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## Minus One, or the Mismeasure of Man: Sartorial Superegoism and the Ethics of Unruliness

### Keywords

Joan Copjec, Jacques Lacan, ethics of psychoanalysis, superego, perversion, fantasy, racism

### Abstract

This essay looks at chapter 4 of Joan Copjec's *Read My Desire*, "The Sartorial Superego," in order to advance its critique of racism as a form of perversion that posits the racial other as a superegoic Other thought to harbor an obscene enjoyment or "will to *jouissance*." While other chapters of *Read My Desire* have played a pivotal role in shaping Lacanian theory over the past thirty years—especially Lacanian film theory ("Locked Room/Lonely Room") and Lacanian sex theory ("Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason")—"The Sartorial Superego" has yet to receive the attention it deserves for the contribution it makes not only to Lacanian race theory, but also to Lacanian ethics more generally. Aiming to redress this oversight, the essay first rehearses, so as to bring into better relief, Copjec's critique of the perverse "sartorial superegoism" at work in a series of photographs of cloth-donned colonial others taken by famed French psychologist G. G. de Clérambault. It then applies Copjec's analysis of Clérambault's sartorial superegoism to more recent, far more sadistic, instances of sartorial superegoic violence perpetrated against postcolonial others in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001. In so doing, the essay demonstrates that properly grasping both the prescience of and the urgency behind *Read My Desire*'s concluding call for "another logic of the superego [to] commence" requires reckoning with "The Sartorial Superego."

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# Minus ena ali Človeška napačna mera: krojaško nadjazovstvo in etika neposlušnosti

## Ključne besede

Joan Copjec, Jacques Lacan, etika psihoanalize, nadjaz, perverzija, fantazma, rasizem

## Povzetek

Ta članek obravnava četrto poglavje knjige Joan Copjec *Read My Desire*, »Krojaški nadjaz«, da bi, izhajajoč iz te obravnave, nadalje razvil kritiko rasizma kot oblike perverzije, ki rasnega drugega postavlja kot nadjazovskega Drugega, za katerega se domneva, da skriva obsceni užitek oziroma »voljo do užitka«. Medtem ko so druga poglavja knjige *Read My Desire* v zadnjih tridesetih letih odigrala ključno vlogo pri oblikovanju Lacanove teorije – zlasti lacanovske filmske teorije (»Zaklenjena soba/Osamljena soba«) in lacanovske teorije seksualnosti (»Spol in evtanazija uma«) –, pa poglavje »Krojaški nadjaz« še ni bilo deležno pozornosti, ki si jo zaslubi za prispevek ne le k Lacanovi teoriji rase, ampak tudi k Lacanovi etiki na splošno. Da bi to pomanjkljivost odpravil, članek najprej ponovi Copjecino kritiko perverznega »krojaškega nadjaza«, ki se kaže v seriji fotografij kolonialnih drugih v oblačilih, ki jih je posnel znani francoski psiholog G. G. de Clérambault. Nato Copjecino analizo Clérambaultovega krojaškega nadjaza uporabi na novejših, veliko bolj sadističnih primerih krojaškega, nadjazovskega nasilja nad postkolonialnimi drugimi po napadih na Svetovni trgovinski center in Pentagon 11. septembra 2001. S tem esej dokazuje, da je za pravilno razumevanje predvidevanja in nujnosti sklepnega poziva knjige *Read My Desire* k »neki drugi logiki nadjaza« treba upoštevati »krojaški nadjaz«.



We are told that man is the measure of all things. But where is his own measure? Is it to be found in himself?  
— Jacques Lacan<sup>1</sup>

Halfway through the fourth chapter of *Read My Desire*, “The Sartorial Superego,” Joan Copjec succinctly mathematizes the difference between psychoanalytic and

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 68.

utilitarian ethics. As she explains, whereas utilitarianism blithely assumes that “man can be counted as zero,” psychoanalysis insists that, if counted man can indeed be, it is only as “minus one.”<sup>2</sup> Confident that “the goal of man” is the maximization of pleasure and that pleasure can therefore be used to “regulate and manipulate man,” utilitarianism presumes that “man is basically and infinitely manageable,” that he is, in short, “fundamentally *ruly*.”<sup>3</sup> The psychoanalytic objection to this supposition, Copjec clarifies, rests not on the protest that “man is *more* than [ . . . ] rationalist engineers” like Jeremy Bentham in philosophy or Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand in architecture will allow, but rather that “man is, in a manner, *less* than” utilitarians realize insofar as “he is radically separated from, and cannot know, what he wants”—a separation and an unknowing that renders man fundamentally *unruly*.<sup>4</sup> Hence Copjec’s conclusion that “the difference between the utilitarian and the psychoanalytic subject is the difference between zero and minus one, between a subject who is driven to seek the maximization of his pleasure in his own greater good, and a subject for whom pleasure cannot function as an index of the good, since the latter is lost to him”—lost because the subject is ultimately “subject to a principle *beyond* pleasure.”<sup>5</sup> This principle is, of course, what psychoanalysis designates as the death drive.

As Copjec stresses, it is on this principle of the death drive, the principle that the subject is essentially, constitutively, “*not driven to seek his own good*,” that psychoanalysis grounds its Copernican revolution in ethics.<sup>6</sup> To subscribe to an unruly ethics of the drive is to maintain that the subject’s freedom, paradoxically, is possible only by way of submission. So far as psychoanalysis is concerned, “the freedom of the ethical subject” is “the freedom to resist the lure of the pleasure principle and to submit oneself to the law of the death drive.”<sup>7</sup> This is why, *contra* utilitarianism, psychoanalysis insists that freedom resides not in a subject “choosing” its own good and “act[ing] in its own best interest” (an “illusory freedom,” Copjec stresses, since the good determines the choice and not vice versa), but rather in a subject “choosing *not* to be motivated by self-interest

<sup>2</sup> Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 87.

<sup>3</sup> Copjec, 85.

<sup>4</sup> Copjec, 87.

<sup>5</sup> Copjec, 87.

<sup>6</sup> Copjec, 87.

<sup>7</sup> Copjec, 96.

and thus [...] acting contrary to its own good—even to the point of bringing about its own death.”<sup>8</sup> Mismeasuring man as zero rather than minus one, utilitarianism fails to fathom that “the subject’s only freedom” consists “precisely in its ability to *disregard* all circumstances, causes, conditions, all promises of reward or punishment for its actions.”<sup>9</sup> In short, as Kant would put it, the subject’s freedom is non-pathological.

