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## On Lacan's *The Triumph of Religion* and Related Matters<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, I will try to point out some themes related to Lacan's theses put forward in his press conference with Italian journalists on 29 October 1974 and later published under the title *The Triumph of Religion*<sup>2</sup>. I think that some of Lacan's claims there are not only intriguing as regards our topics here (The End(s) of Political Theology<sup>3</sup>), but have a much wider scope. It is true that Lacan tackles many things at once and that I will not be able to follow him properly – to do it right, one would need months or even years, and there are already many competent commentators that have done it. On the other hand, I have to confess that my title is in fact misleading insofar as it implies that I am going to be preoccupied here mainly with the problematics of Lacan's relation to religion,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See: Jacques Lacan, *Le triomphe de la religion précédé de Discours aux catholiques*, Paris: Seuil 2005 and Jacques Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion, preceded by Discourse to Catholics*, trans. by Bruce Fink, Cambridge: Polity Press 2014. The first version of the text was published in the internal bulletin of École freudienne de Paris *Les Lettres de l'École*, No. 16, 1975, pp. 6–26.

<sup>3</sup> This article is a rewritten version of a paper presented at the conference “End(s) of Political Theology” organised by ZRC SAZU and Lancaster University held in Ljubljana at ZRC SAZU on 6 June 2018. Many thanks to the organisers for inviting me and for organising such an event in the first place, especially Boštjan Nedoh and Arthur Bradley.

<sup>4</sup> There is no comprehensive commentary on *The Triumph of Religion* yet, or on Lacan's views on religion. Unsurpassable remains François Regnault, *Dieu est inconscient*, Paris: Navarin 1985, but I rely here also on Alexandre Leupin, *Lacan Today. Psychoanalysis, Science, Religion*, Other Press, New York 2004, especially pp. 105–124, and on two chapters in the recently published *Theology after Lacan* (Cascade Books, London 2014): “Secular Theology as Language of Rebellion” by Noëlle Vahanian and “The Triumph of Theology” by Clayton Crockett. I consulted for these purposes also all three recently published books on these topics: Aron Dunlap, *Lacan and Religion*, Acumen, Durham 2014, Jean-Louis Sous, *Pas très catholique, Lacan?*, Epel, Paris 2015, and Jean-Daniel Causse, *Lacan et le christianisme*, Campagne-Première, Paris 2018.

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which I will tackle in passing, but I will be interested in many other things as well. Although Lacan's 'text', if one may use this word in connection with it, is centred mainly on psychoanalysis and its place in this world, on its relation to science and religion, the scope of the text, in my view, is much broader and wider; the text relates to politics and capitalism and is centred – at least the way I understand it – on nothing less than the category of negativity as one of the central categories of critical thinking, dialectics and politics. For what is described therein by Lacan as “religion” is in broad terms actually nothing but an arrival, a triumph of a dystopian situation where negativity, “something that goes wrong” (a symptom, psychoanalysis, the Real), is “no more.” So, despite the fact that Lacan is concerned here with psychoanalysis, with its status in the world, with its definition of the symptom, and with the question of whether psychoanalysis itself is such a symptom, I think it is pertinent to ask some other questions, for instance: “What does the ‘triumph of religion’ mean for a society and its critique?”; “What is negativity in (destitute) times like these?”; etc. That is also the reason why I put “related matters” in my title, i.e. to point out some of the themes that are, at least for me, related to the topics that Lacan talks about in *The Triumph of Religion*.

## The two sides

To say that *The Triumph* is actually about negativity is at the same time helpful and yet quite misleading. Lacan is, if we compare him to our other contemporaries, of course not the only one interested in the category of negativity<sup>5</sup>. But it would be a big mistake to see in these topics just a Hegelian, a Marxian, a Heideggerian,<sup>6</sup> or even a Lacano-Hegelian “deviation”. On the contrary, themes of dysfunction, malfunction, and of “what goes wrong” can be found among

<sup>5</sup> Another name for the latter is also “resistance”. See an illuminating paper of Rebecca Comay: “Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel”, in: *Research in Phenomenology*, 45 (2/2015), pp. 237–266.

