist social relation – i.e. that it was one of capitalism's internal limits. What has not been emphasized is that the flip side of the creation of the modern *individual* is the simultaneous creation of individual *classes*: capitalism is such that each has a connection to others in their particular relation to the means of production. Where psychoanalysis relies on money in order to show the social nature of individuality as such, the Party thus uses liberal individual freedoms (for example, the freedom of association) to demonstrate the social nature of liberal social organization as a means to overcome its limitations. This is the question that is developed in more detail in the

following chapter with an eye to the history and sociology of the Bolshevik Party as well as the German SPD.



Chapter 7 – The Party: history, possibility, actuality

In order to supersede the *idea* of private property, the *idea* of communism is enough. In order to supersede private property as it actually exists, *real* communist activity is necessary. History will give rise to such activity, and the movement which we already know *in thought* to be a self-superseding movement will in reality undergo a very difficult and protracted process. But we must look upon it as a real advance that we have gained at the outset an awareness of the limits as well as the goal of this historical movement and are in a position to see beyond it.

– Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*

He was an important leader, so people began to look at him as somebody who was going to do something for them. But Debs was always hostile to the idea that the point of organizing a socialist party was to get its leader elected, or that it would solve anything. So this is how Debs responded to people who saw him as the solution: ‘If I could lead you into the promise land, I could lead you back out again.’ That is, if I had the personal power to grant you socialism, then I’d have the power to take it away again. Ok, good quote. But how do you solve this problem?

– Todd Chretien, ‘Lenin’s Theory of the Party.’



The necessity of the Party as a form of organization appropriate to overcoming capitalism needs to be further developed. The starting point, explored in the preceding chapter, lies hidden in the liberation implied in *Fight Club*, an example that seems wholly fantastical. A more readily understandable real-life example, however, appears in *Less Than Nothing* – a reference to the Egyptian uprising of February, 2011:

...the violence of the protestors was purely symbolic, an act of radical and collective civil disobedience: they suspended the authority of the state – it was not just an inner liberation, but a social act of breaking the chains of *servitude volontaire* (Žižek, 2012: 34-5).

Here, a personal liberation is contrasted to a collective one; in addition, in place of a literal self-beating to suspend the authority of the ‘master’ and one’s *servitude volontaire* it is the moment of acting differently that is seen as one of violence – a refusal to submit to the demands of the state. This reference to the state and collectivity is the key and has been referenced before in regards to the general strike of 1919 in Winnipeg: Bartleby’s refusal is not simply a standing back, but from the perspective of the state a violent action; from the perspective of state any refusal is seen as disorder, but from the

perspective of the refusal it is the creation of a new social organization. The question is then one of individual versus collective action, and collective action within and without the bounds of the state.

Against the assertions of Sharpe and Boucher that there are two Žižeks – one a good ‘radical democrat’ and the other an evil, Lukács-inspired totalitarian – it was earlier argued that there was a continuity to Žižek’s thought. This involved stressing his reliance on the commodity form and references to the formal power of Hegel’s monarch, where the later was seen as an empty universal that maintains the existing form of collective life and the Leninist Party, by contrast, stood as the particular as universal excess that could potentially blow apart existing structures and establish new ones. The discussion in the previous chapter was an attempt to establish, in broad outline, that the modern subject is the outcome of the capitalist mode of production and the freedom that comes with it is both embodied and obscured in the commodity form as money, the discussion turning to the role of money in the psychoanalytic treatment. In an earlier chapter it was shown that the relationships had in psychological clinics are not simply individual but already mediated by the professional associations – the community of professionals – and the market. Likewise, outside the clinic in that part of our everyday reality that Marx calls the ‘simple form of exchange’ it appears as though two equal individuals meet to mutually satisfy their needs, but developing the concepts that relate to capitalism from that point show that it is instead a phenomena that relies on an entire social and economic system: while exchange might at first glance appear as a personal, freely entered relationship between two individuals on the market, it is of course only possible because of a collection of people performing the same act, of contracts and laws guaranteed by the

‘monopoly of violence’ possessed by the state, the division of labour, and ultimately the alienation of the worker – ‘free’ from the means of reproducing themselves without the mediation of capital and the vending of their labour power.

The one-on-one relation between an analyst and an analysand can, of course, create positive results without reference to the political ether in which it swims. Likewise there is some freedom in the liberal democratic illusion: Žižek remarks that making the ‘old Marxist point’ that there is a gap between formal and real equality is not enough, giving credit to Herbert Marcuse, Claude Lefort, and Jacques Rancière for the idea that formal freedom and equality, though flawed, can lead to the fight for, and gains of, actual freedom and equality (Žižek 2009a: 67;143). Marx, too, should be included in this list:²⁰⁰ discussing the difference between wage work and slavery in ‘Results of the Immediate Process of Production’ he writes that ‘if supremacy and subordination come to take the place of slavery, serfdom, vassalage and other patriarchal forms of subjection, the change is *purely one of form*. The form becomes *freer*, because it is objective in nature, voluntary in appearance, *purely economic*’ (Marx, 1977:1027-28). He then refers to the following quote: ‘The condition of a labourer is superior to that of a slave, because a labourer *thinks* himself *free*; and this conviction, however erroneous, has no small influence on the character of a population’ (Edmonds in Marx, 1977: 1027, n26).²⁰¹

The point to be made here is threefold: first, though illusory this freedom is ‘effective’, has a result in people’s real lives; the second is that this version of the individual is historical and its particular character includes its opposite. The most famous portion of the *Grundrisse*, for example, is dedicated to showing the historical genesis of capitalism, which brought with it the development of the individual:

He appears originally as a *species-being, clan being, herd animal* – although in no way whatever as a [political animal] in the political sense. Exchange itself is a chief means of this individuation. It makes the herd-like existence superfluous and dissolves it. Soon the matter [has] turned in such a way that as an individual he relates himself only to himself, while the means with which he posits himself as individual have become the making of his generality and commonness’ (Marx, 1973b: 496).

That is, capitalism separated ‘man’ from the clan and provided a different means of social intercourse, one that brought with it a larger set of ‘real connections’ – i.e. the creation of large groups of people who share a relationship to the means of production. That is, the flip side of what is left out of a perspective that focuses solely on the ‘simple form of exchange’ is the creation of *class* as a collective actor.

The third, last point to be made is that the form is not incidental but necessary: there is no liberal individual without the commodity form. Likewise, there is no class without class-consciousness. This is of course fundamental to the arc of *History and Class Consciousness*: the limiting, reified social relationships seen under capitalism are made possible by the commodity form and are to be combated with the form of the party as a new social organization, one that encourages the development of all aspects of the worker along with their class consciousness. This is of course also included in the work of Marx and Engels: as previously noted, class is not a ‘sack of potatoes’, not a set of numbers that refers to all those of a certain socio-economic status; for Marx and Engels it is instead the conscious activity of one class in conflict with another, as can be seen in works from *The German Ideology* to *The 18th Brumaire*.²⁰² The question is then one of the *form* appropriate to class, rather than just individual, consciousness.

While not often stressed in discussions of Marx and Engel’s politics, they of course saw a need for a political party of the working class: arguing that ‘the concept of the proletarian party occupies a central position in the political thought and activity’ of the pair, Monty Johnstone opens his survey of the vicissitudes (and continuity) of Marx

and Engel's thoughts on the party by quoting a resolution they drafted for (and which was passed by) the 'First International' in 1872:

'Against the collective power of the propertied classes,' they argued, 'the working class cannot act as a class except by constituting itself into a political party distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed from the propertied classes.' This was 'indispensable in order to ensure the triumph of the social revolution, and its ultimate end, the abolition of classes' (Johnstone, 1967: 121; see also 132, 141, 145 n.1).

On this same point Lars Lih – who has written a detailed account of the actual (rather than perceived) status of Lenin's supposed recipe for a political party (i.e. *What Is To Be Done?*)²⁰³ – goes so far as to claim the following:

Ultimately, the vanguard outlook derives from the key Marxist assumption that 'the emancipation of the working classes must be the work of the working classes themselves.' Sometimes this dictum is viewed as the opposite of the vanguard outlook, but, in actuality, it makes vanguardism almost inevitable. If the proletariat is the only agent capable of introducing socialism, then it must go through some sort of process that will prepare it to carry out that great deed (Lih, 2008: 556).

That is, Marx's answer to 'who educates the educators' is action, and to fight as a class there must be some means to gather experience and disseminate it rather than expect that different people in different places will all come to the same conclusions at the same time. That is, where the property owning classes have been centrally organized in the form of the state for much longer, the working class needs to catch up. Lih argues this was common sense for the 'Erfurtians' – i.e. those who espoused the Erfurt program of the SPD: the assumption, made by the Social Democrats of Germany and those who looked to them, that revolution would come eventually, that the working class *was* coming into class consciousness, thereby making the aim of the party to speed up the process (which Lih argues is part of what he dubs 'the merger narrative'). Similarly, Johnstone argues that Marx and Engels pushed for a form of association that would unite the working classes of the world and 'shorten the process' by which workers would come to anti-capitalist (i.e. communist) conclusions and activity (Johnstone, 1967: 143).

Sociology against the Party; history against sociology

Before making a final statement of how Žižek's reference to the Party is akin to these conceptions it's important to briefly take up some of the classical sociology on the question of party politics (Ostrogorski, 1964a, 1964b; Michels, 1966; each of which inform Weber, 1958) for at least three reasons: first to head off some of the available criticisms of the party form based on these classical sources; second, to respond to Bosteels call, in the first of Žižek *et al's* *Idea of Communism* books, to eschew relying on a generic version of 'communism' which simply rejects the question of the party and party-state as outdated,²⁰⁴ and begin a 'comprehensive and collective rethinking, without epic or apostasy, of the links between communism, the history and theory of the State, and the history and theory of modes of political organization – with the later including not only the party but also the legacy of insurrectionary mass action and armed struggle...' (Bosteels, 2010: 64); lastly, because Lih briefly references Ostrogorsky and Michels in his study of Lenin and *What is To Be Done?* – at one point to argue that substitution/oligarchy is not particular to Lenin's vision but a problem in all democratic organizations, and at another to suggest that Lenin was perhaps naïve in his positive assessment of Russian workers (Lih, 2008: 551; 599).

While there are of course problems in Ostrogorski and Michels' arguments and their applicability to the RSDLP and political parties more generally they do contain some interesting insights. This is particularly true of Ostrogorski's study, which operates in historical mode. He shows that the party machines that came to be in England and the Unites States were a convention taken over from what was essentially a different political and economic structure in England before the industrial revolution: a limited organization

that didn't stretch far beyond the houses of government and bathed in the light of the 'old unity' – that of feudal and semi-feudal society – itself based in limited suffrage. He provides a rather rosy image of a gentry that acted out of a sense of public duty and governed through person influence and excellence in a social environ where all excepted this way of life and also did their duty (an image clearly taken from the eyes of the gentry itself). In this context parties mirrored this structure, revolving around strong personalities and based in a sense of duty and reverence for hierarchy. Here parties are socially and economically homogeneous and based on relatively small differences rather than in fundamental principles – in the case Ostrogorski focuses on (and to simplify), being either for or against the King (i.e. the Tories and the Whigs) (1964a: 14-15; 1964b: 350-1). With the social strife raised by the industrial revolution, the extension of suffrage that followed it, and the development of representational democracy, political parties extended beyond state institutions and into the civil sphere, in the process becoming formalized, mechanical organizations:²⁰⁵ needing to cater to socially and economically heterogeneous groups of people in order to take power in government parties were converted into a means of garnering votes. As the registration of voters was not initially institutionalized as part of the state, private interests took on this role; the success of these committees led to them being incorporated into the body of the parties, eventually leading to the re-birth of the party whip in the form of the party secretary: where the whip would trade money and favour for offices and seats in the old parties, the secretary stood as the prototype of the 'wire-puller' who chose those who could best sway the masses with crass feelings and zeal rather than rational argument and moral feeling – a process of selection 'repeated at every stage of the Organization' (1964a: 170; 177). In the end the

‘representatives’ put forward by the party and later elected to parliament were thus selected less by the citizen and more-so by the party elite.

While his ideal was of a non-party system where any individual who so desired could nominate themselves, and where vigorous public debate would lead to those best suited to govern being voted into power, Ostrogorski could see the need for collective action: he was not so much against parties as against permanent party machines. Non-permanent parties were, in his view, a legitimate and necessary means for like-minded citizens to get together on specific topics that they thought needed redress – and he saw taking power as a legitimate strategy or end – so long as they disbanded when the problem was solved (1964b: 356-9). He goes so far as to argue that ‘wherever liberty reigns’ the laws that flow from it only need capable administrators to carry them out, and new laws can be created by legislators who must obey only the openly expressed rationally argued opinions of an educated, sovereign people (Ibid: 352-3). If one for a moment forgets that his ‘liberty’ is primarily that of the individual on the market, reverberations of Saint Just and Marx can be felt.

His main objection to the political parties of his day was not only that their structure led to oligarchy, but that this structure could achieve this because it relied on the historically contingent education and habits of the masses: he held that people were largely ignorant, uninterested in participating in politics, or more than happy to let the party act as a fetishistic stand-in for their patriotism and politics needs (though he saw changes that began to point to this problem dissolving).²⁰⁶ Claiming to be representative, party caucuses – where parliamentary candidates were selected and party policy was debated – were too large to allow debate, demanded that candidates subordinate

themselves to the resolutions passed by the caucus, had representatives vetted for them by the hierarchy of influence established within the party, and were poorly attended. These four factors made independent thought nigh impossible and saw those ‘excellent’ individuals who could have done the public well leave politics because they felt stifled. Herein, then, lies the limit of Ostrogorski’s analysis: it revolves not around ‘democracy’ in general, but the particularities of representational democracy as developed in the direction of party politics.

The obvious differences between what he describes, the RSDLP as Lih describes it, and certain elements of the German Social Democratic Party are as follows: where Ostrogorski describes a machine designed to garner votes, the RSDLP aimed for self-determination in a non-parliamentary democracy modeled after the Paris Commune as a party organization that would facilitate seizing and transforming the state. Indeed where the primary element of the SPD eventually became the voting district (see below), for the RSDLP it was the local ‘cell’ (Elwood, 1974: 88-90);²⁰⁷ Ostrogorski describes an apathetic mass of people who are little interested in politics, and if they either are educated, independent, or interested, the party machine favours conformity and mediocrity and thereby squeezes them out. By contrast the RSDLP pushed for members to become fully involved activists who would develop many party-skills at different levels of organization (agitation, activity in party schools, group newspaper reading, attending as many meetings as possible, contributing to publications, etc.);²⁰⁸ In the party system of England ‘fetes’, ‘entertainments’, and other ‘periodical gatherings’ were geared towards giving people interested in party activity ritualistic supports of belief, a taste of the favour of the leader, material comfort, etc., (Ostrogorski, 1964a: 178-9) whereas the

social-democratic labour movement in Germany, for example, encouraged various different working class organizations (from dancing clubs to sports leagues) in order to develop a new type of culture (Lidtke, 1985); Where Ostrogorski describes the watering-down of party ideology as a function of having to appeal to the entirety of the voting public – a mass of heterogeneous classes, interests, and demands – Lih describes a party (or at least a leader) unafraid to limit its ideology and practice to a specific set of ideas.²⁰⁹ In Ostrogorsky's account, the tendency to cater to as many interests as possible in order to garner as many votes as possible meant that 'all interests but the general interest' ended up being represented. For Lenin it meant diluting the aims of the Party. In 1902 it would have meant accepting revisionism and a reformist, rather than revolutionary, platform. As Lih argues, there is nothing illiberal in this in that as a voluntary organization no one was forced to be a member of the Party, and so accepting multiple ideologies was not necessary, and even antithetical to presenting a competing world-view for a party dominated by Tzarism and competing with a multitude of other ideas (Lih, 2008: 747-5).²¹⁰ All this is to say that the intentions, organizational forms, and historical circumstance are different in the case of the liberal democratic parties of Western Europe and the RSDLP before the civil war.

A possible response to this lies in the work of Michels, who's study focused specifically on the Social Democratic Party of Germany and led him to conclude that party organizations (and in the end *all* organizations) obey the 'iron law of oligarchy.' In large part what Michels does is add some spurious psychological arguments (e.g. people's need for worship, and thus their identification of party leaders with the party itself) and a class component to the argument that there has to be larger, more centralized

organizations the more complex social needs, states, etc., become: those involved in paid party work eventually rely on it for their own material existence. That is, where in 1844 Marx described workers' organizations becoming ends-in-themselves in terms of a new form of social interaction not found in alienated work, Michels' describes the party turning into an end-in-itself because it becomes aligned with the status quo. While there are of course several places to look for critiques of this thesis²¹¹ – both in terms of its historical accuracy as well as its generalizability – perhaps the most pertinent is Carl Schorske's (1983) study of the SPD, which covers the years between the first and second Russian revolutions.

Schorske's central argument in this regard is that bureaucracies are not a universal phenomenon that drive in one specific direction (i.e. that of oligarchy) but that they are instead 'constructed for the purposes of those who build it. Political and social aims enter into its fibres at its birth, while the mentality and outlook of its framers are reflected and perpetuated in its lower echelons' (Schorske, 1983: 118). That is, there are more forces at play than just bureaucracy itself. To put it in Marxist terms, what Michels left out was not only historical circumstances but *counter-tendencies*. Where (in Schorske's account) the revisionists, the radicals, and the centrists in the SPD held that Germany was not in a revolutionary situation, none had a problem with making use of parliament in their tactics – because, for instance, unlike the parliaments of today they were an important part of disseminating ideas because debates were followed far more closely. As a consequence, when the parliamentary route became more and more successful it was decided to revise party organization in such a way as to strengthen the means of mobilizing the electorate.

This led to a manifestation, at the level of organization, of a fight based on differing theoretical starting points.

The revisionists held that social change was to be the product of the upper-classes crumbling under their own weight, making revolution and the violent seizing of power and the transformation of the state unnecessary. This led to a parting of ways at the level of organizational principle, as best felt in the more rural areas of Germany: tending to be more conservative their populations were less friendly to revolutionary party platforms to the point of completely ostracizing activists from social life. Where the party program was a radical one (passed at Erfurt), and where these areas were in many instances worked by revisionists, there was a push to limit the authority of the central organization over the local and provincial (rather, 'state' – *Land*) levels in order to be free to present a less radical program. At the same time the popularity of revisionism drove the radicals to demand more centralization in order to ensure party discipline and adherence to the party program. In the end both won out, where the party became more centralized and yet much autonomy was maintained at the other levels of the organization, allowing revisionist party members in conservative areas to tone down party objectives for their audiences. That is, parliamentarism plus revisionism plus the Erfurt program meant a push and pull between centralism and federalism. Schorske charts this tension up through to the formal splitting of the party during the First World War, while at the same time describing another tendency/counter-tendency: to avoid becoming *de facto* illegal in the face of a Germany-wide declaration of a state of siege (thereby allowing the state to legally harass anyone seen to be undermining German unity), the party executive could only make reformist statements in public and was forced to act as the means to discipline

party members who did otherwise. This meant that party discipline – for example in the form of parliamentarians voting *en bloc* on various issues as a symbol of the unity of the working class – became the means of maintaining a revisionist (i.e. reformist) position rather than that of the party program (i.e. the Erfurt program). The more this happened, the more the radical factions pushed back, culminating in an organizational split and the re-adoption of the Erfurt program by the newly established party.

The SPD became akin to the parties described by Ostrogorsky in that securing votes became its most prominent function, to the point where the electoral district organization became the basic organizational unit of the party (Schorske, 1983: 121). Instead of succumbing to Michels' 'iron law', however, it was pushed and pulled in ways particular to its historical circumstances – German laws, the length of the struggle for legitimacy, the popularity of and struggle against revisionism, etc. Schorske's account thus also establishes the ground for a further differentiation of Ostrogorski's and Michels' account from the Russian case. Lih goes down this route, suggesting that 'one might, in fact, argue that the Russian underground was forced to be *more* democratic than the SPD in some respects, because the constant arrests prevented the formation of a permanent elite and because support for the Party remained not only voluntary but highly dangerous' (Lih, 2008: 472).²¹² While it might raise some eyebrows (if not hackles) to put them in the same paragraph, Robert Service²¹³ takes a similar tack against Michels – as well as Weber – arguing that the conditions in Russia were very different than those in Germany, giving rise to different results: in addition to giving a list of outcomes of Bolshevik activity that would have defied Michels' expectations (Service, 1979: 200-1) he outlines factors and forces that led the Bolsheviks away from a relatively open, decentralized,

democratic organization that were not simply historical circumstance, the force of personality, nor the logic of bureaucracy (1979: 7). They were instead largely 1) a push from the grass roots of the party for greater centralization and organization of information and instructions in the face of worsening conditions during the civil war; 2) the decimation of the ranks upon seizing power²¹⁴ (where people were sent to fight, were constantly changing posts in light of new problems, etc.); and 3) a series of people at the top who were more than willing to oblige in demands for centralization (ibid: 207-8). Rabinovitch gives a similar account in the first and last installments of his trilogy on the Bolshevik Party and the Russian Revolution (1968; 2007), arguing that the relatively open, decentralized party of early 1917 was transformed not because of pre-conceived ideas about centralization and ‘totalitarian’ rule, nor an iron law, nor Lenin’s own supposed lust for power. Instead, he locates the cause of the change in historical circumstance and the push-and-pull between rank and file members,²¹⁵ the Bolshevik Central Committee, the Bolshevik Petersburg Committee and Military Organization, and the right/left/moderate ideological divisions found throughout. In the end both conclude that the shift in party organization was anything but inevitable.

Revolution: impossible and actual?

This brief treatment of the historical question is far from comprehensive but at least points in the direction of ‘totalitarianism’ being anything but the inevitable outcome of party organization. What it does is help eliminate recourse to what Marcuse called one dimensional thought – the emphasis on a supposed ‘is’ rather than a possible ‘ought.’ This does not account, however, for the necessity of the Party in working towards a sea-change in social organization, but it does not mean that one has to turn to an ‘ethical

socialism’ conceived of independently of what is. It demands a revolutionary theory of capitalism – as Lenin is quoted as saying above – but also a revolutionary theory of the Party. That was in large part approached in the previous chapter and above. It has to be reiterated that this latter question was also what Lukács attempted in the last chapter of *History and Class Consciousness*, writing that...

The Idea of the Communist Party, opposed and slandered by all opportunists, instinctively seized upon and made their own by the best revolutionary workers, has yet been seen purely in *technical* terms rather than as one of the most important *intellectual* questions of the revolution (Lukács, 1971: 295).²¹⁶

Some of the technical questions – as posed by Michels, who at the time of his study was a Social Democrat – have been reviewed above. One possible theoretical answer has also been provided above: that the form of capitalism holds within it the form of its negation – i.e. that of analysis/the Party. Driving this point home perhaps requires two more steps. The first is to re-iterate that the subject is its own product (and is so *via* the intervention of the capitalist signifier – money); the second is to compare the theory of the role of the party as presented in Lukács and draw the links between it and the practice of psychoanalysis.

The first can be approached with reference to Brockelman’s (2009) study of Žižek, in which he absolutizes the ‘impossible’ against Žižek’s own use of the term, arguing that in giving us a description of the Party Žižek thereby makes us ‘forgo the thesis of utopia’s “impossibility”’ (115): ‘We can’t say that utopia is “always already there” in the form of a potential to be realized without compromising this truth of its unanticipated nature’ (116).²¹⁷ Brockelman has, in saying this, reproduced a problem that Žižek sees in the work of Badiou and tries to eliminate: conceiving the ‘event’ as independent of ‘the situation’, as coming from somewhere outside it. Žižek argues,

constantly argues, that the Real as impossible that erupts in an Act is part of the situation. That is, the Real is not completely heterogeneous to or outside of the ‘situation,’ but ‘*extimate*’ to it – its excluded inside. In doing this Brockelman also misses Johnston’s description of one of Hegel’s arguments against Kant, one that Johnston sees as important for understanding Žižek’s reliance on German Idealism: in asserting something is completely unknowable to us (i.e. Noumenal) you betray at least a minimal knowledge of that unknowable thing.²¹⁸ Put in Lacanian terms, ‘the non-immanent Real is reached only through the deadlocks and inconsistencies immanent to the Symbolic’ (Johnston, 2008: 152). That is, once one describes the ‘inside’ one has already given a description of the ‘outside’, if only by negation. Žižek makes this argument about limits clear in the third chapter of *Tarrying With the Negative*: ‘We cannot *know* them, but we must *think* them’ (1993: 111).²¹⁹ The distinction is here between ‘contentless form’ and ‘formless content’: ‘formless content’ is *unknowable* ‘abstract matter’, the product of the form of our thought, and ‘contentless form’ the practice of thought itself (Žižek, 2012: 167-8). In this instance, the ‘contentless form’ is capitalism rid of its capitalist content in the psychoanalytic relationship (see the previous chapter). That is, the limit is in one’s practice, the ‘unknowable’ a product of current ways of doing things and not of the world itself. This is all to say that the only reason Žižek can say there is something that is impossible in the first place is because it is ‘impossible’ by dint of the form of the situation in which we find ourselves, but that form itself contains the means of its overcoming.

A very brief discussion of Hegel’s version of ‘actuality’ – through the eyes of Carlson and Žižek – can make this point clearer. In Carlson’s account (2007: 402-13),

when in *The Philosophy of Right* Hegel pronounces that the rational is actual and the actual rational he is not making an *apologia* for the Prussian state but saying that there is no essence without that essence appearing, and that all that is can be understood rationally – whether it be irrational, contingent, or otherwise (Carlson, 2007: 393). This only becomes clear, argues Carlson, if one turns to the *Logic*: and as perhaps comes as no surprise, ‘actuality’ does not have a single meaning for Hegel, but passes through several developments. These are formal actuality, real actuality, and absolute actuality, which make up some of the final sections of the ‘doctrine of essence’ and Hegel’s discussion of objectivity. The first moment roughly corresponds to vulgar empiricism: what is, is, and one cannot determine the links between any property.²²⁰ Here none of the appropriate categories (actuality, necessity, impossibility, contingency) can be held to any real distinction and collapse into each other. In the second moment, all the links between properties are taken into account: rather than isolated moments there is instead ‘the totality,’ where any event is related to every other one and cannot be understood without reference to them. This is still not absolute actuality, however, which in Carlson’s account is when what is can negate itself – that is, actuality appears as contingency, where contingency is the freedom to not actualize.²²¹ Here, then, the difference between form and content disappear as there is no longer merely formal determinations and latent content to be realized: there is instead only the ‘activity of form’, where appearance is understood to be essence (Ibid: 411). It is this third moment, and Žižek’s take on it, that is of interest for the present discussion.