This invocation of Kant is no accident, of course, for, as Copjec notes, Freud was not the first to frame freedom in such subtractive terms. Kant primed the psychoanalytic pump by placing the categorical imperative “in a realm radically beyond the phenomenal,” thereby “splitting the subject between two realms, one subject to the determinations of historical conditions [the phenomenal], the other [the noumenal] not.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, as Copjec likewise stresses, by failing to account for the “enunciating instance” of the categorical imperative—a failure that makes it seem as though it “come[s] from nowhere,” which, in turn, allows its addressee to “presume to occupy the vacant enunciative position” and (mis)take itself as “the source of the statement”—Kant “partially sealed up again the gap he so dramatically opened.”<sup>11</sup> As Lacan would put it, what Kant failed to do was to distinguish between the subject of the *enunciated* (the subject of the *statement* that Kant correctly understood the categorical imperative to be) and the subject of the *enunciation*, the latter of which psychoanalysis identifies as the superego.<sup>12</sup>

This distinction between the subject of the enunciated and the subject of the enunciation is the turn of the screw that transposes us from the realm of Kantian ethics to that of Lacanian ethics. For if, as Copjec puts it, “the sole moral maxim of psychoanalysis” is to “not surrender your internal conflict, your division”—a gloss of Lacan’s famous maxim from *Seminar VII* to not “give ground relative to” your desire—then acting ethically, paradoxically, entails not *identifying* with the moral law, as in Kant, but rather *disidentifying* with and “*recoil[ing]*” in “moral

<sup>8</sup> Copjec, 96.

<sup>9</sup> Copjec, 96.

<sup>10</sup> Copjec, 96.

<sup>11</sup> Copjec, 96–98.

<sup>12</sup> As Copjec stresses, this failure to distinguish between the subject of the enunciated and the subject of the enunciation is why for Kant “the ethical subject hears the voice of conscience as its own.” *Read My Desire*, 98.

revulsion” from this “incomprehensible part of our being.”<sup>13</sup> Psychoanalysis “insist[s] on exposing” the “sadistic superego” as the “cruel enunciator” of the moral law, Copjec concludes, because it “wishes to demonstrate the ethical necessity of hearing the otherness of this voice and of maintaining our distance from it. It is always and only this division of the subject that psychoanalysis insists on.”<sup>14</sup> Contrary, then, to the typical (mis)understanding of the superego as an ethical agency, Lacan insists that to (attempt to) comply with the injunctions of the superego is patently *unethical* insofar as to do so is to betray—to *compromise*—the “pure,” non-pathological desire upon which the death-driven ethics of psychoanalysis is founded.<sup>15</sup>

Generally speaking, “The Sartorial Superego” is not the most feted chapter of *Read My Desire*. That distinction belongs to its final chapter, “Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason,” wherein Copjec anticipates by more than two decades much of the recent work in Lacanian theory regarding the ontological dimension of sex by insisting, *contra* Judith Butler, that sexual difference is not a discursive difference “inscribed in the symbolic” like “racial, class, or ethnic differences,” but is instead “a real [...] difference.”<sup>16</sup> And yet, as we will see, understanding what is at stake in “The Sartorial Superego” is crucial for understanding why Copjec concludes the book by so stridently distinguishing between the “real

<sup>13</sup> Copjec, 88, 92. Lacan’s maxim reads as follows: “I propose then that, from an analytical point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire.” Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 319.

<sup>14</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> Slavoj Žižek has forcefully made this precise point on numerous occasions. As he puts it in *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, for instance: “Lacan’s maxim of the ethics of psychoanalysis is *not* to be confounded with the pressure of the superego [...]. [I]n a first approach it may seem that the maxim ‘Do not give up your desire!’ coincides with the superego command ‘Enjoy!’—do we not compromise our desire precisely by renouncing enjoyment? Is it not a fundamental thesis of Freud, a kind of Freudian commonplace, that the superego forms the basic, ‘primitive’ kernel of the ethical agency? Lacan goes against these commonplaces: between the ethics of desire and the superego, he posits a relationship of radical exclusion.” Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (New York: Verso, 1994), 67.

<sup>16</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 207. See, for instance, Alenka Zupančič, *What Is Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017); Slavoj Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019); and Lee Edelman, *Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

difference” that is sexual difference and symbolic differences such as those of race and ethnicity—a distinction that looms large over the book’s famous final sentence: “Another logic of the superego must commence.”<sup>17</sup> For, as she insists, it is only by attending to the real of sexual difference that we are able to grasp the subject’s constitutive unruliness, what she dubs its “sovereign incalculability”; and insofar as this incalculability is the very hinge upon which the ethics of psychoanalysis pivots, it must, she also insists, be acknowledged if we are to resist the ever-increasing superegoic “demands for the surrender of difference to processes of ‘homogenization,’ ‘purification,’ or any of the other crimes against otherness with which the rise of racism has begun to acquaint us.”<sup>18</sup> *Read My Desire* thus doesn’t merely anticipate the sex-driven “ontological turn” in contemporary Lacanian theory. By dint of its theorization of the “sartorial superego,” it likewise anticipates much of the current work by Lacanian theorists to trace, so as to traverse, what Todd McGowan has recently termed the “racist fantasy.”<sup>19</sup> Before delving into the relation between the sartorial superego and the racist fantasy, however, we must first consider Copjec’s analysis of racism as a symptom of the failure of that more primary fantasy upon which the liberal modern order rests: the utilitarian fantasy.

## Perversion and the Utilitarian Fantasy

Copjec sets the stage for her notion of the sartorial superego by way of an extended analysis of the numerous perverse photographs of colonial cloth taken by a man whom Lacan once lauded as his “only master”: psychiatrist G. G. de Clérambault.<sup>20</sup> Following Copjec, my use of the term “perverse” to characterize Clérambault’s photographs draws on the Lacanian understanding of perversion

<sup>17</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 236.

<sup>18</sup> Copjec, 208.

<sup>19</sup> See Todd McGowan, *The Racist Fantasy: The Unconscious Roots of Hatred* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022). For other recent Lacanian work on racial identity and the psychopathology of racism, see Sheldon George, *Trauma and Race: A Lacanian Study of African American Racial Identity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016); Gautam Basu Thakur, *Postcolonial Lack: Identity, Culture, Surplus* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020); Jack Black, *The Psychosis of Race: A Lacanian Approach to Racism and Racialization* (New York: Routledge, 2024); and many of the essays collected in Sheldon George and Derek Hook, eds., *Lacan and Race: Racism, Identity, and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 65.

as the turning of oneself into an instrument of the Other's enjoyment. As she demonstrates over the course of the chapter, a number of these photographs, particularly "those in which the bodily form has completely disappeared," are not ruled by the logic of *fantasy*, which would entail Clérambault positioning himself as a "colonialist subject confronted with an objectified image of his own loss," but by the logic of *perversion*, with Clérambault positioning himself as "the gaze of the Moroccan Other," as himself occupying the position of the *objet petit a*.<sup>21</sup> In an "inversion" of the fantasy, these perverse photographs turn the cloth donned by the colonial other into a fetish object that enables Clérambault to disavow his own lack by transposing his own split, his own "barring," onto the Other.<sup>22</sup> The proper Lacanian formula to apply to *these* photographs is thus not " $\$ \diamond a$ ," the formula for fantasy, but its inversion, " $a \diamond \$$ ," the formula for perversion (see Figure).