<sup>6</sup> Via §16 of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger speaks about a situation when something becomes unusable, when its normal use becomes disturbed and broken. He even makes very brief allusion to the German prefix *Un-* that so bothered Lacan in Freud's word for the unconscious (*Unbewusste*) via mentioning German privative terms such as *Unauffälligkeit*, *Unaufdringlichkeit*, and *Unaufsässigkeit* (translated into English as “inconspicuousness”, “unobtrusiveness”, and “non-obstinacy”, respectively). Heidegger, however, was far from Freud. Even when dealing with the latter explicitly, as in his later Zollikon Seminars, he completely (mis)understood Freud and referred to his work critically because of its sup-

many other contemporaries,<sup>7</sup> even among notoriously self-professed anti-Hegelians/Lacanian/Heideggerians such as Deleuze and Guattari: “It is *in order to function* that a social machine must *not function well* [...]. The dysfunctions are an essential element of its very ability to function, which is not the least important aspect of the system of cruelty.”<sup>8</sup> And while it seems that for Deleuze and Guattari dysfunctions are here not proper negativities, and that what really matters here are “the desiring-machines” or what functions, produces, and flows, for Lacan, psychoanalysis is primarily about something that *does not function* or does not *function well*: “The unconscious consists entirely in the repetition of cracks, deadlocks and conflicts, which throw thinking out of joint. Lacan brought this to the point in his later teaching, when he translated the German *das Unbewusste*, the unconscious, with the French homophony *une bévue*, meaning precisely error, mistake, overlooking, for which Lacan specifies that it stands for ‘the very texture of the unconscious’.”<sup>9</sup> Or, as Lacan put it already in his XI seminar, what really matters is discontinuity, gap, obstacle, impediment, failure, split, rupture: “In short, there is cause only in something that doesn’t work.”<sup>10</sup>

And if this is one of the crucial things that psychoanalysis is all about, in *The Triumph of Religion* Lacan wonders whether psychoanalysis itself can resist being absorbed into culture and society. His conclusion there seems to be a pessimistic one, since for him what he calls “religion” will “eventually” triumph or will triumph “in the end.” But what exactly is here meant by “religion” and what will it triumph over? Lacan equates “religion” here simply with anything “that confers meaning.” As such, it will eventually triumph over psychoanalysis, however, it will triumph “over lots of other things too.” First of all – how and

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posed biologisation of Man and because for him Freud had insufficient (metaphysical) philosophical foundations.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of these topics in Derrida, Deleuze, Latour, and Badiou, see: Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative. A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, Continuum, London and New York 2004, p. 166.

<sup>9</sup> Samo Tomšič, “Better Failures: Science and Psychoanalysis”, in: *Lacan contra Foucault. Subjectivity, Sex and Politics*, ed. by Nadiou Bou Ali and Rohit Goel, London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Bloomsbury, Sydney 2019, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 1964*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan, W. W. Norton & Co., New York 1998, p. 22.

why? How it will triumph and what does it mean to speak about triumph and victory? Does this mean that we have a fight or a struggle here? Who is fighting? What is the fight about? How many parties are there, in the first place?

Lacan introduces these topics in *The Triumph of Religion* by departing from the fact that there are all kinds of distressing things in each person's life, especially in our time, in which science reigns. However:

Religion, above all the true religion, is resourceful in ways we cannot even begin to suspect. One need but see for the time being how the place is crawling with it. It's absolutely fabulous. It took some time, but they [Christians] suddenly realized the windfall science was bringing them. Somebody is going to have to give meaning to all the distressing things science is going to introduce. And they know quite a bit about meaning. They can give meaning to absolutely anything whatsoever. A meaning to human life for example. They are trained to do that. Since the beginning, religion has been all about giving meaning to things that previously were natural. It is not because things are going to become less natural, thanks to the real, that people will stop secreting meaning for all that. Religion is going to give meaning to the oddest experiments, the very ones that scientists themselves are just beginning to become anxious about. Religion will find colourful meaning for those.<sup>11</sup>

Religion (and "above all true religion," but we will return to this later) is for Lacan something that goes together with (historical) progress, which is governed by science and permeated with all kinds of anxieties. The situation Lacan describes here is in fact a strange mixture of Freud's "future of an illusion" and his "discontents in civilization," with a sip or two from Nietzsche, Heidegger, and many others. We could use here a plethora of interpretations of how to understand "religion" here, but let us quote a very recent description of the situation from a famous contemporary:

The true expertise of priests and gurus has never really been rainmaking, healing, prophecy or magic. Rather, it has always been interpretation. A priest is not somebody who knows how to perform the rain dance and end the drought. A priest is somebody who knows how to justify why the rain dance failed, and why we must

<sup>11</sup> Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, pp. 64–65.