It is the shift to necessity as contingency that sustains his attention here, and to explain it he turns to Marx: regardless of how it began, once set in motion the logic of

capitalism is such that contingent conditions allow it to manifest itself (Žižek, 1996c: 403). There are perhaps three ways to grasp this: First, every contingent capital, competing with every other, is what makes capitalism what it is – Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand.’ A further example is money itself: the embodiment of ‘essence’, of value, it transforms any contingent thing (i.e. commodities) into its equivalent. Lastly, once operative the logic of capitalism turns what appears to be external to it into one of its own determinations. One way to understand this is through Marx’s description of ‘formal subsumption’: a pre-existing labour process may not change in-itself when subjected to relations of wage-labour and capital (i.e. the way the work is actually performed can remain the same) but its fundamental end changes and becomes that of capital: the creation of more money (Marx: 1997: 1019-1023). More properly speaking – and this is the example that Žižek actually gives – each component of capitalist production of itself does not explain the functioning of capitalism; once the logic of capitalism comes into existence, each of its component parts performs a different function than it did before, subordinated to capital’s tendencies. That is, every particular embodies the essence of the universal. This can be seen in Marx’s discussion, in the introduction of the *Grundrisse*, of the difference between the historical genesis of different elements of what becomes capitalism and how they work together in bourgeois society (Marx, 1973b: 107): while money has existed in many different societies, ‘it makes an historic appearance in its full intensity only in the most developed conditions in society’ (103). More generally speaking, Marx puts it this way:

At the very beginning these [the preconditions of a mode of production] may appear as spontaneous, natural. But by the process of production itself they are transformed from natural into historical determinants, and if they appear to one epoch as natural presuppositions of production they were its historical production for another (Marx, 1973b: 97).

To put it in terms that Žižek uses, what was once a presupposition becomes posited: the subject retroactively chooses its own causes. Or, to use another turn-of-phrase used by Marx, after the first cycle of the movement of capital the son begets the father.²²²

At least, that's how it may appear. Where the self-negation of any property in 'absolute actuality' is taken as akin to freedom – i.e. self-mediation – it is not yet the completion of the move from objectivity to subjectivity (i.e. the 'doctrine of essence' is not the end of Hegel's *Logic*). The pitfall to be avoided is then that of taking capital as if it is a 'self-mediating' entity. Marx presents the tendency to do so in political economy and everyday life the following way:

The mystification in the *capital-relation* emerges at this point [when labour-power is subsumed under the wage-form]. The value-sustaining power of labour appears as the self-supporting power of capital; the value-creating power of labour as the self-valorizing power of capital, and, in general, in accordance with its concept *living* labour appears as to be put to work by *objectified* labour (Marx, 1997:1020-1021).

This is of course the work of commodity fetishism, and is directly related to the critique that McNally levels against Postone's reading of Marx: Postone takes abstract labour to simply be an empirical fact, forgetting that capitalism is parasitic on maintaining abstract labour and that the latter is subject to the push-back of workers. As a consequence Postone is lead to understand capitalism as 'a self-mediating social mediation' (McNally, 2004: 197-200). Marx himself, of course, appears to make this claim at the end of chapter four of *Capital*, at one point writing that value is the 'dominant subject' of the process of capitalist production and exchange, and is at this moment in 'identity with itself', a 'self moving substance' (Marx, 1977: 255-6). This is, however, only when it possesses the form of money (Ibid: 255), a form which he goes on to argue disguises that its supposed self-mediation is actually based on eviscerating labour-power – a power which Marx

even later in *Capital* calls a ‘self-activating capacity’ (Ibid: 980).²²³ Žižek, too, realizes this, writing the following in ‘Lenin’s Choice’:

Is capital, then, the true Subject/Substance? Yes and no: for Marx, this self-engendering circular movement is – to put it in Freudian terms – precisely the capitalist ‘unconscious fantasy’ which parasitizes upon the proletariat as ‘pure substanceless subjectivity’; for this reason capital’s speculative self-generating dance has a limit, and brings about the conditions of its own collapse (Žižek, 2002: 283).²²⁴

In the paper where he discusses ‘absolute actuality’, however, it may at first appear that Žižek simply does not address this issue. This is because in the piece in question (“Hegel With Lacan, or the Subject and Its Cause”) Marx’s take on capitalism and contingency is merely used as an example to help Žižek get at the point he is trying to make in regards to the Lacanian conception of the Subject. Following his use of Marx he makes a turn to religion. More specifically, he turns to a discussion of Hegel’s account of the creation of the Christian community as the embodiment of the Holy Spirit in the wake of Christ’s crucifixion.²²⁵ This is because he acknowledges that absolute necessity ‘is not Hegel’s last word’ (Žižek, 1996c: 403). However, the point he makes is not so much about Christianity as about ‘the subject’s belief in itself’ (Ibid: 405), and so it can easily be applied to commodity fetishism. Take the following quote about the Holy Spirit and the activity of the Christian community, from the paper in question:

The relationship of cause and effect is here dialectically reflected. On the one hand, the cause [the Holy Spirit] is unambiguously the product of the subject’s activity; it is ‘alive’ only insofar as it is continually resuscitated by the passion of the believers. On the other hand, these same believers experience the cause as the Absolute, as what sets their lives in motion – in short, as the cause of their activity; by the same token, they experience themselves as mere transient accidents of their cause. Subjects therefore posit the cause, yet they posit it not as something subordinated to them but as their absolute cause. What we encounter here is again the paradoxical temporal loop of the subject: the cause is posited, but as what it ‘always-already was’ (Žižek, 1996c: 406).

Clearly it is the workers who generate value, but it appears as though value determines the actions of the workers and they posit it as such a cause. Important is the role played by Christ in this discussion of the Holy Spirit: first he is an *object* of doctrine – the story

of the ascension; secondly he is a point of *subjective* identification – feeling as one with Christ on the cross; then he is the *subject-substance* of the community, alive as the Holy Spirit. While Žižek discusses these moments in relation to different forms of syllogism, they roughly correspond to the moments of the *Logic* presented by Žižek: first, the contingent individual comes to embody essence/the beyond in the world (i.e. ‘absolute actuality’); second is the moment of narrativization, where one chooses which story one wants to explain the cause/effect relations one sees (which roughly corresponds to Carlson’s discussion of ‘the relation of causality’ – 2007: 418-426); This is not yet substance-as-subject because the narrative is not yet one that actually determines ‘the absolute’ – the social-substance embodied in *everyone’s* activity as the community of believers, and not in just one individual as Christ (i.e. the moment of ‘reciprocity’ – that found at the very end of the section on the ‘objective’ in Hegel’s logic. See Carlson, 2007: 426-31).

The key is in that with which one is said to identify in Christ: his abandonment on the cross, the question of why he had been forsaken. Remember that in chapter three of the present study it was argued that in Žižek’s take on religion – at around the time of the ‘Leninist turn’ – the logic of Christ was compared to the logic of the commodity (Žižek, 2001a: 100) as it was in Marx’s 1844 manuscripts (Marx, 1992: 261); note too that Marx’s comments about the son ‘begetting the father’ is a reference to Christ and is found precisely at the moment when Marx declares that value is a ‘self-moving substance’ (Marx, 1977: 256); also recall that Žižek’s primary argument surrounding Christ was – as opposed to what he sees as the standard reading of the crucifixion – that He could be taken as a negative, disruptive universal rather than a positive, conservative

one (as was also argued in regards to the Leninist party and Hegel's monarch in the above discussion of Laclau and Rancière). That is, when Christ dies so too does God – one realizes that He does not exist (this also appears in 1996c: 408). When he writes that the subject 'is posited as what it "always-already was"' (quoted above) he means that the community already created God through its own activity, but in killing God that community comes into their own creation – i.e. they are free, self-mediating subjects. The caveat he adds is that this is still not a 'transparent' community. Although now seen as incomplete or barred, the big Other *still exists*: people still can't control *all* the outcomes of their actions, there is still an external, 'immaterial' social element that enables people to interact.²²⁶

In addition to noting that Hegel's discussion of doctrine, ritual, and belief is the logic that Žižek uses to describe ideology in his 1994 paper in *Mapping Ideology* (see also Sigurdson, 2012: 48-53), taking all this into account reveals his comments to be more directly related to overcoming capitalism than it might first appear. Indeed, fourteen years later, on the final page of *Living in the End Times*, Žižek explicitly links the Leninist party to the Holy spirit: the death of God means the birth of a community based in the non-existence of the big Other. The analogy with capitalism and money is, then, this: God as Value and Christ as Money are the unconscious embodiment of human self-determination – labour-power as Marx's 'self-activating capacity'; Christ as money is the means of overcoming this alienation, if only he is taken as a means to show that God was always dead; once this is done labour as self-activating capacity becomes a new, conscious community – though still with externalized, non-certain, forms of social interaction. The argument that Žižek makes in regards to Christ was above applied to

money: ‘why has thou forsaken me’ without ‘into thy hands I commit my spirit’ makes Christ a revolutionary; the connections made between people through capitalist money without the separation that money also brings is progressive – likewise replacing the money-form with the party-form minus the trend toward parliamentarism and the unification of diverse interests; lastly, perversion without the big Other is not perversion, but psychoanalysis.²²⁷ The further point to be clarified is that the ‘community of believers’/Party has to then be understood as *both* ends and means, which will also address some of Rothenberg’s concerns as presented in the introduction to chapter seven. Before taking this up, however, it remains to make some clarifications not about the actuality of capitalism and value, but the actuality of revolution. For this a turn to Lukács is necessary.

While he doesn’t use the Hegelian terminology (Lukács writes of ‘*Aktualität*’ rather than ‘*Wirklichkeit*’) his monogram on Lenin can easily be seen in the light of ‘absolute actuality.’ Fundamental to his argument is not only that Lenin could see the ‘actuality of the revolution’ but that he was building on the work of Marx: where Marx saw the actuality of revolution in the logic of capital *per se*, Lenin saw it also in the particularities of imperialism and monopoly capitalism as well as the conditions in Russia. That is, Lukács argues that there is an actuality at the level of the universal (capitalism as such), the particular (monopoly capitalism), and the individual (Russia).²²⁸ The difference is that he is not talking about the effectivity of capitalism – the fact that immaterial value animates the capitalist system and the fact that the logic of capital is more than just the sum of its parts – but its flip side: the revolutionary potential that comes with it. Lukács was clear that this didn’t mean that revolution was possible at any

moment,²²⁹ but instead that every political problem and outburst could be seen as a manifestation of the revolutionary potential pregnant in capitalism. In contrast to the ‘mediocre scholar’ who ‘does nothing more than interpret as “general Laws”, in a truly abstract way, certain aspects of phenomena limited in time and space, and apply them accordingly,’ the ‘genius’...

...on the other hand, for whom the true essence, the living, active main trends of an age are clear, sees them at work behind every event of his time and continues to write about the decisive basic issues of the whole epoch even when he himself thinks he is only dealing with everyday affairs (Lukács, 1970: 10).²³⁰

The link to capitalism as ‘absolute actuality’ is clear: where in capital contingent elements partake in the ghostly logic of accumulation, in contingent everyday struggle one can see the living logic of revolution. Consequently, the role of the Party is to show these links to all the oppressed and prepare them to take best advantage of those moments.

Before turning to the question of the self-causing subject and the political community as both ends and means (as was done in regards to the organization of psychoanalysis in chapter six), a formal link between psychoanalysis and the Party can be drawn. Just as the Party is there to make connections between what might otherwise be taken as insignificant everyday occurrences, the analyst works to demonstrate how insignificant everyday slips of the tongue, etc., are in fact symptoms that point towards the whole of one’s subjective organization. This can in part be seen, in a rather morbid vein, in Henry Bond’s Lacanian analysis of photographs of murder scenes taken by English police agencies in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Bond points out that ‘the perverse subject often creates a scenario in which *all is not as it seems...*’ (2009: 86), where a ‘*punctum*’ (a term akin to Lacan’s *objet a* developed by Roland Barthes) is used as ““a

spark of contingency” that the pervert often leverages in order to instigate a level of doubt, or hesitation, in the viewer, jury members, an interrogator.’ The ‘seemingly trivial *punctum*’ is used to ‘undermine a hitherto dependable logic.’ In place of the quietly accepted norm, the pervert ‘offers instead open-endedness, and a quixotic shifting that produces a permanent state of permeability...’ (all quotes Ibid: 87). All that one need remember here is that the analyst shares the ‘discourse of the pervert’ to take the point: the role of the analyst is to use the analysand’s own everyday parapraxes, etc., to encourage them to realize that the world is not as it seems: there is no big Other; it is unstable and changeable; it is the product of your relation to the social world. In words closely echoing Lukács’ on ‘genius’, Gallagher describes the analyst’s relation to these signifiers:

The analyst is not the possessor of a general knowledge which is then applied to particular cases. The dictum of Picasso: “I do not search, I find” is quoted approvingly by Lacan. The analyst is not to construct theories about the subject who is speaking to him, he is there to hear and to reveal to that subject the incontrovertible signifiers which appear concretely in his spoken discourse (Gallagher, 1995:14-15).

Likewise, against the hegemonic understanding of capitalism, the Party seeks to make links between events to show its inherent instability and the possibility of change. Not only that, it is not simply a work of intellectual suasion: it involves approaching the *desire* and feelings of the workers. This finds expression in Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?*: if indictments of tsarist repression could be better organized by activists of the RSDLP, then...

...the very simplest worker will understand, *or will feel*, that the dark force that mocks and oppresses the student and the sectarian, the *muzhik* and the writer, is the same that oppresses and weighs on him at each step of his life. And, when he does feel this, he will himself desire, with and overwhelming desire, to respond – and he will know how to do it ... (Lenin, 2008: 738).²³¹

That is, Party work is not only to point out how everyday struggles are related to the destruction of capitalism, but also how each group of oppressed people are linked to the

next, and in so doing making *affective* connections (and, not incidentally, doing so will enable people to themselves know what to do about it). Indeed, the Party would be nothing without this feeling. Lih's central thesis on *WITBD* is that Lenin, along with the vast majority of Social Democrats in Russia and Germany, held that the workers would spontaneously come to class-consciousness and all that was needed were activists to push that process along. This because of the creativity and enthusiasm of the workers. He begins to present this when giving a slightly different spin on 'the actuality of the Revolution' and Lenin's outlook in *What Is To Be Done?*:²³²

If Russia was entering into a period of revolutionary crisis, if almost all of Russian society was turning in anger against the tsar, if everyone was waiting for some sort of mass action against the tsar before revealing their own radical dissatisfaction, if an underground organization would receive support not only from the workers but from all groups – then, indeed, even a pathetically small and weak Social-Democratic organization could make a major impact and genuinely lead a revolutionary transformation of Russia. For Lenin, all of these 'ifs' were facts (Lih, 2008: 8).

Not only that, according to Lenin they were hungry for information and action. As noted above, Lih – with reference to Michels and Ostrogorski – suggests that Lenin was perhaps too naïve in making this judgment, proposing that his contemporaries did not share it. However, where Ostrogorski discusses how party caucuses were thinly attended but gives historical justifications for why this may be, Elwood similar discusses the role of party organization and gives historical reasons for the 'apathy and indifference' that at times befell the Party in the Ukraine: it was in part the product 'of too many spies and too few intellectuals, émigré factionalism and local isolation. But it also was the natural reaction to the defeat suffered in 1905' (Elwood, 1974: 87).²³³

Not only that – it was also the product of a lack of effective Party organizations. In making these observations Elwood points to one of the ways the Party is both ends and means: without the feelings of the working class being roused there would be no Party activists to in turn rouse and direct more feelings towards revolution. In Lenin's outlook,

however, – at least at the junctures around the two revolutions – the feeling is already there. It simply needed to be reformulated. Indeed, Elwood points to the same issue. His study revolves around the Party’s activity in the Ukraine as in his assessment the low-ebb of labour actions and mass unrest can not be explained by Ukraine’s relatively ‘backward economy’ – he claims that similar levels of oppression and the sub-par working conditions could be found there as in the bulk of Russia, and there *were* examples of large strikes and labour unrest. What was missing, however, was an active Party underground that could organize this unrest into concerted action, in part because of heftier police organization. There was also little activity in legal organizations, however, unlike in the rest of Russia. What was also lacking, in Elwood’s assessment, was a party program that could appeal to the largely peasant populations and Ukrainian nationalism (Elwood, 1974: 245-270). That is, the form of the Party as an organization to develop revolt was not enough – it needed to develop feeling by means of appropriate *content*.

Here the parallel between the Party and psychoanalysis reveals more of its links: one of the central features of the psychoanalytic session is its reliance on the transference. For Freud this meant the analysand reliving past experiences and emotions, which is most famously taken up in the ‘Dora’ case study as well as his lecture ‘Recollection, Repetition, and Working Through’: living through past experiences and affects and working out the problems that were not then worked out could lead to the end of analysis – so long as (among other things) the analyst didn’t themselves fall prey to the ‘counter-transference’, acting out their assigned role in the analysand’s scenario. That is, it is instead when one encounters the ‘subject supposed to know’ – supposed to know one’s desire – that one is in the thrall of transference.²³⁴ And, like the Party giving pointed

determinate social form to feelings of unrest (Lenin's making the link between creating an understanding and generating a feeling), in Lacan's assessment the transference did not see one reliving an old feeling, but generating a new one. In Lacan's reading of the Dora case study it is the subject's relation to other subjects that is of greatest import, not the affect involved: '...transference does not fall under any mysterious property of affectivity and, even when it reveals itself in an emotional guise, this guise has a meaning only as a function of the dialectical moment at which it occurs' (Lacan, 2006: 184). This is directly related to the brief discussion of sublimation in chapter two and the discussion of masochism and *jouissance* in chapter six: where for Freud there is a pre-existing libido that is then redirected toward other aims, for Lacan libido is instead the product of the encounter with the Other. Likewise, what's being suggested here is that it is not simply the feeling of the workers (and peasants, etc.) that is being roused and rechanneled, but its transformation into a feel for revolution.

Here it has to be remembered that Žižek's position is that the link between analysis and the Party is that '...the authority of the Party is not that of determinate positive knowledge, but that of the form of knowledge, of a new type of knowledge linked to a collective political subject' (Žižek, 2002: 188), the crux of course being that both the Party and the analyst generate theoretical and factual knowledge. There are two points to be made on this score, both of which relate directly to the role of the training analysis in Lacan's teaching: as was broached in chapter six, for Lacan there was to be no distinction between a training analysis and any other analysis. Each analysis, if successful, would end in the self-invention of a new analyst – i.e. the entry of a new member into the particularities of a community based on the overcoming of a belief in the

big Other. Second, this meant that, against the received wisdom of the International Psychological Association, analysands did not have to wait until a certain point of the analysis to attend lectures and begin studying psychoanalysis (Gallagher, 1995: 2). Like in Elwood's discussion of the Party's failure in the Ukraine, or Lenin's insistence that a party Member not only possess formal membership but also write for a newspaper, agitate, spread the good word²³⁵, etc., a full analysis includes both the analytic session and lessons in theory – both 'form' and 'content.'²³⁶

This returns the discussion to the question of organization being both means and end. The issue with Rothenberg's take on 'Bartleby politics – as was broached in the previous chapter – is that her attempt to elucidate how Bartleby might be put to work doesn't solve the chicken/egg problem: that of how Bartleby comes about and how 'Bartleby politics' are to be implemented. Rothenberg's solution was to posit an outsider – Guattari as benevolent medical doctor – who could impose a new form of social engagement, and that form of social engagement was one generated by capitalism – i.e. schizophrenia. The solution that can be extrapolated from Žižek's work is that the form for organizing against capitalism is generated by capitalism – the form of capitalist money and the legal 'superstructure'/the state that supports it – and that this form must change as the struggle does. Just as Lacan held that the form of analysis had to change to take into account the way analysands related to it (for example, introducing the 'variable hour' so that analysands could not use a standard time as a means to avoid confronting their symptoms) the Party has to adapt not only to the form of opposition that it faces (legal versus illegal status, for example) but also to the activity of the working class. Lukács puts it this way:

Lenin's concept of organization is in itself dialectical: it is both a product of and a conscious contributor to, historical development in so far as it, too, *is simultaneously product and producer of itself*. Men [sic] themselves build a party. [...] The individual Jacobin who joins the revolutionary class can shape and clarify its actions through his determination, militancy, knowledge, and enthusiasm. But the social existence of the class and its resulting class-consciousness must always determine the content and trajectory of his actions, which are not undertaken by him on behalf of the class but are the culmination of class activity itself (Lukács, 1970: 37).

It can, then, in fact be said that 'utopia is always-already there in the form of a potential to be realized' (Brockelman) when discussing the role the Party plays in Žižek's work, if the word 'potential' is replaced with 'actual.' Brockelman makes the misstep that he does because he misunderstands 'the Party' as the 'impossible' Real, conflating actual self determination at the level of the economy (i.e. an economic/social revolution) with the *form* of the Party by which this might come to be. To ape Žižek's comments in *Tarrying...*, we cannot *know* what fully democratic, communist self-determination will be like until we build it, but we must *think* the mediation by which this building will happen. As Marx puts it, '...it is precisely the advantage of the new trend that we do not dogmatically anticipate the world, but only want to find the new world through the criticism of the old one' (Marx, 1844: unpaginated).

Given everything that has been put to paper in this study, is it then merely a coincidence that there exists a strong resonance between Marx's second thesis on Feuerbach²³⁷ and Žižek's assertion that 'Truth is this shattering experience of the Void – a sudden insight into the abyss of being' (Žižek, 2008b: lxxxii), a void which is embodied in a world-changing activity nominated not by the word 'Event' but by the word 'Act'?²³⁸



Conclusion – In the beginning... was the Act

It says: 'In the beginning was the *Word*.' / Already I am stopped. It seems absurd. / The *Word* does not deserve the highest prize, / I must translate it otherwise / If I am well inspired and not blind. / It says: In the beginning was the *Mind*. / Ponder that first line, wait and see, / Lest you should write too hastily. / Is mind the all-creating source? / It ought to say: In the beginning there was *Force*. / Yet something warns me as I grasp the pen, / That my translation must be changed again. / The spirit helps me. It is exact. / I write: In the beginning was the *Act*.

– Goethe, *Faust*



Sympathy for the devil

In his study of modernity Marshall Berman (1988) suggests that the story of Faust's encounter with the spirit of negation – Mephisto – embodies the core impulse of modernity. Dissatisfied with a life dedicated to the cultivation of the mind Faust is pushed by despair to an encounter with his childhood, thereby pulling himself from his funk and to the Gospel. Turning to the work of St. John in his native German – as bequeathed by the reformation – Faust continues in the spirit of Luther and substitutes the lay translation of the good book's opening volley with his own: in the beginning was not the word, but the act. Faust turned from the life of the mind to, in the end, focus his energies on the social and economic transformation of his surroundings, coming to his solution only after passing through his mistakes. As Berman sees it, Faust's deed was that of creative negation, of the dismemberment seen in the capitalism of nearby England supplemented by the developmental ideals of German utopianism.²³⁹

This is the *Faust* of Goethe, a lifelong labour that pulled together and tore apart the myriad versions of the tale. Berman argues that the modernist impulse found in it is also visible in the works of Marx, whose observation that 'all that is solid melts into air' serves as the title of Berman's study. The modern experience of dislocation and constant change, in addition to the ability to realize the developmental ideal that he sees in *Faust*,

would – according to Berman – only be fully realized in industrial capitalism. This is, of course, Marx’s major contribution: he too spent a great portion of his life forging a masterwork, in this case from the myriad works of European political economy. This he did with the intellectual tools he found in Hegel, but with his own Faustian inversion of theology: in place of the idealism he found in Hegel he focused on our interaction with the world in which we live, the labour with which we transform the world and ourselves. From this work Marx concluded that the horrors of capitalism would end with the complete emancipation of those who suffered within and because of it: Mephisto’s ‘mother night,’ Mephisto as negation, would end with in the brilliant dawn of communism. And while Berman doesn’t point this out, Mephisto is *directly* tied to that aspect of capitalism that Marx pinned as its ultimate negative power: in his manuscripts of 1844 Marx quotes Mephisto as a means to describe money’s role in bequeathing our species its universality while also alienating us from it. For Marx money is, of course, the highest development of the commodity form, which he understood as the key for understanding how capitalism makes ‘all that is solid melt into air.’

While he doesn’t appear in Berman’s study, a modern figure who has a similar connection to Goethe’s *Faust* was Freud. In his papers on metapsychology the creator of psychoanalysis compared the work of theory to a necessary evil, to Mephisto’s handmaid the witch (Freud, 1968: 225). Taking up this hint, Sabine Prokhoris (1995) shows that Mephisto was Freud’s most constant and unnamed partner: whenever Freud ran into a roadblock he would summon a quote from Goethe, most often from the pages of *Faust* and the mouth of Goethe’s devil... though Freud never pointed this out. In her view the Faustian narrative was the unconscious frame of Freud’s theory. Knowing this, it is not

without significance that the most notorious of his ‘metapsychological speculations’ was precisely this character: Freud declared that despite his followers resistance to it, the theory of the death drive was the most consistent explanation for the aggressivity he continuously encountered in analysis (1961b: 66). Mephisto as ‘the spirit that negates’ became one of Freud’s core tenets.

Berman argues that capitalism is the culmination of the both creative and destructive negative force of modernity. Similarly, Žižek argues that the Cartesian subject could only be fully realized in Kant and then Hegel’s re-working of it as a non-substantial ‘I’ of negation because it is a product of the generalization of the ‘exchange abstraction.’ This is not, of course, the only way Žižek develops this theme – he also delves directly into the work of the German Idealists, arguing against what he sees as the contemporary tendency to blame the Cartesian subject for all the evils of modernity. Instead, he puts the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of capitalism and shows that the development of Descartes’ discovery holds the key to freedom and anti-capitalist struggle.²⁴⁰ As has been emphasized, the basis of this claim is the link between the ‘form’ of the dream and that of the capitalist commodity. This demands an answer to the question of what, precisely, form means, and how this impacts Žižek’s take on the relation between politics and economy, between the subject and the overcoming of capitalism. While it might seem like an odd place for such a discussion – at the end of a study ostensibly on form – it is only through dealing with the diverse ‘content’ of Žižek’s work that it can be properly grasped. What follows is the final product of the work done in the preceding chapters, presented now in an attempt to clarify the import of what has already come. That is, it is

only at the end that, finally, one is able to being at the beginning... where form is revealed to itself be the sought after content.