 $\$ \diamond a$  $a \diamond \$$ **Fig.:** Photographs by G. G. de Clérambault

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By positioning himself not "in relation to the imaginary form of the object *a*," as in fantasy, but as himself the object *a* "in its real form," Clérambault "places

<sup>21</sup> Copjec, 78, 111.

<sup>22</sup> See Copjec, 109. It is Lacan who, in *Seminar XI*, defines perversion as "inverted fantasy," or, more precisely, as "an inverted effect of the phantasy." He also explains in the very next sentence that in perversion, "It is the subject who determines himself as object, in his encounter with the division of subjectivity." Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 185.

himself in the real, the only place where nothing is lacking, where knowledge is certain.”<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the hysterical subject, for whom the Other’s desire remains utterly opaque—hence the hystericizing question, “*Che Vuoi?*,” which is a thoroughly *ethical* question insofar as it bespeaks a distance between enunciation and enunciated—Clérambault, as a perverted subject, “places himself in the position of ‘never being deprived with regard to knowledge’” of what the Other wants.<sup>24</sup> No sublime hysteric, the pervert poses no such *Che vuoi?* because he finds nothing inscrutable or perplexing in the demand of the Other. On the contrary, the pervert *knows very well* what the Other wants or enjoys. Indeed, as Néster Braunstein stresses, it is this very “*savoirjouir*,” this “*jouissance* know-how [...] in the Other,” that paves the way to the perverse act, for it is the pervert’s very styling of himself a “subject supposed to *savoirjouir*” that makes him all too willing to serve as the instrument—or, as Lacan alternately puts it in *Seminar XI*, the “organ”—of the Other’s sickening surplus-enjoyment.<sup>25</sup>

It is precisely this self-instrumentalization (or self-organization) that Copjec sees at work in those Clérambault photographs in which the bodily form of the cloth-donning colonial other has all but disappeared. Photographing the cloth “to meet the satisfaction of [the Other’s] gaze”—that is, to satisfy the sadistic sartorial superego—Clérambault perversely “makes no claims on any right to enjoyment” in these photos;<sup>26</sup> instead, he “busies himself” with the fetish object “only for the sake of the Other.”<sup>27</sup> In so doing, he “evades [the] division,” the “internal conflict,” constitutive of his subjectivity by “making himself the *agent*”—again, the instrument or organ—of “a division outside himself.”<sup>28</sup> In short, he compromises his desire. Yet this is only half the problem, for in compromising his desire, Clérambault cannot help but *fail to read the other’s desire*, and the

<sup>23</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Copjec, 109.

<sup>25</sup> Néster A. Braunstein, *Jouissance: A Lacanian Concept*, trans. Silvia Rosman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020), 67, 201, 67, 203. I find “organ” preferable to “instrument” insofar as it better captures the undead enjoyment, the “immortal,” “irrepressible,” “indestructible life,” as Lacan puts it, with which the phallic object pulsates. As I address later, Lacan gives this “organ of the drive,” or “organ of the libido,” two names: “*hommelette*” and “*lamella*” (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 198, 196, 200).

<sup>26</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 111.

<sup>27</sup> Copjec, 115.

<sup>28</sup> Copjec, 111.

result of this failure—to trope the title of Copjec's follow-up to *Read My Desire, Imagine There's No Woman*—is that he imagines there is an Other.<sup>29</sup>

To return, then, to the distinction Copjec draws between utilitarian and psychoanalytic ethics, what these photographs ultimately reveal is not Clérambault's personal ethical failure but, rather, the ethical failure of what she terms the “utilitarian fantasy.”<sup>30</sup> As she elaborates, utilitarianism's fantasy of the maximization of pleasure—the very fantasy that enables it to count man as zero and, thus, an infinitely *manageable*, fundamentally *ruly* being—is

sustained by the structural suspicion that somewhere—in the other—the principle [of the maximization of pleasure] has defaulted. Included, and necessarily so, in the fantasy of a perfect reciprocity of social relations is the negation of the principle that produces the fantasy. For someone—the other—must structurally be supposed to oppose this principle, by the very assertion of its own will. The system of utilitarianism only constitutes itself as such, only thinks its totality by including within itself an element that gives positive form to the impossibility it otherwise excludes. This element is the positive will of the other; it is, in psychoanalytic terms, utilitarianism's symptom.<sup>31</sup>

This “positive will of the other” that functions as “utilitarianism's symptom,” as the disavowed “exception” that at one and the same time founds the utilitarian fantasy and functions as its “internal negation,” is what Lacan, in his paradigmatic *écrit* on the subject of psychoanalytic ethics, “Kant avec Sade,” famously dubbed the “will to *jouissance*.<sup>32</sup> As the voice of the superego, the will to *jouissance* sadistically bombards the subject with the imperative, “Enjoy!”<sup>33</sup> It is in

<sup>29</sup> See Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 115.

<sup>31</sup> Copjec, 104–6.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Kant with Sade,” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 652. The definition of the symptom as “the point of exception” that simultaneously structures an ideology (or, in this instance, a fantasy) and serves as its “internal negation” is Žižek's. *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 23.