keep believing in our god even though he seems deaf to all our prayers. [...] Yet it is precisely their genius for interpretation that puts religious leaders at a disadvantage when they compete against scientists. Scientists too know how to cut corners and twist the evidence, but in the end, the mark of science is the willingness to admit failure and try a different tack. That's why scientists gradually learn how to grow better crops and make better medicines, whereas priests and gurus learn only how to make better excuses. Over the centuries, even the true believers have noticed the difference, which is why religious authority has been dwindling in more and more technical fields. This is also why the entire world has increasingly become a single civilization. When things really work, everybody adopts them.<sup>12</sup>

Be as it may, let us go back to Lacan. In essence, Lacan somehow cuts everything down to two sides: religion is equated with meaning, world, and “cure”: “Religion is designed for that, to cure men – in other words, so that they do not perceive what is not going well.”<sup>13</sup> On the other side, psychoanalysis is equated with symptom, the Real and with “what isn't going well.” Therefore the two sides are: religion=meaning=world=going well *versus* psychoanalysis=symptom=the Real=not going well. The first side will eventually triumph, whereas the other side will never triumph, it simply cannot win. It might even disappear since Lacan says that “it will survive or it won't.”

So, the two sides are in principle not equal in power: the first side will always prevail, dominate, win, and will never perish or die. Lacan even says that in that sense religion is “invincible.”<sup>14</sup> The French original is even stronger, “*incroyable*,” and it refers to something that simply *cannot die* or be washed away (it is interesting, by the way, that Badiou uses this expression in connection with Beckett<sup>15</sup>). “*Incroyable*” is not only invincible, it also resists its own death and its annihilation, even its “second death” since what is “truly *incroyable*” for Lacan is animality. Humanity and science might namely produce their own destruction and Lacan quite cheerfully describes these grim prospects. The scientists namely:

have begun to get the idea that they could create bacteria that would be resistant to everything, that would be unstoppable. That would clear the surface of the

<sup>12</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Vintage, London 2019, p. 119–120.

<sup>13</sup> Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>15</sup> See: Alain Badiou, *Beckett. L'incroyable désir*, Hachette, Paris 1995.

globe of all the shitty things, human in particular, that inhabit it. And then they suddenly felt overcome with pangs of responsibility. They put an embargo on a certain number of experiments. Perhaps it is not such a bad idea; perhaps what they are doing could be very dangerous. I don't believe so. The animal world is indestructible. Bacteria won't get rid of all of that for us. But the scientists had a typical anxiety attack, and a sort of prohibition, at least provisional, was announced. They told themselves that they must think twice before going further with certain experiments involving bacteria. What a sublime relief it would be nonetheless if we suddenly had to deal with a true blight, a blight that came from the hands of the biologists. That would be a true triumph. It would mean that humanity would truly have achieved something – its own destruction. It would be a true sign of the superiority of one being over all the others. Not only its own destruction, but the destruction of the entire living world.<sup>16</sup>

The main rhetorical value of the picture presented here lies in it introducing another level, a higher level, a level of truth. There is namely for Lacan “a triumph,” but there is also “a true triumph” in the same vein as there is “a religion,” and there is “a true religion,” “a destruction” and “a true destruction” as the destruction of the entire living world. By differentiating between the two levels, Lacan seems to imply that there are many ways of understanding of what he tries to say. He tries to highlight the fact that he is deadly serious about what he is saying, yet he is far from desperate. He seems to be pessimistic and cheerful at the same time while speaking about the fate/end of psychoanalysis and about a possible fate/end of the world itself. World might perish or not, however, psychoanalysis in Lacan's view is not “incredible”. In this vein in his lecture in Rome from 1967, “*La psychanalyse. Raison d'un échec*” he says: “It is when psychoanalysis will have been vanquished by the growing impasses of our civilization (a discontent which Freud foresaw) that the indication of my *Écrits* will be taken up again. But by whom?”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, it has to be noted that in an interview from roughly the same period as *The Triumph*<sup>18</sup> in which

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<sup>16</sup> Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 60. For a good overview of animals and animality in contemporary, thought see: Oxana Timofeeva, *The History of Animals: A Philosophy*, Bloomsbury, London 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits*, Paris: Seuil 2001, p. 348.

<sup>18</sup> See his interview with Emilio Granzotto for the Italian magazine *Panorama* “*Il ne peut y avoir de crise de psychanalyse*”, republished in: *Magasin littéraire*, No. 428, Paris 2004, pp. 24–29.

he put forward similar claims regarding the return of religion and the triumph of science he stressed that, faced with this situation, he is neither pessimistic nor anguished. And he is there much more optimistic regarding psychoanalysis, since he explicitly says that there can be no crisis of psychoanalysis at all. Psychoanalysis, he claims, is still something new, something young, which can and has to be rethought; however, there is no necessity here that that will happen. It might not happen, precisely because of religion. The latter will somehow prevail, that is sure.