This should not be taken in the sense that it might be if considering Taussig's work on the relationship of commodity fetishism and the devil in Columbia and Bolivia or McNally's on the relationship between zombie stories and the introduction of capitalist wage labour in Haiti and the African continent: in each case the author demonstrates the way that economic activity and the class discipline imposed on the exploited becomes a topic of cultural production. What is instead meant here by 'revealing form to be content' is that 'form', too, is one of the predicates of any thing, but stands as a predicate in its status as process rather than as an unchanging object. Once this is understood it becomes clear that this is true of all the object's other predicates as well: none are a static thing, but are instead the product of the object's creation and people's historical relationship to each of those predicates. Similar to Ilyenkov's discussion of the radius in relation to the other properties of a circle, 'form' is the process/predicate that explains the relationship between all the others.

Not skepticism, but form

Much of the discussion that takes place between Laclau, Butler, and Žižek in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* revolves around the question of formalism. Žižek's central argument is that in their emphasis on contingency – as a counter to essentialism – Laclau and Butler implicitly rely on a static formalism within which contingency can take place. That is, they rely on a notion of form as an empty container that retains its properties across time. Regardless of how accurately this represents their position, what is of interest here is the alternative he presents. As opposed to a continuous historical space

filled with contingency, one must ask how there is something to in the first place be so transformed or hegemonized before determining what particular content mediates the meaning of political discussion and action (i.e. before looking for particular '*points-de-capiton*'): 'How, in what specific historical conditions, does abstract universality itself become a "fact of social life"?' This is to ask why Laclau and Butler can speak of the universal or its failure at all. His answer relates directly to Marx: 'in a society in which commodity exchange predominates, individuals themselves, in their daily lives, relate to themselves, as well as to the objects they encounter, as to contingent embodiments of abstract-universal notions' (Žižek in Butler et al, 2000: 105). These premises are of course those first introduced through the work of Sohn-Rethel, and here flogged again and again. What these imply, what Žižek's objections centre around, is what he sees as a silent acceptance of a Kantian skepticism – the idea that there is some impossible outside that can never be reached by human senses, minds, or activity. In Žižek's opinion, the contemporary left's version of this skepticism finds capitalism in place of the Noumenal in that 'the very notion and form of the "political" within which it operates is grounded in the "depoliticization" of the economy' (Ibid: 98). This is to say that emphasis on constant change and the absence of any essence in which the social world could be anchored is only possible within an economic system in which 'all that is solid melts into air.'

What is instead needed, according to Žižek, is a discussion of the changing conditions that make certain forms of politics seem possible and others appear impossible. In the preceding pages this was thematized in terms of the changes in the democratic principle of lottery/contingency, beginning with actual lottery in ancient Greece, moving to the constitutional monarch as understood by Hegel, and ending in the

Communist Parties of Europe. Here Marx's comments at the end of the introduction of the *Grundrisse* come to make sense in a different way: Greek democracy (rather than its art) is still an object of fascination for us because it offers freedom, but not at its freest. The 'essence' of democracy, that which gives it its specific character, manifests in a different type of activity as history flows on. While economic transformations are not explicitly taken into Žižek's account, while he does not explain *why* the transition between economic modes occurred – for that it would be necessary to turn to the 'transition debate' – he does argue for the possibility of changes in form in principle. This is, of course, the 'Act'. As opposed to a reading of the Lacanian 'Real' that understands it as an unreachable 'Noumena' that pulls the strings of the phenomenal world, as opposed to a conception of the Real that leads to treating the universal as a mere regulative idea that if taken too seriously can only lead to political monstrosity when pursued, Žižek argues that 'it *is* possible to touch the Real through the Symbolic' (Žižek in Butler et al, 2000: 121). This is because the Real is in his view 'posited' by the Symbolic and serves as its immanent limit.²⁴¹ This is to say that it is by means of the present – in this case the commodity form and potentially the Party form – our 'essence' can be transformed.

His comments about capitalism being an historical form in his debate with Butler and Laclau can also be seen in the difference he asserts exists between the form of politics in feudalism and capitalism, as found in the first chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: whereas in the former class exploitation was explicit, in the latter it is latent because of the commodity form as applied to labour power. Whereas in feudal relations such 'fetishism' appears as the reification of social roles, where monarchs hold themselves to be of a different cloth (i.e. as imbued with divine right, taking themselves

to be monarchs by their own virtue, the power given them by blood or God, etc.) rather than the products of their social relations – where people think they are subjects by virtue of there being a monarch, rather than the reverse – in capitalism fetishism appears as the displacement of human relations onto things. In the latter case this means that people approach each other as formally free and equal in the marketplace, where the truth of their relations is embodied in the commodities for which they become the representative: the relations that actually sustain lives and determine the ways in which people interact happen at the level of money.²⁴² ‘Freedom’ in market relations would thus collapse without commodity fetishism to sustain it. That is, this ‘reality itself cannot reproduce itself without this so-called ideological mystification’ (Žižek, 1989: 28).²⁴³ In other words, there is no simply empirical, non-mediated interaction with the world; there is always some ‘subjective’ element to every ‘objective’ one. There is no capitalist economy independent of ideology. This is why one can use ‘subjective categories’ (like those of psychoanalysis) to talk about ‘objective conditions.’

In this take on the subject as developed in German Idealism, in his rejection of Kantian skepticism (in which the world is inherently unknowable to us), Žižek follows the line of argumentation developed by Robert Pippin in his *Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (1989), giving it no small praise in a footnote to his own *Tarrying with the Negative* (1993: 265, n.12). Pippin’s fundamental argument is that rather than being outside the Kantian universe, Hegel continues in the footsteps of Fichte in building upon Kant’s work by questioning the role of ‘intuition’ – the supposed faculty by which we simply perceive the world, the perceptual products of which the Understanding and Reason act upon to make them intelligible. In Pippin’s view Hegel holds that even our

barest of perceptions are already mediated, that we always discover that we have ‘posited’ what we assumed was immediate. As Žižek formulates it in another footnote in *Tarrying...*, it is only when we realize that this is the case that we are ‘...able, finally, to begin from (being which is) nothing’ (1993: 269, n.43), that we can finally begin from the *beginning*: the world created by our activity. This is important to note because it helps gesture at a redress to a possible criticism of Žižek’s work, one based on his use of Lacan and a linguistic theory of the subject.

While he only makes passing reference to Lacan, McNally’s take on Derrida might readily be aimed at him and thereby Žižek in that Lacan in part shares Derrida’s reliance on the work of Saussure. McNally argues that Saussure uses a vulgar notion of capitalist exchange as a basis for a formal description of the differences between signifiers, and that this cannot account for how particular binaries come into being – i.e. how meaning comes to be a part of a system of formal difference. He instead turns to a critique of the work of Voloshinov and Bakhtin to build a theory of language and meaning that offers a changing, ‘open totality,’ one that is not arbitrary but determined ‘by a finite number of concrete social settings’ (McNally, 2001: 115; 117). There are perhaps two answers to this (potential) reproach, the first having to do with Lacan’s own departure from Saussure. The second revolves around Žižek’s insistence on differentiating language from other concrete, empirical practices. According to Žižek thinking of language in certain ways eliminates the possibility of ‘meaning’ in the first place, its arbitrary character – but arbitrary in a particular sense.

In Žižek’s account ‘arbitrary’ means that there is no continuous chain of causation, that there is a gap between the subject and its genesis. For Žižek the subject is

the gap itself, the ‘break’ in the chain of causality. In terms of language this is to say that language is a formal system of signifiers, but one that also stands as its own limit and therefore its openness – language is both constraint and freedom. To put it in terms of Pippin’s arguments, one can only measure the correspondence of language and the objects of cognition from the perspective of language itself, but this system holds within itself the means of both divergence and correspondence. This is the master-signifier, the signifier that means nothing other than there being meaning at all, and thereby also that meaning can change: it guarantees both the ‘quilting’ of the other signifiers to a signified and enables that difference to begin with.

This can be explained in the following way: if the world is knowable and can be apprehended by means of language, image, or another system of difference, it is because it is not already known, because there is a separation between that which knows and the known. This is perhaps a commonplace, but otherwise put it means that one does not directly cognize the world, but must come to it by first being separated from it and thereby interact with it. This sets up the problem in terms of the ‘Noumena’ – the completely unknowable – which is for Žižek not the material world as a Kantian substratum that determines phenomena, but precisely the subject itself. This is most easily recognizable in the case of other people – one can not know them directly, but only in their communicating to us. That is, coming to know the material world is simply an epistemological problem in the sense that getting to know it is a possibility if one can find the proper means; by contrast, knowing the ‘other’ – i.e. the subject, including one’s own self – is an ontological impossibility that makes systems of difference necessary in the first place and the ambiguity essential to any ‘meaning’ possible. In this sense the

‘Noumena’ as subject is also not unknowable, but *only* knowable through the (psychoanalytic) ‘Act’ of the subject – which manifests the susceptibility of the present to the past, and that present’s overcoming. That is, the ‘Noumena’ as truth only flies at dusk. According to him, this is what Lacan means by truth: not a simple material fact, but the traumatic link between past and present (Žižek: 2008b, 197-203), a link between two different processes or forms, two different ‘gaps.’ This was earlier discussed in terms of the work of Darian Leader and Lorenzo Chiesa: the ‘trauma’ of ‘castration’ – understood as a realization that one is not a complete, self-enclosed whole – is only overcome with the overlapping of the symbolic and imaginary, with their ‘parallax’ relation.

Žižek summarizes the difference he sees between language and a cause-and-effect material substratum in the following way:

The moment we oppose the finitude/closure of the given symbolic texture to the endless horizon of its possible rearticulations, language is reduced to an ordinary natural entity and its development to a gradual evolution of such an entity. What differentiates language from a natural entity or system is the presence in it of the element designated by Lévi-Strauss as the *mana-signifier*: the ‘reflective’ signifier that holds the place, within the system, of what eludes the system, of its *not-yet-signified*. The ‘openness’ of a symbolic system has nothing whatsoever to do with the pressure of an ever-changing external circumstances that compel the system to transform; in the case of a symbolic system proper, this openness has to be inscribed into the ‘closed’ system itself in the guise of a paradoxical signifier that represents non-sense in the field of Sense – what Lacan calls the phallic signifier (Žižek: 2005c, 201).

Yet, all this asserts is that there is a necessary non-correspondence between signifiers and what they signify, that there is an inherent need of ‘formalism’. This is not yet an answer to the problem proposed above – how particular binaries arise and how particular meanings come to be associated with particular differentiated elements. Lacan himself admits that the work of Saussure is limited by this problem,²⁴⁴ but the solution he proposed is not immediately clear in his own work or in that of Žižek.

It does, however, become much clearer in a book published under the banner of Žižek’s ‘Short Circuit’ series – Chiesa’s *Subjectivity and Otherness* – taken up in detail in

chapter seven. McNally briefly criticizes Lacan for reducing mothers to natural forces and failing to see how they can nurture a child and help them develop. Without going into much detail, let it suffice here to say that McNally's view of development and Chiesa's discussion of Lacan are not necessarily at odds: what is described in chapter seven is the introduction of the symbolic, the ability of a child to apprehend themselves as part of, rather than all of, the world, the ability of the child to differentiate objects, including words. That is, it is a discussion of how a child comes to know difference as such. That discussion comes from the last two chapters of Chiesa's study of Lacan, where the first three chapters deal with issues that pertain to the ways in which a child acquires language, including the necessity of identifying with their caregiver – a point when the sort of nurturing that McNally discusses could be theoretically introduced. In addition, where McNally argues that the problems with Derrida's work can be traced back to Saussure's theory of language and its inability to account for *relevant* oppositions or differences, it's important to note that in these early chapters Chiesa goes into depth about how Lacan, too, disagreed with Saussure on this point. In the 21st lecture of Seminar III, for example, he introduces the idea that the signifier is of the body, that there are significant limits to Saussure's method (e.g. that no signifier exists in isolation), and part of the solution to those limits is the introduction of the individual's relation to the social: with reference to Racine's *Athalie* Lacan begins to argue that meaning can only be had when the big Other – in this instance the church and God – becomes a means of establishing it. Note, too, that where McNally attempts to replace Derrida's discussion of escaping totality with the notion of an 'open totality,' Žižek replaces it with a similar notion: Lacan's 'feminine' logic of 'not-all.'²⁴⁵

This discussion hasn't truly been broached in this study because the main focus falls elsewhere: Chiesa's assertion that the 'master signifier' that marks the internal limit and possibility of a system of difference is not eternal – not always the commodity form – but changes across history, this because difference as such is introduced into the human mind by means of social contact. What Chiesa sidesteps, however, was here made more explicit: Lacan himself emphasizes that Marx's conception of surplus-value is what he (Lacan) is referring to when he speaks of *jouisissance* and thus stands as the culmination of this line of thinking. And it is this line of thinking that not only appears in Žižek's oeuvre, but runs through it like Ariadne's red thread.

The 'activity of form' – *Non-objet*

One indication of this continuity is the reappearance throughout Žižek's work of the arguments made in the first two chapters of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and in *The Parallax View*. In discussing Marx, Freud, and form (in relation to Karatani) Žižek makes reference to section 87 of the preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* – that it is not so much content that matters, but the form of its mediation (Žižek, 2006a: 394, n. 78). Perhaps more importantly, form is there directly linked to activity and becoming rather than to a static object. This is also clear in the first chapter of *Sublime Object* (which is also referenced in this chapter of *Parallax View*) where Žižek clearly outlines the two different types of 'content' that Marx and Freud deal with: manifest and latent dream thoughts for Freud; the difference between the particular price (manifest content) realized by any particular commodity and the fact that value is the secret (latent content) of that price for Marx (Žižek, 1989: 14-15). What is important in each case is less the two types of content, but the form that makes that content possible in the first place.

It is far easier in the case of Marx, however, to see how ‘form’ is synonymous with activity: trading items in the market (including labour) as if they were exchange values makes them commodities; treating labour as a commodity is what makes capitalism a producer of value and a system of exploitation. For Freud the link is somewhat more obscure. Understanding how the form of the dream can be understood as activity can be best approached through a discussion of the footnote in *The Interpretation of Dreams*²⁴⁶ from which Žižek derives the claim that it’s the form of the dream rather than its manifest or latent content that’s important. The point is somewhat unclear even in the note Žižek references, but in his eleventh and fourteenth introductory lectures on psychoanalysis Freud gives the problem a more extended treatment. The eleventh lecture, in fact, opens and closes with reference to the confusion had by readers of the *Interpretation of Dreams* over what part of the dream was most significant (i.e. the claim that is made in the note to which Žižek refers). This is the dream-work – the mind’s activity of putting existing thoughts (the latent dream content) into a new order (the manifest dream content).²⁴⁷ (In lecture XXXII Freud describes ‘forgetting’ – i.e. repression – as consisting ‘mostly of a falling away of the links between various ideas, a failure to draw conclusions, an isolating of certain memories.’) Once the principles of distortion were understood, according to Freud, dreams could be properly interpreted. Similarly, because Freud found that the sleeping mind had no way to visually express ‘relations between thoughts’ the connections could only be understood by the distortions given by the dream-work. ‘Thus,’ concluded Freud, ‘the form of dreams is far from being without significance and itself calls for interpretation’; he went so far as to further write that ‘as compared with the processes we have come to know in [the dream-work], interest

in the manifest dream must pale into insignificance' (Freud, 1961a: 177; 181). That is, it is the process of thinking that is important. *Why* this is important becomes still clearer when turning to a subsequent lecture on wish-fulfillment: there is nothing particularly interesting or traumatic about the material from waking life that is put to use in dreams, nor in the latent dream thought, without them being attached to some sort of desire. It is this element that introduces the need for the dream-work to occur in the first place: the wish is usually not one which is to the approval of the ego or the big Other.

This is perhaps still obscure, but can be readily comprehended with a glance at Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*: here Freud again shows that it is not the hidden fantasy of the analysand that is of greatest import, but the way it is distorted. Here Freud asserts that 'neuroses are the negative of perversion' (Freud, 1991a: 80; 155; 163), where 'perversions' are either fully conscious or disavowed and 'negation' refers to subsequent repression which leads to neuroses. That is, the two phenomena are tightly linked. For Freud perversion is any activity that isn't directed at the final aim of reproducing the species, one that becomes pathological only when that final aim is precluded by fixation on one or several of the component drives. The activity of the partial or component drives – for Freud, oral, anal, and phallic – is by nature perverse because they are not aimed at copulation, but when they come to be subordinated in 'normal' sexuality in the form of genital development their perverse nature is mooted. 'Normality' is of course a rarity, with people more often taking on several different strategies in relation to enjoyment: the pervert openly enjoys their activity and knows that they enjoy it (for Freud kissing is technically a perversion, for example); the neurotic only unconsciously enjoys; the psychotic is awash in enjoyment. In a footnote Freud goes

so far as to claim that the conscious fantasies of the pervert, the unconscious fantasies of the hysteric, and the delusions of the paranoid share the same content (Freud, 1991a: 80, n1).²⁴⁸ What differs, then, is the way this content is approached. The pervert disavows what they know, the epitome being fetishism; the neurotic represses, resulting in hysterical and obsessional symptoms; the paranoid forecloses, fomenting psychoses. That is, the content of the fantasy is the same, but the form, what is *done* with the fantasy, changes. It is precisely by this means that Lacan differentiates the neurotic from the pervert: ‘To return to fantasy, let us say that the pervert imagines he is the Other in order to ensure his own *jouissance*, and that this is what the neurotic reveals when he imagines he is a pervert – in this case, to ensure control over the Other’ (Lacan, 2006: 699).²⁴⁹ That is, each of these three positions is a means of relating to the social processes in which one participates. In the end, the analyst doesn’t seek to treat the fantasy, but to look at whether one relates to it as an hysteric, psychotic, pervert... or analyst. To relate this back to dreams: it is not either type of content – the hidden desire/fantasy or the fantasy as ‘constituted’ in the dream – but the ‘constituting’ distortion that is important. (The question in relation to Marxism is, it must be pointed out, not just how one relates to value, but to *labour power* – that is, ‘value’ is the form of a relation, and not that which is related to. The relation in question is with that of *freedom*.)

This directly relates to Žižek’s theory of ideology and its relation to Marx: this distinction can be mapped onto that between ‘fetishes’ and ‘symptoms’, which can then be used to distinguish between two levels of ideology – commodity fetishism as constitutive ideology and (for example) formal freedom as constituted ideology. Commodity fetishism/exchange as real abstraction produces ‘formal freedom’ as a

subsequent abstraction: once formal freedom as a principle necessary for market exchange is on the table people can begin to demand to be treated as equal in other ways and make gains that bring them closer to actual equality (Žižek 2009a: 67;143).²⁵⁰ This in turn means the appearance of ‘symptoms’ that haunt it: confronted with race and gender inequality, for example, the state begins to alter who is included in the list of the equal. This is more-or-less the position of Losurdo in his *Liberalism – A Counter History*: rather than simply an historical contingency, racism (which according to him includes not only people of colonized territories, but also the poor and the workers, as the master-race was not simply the whites, but *wealthy* whites) was built into liberalism from the beginning and for the most part purged from it only because of forces come from without. One of the great strengths of liberalism, one not to be ignored (according to Losurdo), was its ability to transform itself in the face of these symptoms.²⁵¹ The limit to this transformation is that which constituted liberal ideology in the first place, as can be seen in the work of Mill (whom Losurdo likes to point out made a great many leaps forward, but, for instance, replaced racism with the ideology of violently uplifting ‘savages’): ‘...there are perhaps no contracts or engagements, except those that relate to money or money’s worth, of which one can venture to say that there ought to be no liberty whatever of retraction’ (Mill, 2006: 116).²⁵²

That is, once we leave the sphere of exchange – ‘a very Eden of the innate rights of man’ – we move into the inferno of production (Marx, 1977: 280). Here then is the relation between symptom and fetish: where the symptom is the return of the repressed and the dissolution of one symptom often leads to the repressed reappearing in a new symptom, ‘the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic is retained as a fetish’

(Freud, 1991b: 354). As Žižek puts it, the symptom momentarily disturbs ideological fantasy while the fetish maintains it.²⁵³ Where more and more groups of people can make more-or-less successful claims to liberal equality, ‘the buck stops’ at class struggle: any claim of inequality between labour and capital is denied, stifled in contracts of equal exchange. As Žižek puts it, liberalism is not strong enough to save ‘its own core’ – freedom and equality (2011b: 664) – because the ‘perverse’ fetish is the basis for the appearance of more and more ‘hysteric’ symptoms.

This is in effect what was approached in the final three chapters of this study: locating the activity that lead to the genesis of psychology, the subject, and the party enables one to transform them. In terms of the political organization of psychology the ‘form’ of the organizations that helped create psychology and psychoanalysis were shown to be that which gave each its particular character. This was explored by looking at the role of professional organizations in creating psychoanalysis as a discipline in Canada and Lacan’s tussles with the International Psychoanalytic Association in the early days of his career. The Canadian Psychological Association was developed as a means to secure a market for certain services and to offer it the legitimacy of allegiances with the medical profession. Its creation also affected the sort of research that was done and the kind of knowledges and practices that were then developed. By contrast, Lacan’s discussion of the role of psychoanalytic associations and his corresponding actions were an attempt to offer a discipline that was subordinated to neither market imperatives nor medical imperatives, each of which demand quick solutions rather than deep seated personal and social change. That is, where other professional associations aim at creating liberal citizens and fulfilling the bourgeois dream Lacan sought to enable people to

challenge the social norms embodied as the ‘big Other’ and to create a social organization (i.e. his particular form of Psychoanalytic association) to match that aim. He did this not so much by *treating* people, but by *training* them – i.e. pointing them towards a new form of activity. That is, Lacan’s premise was not that people should simply be analysed to the point of a cure but trained as analysts from the time they stepped up to the couch.

The ‘form of analysis’ is of course not immune from the viciousness of the commodity form – Lacan’s is not the only subspecies of psychoanalysis, and as was seen in chapter seven Žižek argues that the particularities of psychoanalysis are the product of capitalist social relations, particularly that engendered in money. The difference is that rather than simply pushing psychoanalysts along in the stream of market imperatives the commodity form as the embodiment of the split subject can be used to elicit a ‘cure’ (perhaps better understood as a ‘plague’ – Freud’s characterization of psychoanalysis while ruminating about his passage across the pond for the first and only time): the psychoanalyst exploits the particularity of the exchange relationship such that the analysand can develop their own particularity by treating the human being that is the analyst as an empty sounding board, as a completely alienated (in the Marxist sense) counterpart. It was also in this chapter that the link between the form of analysis and the Leninist party was clarified: the Party, too, relies on the commodity form in that it is the social link that effectively connects each person subjected to capitalism to all the others – hence the ability of an economic crisis stemming from one country sending the capitalist planet into a tailspin. Unlike other parties, however, The Leninist party is (potentially at least) to parliamentary/electoral parties what psychoanalysis is to other psychotherapies: just as Fenichel held that psychoanalysis was not to replace all other forms of

psychotherapy, but was in a better position to understand and make use of them, the party takes advantage of those elements that are effective organizing tools but always with a view to their relationship to capitalism and the ultimate goal of the self-determination of the people (as formulated, for example, in Lukács' 'Tactics and Ethics').

All this points to a further differentiation: not only between fetish and symptom, but also between these two and the empty signifier as such. This can also be formulated with reference to one of the few places in Žižek's oeuvre where he explicitly addresses the question of form at any length: the fourth chapter of *Tarrying With the Negative*, which is dedicated to Hegel's 'logic of essence' (which was discussed in chapter eight of the present study). Where the symptom is used by the analyst to re-orient the analysand to the meaning of the totality of their actions (a slip of the tongue, for example, is used to discuss one's fundamental unconscious fantasy, and not just the particularities that lead to the slip), and the fetish is the means by which the analysand avoids approaching their fundamental fantasy (the pervert stops at the last thing they see before what is in effect *their own lack*²⁵⁴), the empty signifier refers to the potential of a different future. Žižek puts it this way:

...as the signifier of pure possibility, the phallus is never fully actualized (i.e., it is the empty signifier which, although devoid of determinate, positive meaning, stands for the potentiality of any possible future meaning), whereas a fetish always claims an actual status (i.e., it pretends actually to substitute for the maternal phallus). In other words, insofar as the fetish is an element that fills in the lack of (the maternal) phallus, the most concise definition of the phallic signifier is that it is a *fetish of itself*: phallus qua "signifier of castration" as it were gives body to *its own lack* (Žižek, 1993: 161).

This can be better understood with reference to different conceptions of form (as the relation of form and essence, form and matter, and form and content) as explained by Žižek in the same chapter (1993: 134-6) and by combining them with Žižek's brief

discussion of the development of Freud and Lacan's practice as described in the second chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989: 73-74).

In the first case (form/essence), form is the passive expression of an underlying essence: regardless of its external appearance essence remains unchanged, but causes changes in appearances. This is the status of *symptom* – a passive expression of an underlying trauma in the sense that dissolving the symptom achieves nothing but the appearance of a new symptom to take the old one's place... this because the trauma still exists. There is a contradiction here, however: essence presents itself in something inessential, as something that can fade away and appear as something else. Either essence is not essential or the relation between it and its form is inessential. In either case 'symptom' falls away as a clinically productive category in the sense that removing particular symptoms doesn't end the analysand's distress. In Lacan's work symptom was thus something to be interpreted, was a coded message to the Other sent by the unconscious, but never able to fully reveal its root. Another solution presented itself, however: this is the symptom that just won't go away, one that is enjoyed as such. This is the *fetish*: not present to be interpreted but present only so that enjoyment can exist at all. This aligns fetish with the couple form/matter, where form is taken to be 'essential', or determining, and matter the passive 'stuff' that is formed. Rather than trauma it here makes more sense to think of the ambiguous status of *Trieb* (instinct/drive) in Freud's work: it was always a convention, assumed to be the mental representation of a biological process that could never quite be pinned down (see for example the few opening pages of 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes'), so much so that he goes so far as to deem them 'our mythological theory of instincts' (Freud, 1963: 144). This changes with Lacan, as was

argued in chapter six: 'drive' is the *product* of the individual's exposure to the symbolic. That is, the introduction of the fetish 'forms' the 'matter' of instinct into drive, which is to say that the drives are 'mythic' because of their relation to instinct, because they are social 'effectivities.' Here again, however, an ambiguity presents itself: it is not simply that the symbolic imposes a form upon a formless, indeterminate matter, but upon a matter that is itself determinate, which itself has its own structure. That is, the symbolic transforms instinct (the need to eat, defecate, etc.) to create drive, enjoyment, etc. Here again the symptom as fetish is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. One disavows, makes unconscious, that one is oneself lacking and using the fetish to overcome that lack and enjoy the other. The end of analysis is thus that the analysand no longer produces symptoms that point to an underlying cause, nor grasps a fetish that replaces a lost essence (the mythical maternal phallus), but establishes *a new form of community*. This roughly corresponds to the couple form/content, which is in effect a tautology because there is neither form nor matter nor essence, but only content: each person acting as the mediator of the other. That is, the *empty signifier* is not a means to an end, but the community itself – the social world that Marx holds is in actuality human 'essence.'