<sup>33</sup> Hence Lacan's claim that the Kantian categorical imperative is equivalent to the Sadean will to *jouissance*: “[I]t is clearly Kant's will that is encountered in the place of this will that can only be said to be a will to *jouissance* if we explain that it is the subject reconstituted through alienation at the cost of being nothing but the instrument of *jouissance*.” Lacan,

this sense that those photographs wherein Clérambault perversely fetishizes the “useless, overbearing presence” of colonial cloth can be said to function as instantiations of the sartorial superego, for they “give positive form” to utilitarianism’s disavowed dependence on the Other’s will to *jouissance*.<sup>34</sup> To again quote Copjec at length, the division of Clérambault’s photographs into those that extol the usefulness of colonial cloth and those that fetishize its uselessness

corresponds to the division between the statement or fantasy of utilitarianism (of the ethical value of useful pleasure) and the useless pleasure of our neighbor, which enables, at the same time as it is neglected by, the fantasy. By not converting the Other’s supposed enjoyment into an image useful to utilitarianism, by laying the two alternatives side by side, the photographs taken by Clérambault expose what the fantasy obscures: its strict dependence on the supposition of the Other’s obscene enjoyment. Not an enjoyment that can be corralled by use, but one threateningly outside the bounds of utility.<sup>35</sup>

To further illustrate this fissure in the utilitarian fantasy, as well as to anticipate some of the more militant manifestations of the sartorial superego at which we will look later in this essay, let us consider the case of another famous pervert, that of the character Leonard Lawrence, a.k.a. “Private Pyle” (Vincent D’Onofrio), from Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).<sup>36</sup> Rather than disidentifying with and “recoil[ing] before the violence and obscenity of the superego’s incitement to *jouissance*, to a boundless and aggressive enjoyment”—a function performed by the character of the drill sergeant (R. Lee Ermey), who is the cruel, sadistic enunciator of the superego in the film—Leonard *overidentifies with it*.<sup>37</sup> Failing to hear the otherness of this voice, which would necessitate maintaining his distance from it, Leonard, like the Kantian subject when interpellated by the moral law, assumes this voice as his own. This is why, immediately before killing the drill sergeant and turning the rifle on himself, he recites the “Rifleman’s

<sup>124</sup> “Kant with Sade,” 654. Here we have yet another definition of the perverse subject as “the instrument of *jouissance*.”

<sup>34</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Copjec, 115.

<sup>36</sup> The following discussion of Leonard and *Full Metal Jacket* both draws from and expands upon Žižek’s analysis of the character and film in *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*, dir. Sophie Feinnes (Zeitgeist Films, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 92.

Creed": "This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine . . ." At various points throughout this creed, the recruit proclaims the rifle (a fetishized phallic object if ever there was one) not merely his "best friend," but his very "life," even going so far as to proclaim, "My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother [ . . . ]. We will become part of each other."<sup>38</sup> With the exception of these last few lines, which aren't included in the film's truncated version of the creed, Leonard recites all the aforementioned ones (including the line about the rifle being his life) during the scene in which he runs amok and kills the drill sergeant before turning the gun on himself.

It is instructive to juxtapose this creed with the following obscene marching chant that recurs throughout the film: "This is my rifle, this is my gun. This is for fighting, this is for fun." In this chant, the "gun" whose stipulated use is "fun" rather than "fighting" (a utility reserved for the rifle) is the soldier's penis, a point emphasized by the recruits, who grab their crotches as they proclaim that their "gun" is "for fun." When we consider this chant alongside the Rifleman's Creed, we encounter the same splitting of the utilitarian fantasy that Copjec traces throughout Clérambault's photographs. Acknowledging that sex can be, and often is, engaged in for "fun" rather than for procreation, the chant at the same time *disavows* the uselessness of this "fun" by recruiting it into the ranks of utility, ascribing it a use value by making it "for" something. The creed, on the other hand, is the symptom of this disavowal of the Other's useless will to *jouissance*. In contrast to the chant, the creed doesn't extol the rifle's utility. Rather, as we have seen, it all but worships it as the rifleman's very "life," an object that is "human, even as I, because it is my life": hence the creed's assertion that rifle and rifleman "will become part of each other."

To thus return to our earlier discussion of the pervert turning himself into an "organ" of the Other's surplus-enjoyment, Leonard's rifle is a perfect instance of what Žižek, inverting Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs," would term an "organ without a body," an excessive, phallic appendage that, precisely insofar as it is phallic, functions as an agent of castration.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, that

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<sup>38</sup> Here and throughout, I am quoting from the version of the creed available here: <https://www.usmcu.edu/Research/Marine-Corps-History-Division/Frequently-Requested-Topics/Marines-Rifle-Creed/>.

<sup>39</sup> For Žižek's distinction between the organ without a body and the body without organs, see Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge,

the rifle functions as an organ without a body, an organ of the “immortal,” “irrepressible,” and “indestructible life” with which the phallic object pulsates, becomes even clearer if we consider the following line from the full version of the creed: “I will ever guard it [the rifle] against the ravages of weather and damage *as I will ever guard my legs, my arms, my eyes and my heart against damage*” (my emphasis).<sup>40</sup> By turning himself into this instrument-organ of the Other’s will to *jouissance*, Leonard inverts, as perversion does the fundamental fantasy, the meaning or signification of the term “life” in the “Rifleman’s Creed,” for the rifle comes to assume the role of his “life” not insofar as it protects him in battle (i.e., preserves his biological life), but insofar as it embodies the undead, immortal life substance of the drive: *jouissance*.

In answer, then, to the drill sergeant’s famous question, “Private Pyle, what is your major malfunction?,” Leonard’s major malfunction is that his anthropomorphization of the rifle as something “human, even as him” results not in the humanization of the rifle but, inversely, the *inhumanization* of the rifleman into an instrument-organ of the undead enjoyment of the drive. To thus invoke one of Lacan’s other terms for the organ without a body, what causes Leonard to “crack up” is that he has perversely turned himself into an “*hommelette*,” that little piece of the real which is “the libido, *qua* [...] immortal life, or irrepressible life [...], simplified, indestructible life,” and of which “all the forms of the *objet a*”—gaze, voice, breast, phallus, and feces—are “the representatives, the equivalents.”<sup>41</sup> It is therefore only fitting that after killing the drill sergeant Leonard blows his own head off with the rifle, for he has become nothing but an organ of the acephalous drive.

I have already underscored the ethical dimension of the *Che vuoi?*, but for Copjec the pivotal question upon which the ethics of psychoanalysis turns is the following: “Would the Other be willing to sacrifice for us?”<sup>42</sup> The answer to this question, as intimated by Freud’s “undisguised and unabashed *incomprehension*” when addressing utilitarianism’s moral command to “Love thy neighbor as thyself”—or, as Copjec restyles it, to “Love thy superego as thyself”—is an emphatic

2004).

<sup>40</sup> See note 25, above.

<sup>41</sup> Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 197–98. Lacan’s less “joky” (and more frequently cited) term for the organ without a body is “*lamella*” (197).

<sup>42</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 91.