This conviction is something very persistent in later Lacan. In his seminar from 18 March 1980 he stresses: “You have to know that religious sense will experience an explosion [*va faire une boom*] which you cannot imagine at all. Religion is namely the original site of sense [*c’est le gîte originel du sens*]. And this certainty imposes itself.”<sup>19</sup> So, without going into detail, we can safely say that this talk about the “triumph of religion” is in later Lacan something constant and persistent. However, we can also safely say that Lacan is *not simply against* religion as such: “[...] there is nothing doctrinal about our role. We need not answer for any ultimate truth, and certainly not for or against any particular religion.”<sup>20</sup>

### **But the triumph of what? Kojève, the Latin Empire, evaluation, and operationability**

Although Freud warns us that sometimes cigars are simply just cigars, it is first of all clear that religion in *The Triumph of Religion* is *not* (only) religion – what is it then? What is meant by “religion” here and what does it mean that it “will triumph”? Why does Lacan use this word – “triumph” – in the first place? Why does he not choose some other word, such as victory, prevalence, achievement, success, or conquest? It has to be noted that Lacan is never reckless with words: “I use terms sparingly, I am careful about what I say.”<sup>21</sup>

In general, we could say that the word “triumph” was abundantly used in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, after that its use slowly declined. The very word derives

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Monsieur A.,” *Ornicar*, Nos. 21–22, Paris 1980, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*. The First Complete Edition in English, trans. by Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton & Co., London and New York 2006, p. 693.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Russell Grigg, W. W. Norton & Co., New York 2007, p. 114.

from the Greek word *thriambos*, ‘hymn to Bacchus’, and refers to a competition, to a struggle, even to an ongoing struggle between two parties and to the celebration when the fight is over. The Cambridge English dictionary defines “triumph” as “a very great success, achievement, or victory (= when you win a war, fight, or competition), or a feeling of great satisfaction or pleasure caused by this.” Triumph, in short, is a decisive, great victory accompanied by great joy.

It is not unimportant in this context that Lacan frequently used term “triumph” in his early days to define the joy and satisfaction of a young infant upon discovering his image in the mirror: “What is involved in the triumph of assuming the image of one’s body in the mirror is the most evanescent of objects, since it only appears there in the margins.”<sup>22</sup> Triumph goes together with the “mirror’s stage,” with the Imaginary in Lacan’s sense, with a struggle and a competition with our double, with the Hegelian struggle between Lord and Bondsman, with the narcissism and with the Ego: the latter is for Lacan nothing but “a function of mastery, a game of bearing, and constituted rivalry.”<sup>23</sup> Another occasion that Lacan uses word ‘triumph’ is also a telling one. When in his XI seminar he talks about a competition between the two Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhaios<sup>24</sup> he underscores the end of the story with the following words: what we have here is “a triumph of the gaze over the eye.”<sup>25</sup> Here the very word ‘triumph’ designates a change, a victory that has permanent consequences. The word, therefore, for Lacan carries with it a sense of reversal, a turn that “ends something” and which puts an end to something. In this sense, Lacan in his XVI seminar mentions Lenin’s belief that Marxist theory will triumph in the end, because it is true.<sup>26</sup> So, to summarise Lacan’s use of the word, we could say that in general for him ‘triumph’ refers to the end of a struggle between two parties, a decisive end that destroys, eliminates, one of the parties.

<sup>22</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 685.

<sup>24</sup> In this classical tale of two painters, Zeuxis has the advantage of having made grapes that attracted birds. The stress is placed not on the fact that these grapes were in any way perfect grapes, but on the fact that even the eye of birds was taken in by them. This is proved by the fact that his friend Parrhasios triumphs over him by having painted on the wall a veil, a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him, said, well, and now show us what you have painted behind it.

<sup>25</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> See: Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XVI. D’un Autre à l’autre*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, Seuil, Paris 2006, p. 172.

But before we proceed further, just one additional point. A narrative about struggle, competition, and recognition, together with the Imaginary and with a specific reading of Hegel, is, of course, omnipresent in (early) Lacan. However, as Judith Butler has shown in her *Subjects of Desire* from 1987, the Hegelian struggle between Lord and Bondsman decisively influenced not only Lacan, but also a very large part of contemporary French philosophy. The main reason for this are the lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* by Alexandre Kojève in the 1930s, which Lacan (together with Queneau, Aron, Bataille, Merleau-Ponty, Leiris, Breton, Weil, Corbin, and others) attended, and which were, as Butler shows, important influence on posterity, on Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and our contemporaries.