Jameson too, makes this point: giving primacy to form is not a question of it being imposed upon a passive 'matter,' but is instead akin to a process he points to as primary in modern literature. Here the question of form explicitly presents itself as an element of concern: '...from a certain elevation intrinsically formal considerations suddenly dissolve into problems of content' – the self-reflective author, internal to the narrative, of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins* standing as one of his examples (Jameson, 1971: 351-2).

And this is precisely what happens with Lacan and Lenin – the question of organization, of form, is not a secondary question but a primary problem. This can be made a little clearer with reference to where one locates form in the discussion of symptom/fetish/empty signifier: in the case of the symptom some portion of the ‘polymorphously perverse’ hysterical body acts as the source of satisfaction; in the case of the fetish an external object replaces the ‘missing’ portion of the other, thereby enabling sexual gratification; in the last case, it is the other *per se* that mediates enjoyment in the form of a community that is mutually decided upon by that community’s members. It is in this sense that Molly Rothenberg’s discussion of radical, community oriented psychological practice (as discussed in chapter six) is on point – all that was missing was the universal historical means of its creation.

Given that this means exists in the social relations created in a capitalist society by means of money, communism – as the negation of capitalist exploitation, the negation of the commodity form and thus what is dependent upon it – is to be considered neither total equality nor a leveling, a conception Marx instead attributes to the enviousness of ‘crude communist’ (Marx, 1992: 346). It is instead, as Lenin saw in Marx’s critique of the Gotha Program, ‘a society without any standard of right’ – as in liberal ‘equal right’ (Lenin, 1987: 343). Eliminating the standard of equality attendant to capitalist exchange would not mean an exchange of social wealth measured by the amount one labours, but a distribution of wealth along the lines of Marx’s well rehearsed ‘from each according to their ability, to each according to their need,’ which might be best understood as ‘producing as a human being’ (his formulation in his ‘comments on James Mill’). This for Marx means developing one’s specific talents and, externalizing these talents in a

product, having that product satisfy the need of someone else who thereby likewise develops their talents. Being both satisfying and satisfied, each mediating for the other as the link to the species, production expresses the human nature of both (Marx, 1992: 277). This need not necessarily refer to an Aristotelian equality of virtue, however, which can be seen in Žižek's brief discussion of Theodor Sturgeon's *More Than Human* if taken as a metaphor for Marx's 'from each, to each' (Žižek: 2010a: 377-8): on their own the misfit characters are separated from society and ineffectual, but when brought together they compliment each other's abilities and amplify them to the extent that they are 'more than human', the next stage of human development, a group of people that has the means to help others also reach that same point. That is, where a master signifier as just described above is understood as an open rather than a closed social mediator (i.e. as opposed to a symptom or a fetish) it is subjects themselves as 'not all' that can serve as that social mediator.

This leaves open the question of what, exactly, might be done with money once it no longer stands as the intermediary of all social relations. Rather than discuss the limited role that markets might play in such a society, perhaps for the moment something of a joke can suffice. At one point in *Capital* Marx discusses the capitalist's indifference to money's origin: *Non olet*, writes Marx – 'it has no smell'. This was apparently once said by Vespasian, the Roman Emperor, to his son Titus, who had reproached his father for making money by taxing lavatories (Marx, 1977, 205). While a capitalist doesn't care where their money comes from, a socialist of course does. Not only that – the form of money itself is a problem. Discussing what should be done with gold once capitalist exchange relations had been done away with altogether Lenin wrote the following:

When we are victorious on a world scale I think we shall use gold for the purpose of building

public lavatories in the streets of some of the largest cities of the world. This would be the most “just” and most educational way of utilizing gold for the benefit of these generations which have not forgotten how, for the sake of gold, ten million men were killed and thirty million maimed in the “great war for freedom”, the war of 1914-18 [...] (Lenin, 1965, unpaginated).

There are two things to note here: this was written in 1921, upwards of five years after the revolution had taken place. The Act, mediated by Party work, was and is not simply an immediate sea-change, but also akin to what Badiou calls an Event – something that, once accomplished, changes everything but also nothing. The old remains, and can only be overcome with fidelity to the new. Secondly, once ‘castrated’ by the exploited, what better throne to relegate the capitalist big Other than a public shitter?



Endnotes

Introduction

¹ While not to be found in the Padover translation of Marx's correspondence (1979), Lukács's translator renders a different passage from this letter in the following way: "It will then be realised that the world has long since possessed something in the form of a dream which it need only take possession of consciously, in order to possess it in reality" (Lukács, 1971, 2). This translation speaks more directly to the thesis of this dissertation: that consciousness is but another *form* of matter, one that can be apprehended through Marxism and psychoanalysis...

² The majority of the ideas in this chapter come from a presentation made at *Historical Materialism – Toronto* in May 2010.

³ 'If theology is again emerging as a point of reference for radical politics, it is not so by way of supplying a divine "big Other" who would guarantee the final success of our endeavours, but, on the contrary, as a token of our radical freedom in having no big Other to rely on. It was already Dostoevsky who showed how God gives us both freedom and responsibility – he is not a benevolent Master steering us to safety, but the one who reminds us that we are totally left to our own devices' (Žižek, 2010a: 401). See also the joke found in the last chapter of *Less Than Nothing* (2012: 965). Here is perhaps the place to note that Žižek aligns the Monarch, Christ, the psychoanalyst, and the Leninist Party in his 'Lenin's Choice.' Indeed, on the following (and very last) page of *Living in the End Times* – from which the above quote comes – he compares the Christian community in the guise of the 'Holy Ghost' to the Party. See also this comment from an interview with Ian Parker: 'I remember when I was young I found Dostoyevsky always boring but I heard about and basically went to the Grand Inquisitor in Karamazov Brothers. Even now I'm on the side of the Grand Inquisitor you know, which is why my hero is St. Paul. He is totally disinterested in Christ as a person. You find almost none of this, Christ did that miracle, he did this, and this doesn't bother St Paul. It's only, Christ died, he arrives, and ok that was the event, now let's build the party and so on' (Parker and Žižek, 2008: 13). The reasons for this will become clear as the present study progresses.

⁴ This is not to say the elimination of all forms of *discipline*, however. Žižek often spills ink in defense of discipline against what he sees as attempts to make it synonymous with Nazism and totalitarianism. See also Mészáros, 1986, in regards to Hegel's master/slave dialectic, and Marx's move beyond it: 'The problem is that *discipline* is indeed an absolutely necessary requirement of all successful formative activity, it is quite another matter as far as 'fear' and 'service' as well as 'obedience' are concerned. Nor is there a

necessary connection between disciplined formative activity and fear/service/obedience, provided that the activity in question is determined by the ‘associated producers’ themselves who also determine the *self-discipline* appropriate to their own aims and to the inherent nature of the activity itself which they embark upon’ (191, note 46).

⁵ See also Žižek, 2012: 364, where this same argument appears, although minus the circling flies. See also *ibid*: 465 where Žižek talks about ‘retroactivity’ in relation to the necessity of not at first realizing the potential in an historical situation: first making a mistake creates the possibility of realizing something that didn’t exist before the mistake itself made something new possible, something that it could not itself have ‘saved’ or done correctly.

⁶ It’s also the logic that Benjamin ascribes to Brecht’s constant rewriting and restaging: ‘...Brecht started at the beginning again and again. And this, incidentally, is the distinguishing mark of the dialectician. [...] Make certain, says Gide, that the impetus you have once achieved never benefits your subsequent work’ (Benjamin, 1998: 37-8). Placing the same content in new form and new historical context (or to use Žižek’s words from above, new ‘symbolic universes’) Brecht attempted to ‘alienate’ his audiences as a means of consciousness building, as a way of rebirthing the universal in a new context.

⁷ See *Tarrying with The Negative* (1993), page 61, on this point.

⁸ See also Žižek, 2012: 384, n 24.

⁹ This discussion also opens Bosteels’ *The Actuality of Communism* (2011).

¹⁰ See, however, Bosteels’ (2010) critique of the ‘generic’ of ‘communism’ in *The Idea of Communism*, edited by Žižek. Bosteels (2011b) further develops his critique of Badiou by turning to his (Badiou’s) earlier involvement with Maoist organizations in France. Against arguments like Žižek’s – that Badiou is too Kantian – Bosteels argues that taking into account Badiou’s engagement with the Party shows his thought to be far more dialectical than is often supposed.

¹¹ See the section labeled ‘money’ in the 1844 manuscripts. See also Marx, 1992: 355. This argument is developed in slightly more detail in the seventh chapter of the present study. While he doesn’t do it with reference to money, in his *Hegel’s Rabble* Frank Ruda gives a beautifully succinct rendition of the argument that the Early Marx held that the human species had to *lose* its ‘essence’ in order to become universal (Ruda, 2011: 171-177): ‘...what universal production designates is a process of production that – in always singular historical situations – generates step by step certain determinations which retroactively always determine the ever new species-being. This means that the essence of man is and will always be a non-being [*Unwesen*]’ (*Ibid*: 175); ‘being the negation of the essence, man neither must have an essence nor does he not have one’ (*Ibid*: 172). Note that Ruda makes explicit that his reading of Marx stands in opposition to that of Althusser (*Ibid*: 204-5, n3), that Žižek has written a positive preface for the book (and

discusses it in detail in *Less Than Nothing*), and both Žižek and Chiesa (who is taken up in great detail of chapter seven of the present study) are thanked in the acknowledgements and are referenced throughout the text.

Also of interest in this note is Joan Copjec's 'May '68, the emotional month', in which she takes up the argument that the signifier and *jouissance* are not two incompatible logics but tightly related. She takes a position against visions that see people as anchorless and therefore infinitely malleable, instead pointing to a ground in *jouissance* – the key being that this *jouissance* is not simply pre-existing but tied to the signifier and as such in part a product of it. She runs with the notion that Lacan's enjoyment and Marx's surplus value are one and the same, arguing that as capitalism has become more powerful and able to transform the reality around us the reality and pleasure principles have merged (i.e. we can mold the world into satisfying our desires), *jouissance* thereby being a question of investment in the same sense that capital is invested: calculations are made as to where to put it in order to get more in return. Her aim is to ask how this enjoyment can be in turn transformed: instead of a superego guilt that castigates for bad investments she seeks a shame and anxiety that she argues by definition make visible 'the unrealized, the "thrust aside" powers of the past that might have caused my personal history or history *tout court* – and thus me – to be otherwise' (Copjec, 2006: 104). The 'ground' that she points to is thus the potential of any particular historical moment. She posits this enjoyment as contrary to the 'sham' offered by capitalism, suggesting that the universalization that capital offers can be superceded by one that instead takes full advantage of anxiety as she describes it.

¹² 'Whence also the stubborn not to say hackneyed insistence on motifs – hence we can forego the mention of proper names – such as indivisible remainder or reserve, the constitutive outside, the real that resists symbolization absolutely, the dialectic of lack and excess, or the necessary gap separating representation from presentation pure and simple' (Bosteels, 2009: 239). This is clearly a shot at Žižek, but Žižek's work is not taken up in any depth in this article in order to substantiate it. This same comment appears in Bosteels *The Actuality of Communism*, which does include an extended critique of Žižek but not on these particular themes. There he argues that Žižek in fact holds 4 different versions of the 'Act', all of which fail because of Žižek's adherence to negativity/the death drive and, in the end, Žižek's apparent 'hysterical' need to be a contrarian – an *ad-hominem* disguised with an unelucidated reference to 'purely structural reasons' (Bosteels, 2011: 215). Bosteels' critique is taken up in detail in a footnote to chapter three.

¹³ This is also what Marx is referring to in his sixth thesis on Feurbach: '...the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations' (Marx, 1992: 423). Further disagreeing with Feurbach in regards to anthropology in the same thesis, Marx writes that in not critiquing the social ground of essence means that Feurbach can only comprehend it 'as "genus", as an internal, dumb generality which *naturally* unites the many individuals' (Ibid).

¹⁴ While not attempting to suggest that the following work is of the same calibre, a similar logic can be seen in the writing of both Marx and Lacan: in the case of Marx, what stands at the end of the notebooks that became *Capital, Volume 1* becomes the starting point of the finished work (i.e. the commodity); in the case of Lacan, the paper that for Lacan best represented the central point of his *Écrits* (“Seminar on “The Purloined Letter””) is ripped out of chronological order to appear at the beginning of the collection because it best demarcates the important discovery that appears at the book’s end – the *objet a*: ‘For I decipher here in Poe’s fiction [...] the division in which the subject is verified in the fact that an object traverses him without them interpenetrating in any respect, this division being at the crux of what emerges at the end of this collection that goes by the name of object *a*’ (Lacan, 2006: 4). In these studies, of course, what was discovered was not sought, but found; in the case of the present study, however, form was its primary question from the beginning.

¹⁵ See for example *Less Than Nothing*, page 469, note 19, where Žižek uses material found in Marx as an example to explain the relationship between form and content as an oppositional determination: within each mode of production there is a type of production that gives each of the others their specific character. Žižek asserts that in feudalism handicraft is organized as another branch of agriculture while in capitalism industrialism gives an industrial character to agriculture.

¹⁶ See Flemming, 2011.

Chapter one

¹⁷ It is because of theses like the following that Sohn-Rethel’s work is key for understanding Žižek’s positions: ‘Second nature finds its external expression in money, and in it the specifically human element in us finds its first separate and objectively real manifestation in history’ (Sohn-Rethel, 1978: 60).

¹⁸ “THIS is the hard kernel of today's global capitalist universe, its true Master Signifier: democracy” (Žižek, 2005). See also *The Parallax View*, 321.

¹⁹ Choi (2012) makes a similar mistake, arguing that Žižek misses how Althusser, against Žižek’s assertion to the contrary, does deal with the Real: “Let us [...] pay attention right away to the fact that what we see in Althusser’s final formulation of ideology is the imaginary and the real—not the symbolic” (13). This, however, is the real core of Žižek’s argument: Althusser can’t see that commodity exchange – as the symbolic, as an ontological and material practice – is what lies at the root of capitalist ideology, instead seeing it as a problem of the imaginary and epistemology.

While Valente (2003) approaches the question of Althusser’s position on the Symbolic, arguing that he misses the way Lacan conceptualized it and thereby collapsed it into the Imaginary, he makes a similar mistake in regards to Žižek: his argument revolves around the assertion that Lacan emphasizes the conservative aspect of the symptom while Marx’s project revolved around capital’s tendency to destroy itself. What he misses, of course, is that in addition to enabling the centrifugal force of capitalism it is

commodity fetishism that plays this conservative role in Marx's work. Using the same logic against Valente one could argue that while the symptom is conservative in that it allows one to continue to avoid one's issues, it also leads one to find a cure in analysis: missing in Valente's paper is any discussion of the Act or the ends of 'sitting on the couch'. Valente's other central argument against a link between Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis is that while Marxism is inherently forward looking Lacan's work is essentially a discussion of retroaction. This misses that capital is always 'retroactive' in the sense that it is only considered capital after it generates a surplus, as well as in that what historically appears as a contingent element of capital is later then posited as a necessary condition of it (which is approached in chapter seven of the present study). Instead of tackling Lacan's assertions in seminars XVI and XVII that surplus value (Marx) and *jouissance* were one and the same Valente instead asserts that Lacan made but 'loose analogy to broadly Marxist principles' merely to make his ideas comprehensible to his politically minded followers (2003: 159), and denies Lacan did anything but flirt with Marx in an opportunist way in order to ingratiate himself with Althusser and thereby secure himself a new venue and audience for his teaching.

²⁰ E.g. 'tensions and scissions' (130); 'contradiction and strife' (172); 'loopholes' (187). These terms are not necessarily synonyms for 'contradiction', of course – 'scission' has, for example, been used by Deleuze and Guattari as a means to escape Hegelian dialectics and contradiction – but Johnston does not in this book develop what these terms might actually mean. It would perhaps not be incorrect to see in this an echo of Engel's thesis that nature is internally contradictory, and this is what drives its development.

²¹ 'This negativity, as a set of virtual potentialities perpetually ready to break out of Imaginary-Symbolic systems through the events of acts, haunts the actuality of every Imaginary-Symbolic system' (Johnston, 2008: 196).

²² This, then, in Johnston's reading is Žižek's contribution to a Hegelian Marxist 'theory of everything', and not the more general thesis that what at first appears as a problem is instead a solution: the open totality that is the material world is both the condition of freedom and that which generates attempts to flee from that freedom. This because, as Jameson points out, seeing the obstacle as the solution is attributable to dialectical reason in general: 'this is indeed the most sensitive moment of the dialectical process: that in which an entire complex of thought is hoisted through a kind of inner leverage one floor higher, in which the mind, in a kind of shifting of gears, now finds itself willing to take what had been a question for an answer'; '[Dialectical reversals] can be described as a kind of leap-frogging affair in time, in which the drawbacks of a given historical situation turn out in reality to be its secret advantages...' (Jameson, 1971: 307-8; 309).

²³ Marx wrote that the Commune was 'the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labour' (Marx and Engels, 1985: 75). In *State and Revolution*, Lenin writes that '...Marx, despite the failure of that movement, in spite of its short life and its patent weakness, began to study the political form [i.e. the

Commune] that it had *disclosed*,’ and goes on to quote Marx as above (Lenin, 1987: 312, italics in original).

²⁴ ‘The I’s apperception is by definition devoid of any intuitional content; it is an empty representation which carves a hole into the field of representations’ (Žižek, 1993: 16).

²⁵ This is also apparent in his review of *The Parallax View*, where he focuses on Hegel, contemporary analytic philosophy, and Lacan. Here he quickly lines up Hegel, Marx, and Lacan and their ideas on abstraction without much discussion (Johnston, 2007: 13).

²⁶ ‘...every appearance of substantial identity has to be accounted for in terms of transcendental genesis, as the “reified” result of the pure I’s processuality’ (Žižek, 2012: 154); ‘...when I (as finite subject) “posit” an ideal/unattainable practical goal, the finite reality outside me appears as “not-self”, as an obstacle to be overcome, transformed. This is Fichte’s version (after Kant) of the “primacy of practical reason”: The way I perceive reality depends on my practical projects’ (Žižek, 2012: 160).

²⁷ A supplementary link between Schelling and Capitalism can perhaps be made *via* his Spinozism and that of Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov. In his *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx’s ‘Capital’* Ilyenkov draws a link between Spinoza’s materialism and Marx’s description of the working of capitalism in that the universal is immanent to the material, one element raised to a determining characteristic. The example Ilyenkov lifts from Spinoza is the radius of a circle, from which all its other properties can be deduced ($D = 2r$; circumference = πr^2 , etc). The example taken from Marx is of course the commodity form/money. Schelling begins his essay on human freedom by trying to save Spinoza’s single-substance universe from Spinoza himself (Schelling argues his pantheism is ruined by his mechanistic understanding of science) to go on to argue that evil is not a subtraction from the world of good, not a lack introduced into it, but a ‘misuse of freedom’ or a ‘positive perversion or reversal of the principles’, where instead of consonance between universal and particular the particular takes dominance and becomes universal (Schelling, 2006: 31-35). A vulgar example might be that of cell reproduction: subordinated to the whole organism it brings life, but any single set of cells that reproduces uncontrollably (i.e. cancer) brings death. Capitalism is, of course, the one-sidedness of profit (i.e. the generation of surplus-value), or the greed of every individual capital for growth made into the universal principle of the economy – what McNally calls a ‘bad infinity’ (McNally, 2003: 7). That is, if Schelling’s philosophy is a reaction to modernization and capitalism his description of evil might be taken as a reflection of an actually-existing one. See also Žižek’s discussion of Schelling’s notion of contraction in *The Ticklish Subject*, where it is described in such a way as to be applicable to capitalism’s tendency to ‘dissolve all that is solid’, as a negation of the world that is reconstituted by selecting a ‘unifying feature’ to reconstitute it (Žižek, 1999: 33-34). Note that this ‘contraction’ is for Žižek the act of the subject, the act ‘tarrying with the negative’ and the ‘transcendental imagination’ – i.e. that of human freedom.

²⁸ In his studies of how *Capital* came to be Rosdolsky emphasizes the same point: ‘processes can only be investigated if the central focus is directed toward the *changing forms* of the objects under investigation’ (1974: 66). In his intervention in the early seventies Pilling argues that even the most prominent Marxist political economists (e.g. Mandel and Dobb) fail to take this into account and thereby misunderstand the role of the labour theory of value, driving them closer to Ricardo and mainstream political economy than to Marx and class struggle.

²⁹ Mézáros makes the case that Lukács falls into a similar trap, although unbeknownst to himself: ‘an anticipated moral postulate, as mediator between the ultimate postulates of the universal perspectives of socialism and the immediacy of a given situation, is and necessarily remains a pseudo-mediator, an ideological postulate, an ultimate “*Sollen*” [ought]’ (Mézáros, 1972b: 85). More generally, see pages 77-86. Lukács of course levels the critique that their moral postulates are only regulative ideas at bourgeois individualists (Lukács, 1971: 315).

³⁰ While Žižek initially defends Badiou (2008) against such charges (Žižek, 2009b), he later concedes that Badiou is indeed too Kantian in his later development (Badiou, 2010) of these positions (Žižek, 2010a: 181-5). Similarly, Bruno Bosteels argues that Badiou strips away much of what should be included in the ‘idea of communism’, raising it to ‘the status of a Platonic or Kantian idea’ (Bosteels, 2010: 50; 59)

³¹ ‘Žižek’s hesitation as to “what is to be done” is over-determined by the political neutrality of his political ontology’ (Sharpe, 2004:16).

³² Ellen Wood discusses the differences between these two sorts of profit-making in her *The Origin of Capitalism* (2002).

³³ ‘The problematic underlying Žižek’s insistence on this rubric [‘the big Other doesn’t exist’], I am claiming, is his political need to locate some non-ideological point from whence he can proffer his work as a *critique* of ideology, and in the name of which he can also construct a theoretically informed politics’ (Sharpe, 2004: 125).

³⁴ ‘The whole point of the Pauline notion of struggling universality is that true universality and partiality do not exclude each other, but *universal Truth is accessible only from a partial engaged subjective position*’ (Žižek, 2006: 35).

³⁵ For an English-language history of the vicissitudes of ‘Soviet Marxism,’ see Bakhurst, 1991. The subject of Bakhurst’s study – Evald Ilyenkov – is used by Žižek as an example of an engaged Marxist philosopher, and is described as a ‘superb dialectician and expert on Hegel’ (2000: 155-6). It’s perhaps also worthwhile to here point out that Alfred Sohn-Rethel could also be considered an ‘engaged’ philosopher, as he worked in ‘one of the inner centres of finance capital as an unrecognized Marxist’ pre-WWII and used this experience to write a study of the rise of Fascism in Germany (Sohn-Rethel, 1987: 11).

³⁶ Laclau rejects ‘class struggle’ in part because he holds that ‘a homogeneous space of dialectical mediation’ as seen in the co-dependence of the capitalist and the worker cannot account for the necessity of the worker to resist the capitalist: ‘Why could an antagonism, however, exist between workers and capitalists? Because of the way the worker is constituted *outside* the relations of production (the fact that below a certain level of wages he/she cannot live a decent life, etc)’ (Laclau, 2006b:112). What Laclau has done, of course, is to forget that the ‘outside’ is the product of the ‘inside’: capitalism can only function by being the *only*, or at least the predominant, means to make a living, thereby compelling workers to sell their labour in order to survive. Hence, for example, Marx’s discussion of the ‘reserve army of labour.’ This is to say that there is far more to the dialectics of capitalism than just the ‘capitalist-worker’ relation. The rejection of dialectics is here also of interest in the midst of a discussion of a ‘Kantian’ Žižek, as in the above cited paper Laclau turns to several Kantian Marxists to bolster his arguments.

³⁷ Sheehan’s 2012 ‘guide’ to Žižek’s work also emphasizes class struggle – see in particular the opening pages to the book’s fourth chapter. However, when pressed to give an example of how this works in Žižek’s theory of ideology Sheehan turns to the figure of the ‘Jew’ developed by the Nazi’s rather than to commodity fetishism: ‘At a fundamental ideological level, it is society’s class struggle [...] that needs to be filled in and given body by a seemingly positive object. Such an object is the sublime object of ideology and Žižek’s definitive example in this regard is the figure of the Jew in anti-Semitism’ (2012: 45). As is discussed in a note further below, this sort of turn to anti-Semitism as definitive of ideology as understood by Žižek fails to account for its historical particularity, where discussing it in relation to commodity-fetishism allows one to do so. Sheehan’s study is one of the better ‘introductory’ guides, however, more of which are taken up in the following chapter.

³⁸ ‘Various individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a joint battle against another class. Otherwise they are hostile, competing with each other’ (Marx and Engels, 1994a: 144). ‘The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle [...] this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself’ (Marx, 1973a: 150). ‘The Immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class [...]’ (Marx and Engels, 1994b: 169). ‘In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class’ (Marx, 1987: 124). Jameson: ‘...what distinguishes Marxist from the sociological notion of class is that, for the former, class is precisely a *differential* concept, that each class is at once a way of relating to and of refusing others. [...] the sociological view is *formally* wrong to the degree that it allows us to think of the individual classes in a kind of isolation from each other [...]’ (Jameson, 1971: 380-1). For an example of Žižek’s comments on this, see footnote 42.

³⁹ See also Mézaros, 1971. Žižek also glowingly summarizes what he sees as Lukács' position on the relationship between consciousness and objectivity in the introduction to *The Parallax View*: "consciousness" (becoming-conscious of one's concrete social position and its revolutionary potential) changes being itself – that is to say, it transforms the passive "working class," a stratum of the social edifice, into the "proletariat" as a revolutionary subject' (Žižek, 2006: 6). A similar formulation is found in Žižek, 2000: 174-5.

⁴⁰ This will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this study. Briefly put, just as the secret of value is revealed only in the historical moment that is the generalization of capitalist production – i.e. as the product of labour – the secret of the 'master's discourse' as the fundamental discourse in Lacan's theory is revealed under capitalism to be that of the pervert – i.e. human freedom. (That is, the absolutist monarch/master is not so by virtue of god given right or their personal attributes, but by the activity of people).