“No!”<sup>43</sup> For the Other, by its very definition, brooks no sacrifice. As a “malign, noxious neighbor who will spare us no cruelty in the accrual of its own pleasure,” a neighbor whose law is not “humane and equitable,” but “capric[ious], arbitrar[y], destructi[ve]”—in short, sadistic—the Other is a neighbor with whom the only relation of exchange is a “nonequivalent” one.<sup>44</sup> This is why, *contra* utilitarian ethics, which holds that “one must act in such a way that everyone would benefit,”<sup>45</sup> the “sadistic law of psychoanalysis,”<sup>46</sup> the aforementioned “will to *jouissance*,” holds that it is always the Other, always the sadistic superego, that “benefits from the sacrifice of enjoyment—and always at the subject’s expense.”<sup>47</sup> As Žižek puts it, “the more we obey the superego, the greater [ . . . ] the enjoyment accumulated in it and, thus, the greater the pressure it exerts on us”—until, like Leonard, we crack or explode.<sup>48</sup>

### Sartorial Superegoism and the Racist Fantasy

We still, however, have not quite explained what, precisely, Copjec means by the “sartorial superego.” To do so, I return to my earlier point regarding perversion as both a compromise (a “surrender,” in Copjec’s words) of the subject’s desire and a failure to read the Other’s desire—a failure, as we have said, that causes one to imagine that there *is* an Other. As Copjec stresses, this surrendering of desire has been the cause of “some of the most violent aggressions against our neighbors.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, taking the “well-documented” utilitarian fantasy of “an erotic and despotic colonial cloth” as her case in point—a fantasy in which what was “capital,” she stresses, was the symptomatic “surplus pleasure,” the “useless *jouissance*,” that “the voluminous cloth was supposed to veil and the colonial subject, thus hidden, was supposed to enjoy”—Copjec highlights how

<sup>43</sup> Copjec, 91, 92.

<sup>44</sup> Copjec, 92. In characterizing the subject’s relation to the superego as a “nonequivalent” one, I am drawing on Žižek’s reading of the “nonequivalent exchange” at work between subject and substance throughout the dialectic of *Bildung* in the “Spirit” chapter of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 27.

<sup>45</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 96.

<sup>46</sup> Copjec, 94.

<sup>47</sup> Copjec, 96.

<sup>48</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 160.

<sup>49</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 98.

this fantasy fueled “the singular and sustained effort of imperialism to remove the veils that covered its colonial neighbor.”<sup>50</sup> As she concludes, “every effort to strip away the veil was clearly an aggression against the bloated presence of this enjoyment that would not release itself into the universal pool.”<sup>51</sup> Here we have finally arrived at a more concrete sense of what Copjec means by the term “sartorial superego.” As she queries: “Isn’t this fantasmatic figure of the veiled colonial subject a kind of objectified, sartorial form of the superego? Hasn’t the obscene, superegoic neighbor, abandoned by utilitarianism, returned in the form of those who lived in literal proximity to its project, its colonial neighbors?”<sup>52</sup>

To illustrate both the prescience and the persistence of such queries, we could very well add to them the following ones: What are the perverse, sadistic acts of violence triggered by the various cloths worn by post- and neo-colonial others—hijabs, niqabs, burkas, keffiyehs, dastars, etc.—if not instantiations of the sadistic sartorial superego? What are the laws prohibiting the public wearing of hijabs in France or of burkas in Belgium if not similar instantiations of the sartorial superego? Does not the persistence of questions like these illustrate just how prescient Lacan was when, in 1973, he predicted that a “rise in racism” would result from (as Copjec puts it) the “fetishization of private *jouissance*” endemic to our too-late-capitalist order, with its “ever smaller factions of people

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<sup>50</sup> Copjec, 106. That Clérambault’s fetishistic photographs manifest utilitarianism’s symptom nicely illustrates Žižek’s point that the fetish is “effectively a kind of *envers* of the symptom,” its “other side.” Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Copjec, 106. Here we must distinguish between empirical “colonial neighbors” and the superegoic “neighbor”—or, as Mauro Resmini puts it, the colonial “other” and the superegoic “Other.” As Resmini explains, in a “remarkable twist,” the pervert/sadist’s victims, “the ones whose desire the sadist knows and exploits for his own enjoyment,” are “not the Other,” for “a split, in fact, occurs: the victims are reduced to *others*, that is, dispensable instruments in the hands of the sadistic executioners, while the Other as Law is elevated to a transcendental guarantee of the executioner’s acts [...]. In fully submitting to the Law, an inflexible Other that bears no desire, the sadist becomes its docile instrument. This is the essence of the pervert’s position: it disavows the lack in the Other by projecting it onto the other.” Mauro Resmini, “Asymmetries of Desire: *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*,” in *Unwatchable*, ed. Nicholas Baer et al. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 161–62.

proclaiming their duty-bound devotion to their own special brand of enjoyment”?<sup>53</sup> To quote Lacan’s own words on the “rise of racism”: “With our *jouissance* going off the track, only the Other is able to mark its position, but only insofar as we are separated from this Other. Whence certain fantasies—unheard of before the melting pot.”<sup>54</sup>

In his recent book *The Racist Fantasy*, Todd McGowan provides a more contemporary instance of the sartorial superego: the banning throughout much of France of the “burkini,” an article of swimwear, authorities argued, that “violated French laicity, the restriction on public displays of religious clothing and symbols.”<sup>55</sup> International headlines were made when, in August of 2016, a group of four police officers confronted a woman wearing a burkini on a beach in Nice. The officers not only issued the woman a ticket for “not wearing an outfit respecting good morals and secularism,” but also forced her to partially remove it.<sup>56</sup> Such an incident perfectly encapsulates the shift that western society has undergone from a society of prohibition to one of enjoyment—a shift brought about by the postmodern decline of the paternal function, the “Name-of-the-Father” (*nom-du-père*), or, as Žižek has characterized it, the “demise of symbolic efficiency.”<sup>57</sup> As McGowan succinctly puts it, “Whereas formerly society has required subjects to renounce their private enjoyment in the name of social duty, today the only duty seems to consist in enjoying oneself as much as possible,” an “imperative of *jouissance*” that Lacan famously illustrated by way of the neon-embazoned “Enjoy Coca-Cola” sign he encountered while on the way to the talk he delivered at the famous structuralism conference at Johns Hopkins University in October, 1966.<sup>58</sup> This transition from a society based on the prohibition of enjoy-

<sup>53</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 183. On “too late capitalism,” see Anna Kornbluh, *Immediacy, or, the Style of Too Late Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2024).

<sup>54</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Television / A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. Joan Copjec, trans. Denis Hollier et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 32.

<sup>55</sup> McGowan, *Racist Fantasy*, 42.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Ben Quinn, “French Police Make Woman Remove Clothing on Nice Beach Following Burkini Ban,” *The Guardian*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/24/french-police-make-woman-remove-burkini-on-nice-beach>.