Here, I will not go into the quite complex relationship between Kojève, Hegel, and Lacan,<sup>27</sup> but I would like to point out another side of Kojève, which is perhaps not so present to us now, but which, I am sure, Lacan himself was very much aware of precisely when he talks about “the triumph of religion.” The general story through which Kojève interprets Hegel is historic teleology and the emergence of the wise man at the end of history. In other words, for Kojève the Sage is the telos of history. But this teleology is not as Hegelian or as Marxian as one would perhaps expect. It is something else, and yet also something very precise. After WWII Kojève stopped his philosophical career and became a diplomat fiercely engaged in what is today known as the European Union! His text from 1946, “Outline of a Doctrine of French Policy”, represents in this regard a strange historical twist regarding his reading of Hegel, for the end of history and the emergence of the Sage coincides for him now with the birth of a new empire.<sup>28</sup> The Latin countries, writes Kojève, cannot easily cohabit in a world dominated by communist USSR, on one side, and Protestant USA, on the other. The only solution for them was to create a new empire, a kind of Latin Empire, a union between France, Italy, Spain, and the Maghreb countries (a sort of Mediterranean Union), which would have only one goal: to defend and to protect the specific way of life of Latin, Catholic, or post-Catholic countries. The

<sup>27</sup> See: Mladen Dolar, “Hegel as the Other Side of Psychoanalysis”, in: Clemens and Russell, *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, Duke University Press, Durham 2006, pp. 129–155.

<sup>28</sup> I am relying here on the excellent paper by Boris Groys, “Contemporary Europe: In Search of Cultural Biotopes”, in: *The Final Countdown: Europe, Refugees and the Left*, ed. by Jela Krečič, Irwin and Wiener Festwochen, Ljubljana and Vienna 2017, pp. 33–48.

mission of this empire (which Napoleon had already dreamt of) is to ensure the propagation of this way of life. In a way, we could say that all of Kojève's talk about Desire as the essence of man, all his talk about Desire as the Desire of the other, all his talk about intersubjectivity and about the struggle for recognition, in an ironical twist of History, coincides for him here with the creation of a Latin Empire (today: the EU) as a defensive project whose basic aim is to ensure the reproduction of a certain way of life, call it Catholic or not. So this is ironically the end of history that Kojève engaged in and fought for until the end of his life in 1968, however, it has to be noted that there are also other, yet unknown sides to Kojève as a thinker too<sup>29</sup>.

For the purposes of our topic here we can say that the irony is that the EU project, at least for much of the European Right toady, is a kind of "triumph of religion"; just recall in this context the disputes about the candidacy of Turkey for EU membership and also recall the recent discourse in Europe about migrants, about the crisis of the European project, which echoes the discourse about the crisis of the Western World that (Springer) began already at the end of the 1920s. In this context, "the triumph of religion" coincides with the project "Fortress Europe".

Moreover, the EU does not stand only for that, it does not stand only for rightist politics and policies, for it also stands for the project of the biggest market in the world, and for a specific type of neoliberal governance as the rule of knowledge in the guise of a vast system of bureaucracy. And in this sense, it also somehow stands for what Lacan calls "the triumph of religion," since this rule is ever more opposed to anything that "goes against the grain," anything that is not compatible with it. In what sense? This new empire in the guise of the EU is based on the rule of what Lacan called "University Discourse" in which (certain) knowledge rules. What kind of knowledge, what sort of knowledge? Only "a true one," one could say. It is not an accident, then, that this empire constantly revises, checks,

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<sup>29</sup> I am well aware that things, here, with Kojève as the "most unusual man" as Love puts it (p. 3), are far from being simple. For Kojève is an original and provocative thinker, to say the least, influenced by Hegel, but also Dostoyevsky, Fedorov and Soloviev, ambivalent to European cultural heritage, for him the end of history coincides with the abandoning of the individual self, etc. See Jeff Love, *The Black Circle. A Life of Alendre Kojève*, Columbia University Press, New York 2018; Stephanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism that is not Humanist emerges in French Thought*, (ca:9. Stanford University Press, Stanford 2010, pp. 130–172; Boris Groys, *Introduction to Antiphilosophy*, Verso, London & New York 2012, pp. 145–168.

and authorises what “true knowledge” is in the first place. For these purposes, various protocols, checks, and filters are in use which when put together form a new type of power and control called “the power of evaluation,” to use the expression of Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-Claude Milner.<sup>30</sup> Although in their description of this new power they refer primarily to Lacan and Foucault, it was Lyotard who saw it coming a long time ago. He was well aware that this kind of power “entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear”!<sup>31</sup>