⁴¹ Žižek does little to show how National Socialist ideology can be considered a displacement of class struggle, but Postone, however, does. His contention is that the anti-Semitism of the Nazis differed from that which came before it because of the changes brought on by capitalism and its further development into industrial capitalism. Where the dual form of the commodity makes the separation of exchange value (in the form of money) and use value (in the form of the commodity) appear as though the former can be separated from the latter, anti-capitalism can mistakenly take the form of attacking money alone rather than the system of production (as in Proudhon's formulations, and Marx's comments about 'striking the sack rather than the donkey' – Marx, 1973b: 239-40). In Nazi ideology this became the attack not on industrialization and machinery – i.e. the material aspect of capitalist production – but the abstract form of capital as finance. Postone argues that Jews came to be an embodiment of the abstract form of capitalism and were 'identified with capitalism itself' and descriptions of them had them take on the qualities of money: 'abstractness, intangibility, universality, mobility' (Postone, 2003: 91). In answer to the question of 'why race?' he provides a similar answer: the naturalization of capitalism as seen in the separation of commodity and money also saw the naturalization of biology because 'the capital fetish [...] gives rise to the notion that the concrete is "natural", and [...] increasingly presents the socially "natural" in such a way that it is perceived in biological terms' (Ibid: 93). As to why Jews in particular were the group of people identified with capitalism, Postone points to their relatively recent political emancipation, which constituted them 'as the only group in Europe that fulfilled the determination of citizenship as a pure political abstraction. They were German or French citizens, but were not really considered Germans or Frenchmen' (Ibid: 94). That is, such an identification was possible because they already appeared as abstractions, and because the emancipation that led them to be able to become more prominent and visible in civil society coincided with the changes wrought by capitalism. He admits that he does not address the question of why this happened in Germany in particular. (Note that Postone attempts to develop commodity fetishism without reference to class, private property, or the market – see page 103. For a critique of Postone's overall position on Marx's *Capital* see McNally, 2004.)

Herein, then, is the historical element of fetishism: the absolutist master sits at the top of a hierarchy of ‘blood and soil’ as an excess that maintains social stability (i.e. Hegel’s description of the Monarch as a member of an estate that is not an estate, and so can make decisions from ‘outside’). Here social relations are fetishized and exploitation naked. In capitalism everyone is formally free, but exploitation hidden, with money playing the role of fetish. At the same time ‘blood and soil’ becomes *race* – McNally (2002: 96-146) and Losurdo (2011), for example, show how the rise of capitalism necessitated the development of racial ideologies (McNally mostly in historical mode, and Losurdo focusing more on the intellectual history of liberal/conservative theory). Here the capitalist becomes the formal-legal ‘one’ of civil society against which all else becomes a lower race (from the indigent to the Irish to the people of Africa), the ‘excess’ of which (the ‘thing without a place’, the embodiment of abstraction) appears in Postone’s account as the object of Nazi anti-Semitism, to otherwise appear as ‘symptom’ – a potentially infinite list of groups claiming and fighting for formal equality. This is to say that capitalism, too, simmers in social-fetishism. Similarly, the Stalinist Party follows the logic of capitalist money-fetishism in that it presents itself as ‘the immediate and individual incarnation of these objective laws [of history/capitalist society]’ such that anyone bearing the party pin has their body become ‘sublime’ – the bearer of the knowledge supposedly possessed by the Party (Žižek, 1996a: 3-4). That is, knowledge becomes the fetish/guarantee of the social structure – but unlike the feudal master, it is an *impersonal* knowledge, one akin to the ‘impersonal power’ of the modern state.

⁴² See page 65, for example, where ‘repression’ is used; see also 129 and 130: ‘The crucial contribution of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Hegelian dialectics to Žižek’s thought is the mechanism of foreclosure, which is therefore its fundamental kernel, its disavowed ‘truth’’; ‘A similar mechanism of foreclosure is in place in commodity fetishism...’; ‘... the significance of Žižek’s contested assertion that “capital is Real” depends on the understanding of capital as the foreclosed hard kernel embodied by the Marxian commodity....’

⁴³ On the first count, it is perhaps best to attribute this fault to state-capitalists or Stalin. See Vighi, 43. On the second, let it suffice here to say that it is not Marx that reduces labour-power to labour-time, but capitalism.

⁴⁴ See also page 76: ‘In circulation, the gap in question is substantially different [than that in production], concerning the cleavage between the consumer’s perception of enjoyment as fullness, which allows capital to complete its cycle and realize itself, and the correlation between *jouissance* and lack which, if actively assumed and/or politicized, would seriously threaten the capitalist logic.’ A similar focus on the consumer-identity side of capitalist ideology can be seen in Thomas Brockelman’s *Žižek and Heidegger*. Brockelman, however, does not come nearly as close as Vighi to a discussion of the role of production in capitalism or in Žižek’s work. Instead, taking a more Heideggerian position against Žižek, he aims to prove that technological rationality – and not capitalism *per se* – is the root of the evils of the modern era and what he calls ‘techno-capitalism’ (a term he does not even begin to qualify). Another weakness of

Brockelman's study is that he prefers to interpret what Žižek has to say about technological rationality and Heidegger rather than approach what Žižek actually writes about them. Indicative of this approach is his failure to even mention that some of Žižek's earliest work is in fact on Heidegger's philosophy and language (Žižek, 1999: 13).

⁴⁵ 'The existence of exploited workers and the formation of value in factories and sweatshops is still the key to understanding the actualization of surplus-value in the stock-exchange' (Vighi, 2010: 78).

⁴⁶ In a somewhat similar vein, Johnston argues that Žižek's 'modest political practice' is to use his theory and public appearances as a means to precipitate a transference in his audience, one in which they will no longer look to him for political answers but instead develop them themselves (Johnston, 2007b: 28-9).

⁴⁷ This is more-or-less the position Dean takes in *Žižek's Politics*. See chapter seven of the current study.

⁴⁸ As Mike Davis relates, not everyone sees the slums as a symptom of capitalism: 'One of the researchers associated with the report [produced by the UN on the world's mega-slums] told me that "the 'Washington Consensus' types (World Bank, IMF, etc.) have always insisted on defining the problem of global slums not as a result of globalization and inequality but rather as a result of 'bad governance'" (Davis, 2004: 11). One need not necessarily be a Marxist to see them as such, however. Davis goes on to show that the UN's report sees the slums as the products of neoliberalism.

⁴⁹ Davis takes a similar position (Davis, 2004: 26).

⁵⁰ There are three other major problems with Vighi's position: in regards to the slum-dwellers, he runs the risk of reproducing the theft of knowledge from the 'slave' by the 'master', the position he develops through Lacan and Sohn-Rethel in the first sections of his book. That is, he doesn't give an account as to how the people who live in the slums would contribute to their own political education and the theorization of their position. In regard to Hardt and Negri, he follows Žižek's line of argument in which he castigates them for thinking capitalism can merely have its head cut off and thereby become socialism. Vighi – following Žižek – offers that the productivity of capitalism would be lost without the exploitation inherent to it: not understanding how Lacanian 'desire' and 'surplus' function, Hardt and Negri mistakenly think the wealth of capitalism can simply be controlled with complete transparency (for Žižek's arguments on Marx's supposed positing of a fully transparent social world post-capitalism, see e.g. 1997: 99-101; 1993: 25-26. For a counter-argument in favour of Marx see Sutherland, 2010: 89-90). Like Žižek, Vighi accepts Hardt and Negri's basic arguments about 'immaterial labour,' though their work has been shown to be both internally inconsistent and incommensurate with reality (Camfield, 2007). Lastly, Vighi's discussions of 'labour-power' generally make it come off as an a-historical humanist panacea with infinite potential, when Marx

clearly discusses the historical development not only of capacities to work, but the senses themselves (see e.g. Marx, 1992: 352-3).

⁵¹ McNally points to a similar shift in the way zombies have been treated in Hollywood film: from its Haitian origins and 1932's *White Zombie*, where the undead is a *worker* reduced to nothing but a tattered body with a suppressed consciousness, later Hollywood movies transform the figure of the zombie into a critique of the mindless *consumer* (McNally, 2011: 210-213; 260).

⁵² This thesis might be more appropriate for the likes of 17th and 18th century England, a time before the market became the sole means to reproduce oneself and feudal custom and right had been completely obliterated. In his discussion of various bread riots of the time, Thompson argues that people's rebellions were not simply akin to a natural force, a mere reaction to hunger, but instead a conscious and often well-organized rebellion against attacks on market practices that saw the poor unable to receive a fair price for wheat and other commodities in times of dearth. This 'consumer-consciousness' (as Thompson calls it) was the product of a dying 'moral economy' rather than the new capitalist one, an economy 'in which consumption held somewhat the same primacy in the public mind, as the undisputed arbiter of economic effort, as the nineteenth century attached to profits' (Tawney in Thompson, 1971: 132). This did not lead to socialist revolution, of course, though it did at time get mixed with politics in the form of leveler and Jacobin ideology (Ibid: 126-131); most often it led to a forced lowering of price. The point is that in Žižek's account current ideological formations do not rely on a 'moral economy' but one based on the exploitation of labour *via* the commodity form, and that he does not suggest that the breaking of present ideological formations should be approached at the level of consumption; he is, for example, highly critical of 'ethical consumption.' The relationship between ideology, commodity fetishism, the enjoyment of commodities, and perversion is taken up in chapters three and seven of the present study.

⁵³ This is not to suggest that a new S_1 /money would be a 'labour money.'

⁵⁴ See, for example, Bruce Fink's translation of *Écrits*.

Chapter two

⁵⁵ See for example Žižek, 2006a: 165-8.

⁵⁶ '...class struggle aims at overcoming and subduing, annihilating even, the other – even if not a direct physical annihilation, class struggle aims at the annihilation of the other's socio-political role and function' (Žižek, 2005e, unpaginated; 2004: 186-7).

⁵⁷ See also McNally, 2011: 126-132.

⁵⁸ See the special issue of *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, printed in 2011 as volume 16(3) for a discussion of Žižek's actions in and positions on the Balkans.

⁵⁹ Most recently this took the form of spreading the rumour that Žižek was, before the collapse of the U.S.S.R. and Yugoslavia, spying on his fellow citizens on behalf of his government (This article can no longer be found on the internet). By contrast, see the first chapter of Butler's *Slavoj Žižek: Live Theory* (Butler, 2005) for an attempt to make the link between Žižek's theory and some of the political positions he takes.

⁶⁰ See the first three chapters of Žižek, 1989. He has several times compared his position to Dolar's 'Beyond Interpellation' (Dolar, 1993). For Žižek's critique of Althusser's followers, see chapters three and four of Žižek, 1999.

⁶¹ These same words also appear on page 55 of *Living in the End Times* (2010). Sohn-Rethel draws a division similar to Žižek's 'constitutive ideology' and 'constituted ideology': 'Necessary false consciousness has its roots, not in the class struggle, but in those conditions of historical necessity out of which class antagonism itself results. This might give rise to distinguishing necessary false consciousness from ideology understood in a narrow sense as accessory to class struggle' (1978: 198).

⁶² See Žižek's first two essays in Butler *et al*, 2000.

⁶³ While acknowledging that English slavery was more brutal than other forms, he doesn't account for why this might be the case. One alternative would be to turn to Ellen Wood's *The Origin of Capitalism* and her development of Brenner's side of the 'transition debate.' It's perhaps worth noting that Losurdo makes reference to Wallerstein in the course of his argument.

⁶⁴ I have only found one place where Žižek explicitly makes the link between Lacan's 'fundamental fantasy' and 'constructions of analysis': 'In clear contrast to [an interpretation], a construction (exemplarily, that of a fundamental fantasy) has the status of a knowledge which can never be subjectivized, assumed by the subject as the truth about himself, the truth in which he recognizes the innermost kernel of his being' (Žižek, 1997b, 147). The only other place that Žižek comes to this again, so far as I have found, is 1996c: 399-400. Here Žižek writes that the subject is the Real as retroactively created by the subject in relation to their trauma. The example he gives is Freud's 'Wolf Man' case study, the analysand's trauma of catching his parents having sex. Žižek doesn't mention it, but in this case study Freud relates that this traumatic memory is not simply remembered – it is instead a construction of analysis. (See also Koehler, 1996 for more on constructions and the fundamental fantasy).

⁶⁵ See also Johnston, 2008: 10

⁶⁶ This appears to be a conflation of ego-ideal/ideal-ego with the logic of master-signifier/signifying chain, because it is: see Žižek, 2008b: 233. See also Chiesa, 2007:

117-8;158-161. Chiesa shows that this link comes with Lacan's eventual re-formulation of the relationship between the Symbolic and the Real, where the former is no longer thought to be guaranteed by 'the name of the father' as a natural necessity but instead by the perverse/masochistic activity of drive. This is taken up in greater detail in a later point of the present study.

⁶⁷ 'Thus we arrive at the most concise definition of the subject: the subject is an effect that entirely posits its own cause' (Žižek, 1996c: 404). This is also the conclusion Hegel makes in sections 86 and 87 of the preface to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Take the following as an example: 'Thus in the movement of consciousness there occurs a moment of *being-in-itself* or *being-for-us* [the philosophers] which is not present to the consciousness comprehended in the experience itself. The *content*, however, of what presents itself to us does exist *for it* [everyday consciousness]; we [the philosophers/scientists] comprehend only the formal aspect of that content, or its pure origination. *For it*, [everyday consciousness] what has thus arisen exists only as an object; *For us*, it appears at the same time as movement and a process of becoming' (Hegel, 1977: 56). That is, 'they do not know it, but they are doing it.' See also Žižek 1989: 172;175, where he argues that the subject is the result of hunting for itself. David Gray Carlson (2007) approaches this problem in the 18th chapter of his commentary on Hegel's *Logic*. See particularly p. 430.

⁶⁸ This is iterated in many places, but here is a recent instance: 'The philosophical consequences of this real status of abstraction are crucial: they compel us to reject the historicist relativization and contextualization of different modes of subjectivity, and to assert the "abstract" Cartesian subject (*cogito*) as something which today corrodes from within all different forms of cultural experience – no matter how far we perceive ourselves as being embedded in a particular culture, the moment we participate in global capitalism, this culture is always-already de-naturalized, effectively functioning as one specific and contingent "way of life" of abstract Cartesian subjectivity' (2009a: 143-144).

⁶⁹ This is of course a gross over-simplification. Money is for Marx *many* things other than just a means of exchange. The point made here is that money is not a use-value.

⁷⁰ Fredric Jameson develops a similar visual conception of the relationship of universal and particular in his discussion of Adorno in *Late Marxism*. He labels it 'stereoscopic thinking' (Jameson, 1990: 28; 46). A stereoscope functions on the principle of parallax in that two photographs of the same scene, taken from slightly different perspectives, are presented independently to each eye and thereby give the impression that one is looking at a three dimensional object.

⁷¹ The painting's actual title is *Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve* ('*The Ambassadors*'). Lacan (1978) discusses the painting on pages 85-90 and 92 of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. What is not noted by Lacan (or Žižek, for that matter) is that at the top left-hand corner of the painting the curtain that forms the

background to the two figures that stand before it is slightly pulled back to reveal a small crucifix. (Indeed, while it is visible in the reproduction on the cover of the original edition of the seminar, printed by Seuil, it is cropped out from later French editions, the English edition printed by Karnac Books, and from the cover of Fink *et al's Reading Seminar XI*.) In a more traditional reading of the painting one could say that although all human effort is vain in the face of death, Christ's own death saves from such a fate. Read as a 'parallax', death then acts as both S1 and 'a'. As will be discussed below and in the final chapter of the present study this could be said to be where Žižek in fact goes, with the caveat that, one, it is a crucified Christ who does not seek to submit himself to God's hands who is that salvation and, two, that this Christ as the self-mediating 'community of believers' finds homology in the Party. That is, God, too, is dead – when one views the painting from the far right (physically speaking, not politically) Christ, too, vanishes in a blur when the head of the grim reaper appears. That is, it is a conservative painting in that it is an official icon of the church that saves human endeavour from futility. Perhaps the position of the death's head and Christ should be reversed to instead suggest that all current human endeavour *is* threatened by the *true* infinite (rather than the simply finite – i.e. subject to death) in the form of a Christ that brings the 'sword of division.'

⁷² Marx goes through some of the twists and turns of the capitalist's justifications in chapter seven of *Capital*, where he ventriloquizes... "Have I myself not worked? Have I not performed the labour of superintendence, of overseeing the spinner? And does not this labour, too, create value?" The capitalists own overseer and manager shrug their shoulders' (Marx, 1977: 300). Amongst other wrinkles in the mind of Marx's capitalist we also see a version of 'Bartleby politics' from the conservative side of the 'parallax view' – the capitalist as the rational miser exercises his abstinence as a means of creating value, '...and as a reward he is now in possession of good yarn rather than a bad conscience' (Marx, 1977: 299). See also Chapter 24, Section 3 of *Capital*.

⁷³ This activity results in profit, euphemistically called 'earnings' – a term 'designed to cast the concept of profit in a more respectable light, [which] came into widespread use in the 1950s, when the "profit motive" was under routine attack from postwar socialists' (Olive, 1998).

⁷⁴ Similarly, in *The Holy Family* Marx writes that 'within this antithesis [the estrangement seen in private property] the private property-owner is therefore the *conservative* side, the proletarian the *destructive* side. From the former arises the action of preserving the antithesis, from the latter the action of annihilating it' (Marx and Engels, 1975: unpaginated). While Flisfeder (2012) gives some interesting commentary on 'feminine and masculine logic' in an attempt to elucidate why 'proletarian' might still be an important category for us today he misses this crucial point, thereby driving his discussion of historical and dialectical materialism (where Žižek stands as the means to better understand the difference between the two) in the wrong direction. Rather than two complimentary processes he offers to mutually exclusive ones. See Flemming, forthcoming.

⁷⁵ Žižek isn't completely equivocal, however: '...finally, the most elusive domain, the "spontaneous" ideology at work in the heart of social reality itself [i.e. commodity fetishism] (it is highly questionable is the term 'ideology' is at all appropriate to designate this domain...)' (Žižek, 1994: 9). The point being, however, that it is this 'domain' of ideology that makes the others possible – i.e. 'constitutive ideology' – in that it is the 'genus that is also its own species.'

⁷⁶ 'what is repression for a neurotic? It's a language, another language that he manufactures with his symptoms, that is, if he is a hysteric or an obsessional, with the imaginary dialectic of himself and the other. The neurotic symptom acts as a language that enables repression to be expressed. This is precisely what enables us to grasp the fact that repression and the return of the repressed are one and the same thing, the front and back of a single process' (Lacan, 1993: 60).

⁷⁷ '...the proper moment of subjective transformation occurs at the moment of declaration, not at the moment of the act. This reflexive moment of declaration means that every utterance not only transmits some content, but, simultaneously, *determines how the subject relates to this content*' (Žižek, 2010a: 226). This is one of the ways sublimation relates to the act. It is one's relation to the object that changes in sublimation and the formal conversion brought on by analysis. In this way both the object and the subject are changed.

⁷⁸ See Lars T. Lih's *Lenin Rediscovered* on this point. Note that Lih has a paper in *Lenin Reloaded*, co-edited by Žižek for Verso Books.

⁷⁹ For a longer treatment of some of these themes, see Flemming, 2008

⁸⁰ Rothenberg also takes up the 'parallax' quality that Žižek sees in Bartleby, but emphasizes a slightly different aspect than is discussed above. In her reading the Bartleby parallax is one in which the subject is at one moment 'the missing piece that will unite the social field' and at another 'the obstacle to its coherence' (Rothenberg, 2010: 191). Rothenberg does see Bartleby primarily as a negation – a 'symbolic divestiture' (Ibid: 192) – excluding that he is also a positive entity in his own right, but does however come close to the latter position in some of her comments: 'the subject's role oscillates between being the *cause* of social discord and its *solution*' (Rothenberg, 2010: 191). In a similar vein she notes that at one point Bartleby is made to say 'I have nothing to say to you' to his employer – read literally this sentence could be understood to mean that Bartleby stands as a prosopopia for 'nothing', that through Bartleby nothing 'has its say' (Ibid: 213). In the end this negation is also a new, positive community of analysts – for her the negation of defense mechanisms leads to new social interactions – but is an outcome that has to be precipitated. That is, Bartleby is not in-himself the answer but needs something else to give rise to the move to his position. The relation of all this to capitalism, however, is discussed as a question of hierarchy *per se* – i.e. there is nothing particularly capitalist in the social structures she posits as the problem – and so the means for all to become Bartleby is instead the group therapist who can organize the mental-health

institution such that hierarchy does not interfere with the creation of new group dynamics. This is taken up in more detail in chapter seven of the present study.

⁸¹ Marcus Rediker describes Anglo-American pirates of the 18th Century – drawn from the ranks of the lower classes as they escaped the extreme discipline of their naval, merchant, and privateering ships – in similar terms: ‘Contemporaries who claimed that pirates had “no regular command among them” mistook a different social order [...] for disorder. [...] This social order, articulated in the organization of the pirate ship, was conceived and deliberately constructed by the pirates themselves. Its hallmark was a rough, improvised, but effective egalitarianism that placed authority in the collective hands of the crew. [...] A striking uniformity of rules and customs prevailed aboard pirate ships, each of which functioned under the terms of written articles, a compact written up at the beginning of the voyage or upon election of a new captain, and agreed to by the crew. By these articles crews allocated authority, distributed plunder, and enforced discipline’ (Rediker, 1989: 261). The social order this is contrasted to is of course a capitalist one – which set up military operations to destroy piracy – and the ensign (or it might be said the ‘S1’ or ‘phallus’) under which such pirates sailed was not that of any nation but that of death. Not only death, but ‘Old Roger’ (the Devil, Mephistopheles) or ‘Jolly Roger’, where roger is slang for penis (Rediker, 2004: 164-9). It’s perhaps worth also noting that the term ‘strike’ comes from sailors ‘striking the sails’ (i.e. lowering them) of their ships and refusing to work.

Wahnich makes similar claims in her study, which takes on contemporary understandings of the French revolutionary Terror: from the perspective of today’s political hegemony (comprised by not only the right, but also the left – Agamben stands as her example of the latter with the argument that the Terror is the germ of biopolitics) it appears as a thirst for blood and death. From the perspective of the revolutionaries themselves, however, it was a ‘sign of a movement of life and enthusiasm’ and the protection of newly created rights and freedoms (Wahnich, 2012: 27). In Wahnich’s presentation of the problem the revolutionary tribunal was a way to acknowledge the outrage of the people and transform it from a non-political outburst to an institutional protection of the revolution against its enemies: ‘the means for dissipating these fears [of a massacre of social elites] lay in giving popular enthusiasm a normative symbolic form. It was explicitly demanded that the sovereign emotive power of the people, so that it should not turn destructive, be translated into terms of law’ (Ibid: 30). In contrast to the Thermidorians, who saw the Terror and the right to resist oppression as enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man that led to it as an unthinkable evil, ‘for the revolutionaries, the arbitrary violence that dissolved all social ties arose from a confusion between private and political wellsprings’ (Ibid: 74) – that is, from people confusing vengeance for affronts to personal safety with those to be meted out for attacks on public safety. (Finally, against Arendt, Wahnich locates the basic principle being protected in that of political equality for all, not egalitarianism of wealth and a pity for those living in poverty).

Thompson’s “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century” stands as another example: The bread ‘riots’ of the 17th and 18th centuries in England have been considered so only from the position of power and not from the

position of those doing the ‘rioting.’ In Thompson’s view these actions were instead relatively organized and based not on an abstract, unthinking outrage, but in relation to long held and accepted moral rights and the question of ‘just price.’ (See also note 52 of chapter two). This is to say two things: first, that ‘the fact that something appears to us as a raw, meaningless, unjustified state of things is also a result of our “positing”’ – it is not a neutral act (Žižek, 1996c: 412). Second, perhaps when people focus too closely on *Bartleby* as an example they miss what was said *about* him, instead looking at the content of the story itself and thereby listening to Melville’s words rather than Žižek’s. This is not without merit, of course, but tends to lead people astray. Indeed, such a reading of *Bartleby* is presented later in this study.

⁸² In *Strumpet City*, the television series based on the novel by James Plunkett, Communist labour organizer James Larkin (played by Peter O’Toole) convinces Irish stevedores to go on strike with the following words: ‘Look at their paid henchmen: they’re afraid. They’re afraid of what they know I’m here to ask of you. They know that I’m here to ask you to do something that’s greater than their power, than the batons they beat us with, than the foundry and dockyard gates they bolt shut against us; something so great it can rock the world. I want you to do nothing. Nothing. Go home; take a rest. That’s the help your comrades need from you; That’s the help they’ll give you one day in return because it’s all the same fight. An Injury to one is the concern of all. Help them. Do nothing. Go home.’

⁸³ Johnston also provides grounds for this reading in the appendix to his *Time Driven*: ‘He [Žižek] asserts that there is no such thing as an unsublimated drive’ (2005: 372). Johnston discusses the drives, desire, death drive, sublimation, the Real, and the Symbolic as elements of the ‘splitting’ of drive. Note that this was published a year before Žižek had fully developed his ideas around ‘the parallax view’, so no such language was available to Johnston. See also Žižek/Schelling, 1997: 83 – ‘...drive *is* its sublimation...’. Chiesa makes the same claim for Lacan. See Chiesa, 2007: 135-6. As will become clearer in the final two chapters of this study, where Freud assumes an animal energy to exist from the beginning to be later re-channeled, Lacan (*via* Žižek and Chiesa) can be said to argue that there is no libido before there is social interaction – that is, the historically changing sociality of human beings *creates* libido as death drive... a particularly human trait. Where for Freud sublimation is the redirection of an instinctual aim – i.e. the fulfillment of an animal need is redirected to a ‘civilized’ need – for Lacan/Žižek each drive is already a step outside of instinct and need and into desire or death drive, and hence by definition sublimated.