<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, “Wither Oedipus?,” the final chapter of Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999), 322.

<sup>58</sup> Todd McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction? Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 2; Jacques Lacan, “Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever,” in *The*

ment to one that inexorably bombards the subject with the superegoic imperative to enjoy is what accounts for the fact that, as McGowan notes of the burkini incident, “Whereas decades ago authorities would force women to cover themselves on beaches, now they demanded that they take clothes off.”<sup>59</sup> From this vantage point, it would seem that the problem with the burkini is that it signifies all too blatantly its wearer’s rejection of the contemporary regime of the superego and its secular hedonist imperative to enjoy. Hence the authorities’ aforementioned charge that the burkini fails to “respect good morals and secularism.” Under the current logic of the superego, refusal to enjoy is understood not only as a moral failure, but also as a political threat to “our” secular “way of life.”

And yet, as McGowan reminds us, because “all instances of enjoyment [...] involve an excessive relationship to the order of signification,” the burkini at the same time functions as an ensign of the other’s secret surplus-enjoyment.<sup>60</sup> Here we come upon what Richard Boothby has characterized as the “Janus-faced character” of fantasy.<sup>61</sup> Within the framework of the racist fantasy, the burkini doesn’t merely signify the other’s failure or refusal to enjoy, to adhere to “our way of life.” On the contrary, in its very asceticism, the burkini simultaneously signifies the other’s indulgence in a form of secret surplus-enjoyment that, to recall Copjec’s words, “will not release itself in to the universal pool.” McGowan underscores this very dynamic when he rightly notes that the burkini triggered the racist fantasy because the authorities saw in this article of clothing that “covered the body too much” a form of “excessive modesty” that bespoke an “excessive self-sacrifice” and “suffering” for one’s religion that “equaled enjoyment in the minds of the French onlookers.”<sup>62</sup> Within the frame of the racist fantasy, the burkini, however modest it may seem—indeed, *as a result of its very modesty*—cannot but appear as an excessive, superfluous object that signifies the Muslim

*Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 194. The phrase “imperative of jouissance” comes from the following passage of Seminar XX, *Encore*: “Nothing forces anyone to enjoy (*jouir*) except the superego. The superego is the imperative of jouissance.” Jacques Lacan, *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972–1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 3.

<sup>59</sup> McGowan, *Racist Fantasy*, 42.

<sup>60</sup> McGowan, 44.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 275.

<sup>62</sup> McGowan, *Racist Fantasy*, 43.

woman's *enjoyment* of her "capitulation to patriarchy," her "suffer[ing] . . . adherence to her religion's dress code."<sup>63</sup> This is why, much like the burka or hijab, the burkini was perceived as "a threat to French enjoyment" and a "menace" to "the French way of life," a phantasmatic threat which the banning of the burkini only served to "nourish" by "persuading people that immigrant women were the embodiments of [an] obscenity" that paradoxically "manifested itself in displays of excessive modesty."<sup>64</sup> The other is thus at one and the same time one who fails to enjoy and who *enjoys too much*, one who refuses to enjoy "our way of life," yet who is also said to have stolen and hoarded the very enjoyment upon which "our way of life" depends. Hence McGowan's conclusion that "As long as Muslims fit within the racist fantasy propagated in France, they will represent unrestrained enjoyment no matter what they do and no matter how they are attired."<sup>65</sup>

The sartorial superego is far from limited to France, however. A far more militant, far more sadistic, outburst of it occurred in the United States on August 5, 2012, when neo-Nazi Wade Michael Page opened fire on a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, killing six and wounding three others before turning the gun on himself.<sup>66</sup> Unlike many other white supremacists who have committed racially motivated acts of mass terror in recent years, Page left no manifesto. Thus, when questioned as to Page's motive in the immediate aftermath of the attack, Oak Creek Police Chief John Edwards replied, "I don't know why, and I don't know that we'll ever know, because when he died, that died with him [sic] what his motive was or what he was thinking."<sup>67</sup> Edwards's response is typical of the reflexive tendency among U.S. law enforcement and news media to frame such attacks as "random and unforeseeable" acts of violence committed by "lone wolves." As Rita Katz highlights, Page was "a buzz-cut forty-year-old Army veteran covered in white supremacist tattoos," as well as "a prominent member of the Hammerskins skinhead group and its Crew38 forum," where, in addition to other neo-Nazi websites and forums such as Vanguard News Network and Stormfront, he had "a clear history of posting explicit intentions to commit

<sup>63</sup> McGowan, 43.

<sup>64</sup> McGowan, 43.

<sup>65</sup> McGowan, 44.

<sup>66</sup> Page actually ended up killing seven people. In March 2020, a Sikh priest injured in the attack died of complications from his wounds.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Rita Katz, *Saints and Soldiers: Inside Internet-Age Terrorism, from Syria to the Capitol Siege* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 27.

racial violence.”<sup>68</sup> Reporting for the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Marilyn Elias likewise notes that Page’s Army service took place at the infamous Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina, which in the late 1990s and early 2000s was well-known for being “the home base for a brazen cadre of white supremacist soldiers” who flew Nazi flags and played white power music that “endorsed the killing of African-Americans and Jews.” Indeed, Page himself would go on to play in various white power rock bands in Orange, California, in the early 2000s, when the city stood at “the thriving center of the racist music scene.”<sup>69</sup> As reported by Mark Potok (also of the SPLC), the music of many of the bands with which Page was associated was “incredibly violent” and “talk[ed] about murdering Jews, black people, gay people and a whole host of other enemies.”<sup>70</sup>

But what was it, exactly, that prompted Page to attack a Sikh *gurdwara*? According to criminologist Peter Simi, who interviewed Page on multiple occasions between 2001 and 2003 while working on a doctoral thesis on white supremacy that laid the groundwork for his 2010 book *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement’s Hidden Spaces of Hate*, though most of Page’s hateful rhetoric was directed at Jews and Blacks, he also called Muslims “towel heads,” and he was “so furious after the Sept. 11 attacks that he thought the U.S. should just bomb Middle Eastern countries to smithereens.”<sup>71</sup> Having spoken with Simi, the aforementioned Elias finds it “no coincidence” that the temple was just down the road from the restaurant where Page’s ex-girlfriend worked. As Elias suggests, “Perhaps the turban-wearing Sikh men caught his eye because of the proximity,” adding that “Sikh Americans are well aware of the danger of being targeted for hate crimes by racists who mistake them for Muslims.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>68</sup> Katz, 27.