What it means to be operational today for psychoanalysis soon became clear when in France in 2003 the so-called Accoyer Amendment tried to impose an assessment of and to legalise uniform standards for all kinds of psychotherapies, which would have destroyed psychoanalysis and irreparably damaged its praxis. But due to the general revolt of psychoanalysts of different theoretical orientations under Miller's initiative and guidance, and because of the support of the general public for their “cause,” the attempt to “make psychoanalysis more operative” and “to make it more commensurable” did not succeed (at least not yet). The danger, however is still there and threatens not only psychoanalysis, but science in general and critical thinking in particular. The irony is that the system that Kojève fought for and which triumphed in the end does not need any true critique, any dissensual science or any negative sounding voices. It does not need, it seems, any reference to dialectics and negativity, and in that way it does not need philosophy as critical theory, but it does not need psychoanalysis either. It needs, at least it seems so, only conformism and operationability. This is especially visible in recent trends in European financing of scientific projects of all kinds, and in the massive changes that science itself has undergone in the last couple of decades, not only in Europe<sup>32</sup>. So, to be operational and to be commensurable today, forty years after Lyotard's grim prediction, and forty-five years after Lacan's declaration of “the triumph of religion,” means, in this era defined by general neoliberal commodification, monetisation, financialisation, and marketisation, something very particular: the only way to go with the flow

<sup>30</sup> See: Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-Claude Milner, *Voulez-vous être évalué? Entretiens sur une machine d'imposture*, Grasset, Paris 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, p. xxiv.

<sup>32</sup> See: Phillip Mirowski, *Science-Mart. Privatizing American Science*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London 2011.

is to produce more value, to bring into play more money and to bring about more profit. In order to do so one has to be functional and this demands more fluidity, flexibility, to go together with “what really works,” and not the other way around.

It is in that sense that we could understand the crucial opposition for Lacan. The opposition between the Real and the world namely for him entails the opposition between “what works” and “what doesn’t work”: “The Real is the difference between what works and what doesn’t work. What works is the world. The Real is what doesn’t work. The world goes on, it goes round – that is its function as a world.”<sup>33</sup> This emphasis on something negative, by the way, is not an isolated case in Lacan, but central to his whole endeavour and for him central for psychoanalysis, if the latter deserves to survive at all. Psychoanalysis is all about negativities, and as such it was endangered by “religion”. Lacan was constantly aware of that. He attempted to point out this connection between psychoanalysis and negativity many times, for instance with his definition of the unconscious in the XI seminar as discontinuity and gap (or *bévue* – this was reworked later in the XXIV seminar entitled *L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile à mourre*, which presents a homophony: *L’insuccès de l’Unbewusst c’est l’amour*); recall his definition of the cause as something that “does not work”: “*il n’y a pas de cause que de ce qui cloche*”; and recall that for Lacan his own invention – and a contribution to psychoanalysis he was proud of – the *objet petit a*, in a form of a miscarriage “displays the fact that it is an effect of language” and points out that “there is in every case a level at which things do not work out.”<sup>34</sup> Precisely because of all that one can say together with Badiou: “Lacan is a condition of the renaissance of philosophy. A philosophy is possible today only if it is compossible with Lacan.”<sup>35</sup>

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### **Psychoanalysis, science. And “a true religion”.**

But we cannot say that Lacan emphasised only “what goes wrong,” because he was quite attentive to “what goes along,” to put it like this. In other words, it

<sup>33</sup> Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p. 55.

<sup>35</sup> Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. by Norman Madarasz, State University of New York Press, Albany 1999, p. 84.

would be wrong to say that Lacan is either for (historical) progress or against it. And it would be even more wrong to present him as somebody who is against (modern) science, as many contemporaries following in the footsteps of Husserl or Heidegger were. On the contrary, Lacan constantly refers to modern science and to Descartes. In his "Science and Truth", for instance, he famously says: "To say that the subject upon which we operate in psychoanalysis can only be the subject of science may seem paradoxical."<sup>36</sup> Things are, however, not only paradoxical, but also quite complicated at this point.<sup>37</sup> But one thing is clear and one can only agree with Alexandre Leupin at this point: "Even if psychoanalysis as a cure for psychic ills disappears from the face of the earth, Lacanian epistemology will endure and remain his crowning achievement"<sup>38</sup>.