⁸⁴ Bosteels makes similar comments at the end of his chapter on Žižek and the ‘Act’ in his *The Actuality of Communism*. Here Bosteels begins by taking issue with what he sees as Žižek’s use/development of at least 3 different or competing descriptions of the Act: one as a traversal of the fundamental fantasy as a mere formal conversion, where only one’s subjective relation to the world, and not the world itself, is changed (Bosteels, 2011a: 178-184); an act that actually changes the symbolic and the new is allowed to emerge (*ibid*: 184-5); and the purely formal sticking to principles without changing

course (Ibid:188). Against Bosteels, the latter is better understood not simply as an adherence to form but a dialectic between form and content – i.e. that which is seen as an external means to save the ‘substantial’ content becomes that content itself. See Žižek, 2001a: 85 – where he discusses the film *Brassed Off*. The band portrayed in the film is at first a means to save a coal mine from the vindictive policies of the Iron Lady (on which, see Milne, 2004), but when the mine is finally closed it reveals itself to be the working class ‘content’/way of life that was in the first place to be saved... and lives on beyond the mine. Here the symbolic frame changes, where the alternative is between giving up a particular object in order to maintain or achieve one’s symbolic place – in classical psychoanalytical terms, Oedipalization; in the case of the film, remaining a waged worker – versus keeping the object while giving up on the symbolic mandate/symbolic identification that makes it desirable (and thereby transforming the object, effectively meaning that both the symbolic identification and the object have been given up). On this see also Žižek, 2001b:168. That is, revolutionary struggle is not simply to maintain the means of one’s livelihood – i.e. the mine – but to achieve production through freedom – in this case, playing music with others for its own sake. (This is not unlike Marx’s comments in the 1844 manuscripts on French working men’s organizations, which began as a means of struggle but became ends in themselves where each enjoyed the others’ comradeship). The ‘formal sticking to principle’ (i.e. being in the band) becomes the end itself because of a change in the symbolic identification which effectively makes the band a new object, though it is still empirically the same. One could argue that this also opens a different ground of struggle – i.e. the new. That is, all three aspects that Bosteels sees as incompatible are present in this one example. (This is not to suggest, however, that ‘art’ is in Žižek’s view *the* form of revolutionary action. It’s important to remember that the band was first a means in an actual struggle and only later an end in itself. This is broached in more detail in the following chapter).

This is immaterial, however, as in the end Bosteels asserts that each of these descriptions were in Žižek’s work from the the beginning, that they can be discounted as inconsistent as they operate at different levels or because they are jumbled but held together with a dogmatic adherence to certain Lacanian and Hegelian positions, and that the real problem is Žižek’s adherence to a fourth notion of the Act: what Bosteels calls the ‘arch-act’ or the radical negativity of the death drive. He asserts that in this final formulation all that is left are calls for inactivity and the elimination of any room for identification with any sort of political cause, and thereby also the ability to actually create a new world (Bosteels, 2011a: 208; 217).

According to Bosteels this is all because Žižek apparently gives up on the notion of truth. ‘Žižek could not be clearer in this regard’, writes Bosteels, who after making a few references to Lacan on the subject takes a quote from Žižek out of context to prove it (Bosteels, 2011a: 211-212). In the passage in question (Žižek, 2008b: lxvii) Žižek argues that truth can be used as an ideological mystification (‘being right, but for the wrong reasons’ – *ibid*: lxix) – i.e. used to disguise the *jouissance* that belies it. Later in the same piece Žižek argues that Lacan does, in fact, hold to a notion of the truth that doesn’t simply subordinate it to *jouissance* (the subordination being the core of Bosteels’ dissatisfaction): ‘...for Lacan, Truth is this shattering experience of the Void – a sudden insight into the abyss of Being...’ (*ibid*: lxxxii), a formulation that Žižek then goes on to

argue is not a relativization or subordination of truth, and which he contrasts to Badiou's understanding of the term (see particularly *ibid*: lxxxvi-lxxxviii). This in the end is the real problem for Bosteels: Žižek is wrong by virtue of not being Badiou. This disagreement is what functions as a blinder enabling Bosteels to take the Act to be only destructive, hiding that the creative/destructive parallax inherent to Žižek's description not only exists, but is also present from the beginning – including in several of the books Bosteels references. For example, from *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (upon which Bosteels relies heavily): 'In this sense, revolution is strictly a *creationist* act, a radical intrusion of the "death drive"...' (1989: 143); 'the moment we "see it [reality] as it really is," this being dissolves itself into nothingness or, more precisely, into a new kind of reality' (*ibid*: 28); from the 2002 preface from *For They Know Not What They Do*: 'Nothingness is *being itself* viewed from a different perspective' (2008b: xxvi); in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, close to the pages from which Bosteels takes the epigram for his introductory chapter, Žižek explains that *Aufhebung* and 'subtraction' mean to withdraw, to reveal difference as such, and to destroy, to then one page later add that to properly subtract oneself from a situation also means to transform it (2009a: 129-30).

Note too that Žižek at times describes death drive as the inhuman aspect of being human, the adherence to one particular aspect of being that thereby tears us out of the 'natural cycle' of mere instinct. The exemplar here is of course sex – it's not just for reproduction anymore! Alternatively, this can be formulated as 'sticking to principle' regardless of the supposed content that it is to produce (in this case, children), effectively bringing us back to the last of the three 'different' versions of the Act that Bosteels presents.

It's also important that in contrast to 'subjective destitution' – the outcome of stepping through one's fundamental fantasy – Žižek cautions that the process can go wrong and lead to a 'subjective disintegration' (Žižek, 2008b: lxvii). The latter notion is perhaps best understood as something closer to what Bosteels is railing against – not death drive, but an unredeemable destruction, perhaps akin to the psychiatric work done by Ewen Cameron for the CIA as described by Naomi Klein in the opening chapters of *The Shock Doctrine*. It's also worth noting that while Bosteels discusses 'inactivity' he doesn't reference *The Parallax View* and the sections on Bartleby (cited above, in which Žižek describes activity/inactivity as a parallax). Perhaps all this is excusable given that Žižek himself often talks about sublimation and death drive as two different moments (e.g. 2008b: lxxxiii), but Bosteels appears to be more interested in defending Badiou than understanding Žižek.

⁸⁵ This is further taken up in chapter seven of the present study. Zelnik (1976a: 282; 1976b: 424) makes similar observations about the 'conscious' vs 'intellectual' worker in his discussion of two famous memoirs of Russian activist-workers. (Zelnik is also the translator of Kanatchikov's memoir *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia*.) Lih departs from Zelnik in that the latter, based in part on Kanatchikov's ambivalence to the non-worker intelligentsia, finds it incredulous that Kanatchikov could so easily and so early be on side with the Bolsheviks given their supposed inclinations towards intellectuals (Zelnik, 1976b: 441-2). Lih's work centres around destroying the understanding of the

pre-revolutionary Bolsheviks that leads to this sort of reading. Lih instead sides more with Reichman (1996).

⁸⁶ Given that Parker thinks that the link Žižek makes between the commodity and the dream are useful for the study of culture and film, one would expect him to give an exposition of this link in his chapter on culture. Instead, he mostly cites the negative opinions of others – for example, Homer (discussed above), Ebert (1999) and McLaren (2002). In Ebert's case, the treatment of Žižek makes up only a small portion of her paper. The comments that Parker most approvingly refers to pertain to the notion of class struggle as an 'unsymbolizable antagonism,' which she takes to be an idealist inversion of actual class struggle. This she does – as does Parker – without a discussion of what Žižek might actually mean by this: i.e. that 'class struggle' is not merely an empirical reality (as discussed above). And while Parker cites McLaren as a seconder to Ebert's motion that Žižek ignores the material reality of struggling working bodies, McLaren's conclusions are actually quite different. McLaren turns to McNally's *Bodies of Meaning* to argue that while Žižek does rely on a theory of language that focuses on the erotic side of the body rather than its toiling side, he does not make such a discussion impossible – which is what McNally argues is most problematic in Derrida's work (McLaren: 638-640). In fact, McLaren approvingly discusses Žižek's claims that class struggle is the 'Form of the Social' and that as a consequence truth can only be had *via* class struggle (McLaren: 635-6). By contrast, Ebert asserts that truth is not something Žižek thinks is attainable (Ebert: 407). In the end, Parker merely relies on an aside that McLaren does not in fact go on to substantiate: that Žižek at times provides a 'Hegelian re-reversal of Marxism' (McLaren: 620; Parker: 110). (For a similarly sympathetic siding with Žižek over Derrida on the question of Marx, see Veire, 2007.)

⁸⁷ On a similar note, see Johnston's *Žižek's Ontology*, p 112.

⁸⁸ Mladen Dolar, one of Žižek's Slovenian-Lacanian fellow travelers, makes a similar argument in his *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006: 98-99; 122-3)

⁸⁹ This is also the position that Johnston establishes through the course of *Žižek's Ontology*, with the added subtlety that there is a relationship between the Real as 'pre-symbolic' and as the product of the Symbolic. It is his contention that the two meet where the not-all material world and the symbolic are each, themselves, internally 'barred' (Johnston, 2008: 152).

⁹⁰ Note too that when discussing how value is the 'dominant subject' of the circuit of capital when it is embodied as money he likens the process to the birth of Christ – rather, the birth of God through Christ (Marx, 1977: 256).

Chapter three

⁹¹ This chapter began as a paper presented in October 2011 at the 4th biennial conference of the International Herbert Marcuse Society.

⁹² Interestingly enough, Adorno's name appears more often than Marcuse's in those pages.

⁹³ In his brief "A Critique of the Death Instinct" Otto Fenichel also argues against the view that there are two foundational 'instincts' rather than a fundamental principle that governs all 'instinctual' activity (i.e. the activity of drives). One of the pitfalls of a dual-drive view, according to Fenichel, is that some analysts fell into the trap of seeing neuroses as the product of an internal instinctual battle and thereby eliminated the 'social etiology of neuroses', which amounts to their complete biologization (Fenichel, 1953: 370-71).

⁹⁴ For a discussion of Freud's own relationship to his nurse maid, see McClintock, 1995: 87-9; 406 n41.

⁹⁵ See also *An Essay on Liberation*, p 50. Freud makes the observation that *Eros* and *Thanatos* may be the same instinct in their conservative nature in his *The Ego and The Id*: '...we put forward the hypothesis of a *death instinct*, the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state; one the other hand, we supposed that *Eros*, by bringing about more and more far-reaching combination of the particles into which living substance is dispersed, aims at complicating life and at the same time, of course, at preserving it. Acting in this way, both the instincts would be conservative in the strictest sense of the word, since both would be endeavouring to re-establish a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life' (Freud, 1984c: 380-1). He goes on, however, to argue that they are in fact two separate drives.

⁹⁶ Note that in his account of Lacanian ethics and the end of analysis Chiesa argues that to posit that nature will come to enjoy is a negative consequence of holding to a notion of a Kantian Noumena/pre-symbolic Real – i.e. akin to Sadean ethics (Chiesa, 2007: 181-2). This is approached in the final chapter of the present study.

⁹⁷ Lacan, with reference to Heraclitus, compares the component drives to a bow, playing on the word '*bios*', or life: 'to the bow is given the name of life [...] and its work is death' (Lacan, 1978:177).

⁹⁸ 'In this way [with reference to libido/lamella] I explain the essential affinity of every drive with the zone of death, and reconcile the two sides of the drive – which, at one and the same time, makes present sexuality in the unconscious and represents, in its essence, death' (Lacan, 1978:199). '...the signifier as such, whose first purpose is to bar the subject, has brought into him the meaning of death. (The letter kills, but we learn this from the letter itself.) This is why every drive is virtually a death drive' (Lacan, 2006: 719). According to both Fink and Chiesa, what the letter 'kills' is not any particular 'thing', but the maternal Thing – the fantasmatic wholeness of the pre-linguistic (Fink, 2003: 52; Chiesa, 2007: 74; see also chapter 5 of Chiesa).

⁹⁹ Kant provides a description of birth that is perhaps fitting: ‘The cry of the newborn is not a note of distress but one of indignation and raging anger: he is screaming not from pain but from vexation, presumably because he wants to move about and his own impotence feels to him like fetters on his freedom’ (Kant, 1974: 188).

¹⁰⁰ For a different critique of Marcuse’s approach to the maternal, see O’Neill, 2007: ‘...Marcuse completely psychologized the historical location of matriarchal values as the source of critical utopianism, while historicizing Freud’s two principles of reality and pleasure’ (8). Part of the present argument is that Marcuse also fails properly historicize *Thanatos*.

¹⁰¹ Žižek’s reading of the difference between desire/drive and death drive has another potential ally in Jean Hyppolite (an influential reader of Hegel) who made similar points in a talk on Freud’s ‘On Negation’ to one of Lacan’s audiences in 1954. Take for example the following: ‘We have here, in some sense, <the formal couple of> two primary forces – the force of attraction and the force of expulsion – both of which seem to be under the sway of the pleasure principle, which cannot but strike one in this text’ (Hyppolite, 2006: 750). ‘We must clearly distinguish between the destructive instinct and the form of destruction, otherwise we will not understand what Freud meant’ (Ibid: 753). For a Lacanian take on aggressivity (as opposed to death drive) see Chiesa, 2007, 20-23.

¹⁰² See Marcuse, 1966, 149. See also Moore, 2007. Referring to the 1960 preface to *Reason and Revolution*, Kellner points out that the term is shared with and derived from André Breton (Kellner, 1984: 279; 457 n. 5). Moore, however, finds this unsatisfactory – in part because he primarily associates the term with Whitehead.

¹⁰³ Sohn-Rethel does not himself offer a discussion of why coining by the state began in the first place. Kraay (1964) argues that the growth of the Greek world in the seventh and sixth century BCE increased trade and led to the state becoming more complicated and more official payments being made to it (e.g. taxes) and from it (e.g. creating and paying for ‘public works’ projects). As a consequence it became more cumbersome to use existing methods of weighing precious metals and more convenient to invent and insist upon the use of units of measurement that it itself devised (i.e. coinage with the stamp of the current government upon it) (89-90). Seaford (2004) gives a slightly different account, linking the adoption/creation of coining to religious sanctuaries redistributing their precious metals in paying for services, using a standard of measurement that ‘derived at least in part from the ancient and powerfully persistent notion of the universal right to a share of sacrificial meat, carried over into pieces of metal that, just like the meat, would have to be in small pieces of standard size and quality, acceptably equal for all’ (110). That is, the state practice in part derived from practices of sacrifice and the concentration of ‘communal wealth in the form of precious metal stored in sanctuaries’ (Ibid: 96). Like Sohn-Rethel (Seaford makes several brief references to *Intellectual and Manual Labour*) he attributes many of the particularities of pre-Socratic thought to the qualities of coined money – though the relevant list of attributes he associates with currency differ. Sohn-Rethel, of course, leaves out an extended discussion of Greek

thought to instead focus on how it resembles the Kantian conception of the ‘I.’ Like Žižek, who rails against the idea that ‘technological rationality’ and the Cartesian subject are to blame for ills better laid on the shoulders of capitalism (Žižek, 1999: 4), Seaford argues that the emergence of ideas about a non-changing ‘one’ (as opposed to the wealth of experience that points to the world being nothing but constant destruction and change) can not explained ‘merely by the “economy of simplicity” characteristic of science or the “drive for epistemological power over nature”’ (Seaford, 2004: 217).

¹⁰⁴ In *Tarrying With the Negative* Žižek muses that ‘it would be of great theoretical interest to establish the conceptual link between this genesis of self-consciousness [i.e. Hegelian self-relating negativity] and the modern notion of paper money’ to then briefly discuss Brian Rotman’s *Signifying Nothing* (Žižek, 1993: 28). Not unlike the present study (in which the link Žižek draws between the Cartesian subject, Freudian ‘constructions of analysis’, and Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism are brought to the forefront) Rotman attempts to show that the modern subject is linked to the introduction of the concept of zero into Western mathematics and philosophy, the use of formal perspective (i.e. the vanishing point) in painting, and the introduction of paper money into commerce.

There is a further similarity between Rotman’s study and this one in that he concludes that the possibilities opened up by the initial discovery of ‘the void’ come to also occlude that discovery. Here that takes the form of the exchange abstraction opening the possibility of concrete freedom but also occluding it in commodity fetishism. Rotman gets to a similar point by beginning with the argument that the Western resistance to the concepts of zero and nothing came largely from the Greek philosophical doctrine that nothing came from nothing (a notion that Christian philosophers who believed that God created the world from nothing had to wrestle with). In his account Zero was the introduction, into mathematics, of the idea that there were not simply objects that were counted but someone who originated the counting and therefore also the sequence of signs that followed. This, in his view, thereby introduced the idea that objects did not pre-exist their counting but were in some sense created by it – hence Žižek’s attraction to the book: for Hegel the world is always mediated, never simply empirical or ‘sense certain’ (see the ‘here’ and ‘now’ examples from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*).

This is compatible (in Rotman’s view) with the Christian notion that God created the world *Ex Nihilo*, but with secular overtones: in each of these three instances (Mathematics, painting, exchange) the first step was the creation of an anonymous, generative subject who originates the sign system (in painting, the ‘embodiment’ of the vanishing point in a window or door within the scene), the embodiment of that point in the particular (the vanishing point occurring at the place in the scene where a figure stood), and finally the generalization or naturalization of that position so that it is once again obfuscated (the vanishing point no longer being represented in the painting, but instead indirectly referred to and ironized). That is, agency/freedom is revealed only to in the end be ‘sutured’ or concealed (Rotman, 1987: 54). This thesis holds for money as well, but Rotman does not go very far down the road of anti-capitalism, instead using his study to reflect on the work of Derrida. He does at least, however, finish his book by suggesting that capitalist exchange is a semiotic system that needs to be destroyed in

order to reveal that the world is not simply one of money but one made by people (Rotman: 107).

Though his book gets another brief mention in *The Parallax View* (on a different topic), it is, however, Sohn-Rethel's work that lies at the foundation of Žižek's claim that 'the roots of philosophical speculative idealism are in the social reality of the world of commodities; it is this world which behaves "idealistically"' (Žižek, 1989: 32), and so no further treatment is given to it here.

¹⁰⁵ This can be seen in the last paragraph of the third aphorism of Adorno's 'On Subject and Object.' Take this line, for example: 'The doctrine of the transcendental subject faithfully discloses the precedence of the abstract, rational relations that are abstracted from individuals and their conditions and for which exchange is the model' (Adorno, 2005: 248; See similar comments in Adorno, 1967: 73-4, 76). While reporting he was personally acquainted with Adorno, Sohn-Rethel had apparently only encountered Marcuse in books.

The argument leveled here at Marcuse – that he obfuscates the historical circumstances that can be shown to precipitate changes in the form of reason, instead positing that it is driven to unfold into technological rationality by its own internal logic – finds a counterpart in John Abromeit's biography of Max Horkheimer. He argues that Adorno held an ahistorical understanding of the categories of bourgeois thought (i.e. he treated them as if they existed through all time), a position that later came to be accepted and adopted by Horkheimer, ultimately leading to the pair's collaboration on *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* – which in Abromeit's view represents a break with Horkheimer's earlier development of a Critical Theory fundamentally based on historical analysis (Abromeit, 2011: 349-432). Part of the development of Abromeit's argument involves reference to Adorno's relationship to Sohn-Rethel and Horkheimer's refusal to consider Adorno's requests that the Institute support SR's work: Abromeit presents Sohn-Rethel's supposed ahistorical view and Adorno's advocacy of it as support for the argument that Adorno's work suffered the same ill. That is, in Abromeit's view Horkheimer refused to accept Sohn-Rethel's work in part because references to exploitation, money, and the division of intellectual and manual labour appear to be treated as categories that remain the same across history, thereby undermining Sohn-Rethel's attempt to link exploitation and abstract epistemologies (Abromeit, 2011: 383-385; 387-8). This neglects that money and exploitation *have*, of course, existed long before capitalism, and that it is the *generalization* of their use in the capitalist mode of production that becomes decisive for Sohn-Rethel; it also neglects that Sohn-Rethel's is also a discussion of when the division of intellectual and manual labour *first* appears in history – i.e. at the same time as the introduction of money. Admittedly, he does not discuss the effects of this introduction on Greek life as a whole to any great degree (for such an account see Seaford, *op. cit.*), and judgment is here reserved on his discussion of overcoming the division of intellectual and manual labour (a topic which also forms part of Horkheimer's objections).

¹⁰⁶ In his review of *Less Than Nothing*, however, Pippin makes claims about Žižek's definition of the Act that resemble those made by Bosteels, that it 'makes zero Hegelian

sense. Something understood by an agent as an “abyssal” act is a delusion, the pathos of self-inflating and posed heroism, and the gesture belongs in the Hegelian zoo along with the Beautiful Soul [...]. And if the act is “abyssal”, then “politics” simply means “power”, power backed by nothing but resolve and will, likely met with nothing but resolve and will’ (2013, 16). Again, the response to this criticism is that the Act appears to be abyssal from the existing categories of the Symbolic, but as a product of that symbolic system – i.e. being the ‘extimate’ *objet a* – it can’t be said to be abyssal in the sense of coming from nowhere; it is abyssal in the sense of not being sanctioned/‘guaranteed’ by the *status quo*. Unlike Bosteels, who can apparently find nothing redeeming in what Žižek writes, Pippin does, however, give Žižek some praise on pages 16 and 17 of his review.

¹⁰⁷ In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse relies on Marx’s description of the ‘general intellect’ as found in the *Grundrisse* to back this thesis. Žižek explicitly rejects the notion of the General Intellect, and thereby also large swaths of the arguments made by Hardt and Negri, who also rely on this part of Marx’s work. See for instance Žižek’s *Living in The End Times*, page 192, n. 18.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Where id was, ego shall be. It is a work of culture – not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee’ (Freud, 1965: 71). For Lacan’s take on this quip, see the *Écrits*, 347-8. The first half of the first sentence of this phrase – in its original German – is also the name of a series of books edited by Žižek, a series intended to bring together psychoanalysis and Marxism – which ‘enables us to question the very presuppositions of the circuit of Capital.’ Among other things it includes Žižek’s *The Ticklish Subject*, Zupančič’s *Ethics of the Real*, and Badiou’s *Ethics*.

¹⁰⁹ The Marxist-Leninist Black Panthers, for one, are passed over silently. Interestingly enough, Huey P. Newton held that because of the increased productivity of capitalism the lumpen-proletariat would do nothing but increase (Hayes and Kiene, 1998: 161) – a position which has clear affinities with that of Marcuse. Relying on the work of Fanon, Mao, Guevara, and others, the aim of the BPP became that of organizing this mass. It may just be that the timing of Marcuse’s book was such that this couldn’t be included, but other than a passing reference in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* there doesn’t appear to be any real discussion of the BPP in his work.

¹¹⁰ What is valuable in Kant’s discussion of artistic practice – as found in *The Critique of Judgment* – is his definition of art as production through freedom. That is, art is a means of communicating a universal *via* feeling (i.e. without concepts) as produced in a work done for its own sake. The problem is that Kant doesn’t extend this possibility to ‘handicraft’, the production of everyday things that is done for other ends – i.e. making a living (see for example §43). What Marx does, of course, is crack this latter possibility wide open. See, for example, his ‘Notes on James Mill’ in *Early Writings*.

¹¹¹ Marx held a similar view, putting it this way in the 1844 manuscripts: ‘When communist *workmen* gather together, their immediate aim is instruction, propaganda, etc.

But at the same time they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means has become an end’ (Marx, 1992: 365).

¹¹² ‘...the authority of the Party is not that of determinate positive knowledge, but that of the form of knowledge, of a new type of knowledge linked to a collective political subject’ (Žižek, 2002: 188).

Chapter four

¹¹³ In his assessment of the foundations of the Marxism of the second international Colletti levels the same charge: separating ideology and science (i.e. economics) and seeing the economy as simply a question of the empirical is to eviscerate what was in Marx’s work the ‘most profound originality and its strongest element’ (1974: 76). Linked to this is the inability of Marxists of the second international (and later) to see that ‘Marx’s theory of value is indetical to his *theory of fetishism...*’ (Ibid: 77). Shandro disagrees with Colletti aiming this critique at Kautsky. See Shandro, 1997/8: 475-9.

¹¹⁴ See also Marx and Engels, 1973: 36; Marx, 1977:1054-55.

¹¹⁵ This chapter is the product of two presentations: one given at *The Radical Democracy Conference* held at the New School for Social Research and Columbia University in April of 2011, and *Forms of Domination and Emancipation* held at the University of Sussex in June of the same year.

¹¹⁶ For Žižek’s (badly edited – at one point we learn of a ‘transcendent Thong’!) critique of Boucher see Žižek 2005b. While Žižek explicitly argues against Boucher’s central thesis that the death drive is for Žižek a return to a lost fullness, while Žižek outlines the difference between his Hegelian position and Boucher’s Kantian one, Boucher sticks to his position with the explanation that ‘Žižek does not appear to me to have a reply’ and does not ‘explain his side’ of the ‘political difference’ between them (Boucher, 2008: 165 n1). That is, he doesn’t bother to reply to Žižek’s criticisms. Boucher suffers from the same malady as Sharpe, as outlined in the first chapter of this study: he does not understand the ‘parallax view.’ It is this concept that serves as the primary means by which Žižek refutes Boucher in the above-cited article.

This is all the more interesting given that the thesis that the division between the ‘good Žižek’ and the ‘bad Žižek’ springs from the influence of Schelling is primarily Boucher’s, and Schelling provides a similar concept: ‘what-is-not and what-is are not two different essences in it but are rather one essence regarded from different sides’ (Schelling/Žižek 1997: 143); ‘necessity and freedom are in one another as one being that appears as one or the other only when considered from different sides, in itself freedom, formally necessity’ (Schelling, 2006: 50). See also Schelling, 2006: 31; 63). What should be noted here, however, is that in this essay Schelling is primarily concerned with the work of Spinoza, who in his *Ethics* argues that thought and extension (i.e. the body) are both the same thing viewed from a different perspective. Take this comment on free will, for example: ‘both the decision of the mind and the appetite and the determination of the body by nature exist together – or rather are one and the same thing, which we call a

decision when it is considered under [...] the attribute of thought, and which we call a determination when it is considered under the attribute of extension...' (Spinoza, 1996: 73). Spinoza differs from Žižek in several respects, of course, but most important here in terms of 'parallax' are these two: where the link between the two attributes is for Spinoza the essence/substance of God, it is for Žižek the 'void' of the Real that lies between each side of the parallax; where for Spinoza the two attributes are symmetrical, for Žižek they are lopsided – not in the sense that one side determines the other, but in the sense that one side can undermine the other.

In the end Schelling introduces a similar 'parallax' into Spinoza: standing by Spinoza's arguments that there is only one principle in the world, he differs in that he thinks it is one-sided and too mechanical, too lifeless, arguing that what is needed is the introduction of God's 'personality', his becoming particular (i.e. becoming Christ and dying away). That is, Schelling argues for a God who also has 'wit' (Schelling, 2006: 59), the paradigmatic example which can perhaps be found in Monty Python's (Life of) Brian: not only a particular, but also an entire comedy troupe. Therein lies the parallax: in place of one God with two equal attributes (thinking and extension), a particular person that exists in and through a community. And perhaps Schelling moves too fast in asserting that Spinoza has missed this point. Take these comments on the story of the fall and the loss of human freedom: '...this freedom was recovered by the patriarchs, guided by the Spirit of Christ, that is, by the idea of God, on which alone it depends that man should be free, and desire for other men the good he desires for himself' (Spinoza, 1996: 152).