<sup>69</sup> Marilyn Elias, “Sikh Temple Killer Wade Michael Page Radicalized in Army,” Southern Poverty Law Center, November 11, 2012, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2012/sikh-temple-killer-wade-michael-page-radicalized-army>. Elias also reports in this article that an army buddy told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* that one of Page’s many white supremacist tattoos was of the infamous “14 words” that members of the white supremacist group “The Order” are known to recite as their motto: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children.”

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Erica Goode and Serge F. Kovaleski, “Wisconsin Killer Fed and Was Fueled by Hate-Driven Music,” *New York Times*, August 6, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/07/us/army-veteran-identified-as-suspect-in-wisconsin-shooting.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Elias, “Sikh Temple Killer.”

<sup>72</sup> Elias.

the first fatal victim of a hate crime committed in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks was a Sikh man named Balbir Singh Sodhi, who was shot to death outside the gas station he owned in Mesa, Arizona, on September, 15, 2001. In addition to proclaiming himself “a patriot and an American” upon his arrest, Sodhi’s killer, Frank Silva Roque, publicly remarked at an Applebee’s bar on the evening of the 9/11 attacks that he was “going to go out and shoot some towel-heads.”<sup>73</sup>

In the cases of both Page and Roque, it was the turban as a fetishized, fantasmatic object thought to harbor an obscene surplus-enjoyment that steadfastly refuses to release itself into the universal pool that triggered the racist fantasy by serving as an instantiation of the sartorial superego. Let us recall McGowan’s aforementioned point regarding enjoyment’s excessive relationship to the order of signification. As he explains with respect to racial signification in particular, though “every racial identity seems distinct,” the logic undergirding the racist fantasy “does not respect particular distinctions.”<sup>74</sup> To illustrate this point, McGowan rehearses the following joke:

A Jewish guy walks into a bar, sees the bartender, and exclaims, “Thanks for Pearl Harbor!” The bartender responds, “I’m Chinese, not Japanese.” The Jewish guy says, “Chinese, Japanese, what’s the difference?” The next day, he comes back to the bar. The bartender says to him, “Thanks for the Titanic.” The Jewish guy is perplexed. The bartender explains, “Iceberg, Goldberg, what’s the difference?”<sup>75</sup>

What this joke perfectly illustrates is the unremittingly binary logic of the racist fantasy, which reduces all difference to the very same “otherness.” As McGowan remarks, “While different racial groups can take up the position of the subject or the racial other—a Korean subject and a Chinese other, a white subject and a Native American other, or a light-skinned Black subject and a dark-skinned Black other—racism is fundamentally a black and white issue, even when it doesn’t involve Black and white.”<sup>76</sup> This is why, so far as the white supremacist is concerned, there is no difference between a keffiyeh-clad al-Qaeda terrorist and a

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Simran Jeet Singh, “A Unique Perspective on Hate-Crimes: The Story of a Convicted Killer,” *Huffington Post*, July 20, 2012, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-unique-perspective-on-hate-crimes-the-story-of-a-convicted-killer\\_b\\_1685020](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-unique-perspective-on-hate-crimes-the-story-of-a-convicted-killer_b_1685020).

<sup>74</sup> McGowan, *Racist Fantasy*, 49–50.

<sup>75</sup> McGowan, 37.

<sup>76</sup> McGowan, 49–50.

dastar-donned Sikh. The sartorial superego respects no such difference, for “in terms of the racist fantasy and its distribution of enjoyment, racism concerns only two races, that of the racist subject and the racial other. Even though those occupying the position can change radically, the structure remains the same.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, the very structure of the racist fantasy precludes recognizing any difference between keffiyeh and dastar, let alone between Muslim and Sikh. Indeed, as with Althusser’s Lacanian-influenced notion of ideological *méconnaissance*, according to which socio-symbolic interpellation is successful even, or especially, when one misrecognizes oneself as the subject of a given hailing, the racist fantasy, by structural necessity, functions even or especially when it misrecognizes its other, for *there can only be one other*. Hence the ability of the dastar to trigger the same superegoic response from Page and Roque as a keffiyeh. The logic at work here is the same as that of the racist in McGowan’s joke: “Keffiyeh, dastar, what’s the difference?” Once the dastar enters the frame of the racist fantasy, it becomes indistinguishable from the keffiyeh, reduced to the very same “towel” thought to harbor an obscene surplus-enjoyment that poses a threat to “our way of life.”

It is thus no coincidence that both Page and Roque articulated their racism in expressly nationalist terms, with Page writing white nationalist songs in which he vowed to “fight for my race and nation” and Roque proudly proclaiming himself “a patriot and an American” for having killed a “towel head.”<sup>78</sup> Faced with (what they perceived to be) the endangerment of the “national Thing,” their sartorial superegos, triggered by the dastar as the ensign of an obscene surplus-enjoyment, commanded them to “Enjoy your nation as yourself!” and take back the enjoyment, the “way of life,” they believed to have been “stolen” by the other.<sup>79</sup> In overidentifying with this sartorial superegoic command, they both, like Kubrick’s Leonard, turned themselves into perverse, sadistic instruments of the Other’s will to *jouissance*.

As Žižek stresses, however, if we follow the Lacanian axiom that “enjoyment is ultimately always enjoyment of the Other, i.e., enjoyment supposed, imputed to the Other,” then “the hatred of the Other’s enjoyment is always the hatred of

<sup>77</sup> McGowan, 49.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Goode and Kovaleski, “Wisconsin Killer.”

<sup>79</sup> For more on the “national Thing” and “enjoying your nation as yourself,” see the final chapter of Žižek’s *Tarrying with the Negative*.

one's own enjoyment.”<sup>80</sup> This is why it does not go far enough to simply “point out how the racist's Other presents a threat to our identity,” whether individual or national.<sup>81</sup> As with Clérambault's perverse photographs, “the fascinating image of the Other gives a body to our own innermost split, to what is ‘in us more than ourselves’ and thus prevents us from achieving full identity with ourselves.”<sup>82</sup> Hence the inextricable link between scapegoating and the superegoic imperative to enjoy: in both cases, one disavows one's “own innermost split”—a split materialized or objectivized in the form of the *objet a*, the object-cause of desire that is “in one more than oneself”—by projecting it onto a fetishized other who all-too-conveniently comes to function as the agent of this division. This is the superegoic logic behind such Trumpian slogans as “Make America Great Again” and “Stop the Steal,” the former of which has assumed an iconic sartorial dimension of its own, of course, in the form of the infamous red (or, in some instances, camouflage) baseball cap—the *envers* or “other side,” as it were, of the colonial cloth of the other. Were it not for the interloping other, these nationalist mantras maintain, America would be able to enjoy (i.e., would be “great,” “free,” “white,” etc.) again. What such mantras conceal, however, is “the traumatic fact that *we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us*,” that “the lack ('castration') is originary,” that “enjoyment constitutes itself as ‘stolen.’”<sup>83</sup> To (over)identify with the voice of the nationalist superego—a voice that, to recall Copjec, demands that all racial difference be subjected to militant “processes of ‘homogenization’” and “‘purification’”—is thus, ineluctably, to compromise one's desire, to betray that self-difference, that internal conflict, upon which the ethical freedom of the subject depends.