But what is Lacan's stance towards science? To say this in the shortest way possible – Freud taught that there is Ideal science, whereas Lacan (despite his reliance on linguistics, logics, and mathematics) had a much more complex relation to science: "Before allowing psycho-analysis to call itself a science, therefore, we shall require a little more."<sup>39</sup> But soon Lacan turned the tables – the question is not how psychoanalysis should align itself with science, but what is a science that is compatible with psychoanalysis? Science as such namely sutures the subject and it is blind to this special object psychoanalysis deals with. Science is, as Lacan said in his interview in 1974 for Panorama, unbearable, untenable; it is the fourth impossible profession (together with Freud's educating, governing, and analysing). Science goes together with anxiety and here religion steps in, religion as conferring meaning, i.e. "meaning to all the distressing things science is going to introduce." Psychoanalysis, however, does not go together with meaning and with what Lacan calls "hermeneutic demand" and in this "respect, we see, at least, a corridor of communication between psychoanalysis and the religious register."<sup>40</sup> Who is targeted here? None other than Paul Ricoeur, a philosophical inspiration and spiritual mentor of current French

<sup>36</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 729.

<sup>37</sup> The relation between science and Lacan's psychoanalysis has been dealt with many times by many authors, but the unsurpassable work for me is still Jean-Claude Milner's *L'Oeuvre claire* (Seuil, Paris 1995). For a good general overview in English, see: *Lacan & Science*, ed. by Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, Karnac, London and New York 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Leupin, *Lacan Today*, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

president Macron! Lacan is always very strict at this point: “Psychoanalysis is not a religion. It proceeds from the same status as Science itself.”<sup>41</sup> But although here, with hermeneutics, there lurks a danger, a certain danger for psychoanalysis, one cannot say that this is a true (religious) danger since this is not “a true religion.” But what is it and what is (a true) religion for Lacan then?

Before we answer that question, we should perhaps point out that “religion” does not stand for church, i.e. the dogmatic psychoanalytic organisation known as the IPA, with which Lacan had a longstanding fight before he was finally expelled therefrom. In the first lecture of his XI seminar he refers to it (“I am not saying – although it would not be inconceivable – that the psycho-analytic community is a Church”<sup>42</sup>) and later in his *Televison* names it – SAMCDA (*Société d’assurance mutuelle contre le discours analytique*: Society of Mutual Assurance against Analytical Discourse), which in French sounds close to “sancta” and perhaps implies “sancta simplicitas”. IPA relies heavily on ego-psychology, while for Lacan ego is far from something to rely upon, to say the least. The IPA is not exactly the “religion” Lacan speaks about in the *Triumph of Religion*, for it is too weak in itself let alone something that Lacan would describe as a winning side. However, the IPA is an ally to “religion” as it is definitively conformist; it collaborates in ensuring that “all goes well.” The IPA and ego-psychology are in the service of goods, as Lacan put it, and it is not surprising that Lacan in this context defines ego as “the theology of free enterprise.”<sup>43</sup>

But what is religion then, and what is “a true religion”? We should note here that Lacan frequently plays religion against religion in the name of “a true religion”: “I am speaking of religion in the true sense of the term – not of a desiccated, methodologized religion, pushed back into the distant past of a primitive form of thought, but of religion as we see it practiced in a still living, very vital way.”<sup>44</sup> In his interview for *Panorama* he speaks about a revival of (true) religion: “What is a better devouring monster than religion?”<sup>45</sup> In *Triumph* he speaks about Christianity or Catholicism as “true religion,” but before I get into that, perhaps just a couple of biographical notes concerning Lacan and his personal relation-

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 301.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Lacan, “*Il ne peut y avoir de crise de psychanalyse*”, p. 29.

ship to Catholicism. Lacan was born into a Catholic family, was schooled at the Jesuit College Stanislas from 1907 to 1919, his first marriage was Catholic, and his brother Marc became a monk at the monastery Abbaye de Hautecombe, where he spent the rest of his long life (1908-1994). Jacques was always protective of his younger brother and even dedicated his doctoral thesis from 1932 to him: "To the Reverend Father Marc-François Lacan, Benedictine of the Congregation of France, my brother in religion," but he allegedly visited him only once there, on the occasion of his brother's ordination. "At one point in 1953, convinced that these innovative psychoanalytic theories could have a special meaning for the Roman church, Jacques even asked his brother if he could secure him an audience with the Pope. Unfortunately Marc did not have quite the necessary connections for that."<sup>46</sup> Lacan did not hide his Catholic origins or his general political orientation. In his XVII seminar, for instance, he tells the public that he is not leftist – "I am not a man of the left,"<sup>47</sup> but there he also "confesses": "I can't say that I was brought up on the Bible, because I was raised a Catholic. I repel it. But then, I don't regret it, in this sense that when I read it now [...] it has a fantastic effect upon me. This familial delusion, these entreaties by Yahweh to his people, which contradict one another from one line to the next, it makes you sit up and take note."<sup>48</sup> When Jacques died in 1980 Marc celebrated a mass in honour of his brother, whose open and unashamed atheism precluded a Catholic funeral.