¹¹⁷ '... equality begins only when the power of the experts ceases to hold sway. Wherever the vaunted triumph of law and of the legal state takes the form of recourse to experts, democracy has been reduced to a caricature of itself – to nothing more than government by wise men' (Rancière, 2007: 89).

¹¹⁸ 'This is also why Hegel's deduction of the monarchy can be given a democratic supplement: Hegel insists on the monarch as the "irrational" (i.e. contingent) head of state precisely in order to keep the summit of state power apart from the expertise embodied in the bureaucracy. While the bureaucrats are chosen on account of their abilities and qualifications, the king is the king by birth – that is, ultimately, he is chosen by lot, on account of natural contingency' (Žižek, 2011a: unpaginated). See also Žižek, 2011b, 666-7.

¹¹⁹ '... Claude Lefort's argument, according to which in democracy the place of power is empty, should, I think, be supplemented by the following statement: democracy requires the constant and active production of that emptiness' (Laclau, 2001: 12).
'... it is misleading to say that the 'democratic invention' finds the locus of power empty – the point is rather that it constitutes, constructs it as empty; that it reinterprets the "empirical" fact of interregnum into a 'transcendental' condition of the legitimate exercise of power' (Žižek, 2008b: 276 n52).

¹²⁰ ‘...the function of the representative cannot be purely passive, transmitting a will constituted elsewhere, but that it has to play an active role in the constitution of that will’ (Laclau, 2001: 13).

‘This external element [the Party] does not stand for objective knowledge, that is, its externality is strictly internal: the need for the Party stems from the fact that the working class is never “fully itself.” So the ultimate meaning of Lenin’s insistence on this externality is that “adequate” class consciousness does not emerge “spontaneously,” that it does not correspond to a “spontaneous tendency” of the working class; [...] “adequate” class-consciousness has to be fought out through hard work’ (Žižek, 2002: 189). See also Žižek 2006: 149; 2000: 174-5.

¹²¹ ‘...power, as the medium through which the incommensurability between particularity and universality shows itself, is not the antipode but the condition of democracy’ (Laclau, 2001, 13). ‘Again, there is only emancipation if there is never ultimate self-determination, if the gap between necessity and freedom is never finally bridged. The name of this asymmetry can be called – depending on the dimension we are emphasizing – either democracy, power, or hegemony’ (ibid: 13-14).

“‘Dictatorship’ does not mean here the opposite of democracy, but democracy’s own underlying mode of functioning [...]. In other words, one should use the term “dictatorship” in the precise sense in which democracy also is a form of dictatorship, that is, as a purely *formal* determination’ (Žižek, 2007: xv-xvi).

¹²² This is also the basic thesis of Evald Ilyenkov's (2012) "The Ideal", recently translated by SPT Grad Alex Levant and published in the most recent issue of *Historical Materialism*. See also the first third of 'interlude 1' of *Less Than Nothing*.

¹²³ This echoes the 1844 manuscripts, where Marx writes that ‘the inversion and confusion of all human and natural qualities, the bringing together of impossibilities, the *divine* power of money lies in its *nature* as the estranged and alienating *species-essence* of man which alienates itself by selling itself. It is the alienated *capacity of mankind*’ (Marx, 1992: 377). This also appears in the “Chapter on Capital” in the *Grundrisse*, where *capital is labour* as an alien ‘subject-object’ that in ‘its relation is itself as complete a contradiction as is that of wage labour’: where the labour of any individual is only possible in relation to all labour (abstract labour) the property of all (this abstract labour) becomes the property of one (a particular capitalist) in the form of machinery and other means of production and the commodities thereby produced (Marx, 1973b: 470-1). Žižek acknowledges this ‘subject-object’ is an alienated one (Žižek, 2012: 251-2; 2002: 283).

¹²⁴ While Laclau is the object of the argument above, these comments also serve as a retort to the comments made in Jonathan Rée’s (2012) review of *Less Than Nothing*, printed in *The Guardian*: just because Žižek isn’t talking about particular empirical instances of exploitation, war, and destruction does not mean he can not be considered as part of a line of Marxists.

¹²⁵ ‘...the money system is in fact the system of equality and freedom, and that the disturbances which they encounter in the further development of the system are disturbances inherent in it, are merely the realization of *equality and freedom*, which prove to be inequality and unfreedom’ (Marx, 1973b: 248-9). See also Marx, 1977: 152.

¹²⁶ See also Rancière’s *Hatred of Democracy* (2006: 14-15; 64-5).

¹²⁷ See also Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*: ‘If the conscious expression of the actual relations of these individuals is illusory, if in their imagination they turn reality upside down, this in turn is a result of their limited mode of activity and their limited social relations arising from it’ (1994: 111).

¹²⁸ Žižek also rejects the idea that ideology is an illusion: ‘...the concept of ideology must be disengaged from the “representationalist” problematic: *ideology has nothing to do with “illusion”*, with a mistaken, distorted representation of its social content’ (Žižek, 1994: 7).

¹²⁹ See also the second notebook of the *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1973b: 243).

¹³⁰ Laclau, of course, outright rejects the labour theory of value.

¹³¹ Michael Lebowitz develops this line of argument in his *Beyond Capital*. Most pertinent here is the way he sets up the problem in chapter 4 (Lebowitz, 2003: 63-76): while each can not survive without the other (with the caveat that in the end labour *could* live without capitalism, but capitalism could not exist without labour), and each attempts to be ‘for-itself’ at the expense of the other, that which appears to be ‘outside of capital’ – i.e. historically determined ‘necessary needs’ (the category Marx uses to replace Ricardo’s use of the ‘natural’ limits of the productivity of land and Malthus’ theory of population as the determinant of the subsistence wage) – is in fact the product of class struggle. As the relation between wage labour and capital are an ‘antinomy’ that cannot be overcome (without the destruction of both), resistance is necessarily a part of capitalism.

¹³² ‘Crucial for the fetish-object is that it emerges at the intersection of the two lacks: the subject’s own lack as well as the lack of his big Other’ (Žižek, 1997a: 103). ‘...what both child and mother give without having is the phallus: a temporary superimposition of lacks is obtained’ (Chiesa, 2007: 72).

¹³³ ‘...in the case of *objet a* as the object-cause of *desire*, we have an object which is originally lost, which coincides with its own loss, which emerges as lost, while, in the case of *objet a* as the object of drive, the “object” is *directly the loss itself* – in the shift from desire to drive, we pass from the *lost object* to loss itself as an object. That is to say, the weird movement called “drive” is not driven by the “impossible” quest for the lost object; it is *a push to directly enact the “loss” – the gap, cut, distance – itself* (Žižek, 2008a: 328).

¹³⁴ ‘The effectiveness of the community of speaking beings is predicated on a violence which antedates it. [...] It creates separation in a community, making room for debate therein [...]’ (Rancière, 2007: 85)

¹³⁵ ‘the compromises and disorders of domination are only “democratic” to the extent that they themselves are effects of egalitarian division, the contingent historical configurations where that division can recognize its own place and reaffirm its power, which is the power to declassify’ (Rancière, 2007: 56. See also 32-3).

¹³⁶ ‘The claim that the proletariat is the “universal class” is thus ultimately equivalent to the claim that, within the existing global order, the proletariat is the class that is radically dislocated [...] with regard to the social body: while other classes can still maintain the illusion that “Society exists”, and that they have their specific place within the global social body, the very existence of the proletariat repudiates the claim that “Society exists”’ (Žižek, 2000: 169).

¹³⁷ ‘...as it [the principle of government] attempts to separate out the excellence specific to it from the sole right of birth, it encounters a strange object, a seventh title that is not a title, and that, the Athenian tells us, is nevertheless considered to be the most just...’ (Rancière, 2006: 40).

¹³⁸ To these two myths should also be added a third: that of the city so organized in such contravention of the rules of *The Republic* that it suffers a terrible fate – Atlantis. This is introduced in *Critias*, considered (along with *Timaeus*) to be a companion-piece to *The Republic* (Plato, 2008: 93-110).

¹³⁹ ‘...democracy must have already – without having had to kill any king or shepherd – proposed the most official and the most intolerable of responses...’ (Rancière, 2006: 44).

¹⁴⁰ ‘The scandal of democracy, and of the drawing of lots which is its essence, is to reveal that this title can be nothing but the absence of title, that the government of societies cannot but rest in the last resort on its own contingency’ (Rancière, 2006: 47).

¹⁴¹ For a similar argument, see Ellen Wood’s *Capitalism Against Democracy* (1995), chapter six.

¹⁴² See Lars T. Lih’s contribution to *Lenin Reloaded*, edited by (among others) Žižek.

¹⁴³ For Watkin’s discussion of the film, see <http://pwatkins.net/commune.htm>

Chapter five

¹⁴⁴ The first iteration of this paper was originally prepared for and presented at *Marx and Psychology*, a conference held at the University of Prince Edward Island in August of 2010.

¹⁴⁵ ‘What the inexistence of the big Other signals is that every ethical and/or moral edifice has to be grounded in an abyssal act which is, in the most radical sense imaginable, *political*. Politics is the very space in which, without and external guarantee, ethical decisions are made and negotiated. The idea that one can group politics in ethics, or that politics is ultimately a strategic effort to realize prior ethical questions, is a version of the illusion of the “big Other.” From the questions “which ethics fits psychoanalysis?” we should therefore pass to the question “Which politics fits psychoanalysis?”’ (Žižek, 2012: 963).

¹⁴⁶ Freud’s testimony makes it clear that this essence is some form of liberal humanism. This will be problematized later in this paper when the discourse of human rights is discussed.

¹⁴⁷ For an interesting take on the relationship of psychology and torture, see De Vos, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ I.e. the assertion that reality is not composed of unrelated parts, but is composed of reciprocally mediating ‘distinctions within a unity’ (Marx, 1973: 99-101). ‘In authentic Marxism, totality is not an ideal but a critical notion – to locate a phenomenon in its totality does not mean to see the hidden harmony of the whole, but to include into a system all its “symptoms”, antagonisms, inconsistencies, as its integral parts’ (Žižek, 2011b, 664).

¹⁴⁹ On this question Fenichel briefly brings up the free clinics that were organized in Vienna and elsewhere. For a much fuller treatment of the subject, see Danto’s *Freud’s Free Clinics* (2005).

¹⁵⁰ For a condensed account of this history, see Dunbar (1998). For a more general discussion of professional organizations and psychotherapy, see Lipsig-Mummé, 2006.

¹⁵¹ The CPA reported that in 2010 it had, among other things, lobbied the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council to allow graduate students in clinical psychology to apply for funding, spoken to the Federal Government about providing psychological services to its thousands of civil servants, and prepared briefs on government budgets with other national professional associations (CPA, 2010).

¹⁵² For a discussion of how public employees more generally embody the contradiction between human welfare and the economic and political needs of the state, see Stephanie Ross’s history of the founding of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ross, 2005).

¹⁵³ The limitation of this study, however, is that it relies on practitioners’ perceptions of their use of ethics, not their actual practice.

¹⁵⁴ Mill's *On Liberty* is instructive on this point: free speech and liberty hold only for those in 'civilized' countries who have reached the age of majority. Anyone else is considered a barbarian, and can thus justifiably be 'improved' by violent paternal means. It's not incidental that Mill, like his father, was an employee of the East India Company, which had a major role in colonizing India and attempts to 'liberalize' China in the Opium Wars.

¹⁵⁵ 'The aim of my teaching has been and still is the training of analysts. The training of analysts is a subject that is well to the fore-front of analytic research. Nevertheless [...] in the analytic literature, its principles are lost sight of' (Lacan, 1978: 230).

¹⁵⁶ Or, as Roudinesco (1990) puts it, in the late forties Lacan hoped "The training analyst would be a theoretician of therapy since technical training governs theoretical intelligence" (225-6).

¹⁵⁷ Working out the relation between object and drive in regards to sublimation, Lacan argues that what is at stake is not a mere replacement of one object by another, but a change in the nature of the existing object itself. I.e. 'objects' are not unchanging facts (Lacan, 1992: 293).

¹⁵⁸ Not everyone draws this conclusion, of course. French Canadian analyst Willy Apollon has what sounds like a liberal understanding of the ends of analysis. For him it is to achieve 'no other regard for the demands of the Other than the symbolic limits of social or citizen coexistence' (Apollon, 2002, 140). This can easily be read as liberal negative-freedom, in which one is to let well-enough alone until well-enough infringes on the rights of others.

¹⁵⁹ One wonders how Jacoby would respond to Frantz Fanon's comments as regards colonial racism as it appears as 'inferiority complexes' and the danger that people's 'psychic stricture is in danger of disintegration': as a psychoanalyst Fanon's 'objective will not be that of dissuading him [the analysand] from it by advising him to "keep his place"; on the contrary, my objective, once his motivations have been brought into consciousness, will be to put him in a position to *choose* action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of the conflict – that is, toward the social structures' (Fanon, 1967: 100).

¹⁶⁰ For an example of exactly the opposite, see Noble Prize winner Eric Kandel's *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and the New Biology of Mind* (2005). See also the International Neuropsychoanalysis Society at <neuropsa.org.uk>.

¹⁶¹ See in particular chapters four and five of Turkle's *Psychoanalytic Politics*, as well as the final section of its second edition. Also of interest is David-Menard (1982).

Chapter six

¹⁶² An early version of this paper was prepared for and presented at the 2012 Žižek Studies Conference in late April of 2012, held at The College at Brockport (SUNY) in upstate New York.

¹⁶³ Rothenberg does, of course, touch on the readings of Bartleby that likely prompted Žižek taking the story up in the first place (Rothenberg, 2010: 245, n 2). As noted in chapter three, like many other authors who take Žižek on with regards to Melville's character Rothenberg sees Bartleby as a figure of negation, missing out on the aspect of parallax that also sees negation appear as a positive entity of its own.

¹⁶⁴ See also Lacan, 2002, lectures II-4 and II-8. This also appears in the following year's seminar: 'I have already shown you that in the master's discourse the *a* is precisely identifiable with what the thought of a worker, Marx's, produced, namely what was, symbolically and really, the function of surplus value' (Lacan, 2007: 44). See also Zupancic, 2006. Her main thesis is that where earlier in Lacan's work the signifier and enjoyment were incompatible, separate, and related only as analogy, in his later work – starting with the seminar presented the year before the one just cited – the theory of discourses 'articulates the enjoyment together with the signifier and posits it as an essential element of every discursivity' – that is, at the level of homology rather than analogy (2006: 155). She also discusses the turbine example, as does Chiesa (Chiesa, 2007: 127-8). Diane Elson makes a similar argument in relation to Marx: it is not price or value or exchange that are the objects of Marx's study, but labour and the different forms it takes (Elson, 1979: 123). One of the particular forms is that of value, a form which exists only under capitalist social relations. That is, Abstract labour comes fully into being, is embodied, only in capitalist forms of money, and so she dubs Marx's take on labour not the 'labour theory of value' but the 'value theory of labour.'

¹⁶⁵ Robinson and Tormey's critical strategy in regards to Žižek's work relies on pulling quotes from myriad works and patching them together rather than dealing with how any one argument develops at any one point in any one book. The most significant example of this is when, contrasting what they see as two incommensurate versions of commodity fetishism (those of Žižek and Marx), they take short quotes from works published in the mid-to-late 1990s rather than talking about the first chapter of 1989's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* where it is developed most extensively. The result is a list of sins with the appropriate footnotes, but no consideration of how these snippets might in fact contradict longer-argued positions or be taken in a different light when read within the context in which they are found.

Perhaps more significantly, though their paper on Marx and Žižek was published in 2006 the vast majority of what they cite from Žižek's oeuvre does not post-date the year 2000. One of the more substantial critiques that they raise regards Žižek's assertion that social order needs a master or master signifier in order to achieve stability after any revolutionary 'Act', but their critique is limited because of the books they choose as their points of reference. In the 2002 preface to the new edition of *For They Know Not What*

They Do Žižek offers a long ‘auto-critique’ of his earlier work, which includes a discussion of how his mistaken adherence to a ‘masculine logic’ (based primarily on a master signifier as one usually understands it in Lacanian theory) rather than a ‘feminine logic’ (which bucks reference to the master signifier as an absolute) contributed to the skewing of his Marxism towards liberalism (though R & T would prefer to here find ‘authoritarianism’). While R & T make no reference to this Lacanian distinction, it ironically appears in completely distorted form in the (unsubstantiated, un-cited) claim that Žižek prefers ‘muscular’ to ‘effete’ political action and theory (Robinson and Tormey, 2006: 146). They are unable to see how Žižek himself problematizes the formulation to which they object because they leave out a discussion of the 2002 preface and the development that it represents. It is also significant that *For They Know Not What They Do* – one of the early, significant follow-ups to *Sublime Object* – also includes a development of themes surrounding commodity fetishism but does not appear in the bibliography of either of the two papers by Robinson and Tormey cited here. The question of the post-revolutionary need (or lack of need) for a new master signifier also appears in *The Parallax View* – a book published the same year as R&T’s paper, featuring a painting of Lenin on its cover and containing a discussion of Marxism and commodity fetishism that closely follows the arguments made in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. That the problem of the post-revolutionary master signifier and the creation of a new social order is not simply one upon which Žižek has decided is further confirmed in his *Less Than Nothing*, where he claims that the deadlock that Lacan uncovers but is unable to overcome is precisely this one (Žižek, 2012: 18-19). That book takes this question as one of its central themes.

The pair also slip into superficial comments on the number of times Marx appears in Žižek’s work as compared to Schelling, Hegel, or Lacan – as if the number of citations is a ‘fact’ that speaks for itself in regards to Žižek’s ‘idealism’ – and how his mixing discussions of movies, books, jokes, and theory is somehow invalid or debasing. Here a pro-Lenin quote from a scholar of whom they approve is fitting: ‘He [Lenin] knew, as all adult education teachers know, that a general point of theory is illuminated far more quickly by an apt example drawn from the current problems of his audience, than by an exposition of its validating rationale’ (Harding, 2009: Vol 1, 74). In the end, because they misread Žižek’s take on commodity fetishism they level at him a critique that is perhaps better suited for the psychoanalytically oriented work of Fromm or Money-Kyrle: the reduction of social subordination to psychological processes.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, Lenin’s *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, written and published in 1905, in which he argues that ‘dictatorship’ means not simply seizing the state and becoming a parliamentary (rather than a working) body, but transforming it, and also blasts those who had taken over the editing of *Iskra* (among others) for wanting to remain a party in opposition rather than pushing for an insurrection that would lead to taking power (Lenin, 1962).

¹⁶⁷ In his *Lenin, Hegel and Western Marxism*, Anderson argues that although his reading of Hegel enabled him to understand, in dialectical fashion, the relation between state, imperialism, and progressive nationalism, he (Lenin) did not extend this understanding to

the Party (see for example Anderson, 1995: 166; 229). By contrast, Shandro and Lih (the latter of whom stresses that for Lenin the Party is not to ‘come from without’ but is instead the reciprocal merging of the worker-class and the Party, in line with the position argued by Kautsky) paint Lenin as having a dialectical understanding of the Party long before he (Lenin) ever seriously studied Hegel (Lenin’s philosophical notebooks date from 1914-1916). Shandro is here of course discussing some of the views Lenin made public between 1904-5, while Lih focuses on 1902 and before. Similarly, Shandro elsewhere argues that Kautsky’s understanding of the party was also a dialectical one (though not without its problems) (Shandro, 1997/8).

¹⁶⁸ This is the premise of Andrew Feenberg’s paper on Lukács and the party: that at different points in history there are different appropriate types of party activity – i.e. consciousness raising in the face of ‘spontaneous’ outbreaks at some points, and active organization of outbreaks at others. See particularly Feenberg, 1988b: 144; 147. Lih notes a similar division in *Lenin Rediscovered*, pointing to the difference between propaganda and agitation: propaganda was ‘aimed at creating worker leaders’ and agitation was ‘aimed at awakening the mass of workers’ (Lih, 2008: 542).

¹⁶⁹ See, for instance, his contributions to *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, or his retort to Simon Critchley in *The London Review of Books*, as well as in the final two chapters of *The Parallax View*.

¹⁷⁰ Sharpe and Boucher make a similar mistake in their contribution to a recent collection of papers dedicated to the relationship between psychoanalysis and the economy as seen in light of the 2008-9 financial crisis. Here they argue, as they have in the past, that Žižek illegitimately extends concepts of a discipline that has cut its teeth on individuals to a social sphere to which it does not apply (2012: 201). The flaws in this argument have been elaborated in several chapters previous to this one. What they add in this particular paper is that Žižek’s assessments of the social aspects of contemporary capitalism – that the ‘big Other’ has ceased to exist and is instead replaced with a series of ‘little Others’ – doesn’t follow from what they call the ‘homology thesis’ – i.e. his references to Sohn-Rethel and the relation he sees between the form of the commodity and that of the dream. It is in this sense that they make the same mistake as Dean, proposing a lack of connection between his social analysis and his understanding of the economy. Their particular spin on this thesis follows from their observations that while the latter is a perverse relation the former is a psychotic one. What they miss is that perversion was for Freud not that far from psychosis in that it involves a loss of the sense of reality. This in part because both psychic forms involve a splitting of the ego (Laplace and Pontalis, 1973: 309; 427-9). Coupling this with the knowledge that a capitalist economy ‘melts all that is solid into air’ it is not hard to see how one (commodity fetishism) can lead to the other (the dissolution of all big Others *via* that commodity fetishism). This will be broached in this chapter with reference to Simmel.

The other misstep that the pair make is in claiming that Žižek overextends his use of psychoanalysis while failing to following this assertion to the end by seeing that he also applies psychoanalytic concepts when discussing the political implications of his

assessments of contemporary Western, capitalist societies. Ignoring his claims that the Leninist party and the discourse of the analyst share the same form, Sharpe and Boucher instead focus on Žižek's discussions of Mao, Stalin, and Robespierre as a basis to claim that given the dissolution of the big Other Žižek proposes that we need a new one, a new master. As will be emphasized below, this misses that the end of analysis is for Žižek an end in the belief in a big Other, and that the analyst is the 'master that is not a master' – i.e. one who realizes that the world is 'not-all' and thereby enables others to reach the same conclusions. In asserting that Žižek advocates for a new master the pair also miss that Žižek himself criticizes Jacques-Alain Miller for proposing just that, and in a section of *The Parallax View* to which they refer when J.A.M. comes up in their own discussion. Tightly tied to this confusion is that they conflate Master-Signifier, Fetish, and Empty-Signifier, between which Žižek makes important distinctions. These are discussed in the conclusion of the present study. For the moment suffice it to say that while the Master-Signifier as fetish is unconscious the Empty-Signifier as phallus is not.

¹⁷¹ '...what is really at stake in ideology is its form...' (Žižek, 1989: 84).

¹⁷² Zupančič summarizes this way: 'Capitalism is a major producer of differences, as well as a major leveler or equalizer of these same differences. This is what makes it the greatest promoter of liberalism and of all kinds of liberties and rights (especially the right to be different), and the greatest deactivator of any real liberating or subversive potential of these differences' (Zupančič, 2006: 174).

¹⁷³ In his *Badiou and Politics*, however, Bosteels argues that this *is* the case for Badiou – i.e. Badiou's early and later works have more continuity than difference precisely because of the role that Maoism plays in his thought. '...only an understanding of Badiou's ongoing debts to Maoism can give us insight into his proposed renewal of the materialist dialectic, while, conversely, a miraculous and antidialectical understanding of the relation between truth and knowledge is often the result of an undigested failure to come to terms with the Maoist legacy in Badiou's work'; '... the immanent critique of the party qua form has always been a benchmark of Badiou's Maoism' (Bosteels, 2011b: 115; 126).

¹⁷⁴ In his *Outline of Psycho-Analysis* Freud himself compares psychoanalysis to the practice of confession, but claims there is a fundamental difference: where the catholic tells the priest what others don't know about them, the analyst tells the analyst what they *don't yet* know about themselves (Freud, 1969: 51).

¹⁷⁵ A similar argument can be found in *On Belief*: '... Lacan was well aware of the historical constellation within which psychoanalysis – not as a theory, but as a specific intersubjective practice, a unique form of social link – could have emerged: the capitalist society in which intersubjective relations are mediated by money. Money – paying the analyst – is necessary in order to keep him out of circulation, to avoid getting him involved in the imbroglio of the passions which generated the patient's pathology' (Žižek, 2001a: 17).

¹⁷⁶ It's at this point that Žižek makes reference to Rotman's *Signifying Nothing*. See above, Chapter three, note 104.

¹⁷⁷ This can be seen in so-called 'mommy-porn' title *50 Shades of Grey*. In it the eponymous character (Grey) is a 'dominant' that formalizes a BDSM relationship with the young protagonist whose pleasure he comes to 'own' by having her sign a legal contract. The ownership involved takes the form of a list of certain conditions under which she is allowed to orgasm (i.e. only in his presence), which translates into the need for the author to enumerate the orgasms the protagonist has in various sex scenes.

¹⁷⁸ Pippin summarizes this way: '...the formula for getting Hegel from Kant would be: Keep the doctrine of pure concepts and the account of apperception that helps justify the necessary presupposition of pure concepts, keep the critical problem of a proof of the objectivity of these concepts, the question that began critical philosophy, but abandon the doctrine of "pure sensible intuition," and the very possibility of a clear distinction between concept and intuition, and what is left is much of Hegel's enterprise' (Pippin, 1989: 9). Pippin's thesis is that the work of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel was precisely to develop this point of Kant's philosophy. Fichte develops 'I=I'; Hegel comes to the infinite, negative, self-relation of thought.

¹⁷⁹ Žižek makes this argument in the first chapter of *The Ticklish Subject*.

¹⁸⁰ 'We must say of it that in a certain sense that it has never had a real existence. It is never remembered, it has never succeeded in becoming conscious. It is a construction of analysis, but it is no less a necessity on that account' (Freud, 1979: 170-1). 'No memory of one special kind of highly important experience can usually be recovered: these are experiences which took place in very early childhood, before they could be comprehended, but which were *subsequently* interpreted and understood. One gains knowledge of them from dreams, and is compelled to believe in them on irresistible evidence in the structure of the neurosis' (Freud, 1961a: 368).

¹⁸¹ I.e. *Wirklichkeit*. Capitalist exchange can only happen with the *Wirklichkeit* that is commodity fetishism; the subject can only function with the effectivity made possible by the fundamental fantasy. See Chiesa, 2007: 126-7. Note that this term can also be translated as 'actuality.'

¹⁸² The following account is taken from their entries on Anaclisis, Death Instinct, Masochism, Perversion, Sado-Masochism, and Libido. See also chapters four through six of Laplanche, 1976.