## Pure Desire and the Ethics of Unruliness

This brings us back to where we started, with Copjec's insistence on “the sovereign incalculability of the subject,” the subject's unruly status as “*self-governing*,” “subject to its own laws.”<sup>84</sup> As Copjec takes pains to clarify, this does not mean a subject “who simply does or believes as she wishes,” or “who makes herself subject only to the law she *wants* to obey,” for such a subject would be

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<sup>80</sup> Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 206.

<sup>81</sup> Žižek, 206.

<sup>82</sup> Žižek, 206.

<sup>83</sup> Žižek, 203.

<sup>84</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 208.

“simply a variation on the theme of the calculable subject,” the pathological subject (in the Kantian sense) of the sensuous/phenomenal. On the contrary, as Lacan himself stresses, the subject’s sovereignty “culminates in the sacrifice, strictly speaking, of everything that is the object of love in one’s human tenderness [...] not only in the rejection of the pathological object, but also in its sacrifice and murder.”<sup>85</sup> The sovereign subject is thus a subtractive subject, a subject of the minus one, a subject who suffers for its fidelity to the law of pure, non-pathological desire, of “desire in its pure state.”<sup>86</sup> Hence the pride of place Lacan grants to Antigone in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.<sup>87</sup> A death-driven subject of pure desire *par excellence*, Antigone sacrifices her life rather than compromising her desire and surrendering her sovereignty, thereby demonstrating that the sovereign subject is one for whom, as Žižek is wont to put it, “freedom hurts.”<sup>88</sup>

Still, why does Copjec insist that the “radically incalculable,” non-pathological subject is “the only guarantee we have against racism,” as well as our only “chance of protecting difference in general”?<sup>89</sup> Let us return to Lacan’s warning about the “rise of racism” as a consequence of “our *jouissance* going off the track,” or, as Copjec puts it, our “fetishization of private *jouissance*,” the result of such fetishization being “ever smaller factions of people proclaiming their duty-bound devotion to their own special brand of enjoyment.”<sup>90</sup> Lacan correctly predicted that this fetishization of one’s own *jouissance* would give rise to “certain fantasies” about the other “unheard of before the melting pot” that is our global, multicultural world. As is all too clear from the instances of sartorial superegoic violence analyzed here, the racist fantasy remains alive and well, continuing to feed on the notion that the other enjoys in a way that is altogether different from ours—indeed, that poses a threat to our enjoyment, our way of life. Lacan’s rather cryptic solution to this problem is to “leav[e] this Other to his own mode of *jouissance*,” something he claims “would only be possible by not imposing our own [mode of *jouissance*] on him.”<sup>91</sup> What does this mean, exactly?

<sup>85</sup> Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 275.

<sup>86</sup> Lacan, 275.

<sup>87</sup> See Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 241–87.

<sup>88</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Freedom: A Disease without Cure* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023), 124.

<sup>89</sup> Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 209, 208.

<sup>90</sup> Copjec, 183.

<sup>91</sup> Lacan, *Television*, 32.

As we have said, the racist fantasy functions by imputing to the other an obscene, excessive enjoyment; however, this supposed *jouissance* is nothing but a projection of the subject's own disavowed enjoyment. Hence Jacques-Alain Miller's assertion in his seminar on the Lacanian concept of "extimacy" that "There is no other enjoyment but my own."<sup>92</sup> When we comply with the superego and disavow our own enjoyment by attributing it to the Other, we become "ruly," "calculable." This is what Copjec means when she insists that the subject's sovereign incalculability, its unruliness, is our only guarantee against racism and our only chance of protecting difference in general. To heed the command of the superego is not only to erase all difference between others—as in the case of Page and Roque, whose sartorial superegos erased any and all differences between Muslims and Sikhs—but also to avoid one's difference from oneself, a self-difference, or non-identity, that paradoxically is the key to the subject's sovereignty and, in turn, its freedom.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the typical nationalist refrain with respect to the cause or motive behind the attacks was, "They hate our freedom." If, as we have seen, hatred of the other's enjoyment is always already hatred of one's own enjoyment, then the proper way to understand this refrain is to read it as a sign of the nationalist's hatred of their *own* freedom. In "mask[ing] the loss of the Other," covering up the fact that "there is no *jouissance* of the Other," the sartorial superego offers the nationalist a means of compromising their desire

<sup>92</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller, quoted in Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 203. Žižek is here quoting from Miller's unpublished lecture notes for the "Extimacy" seminar he gave at University of Paris VIII throughout the 1985–86 academic year. The line "There is no other enjoyment but my own" does not appear in the condensed, essay version of the seminar that Miller eventually published, but the essay does address racism's grounding in *jouissance* at length, as in the following passage: "Jouissance is precisely what grounds the alterity of the Other when there is no Other of the Other. It is in its relation to *jouissance* that the Other is really Other [...]. Racism is founded on what one imagines about the Other's *jouissance*; it is hatred of the particular way, of the Other's own way of experiencing *jouissance* [...]. Racist stories are always about the way in which the Other obtains a 'plus-de-jouir': either he does not work or he does not work enough, or he is useless or a little too useful, but whatever the case may be, he is always endowed with a part of *jouissance* that he does not deserve. Thus true intolerance is the intolerance of the Other's *jouissance*." Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimité," trans. Françoise Massardier-Kenney, *Prose Studies* 11, no. 3 (1988): 125–26.

and avoiding the very freedom they purport to cherish.<sup>93</sup> Were the nationalist to tarry with the negativity that is pure desire and traverse the racist fantasy, they would be forced to confront “the unbearable burden of a really free choice.”<sup>94</sup> From the Lacanian perspective, nothing could be less free, or less ethical, than capitulating to the superego’s image of the other’s obscene enjoyment. To truly realize the freedom upon which the ethics of psychoanalysis rests—and upon which a truly antiracist politics must be built—another logic of the superego must indeed commence.

## Data availability statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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<sup>93</sup> Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman*, 46; Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016), 43.

<sup>94</sup> Žižek, *Freedom*, 60.

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