¹⁸³ Laplanche was analyzed by Lacan, but broke with him in 1963. See Ray's short obituary (Ray, 2012).

¹⁸⁴ The next several paragraphs are taken from the third chapter of Chiesa's book.

¹⁸⁵ For a brief response to McNally's criticisms of Lacan in *Bodies of Meaning*, see the conclusion of the present study.

¹⁸⁶ Recall the following description of castration: '...castration – which Lacan refuses to read in terms of a real threat and understands, rather, as a resumption of the image of the fragmented body...' (Chiesa, 2007: 30).

¹⁸⁷ See also Elson, 1979: 144-50. '...Marx's argument is not that the abstract aspect of labour is the product of capitalist social relations, but that the latter are characterized by the dominance of the abstract aspect over the other aspects of labour [i.e. concrete labour, private labour, and social labour]' (Elson, 1979: 150).

¹⁸⁸ 'I believe that the reconstructed Burgess fauna, interpreted by the theme of replaying life's tape, offers powerful support for this different view of life: any replay of the tape would lead evolution down a pathway radically different from the road actually taken. But the consequent differences in outcome do not imply that evolution is senseless, and without meaningful pattern; the divergent route of the replay would be just as interpretable, just as explainable after the fact, as the actual road. But the diversity of possible itineraries does demonstrate that eventual results cannot be predicted at the outset. Each step proceeds for cause, but no finale can be specified at the start, and none would ever occur a second time in the same way, because any pathway proceeds through thousands of improbable stages. Alter any early event, ever so slightly and without apparent importance at the time, and evolution cascades into a radically different channel. This third alternative [i.e. the argument above] represent no more nor less than the essence of history. Its name is contingency – and contingency is a thing unto itself, not the titration of determinism and randomness' (Gould, 1989: 51).

¹⁸⁹ This against Žižek's unreferenced, unsubstantiated, throwaway comment that the 'early' Marx has an Aristotelian, substantialist understanding of labour's 'potential' (Žižek, 2012: 223, 251, 261).

¹⁹⁰ Similar comments appear in the *Grundrisse*. See below.

¹⁹¹ Frank Ruda makes a similar argument in the conclusion of his *Hegel's Rabble*, at the end of which he sides with Marx against (but with the help of) Hegel: 'The actual communist action names an event; an eventual irruption into the structures of historical societal dynamics which lets the specific "universality of man", the matter of the ethical space, following the *logic of double latency*, appear as something that logically lies "before" (although it is always only accessible "after") the structures of the state and civil society' (Ruda, 2011: 173; see also 175-6).

¹⁹² '...this hole [the Cartesian subject] is gradually hollowed out through the increasingly apparent contingency of all operators of subjectification, a contingency that becomes apparent solely through the rise and fall of various temporarily

hegemonic master signifiers of identity jostling with and displacing one another. [...] To paraphrase Marx, when all solid identities melt into air, the subject as devoid of any solid identity begins to emerge...' (Johnston, 2008: 231). See also chapter one of the present study.

¹⁹³ See for Example Žižek, 2002; 2006a.

¹⁹⁴ Žižek's point being that this misconstrual is *necessary* – the truth can only be revealed by first making the mistake.

¹⁹⁵ In the opening paragraphs to the conclusion of his *Less Than Nothing* Žižek replaces 'ethics' with 'politics' – if the establishing of the fetish/master signifier is an act of creation based not in any other necessity than of making a choice (or choosing not to choose – i.e. becoming schizophrenic) then it is necessarily political.

¹⁹⁶ '...Lacan's emphasis on how Kant's ethics is the ethics intrinsic to the Galilean-Newtonian universe of modern science has to be supplemented by an insight into how Kant's ethics is also the ethics intrinsic to the capitalistic logic of circulation as an end in itself' (Žižek, 2002: 332, n 162).

¹⁹⁷ Žižek argues that drive is as such perverse in *Less Than Nothing* (2012: 549-50). Rather, he argues that drive as such is separated from perversion by a 'thin line', where it is done with no reference to the Other. As it was described above, it is a 'perversion without perversion.'

¹⁹⁸ 'Is such a radical gesture of "striking at oneself" not constitutive of subjectivity as such?' (Žižek, 2010a: 398). 'Subjectivity as such' should here be understood as 'subject' and not 'subjectivization.' The sentence following the one quoted reveals as much.

¹⁹⁹ On the destruction/giving up of the object, see Žižek, 2001b:168. A similar 'self destruction' and an attack on the object that leads to symbolic identification rather than a change in the symbolic happens in the film adaptation of Woody Allen's *Play It Again Sam*, to which Žižek makes reference in *Sublime Object of Ideology*. Where Norton first literally beats himself in *Fight Club* under the guise of a projection that no one else can see (think of the rivalry of the 'mirror stage') to later give up this imaginary identification, it is the imagined projection of Allen's lost love object (his ex-wife) that shoots the imagined projection of his imaginary role-model (Humphrey Bogart) and sees the return of Allen's own voiceover (which had been replaced by conversations with Bogart when his ex-wife left him). Bogart returns when Allen loses his new love object (played by Diane Keaton), and this new love object appears as an imaginary projection that attempts to shoot Bogart only to have him slap and disarm her. Allen then confronts the 'actual' Diane Keaton, 'telling her how it is,' 'cutting her loose', speaking Bogart's lines from *Casablanca* rather than having Bogart first prompt him with what to say. Then follows the scene to which Žižek refers: Allen tells Bogart that he doesn't need him because he, Allen, is short and ugly in his own right. That is, *via* an identification with

the weakness in the Other and rejecting/beating *the object* (Bogart's slap; Allen 'breaking the news') Allen has taken on his symbolic mandate (Žižek, 1989: 109-110). That is, he gives up the object he can't have anyway (Keaton's character tells him that she was about to leave San Francisco with her husband, regardless for her feelings for Allen) and thereby completes his assumption of a symbolic mandate – his Oedipalization, the acceptance that though he wants the object it has been denied to him.

This 'self-beating' theme also appears at the end of *Living in the End Times* with reference to Bertolucci's *1900* (2010a: 397) and in the conclusion of *Less Than Nothing* with reference to the film *They Live* (2012: 999).

Chapter seven

²⁰⁰ Which Žižek in effect does in *Less Than Nothing*, where he attributes this role to Marx's discussion of commodity fetishism (2012: 360-1). Colletti also makes this point (1974: 92-98).

²⁰¹ See also earlier in the *Grundrisse*, where Marx argues that to take the exchange abstraction is not simply not-freedom, but a one sided-conception (Marx, 1973b: 240).

²⁰² See chapter two, note 38.

²⁰³ Hal Draper makes similar, though far less detailed, arguments against what Lih calls the 'textbook interpretation' of *What Is To Be Done?* in "The Myth of Lenin's 'Concept of the Party', or, What They Did to *What Is To Be Done?*?" (Draper, 1990 [1963]).

²⁰⁴ Unfortunately, in an otherwise interesting paper Ruda (2013) uncritically sides with Badiou's later work on the question of the Party, writing that "the centralized party that had taken power come with a tendency to bureaucratization, a tendency that the Trotskyst [sic], not without reason, called state terrorism and the Maoists themselves called reformism"; "The model of the party with all its implications [...] is saturated today" (307; 308). He goes on to make the un-dialectical sounding remark that we need to 'take into account' the history of the party in order to move forward, rather than suggesting that the present might be a means to *reflect back upon* the need for a 'party of a new type.'

²⁰⁵ 'Formal' in the sense that all that mattered was getting votes; mechanical in the sense that laws/conventions took the place of moral persuasion (Ostrogorski, 1964b: 324; 342).

²⁰⁶ Ostrogorski's pessimism is best seen on pages 166-85 of volume 1 of his study. His 'ideal' and his optimism can be best seen in the conclusion to volume 2.

²⁰⁷ 'Unlike Lenin's corps of professionals, Ebert's [the German SPD's first paid bureaucrat, who helped transform the party into a massive 'state within a state'] was built primarily to compete with other political parties, to get members and voters, not to shatter the existing order' (Schorske, 1983: 127).

²⁰⁸ Zald and Ash remark that in *What is To Be Done?* Lenin doesn't outline a hierarchical organization, but one of 'concentric circles of lessening commitment and participation' (1966: 329, n9). Similarly, Lukács claims that precisely that question – who is committed to Party work and to what degree – is Lenin's central principle of organization: 'other questions of organization – that of centralization, for instance – are only the necessary technical consequences of this [...] Leninist standpoint' (Lukács, 1970: 25). On the question of engaging the 'total personality' of the worker and Party involvement, Lukács (1971: 316; 319; 335) makes reference to 'The Organizational Structure of the Communist Parties, the Methods and content of their Work', a set of theses passed at the third congress of the communist international of 1921 (anonymous, 1980). Part III deals with the need for members to be actively engaged and includes a discussion the different types of activity in which they should participate. Here is also found distain towards the idea that formal democracy alone makes for a democratic organization, and the counter-assertion that only political activity can meet that aim.

²⁰⁹ A similar point also makes up part of Feenberg's (1988) paper on Lukács and the differences he saw between the SPD and the RSDLP.

²¹⁰ Lih acknowledges that Lenin made no such liberal argument, but that making it is not contrary to what Lenin was arguing in *What Is To Be Done?*. Lukács makes a similar point about the Party in his *Lenin*: singleness of ideology and purpose allowed it to make alliances and move in the direction that it sought, rather than including multiple ideologies within itself and thereby diverting its aim (Lukács, 1970: 28-31). In the second section of the third chapter of *Marxism and the Party* Molyneux goes so far as to claim that it was the willingness to divide the Party in order to maintain doctrine that 'was really the distinct hallmark of Leninism, and which resulted in 1912 in the formal foundation of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) as a completely separate and independent party' (Molyneux, 1978: unpaginated).

²¹¹ For example, see Zald and Ash, 1966; Rucht, 1999; and Clemens and Minkoff, 2008. For a book-length Canadian counter to Michels, see Macpherson, 1962.

²¹² Molyneux makes a similar point, writing that because of Tzarsist repression '...the Bolsheviks did not and could not develop, as did for example the SPD, a broad layer of functionaries consisting of local officials, trade-union leaders, members of parliament, local councilors etc. This is a stratum which is inevitably subject to enormous "moderating" pressures from its environment' (Molyneux, 1978: unpaginated [Chapter 3, section 3]).

²¹³ In outlining his beef Lih focuses on Service's later work and not the study referred to here. Lih's argument of course revolves around Service's take on *What is To Be Done?*: where Lih holds that Lenin's party was in fact not of a new type but in large part inspired by the SPD, he takes Service to task for suggesting that Lenin's supposed love of Russian terrorism inspired a new version of the party. See Lih, 2008: 364; 377-384.

²¹⁴ See also Rabinowitch, 2007: 392.

²¹⁵ The classic study establishing the fact that the Bolsheviks were not simply a Blanquist elite but actually a mass party with many members who were primarily young workers is David Lane's *The Roots of Russian Communism* (1968).

²¹⁶ In his 'The Freudian Thing *or* the meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis' Lacan poses the question of a return to Freud in a way similar to how Lukács posed the question of thinking the Party: while some, in Lacan's view, argued that psychoanalysis was an eternal truth that had been discovered by chance and as a consequence could not be altered, the task was instead to ask why it was possible for it to have been uncovered in the first place and to inspect its possibilities further, rather than assuming all the basics had already been discovered (Lacan, 2006: 339-40).

In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Lacan appears to dismiss claims that the 'Thing' in 'The Freudian Thing' had anything to do with Lukács: 'That text and that title surprised because if one starts to analyze my intentions from a philosophical point of view, one comes to relate them to a concern that was very popular at one time, namely, the resistance to reification. Of course, I never said anything about reification. But intentions can always be wrapped around a discourse' (1997: 132). It is in this paper that Lacan argues that one uses external objects as a means to speak, that the unconscious speaks through the ego as an object (where Lacan makes a big show – which is actually quite funny – of ventriloquizing for his lectern). The claim above is that there might exist an alternative link to Lukács: at the level of the 'return.'

²¹⁷ Also: 'the utopia of a radicalized labour fails the *other* Žižekian test, the test of conceptual impossibility' (Brockelman, 2008: 112).

²¹⁸ '...as Hegel later puts it long after his break with Schelling, to know the limits of possible experience as limits, one must already have overstepped these limits via the requisite apprehension of the Beyond thus separated and demarcated by these limits' (Johnston, 2008: 135). Brockelman lists Johnston as someone who 'provided valuable responses to parts of' his manuscript... (Brockelman, 2008: xxi). For similar comments on 'limits', see Jameson, 2006: 391.

²¹⁹ 'Negative judgment is thus not only limiting, it also delineates a domain beyond phenomena where it locates the Thing – the domain of the nonsensible intuition...' (Žižek, 1993: 111); 'A Hegelian corollary to Kant is that limitation is to be conceived of as prior to what lies "beyond" it, so that ultimately Kant's own notion of the thing-in-itself remains too "reified"' (Žižek, 1993:112).

²²⁰ It is on the grounds of 'formal actuality' that Marx critiques various socialist doctrines circulating in 1844: '...the other communism, which is not yet fully developed, seeks in isolated historical forms opposed to private property a historical proof for itself, a proof drawn from what already exists, by wrenching isolated moments from their proper places in the process of development [...] and advancing them as proofs of its historical

pedigree. But all it succeeds in showing is that by far the greater part of this development contradicts its assertions and that if it did once exist, then the very fact that it existed in the *past* refutes its claim to *essential being*' (Marx, 1992: 348). Carlson gives an inverse example, from Hegel: '...he means that the determination of a finite thing (today's lost kingdom) is itself a contingency. Maybe it *is* lost, maybe it will come roaring back, like the Borbons in Spain. "What simply is, is not itself the necessary"' (Carlson, 2007: 407).

²²¹ See also Žižek, 1996c, 402-5 for a brief discussion of these three moments.

²²² Freud makes similar comments about the role of childhood experience in the creation of the formations of the unconscious: 'Analytic experience has convinced us of the complete truth of the assertion so often to be heard that the child is psychologically father to the adult and that the events of his first years are of paramount importance for his whole later life' (Freud, 1969: 68).

²²³ The basis of McNally's argument against Postone is that money is in the end a 'bad infinity', which undermines the argument that abstract-labour and capitalism is a self-mediating substance. He makes these points while turning to the work of Michael Lebowitz on labour. Lebowitz is discussed with reference to Laclau in chapter four of the present study, note 131. See also McNally, 2003: '...at the heart of capital's self-contradictory character is its inability to be truly self-positing (infinite), since it does not capitalistically produce its own vital presuppositions – notably living labour and the natural environment' (7).

²²⁴ This is also appears, word for word, in *Less Than Nothing* (Žižek, 2012: 251-2).

²²⁵ On the question of the relation between religion, politics, Marx, Hegel, and Žižek see also Chiesa, 2013. There he argues that Žižek appears to get stuck actually advocating for religion, rather than in Marxian fashion overcoming it to turn the criticism of religion into the criticism of the world at large. Where Chiesa argues that making the leap is quite possible for Žižek, the current discussion (as well as that found in chapter two) is an attempt to not only show what that leap would look like, but also that the link is not to simply be made at the level of the proletariat (which is what Chiesa advocates) – it must first pass through the economic *via* commodity fetishism.

²²⁶ This position does not preclude the possibility of a rational, planned economy: Žižek suggests such a thing is possible in *In Defense of Lost Causes* (2008a: 384; 419). His issue with the planned economies of 'actually existing socialism' is that they focused too narrowly on production at the expense of consumption (2008a: 485, n64). The point being made – which is present throughout Žižek's oeuvre – is that there can be no 'complete transparency,' that there will always be something that eludes one's grasp by virtue of the fact that one is dealing with *Subjects* immersed in a symbolic system and the way our actions will be taken up by other subjects so immersed is necessarily unknowable (Žižek, 2008b: 199-200).

²²⁷ This perhaps fits the bill of Žižek's reformulation of Badiou's 'subtraction': negating something and thereby changing the field by which the world functions (Žižek, 2008a: 409).

²²⁸ In 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci' Anderson argues that in his own political activity Lukács confused the 'historical *epoch* and the historical *conjuncture*' thereby allowing 'Lukács and prominent colleagues in the KPD such as Thalheimer and Frohlich to ignore the whole problem of the concrete preconditions for a revolutionary situation by abstractly affirming the revolutionary character of the time itself' (1976: 56). While reserving judgment on Lukács' own political activity, it is easy to see in *Lenin* that he clearly outlines the difference. For a critique of Anderson's paper (among other takes on Gramsci), see Thomas, 2009.

²²⁹ 'On the one hand, neither Marx nor Lenin ever thought of the actuality of the proletarian revolution and its aims as being readily realizable at any given moment. On the other hand, however, it was through this actuality that both gained a sure touchstone for evaluating all the questions of the day' (Lukács, 1970: 12).

²³⁰ This should not be limited to the 'genius', but extended to work of the Party itself: 'The Bolsheviks always showed the connection between the maltreatment of factories, and the rule of autocracy [...]. At the same time the autocracy was connected up in the agitation of the party cells with the capitalist system, so that at the very beginning of the development of the labour movement the Bolsheviks established a connection between the economic struggle and the political' (Piatnitsky in Molyneux, 1978: Unpaginated).

²³¹ See also Lih, 2008: 204; 301; 338; 365; 420; 581-2

²³² Lukács was of course writing after the October revolution, and not about Lenin in 1902. Perhaps the collection of letters written by Lenin around 1917 put together by Žižek can be said to display this same enthusiasm.

²³³ Elwood further elaborates this relationship in chapter six of his study.

²³⁴ 'As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere [...] there is transference'; 'Whenever this function [the subject supposed to know] may be, for the subject, embodied in some individual, whether or not an analyst, the transference, according to the definition I have given you of it, is established' (Lacan, 1978: 232; 233).

²³⁵ On the comparison between the Social Democracy and the Preacher, See Lih, 2007.

²³⁶ '... the fact that the Moebius strip – a belt of ribbon whose ends are fastened together after the strip has been given a half-twist – does not define an inside and an outside in the way a circle does, is used to question the received psychoanalytic wisdom of distinguishing between the container and the contained' (Gallagher, 1995: 8). Using the distinction between knowledge and know-how that Lacan introduces in

his seventeenth seminar Vighi notes that this sort of arrangement is the split between knowledge as content and know-how as action, the latter supported by the unconscious (Vighi, 2010: 52). For Žižek the unconscious is synonymous with action and the form of thought itself.

²³⁷ ‘The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question’ (Marx, 1992: 422).

²³⁸ ‘We, however, are convinced that the Russian Revolution is not simply an event but a proletarian act, and that it must naturally debouch into a socialist régime’ (Gramsci in Hoare and Smith, 1971: xxxi). ‘The creation is not an occurrence but an act. There are no results from general laws’ (Schelling, 2006: 59-60). Žižek’s comment on truth comes from a discussion wherein he distinguishes his own theories on social change from those of Badiou. Badiou, of course, nominates these sorts of changes as ‘Events’, and in his account ‘subjectivity’ is the product of being faithful to the Event and comes as a consequence of it. For Žižek, however, the Act itself is the self-creation of the subject.

Conclusion

²³⁹ One can find a similar thesis in Ellen Wood’s *Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*. Wood argues that in the 18th century the English ideology of ‘improvement’ was much different than anything found in France in the same period. Where the English emphasized the capitalist improvement of land (i.e. the increase of its productive capacities) the non-capitalist French emphasized the improvement of human potentials. Berman argues that the motives of the individualist, capitalist entrepreneur of Goethe’s time did not match those found in Goethe’s tragic protagonist (72). Instead, Goethe’s developmental ideal ran counter to this current, one that he considers may be ‘Germany’s deepest and most lasting contribution to world culture’ (96).

²⁴⁰ In the intro to his *The Ticklish Subject* – which is an explicit defense of the Cartesian subject against its nay-sayers – he writes that ‘while this book is philosophical in its basic tenor, it is first and foremost an engaged political intervention, addressing the burning question of how we are to reformulate a leftist, anti-capitalist political project in our era of global capitalism and its ideological supplement liberal-democratic multiculturalism’ (Žižek, 1999: 4). He goes on to ask if we are ‘merely dealing with the logic of Capital, or is this logic just the predominant thrust of the modern productivist attitude that of technological domination over and exploitation of nature? Or furthermore, is this very technological exploitation the ultimate expression, the realization of the deepest potential of modern Cartesian subjectivity itself? The author’s answer to this dilemma is the emphatic plea of “Not guilty!” for the Cartesian subject’ (ibid). This has been taken up in more detail in the third chapter of the present study.

²⁴¹ It’s worth noting a difference that Žižek wrongly claims exists between the use of ‘fetishism’ in psychoanalysis and in Marxism: ‘in Marxism a fetish conceals the positive

network of social relations, whereas in Freud a fetish conceals the lack ('castration') around which the symbolic network is articulated' (Žižek, 1989: 49). That capitalist fetishism in fact does partake of the same logic can be seen in McNally's historical treatment of it, where he argues that '...instead of the absent female phallus, European traders and writers invented the fetish in order to mask the absence of market-values among Africans. In their case too, a frightening discovery – that market-logic is by no means universal – was denied' (McNally, 2011: 203). Confronted with African peoples' refusal to sell certain items regardless of the price offered and thereby shown that market relations were by no means universal, Europeans attributed 'artificiality' to the acts of others rather than to themselves (Ibid: 202; see also McClintock, 1995, 185-9). Marx of course takes up this terminology to show that capitalist relations are themselves not natural.

In something of a throw-away comment Žižek also wrongly claims that while Sohn-Rethel understands that money has a 'sublime body' that doesn't wear away (i.e. up to a point a coin retains its nominal worth regardless of the value of the metal it contains) this is a 'problem unsolved by Marx' (Žižek, 1989: 18). From *A Critique of Political Economy*: 'Although friction with the external world causes other entities to lose their idealism, the coin becomes increasingly ideal as a result of practice, its golden or silver substance being reduced to a mere pseudo-existence' (1970: 109); '...so gold money in circulation is sublimated into its own symbol, first in the shape of worn gold coin, then in the shape of subsidiary metal coin, and finally in the shape of worthless counters, scraps of paper, mere *tokens of value*' (1970: 114). This is of course guaranteed by the state, as it is in Sohn-Rethel's account – see the quote Žižek uses on page 19 of *SOI*.

²⁴² This of course flies in the face of Robinson and Tormey's claim that 'for Žižek, commodity fetishism is most definitely *not* about relations between people being misperceived as relations between things' (2006: 148). Most definitely, Žižek approvingly quotes lines from *Capital, Volume One* where Marx makes the claim that in capitalist economies we see the personification of things and the reification of persons. See Žižek, 1989: 26. See also Žižek, 2009a: 141-2.

²⁴³ 'That supplementary snare [the subjective 'illusion' that the Other knows the meaning of my symptoms – i.e. transference] is, rather, and internal condition, an internal constituent of the so-called 'objective' process itself: only through this additional detour does the past itself, the 'objective' state of things, become retroactively what it was'; 'the initial 'illusion' of the subject consists in simply forgetting to include in the scene his own act'; 'not only is misrecognition an immanent condition of the final advent of the truth, but it already possesses in itself, so to speak, a positive ontological dimension: it founds, it renders possible a certain positive entity' (Žižek, 1989: 57; 58; 66).

²⁴⁴ 'Saussure tries to define a correspondence between these two flows [i.e. signifieds and signifiers] that would segment them. But the sole fact that his solution is inconclusive, since it leaves the locution and the whole sentence problematic, clearly shows both the sense and the limitations of his method' (Lacan: 1993, 262).

²⁴⁵ See for example Žižek, 1993: 53-58. Žižek takes his cue on this point from Copjec's *Read My Desire*. The chapter in question can be found in an edited volume on Lacan Žižek put together in 2003 (Copjec, 2003).

²⁴⁶ 'At bottom, dreams are nothing other than a particular *form* of thinking, made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep. It is the *dream-work* which creates that form, and it alone is the essence of dreaming – the explanation of its particular nature' (Freud, 1991c: 649-50, n. 2).

²⁴⁷ 'The material of the dream-work consists of thoughts – a few of which may be objectionable and unacceptable, but which are correctly constructed and expressed. The dream-work puts these thoughts into another form...' (Freud, 1961a: 172).

²⁴⁸ Žižek makes similar claims throughout his work, though usually only about the hysteric and the pervert. See for example *Tarrying With the Negative*, 268, note 31.

²⁴⁹ Sheridan's translation gives these lines an inflection that better matches Žižek's claim that the pervert knows the Other exists and what it wants, while the hysteric does so unconsciously (i.e. 'God is unconscious'): rather than controlling the Other, Sheridan tells us that Lacan has said that the hysteric imagines himself to be the pervert 'to assure himself of the existence of the Other' (Lacan, 1977: 322 *Ecrits: A Selection*. Alan Sheridan, trans. New York: W.W. Norton Company).

²⁵⁰ Žižek gives credit to Herbert Marcuse, Claude Lefort, and Jacques Rancière for this idea. A similar one can also be found, however, in Marx (Marx, 1977:1027-28). See chapter seven of the present study.

²⁵¹ Žižek says something similar, writing that 'an "honest" liberal democrat will have to admit that the content of his ideological premise belies its form, and thus will radicalize the form (the egalitarian axiom) by way of implementing the content more thoroughly' (2009a: 68).

²⁵² Marx acknowledges that commodity fetishism is itself a legal contract in the first volume of *Capital*: 'This juridical relationship [of treating each other as equal traders of commodities], whose form is the contract, whether as part of a developed legal system or not, is a relation between two wills that mirrors the economic relationship' (Marx, 1976: 178). Miéville (2004) turns to Pashukanis' work on this topic (rooted in this particular quote) to discuss the 'developed legal system' of international law.

²⁵³ '... the symptom is the exception which disturbs the surface of the false appearance, the point at which the repressed Other erupts, while fetish is the embodiment of the Lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth' (Žižek, 2001a: 13).

²⁵⁴ In discussing fetishism as presented in one of Freud's introductory lectures Fenichel summarizes the unconscious thoughts of the fetishist in the following way: 'the thought that there are human beings without a penis, and that I might myself be one of them, makes it impossible for me to grant myself sexual excitement. But now I see here a symbol of a penis in a woman; that helps me shut out my fear, and thus I can permit myself to be sexually excited' (Fenichel, 1945: 341). The twist is here that 'I might myself be one' does not so much refer to the possibility of being castrated by the father in the near future – i.e. of classical Freudian 'castration fear' – but the possibility that I am *already* one, that I do not in fact possess the phallus.

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