But here, at the point of Lacan's "atheism" perhaps an additional clarification is needed. What is atheism and how to be an atheist at all? In contrast to Freud's self-declaration as a man of the Enlightenment and as a man of science, and in contrast to seeing in religion, as Freud did, a mere illusion, Lacan was more prudent. Even more, for him Freud was closer to religion than Freud himself ever realised. In general, our relationship with religion is for Lacan more complicated than we think, even if we proclaim to be atheists. If Nietzsche pointed out that "God is dead," Lacan warns us that he might be dead, but we have to add here "the next step [is] [...] that God himself doesn't know that."<sup>49</sup> Atheism is complicated since "the true formula of atheism is not God is dead – even by basing the origin of the function of the father upon his murder, Freud protects the father –

<sup>46</sup> Aron Dunlap, *Lacan and Religion*, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p. 114.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter, W. W. Norton & Co., New York 1992, p. 184.

the true formula of atheism is God is unconscious.”<sup>50</sup> Lacan does not say that God is the Unconscious, but that God belongs to the Real. Gods, as Lacan points out in the same seminar, “belong to the field of the real,”<sup>51</sup> a point that he accentuated frequently and in other seminars, including the VII and IX seminars.

Is it even possible to be an atheist, can we do away with God? In one word, it is possible, but it is hard to do so and perhaps only psychoanalysis can do it. In seminar VII Lacan points out that only a creationist perspective would do away with God:

I have already indicated the necessity of the moment of creation *ex nihilo* as that which gives birth to the historical dimension of the drive. In the beginning was the Word, which is to say, the signifier. Without the signifier at the beginning, it is impossible for the drive to be articulated as historical. And this is all it takes to introduce the dimension of the *ex nihilo* into the structure of the analytical field. The second reason may seem paradoxical to you; it is nevertheless essential: the creationist perspective is the only one that allows one to glimpse the possibility of the radical elimination of God.<sup>52</sup>

The creation *ex nihilo* is opposed to the hypothesis of the demiurge in Plato’s *Timaeus*, and to the God of philosophers in general, and it means that creation is never just a simple extension of the creator.

There are two other challenges for atheism in Lacan’s view and they concern God’s power and God’s knowledge. The first concerns (according to Koyré) the most important feature of the God of philosophers, *immense potestas*, Almightyness, and in his X seminar, *Anxiety*, Lacan speaks about “the true dimension of atheism”: “The atheist would be he who has succeeded in doing away with the fantasy of the Almighty.”<sup>53</sup> The second challenge concerns God’s omniscience. In seminar XVI, *From the Other to the other*, Lacan even equates the subject supposed to know with God: the “[s]ubject supposed to know, this

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<sup>50</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 45.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>52</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 213.

<sup>53</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book X. Anxiety, 1962–1963*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by A. R. Price, Polity Press, New York 2014, p. 308.

is God.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore: “The true atheism, the only which deserves its name, is the one that would result from questioning the subject supposed to know.”<sup>55</sup> This is practically impossible. Namely, insofar as we speak, we always presume some subject supposed to know and that is why for Lacan God goes together with *dire*, with saying. The *dire* constitutes *dieu* in Lacan’s wordplay *dieur*: “That is why, in the end, only theologians can be truly atheistic, namely, those who speak of God. There is no other way to be an atheist, except to hide one’s head in one’s arms in the name of I know not what fear, as if this God had ever manifested any kind of presence whatsoever. Nevertheless, it is impossible to say anything without immediately making Him subsist in the form of the Other.”<sup>56</sup> Speaking goes together with the hypothesis about God, so that, finally, as Lacan states in his lectures in North America in 1976, “everybody is religious, even the atheists,” and only “psychoanalysis would be capable of making a viable atheist, that is, one that would not contradict himself all the time.”<sup>57</sup>

There is therefore no easy triumph over religion or God for Lacan and that is why, perhaps, religion is invincible and why it can triumph. But what is “the triumph of religion”? It seems to me that this triumph is not connected to any religion, but only “a true one,” which for Lacan is Christianity. But to say that Christianity is “a true religion” has at least three meanings: 1. Christianity is a true religion because it is no longer a religion: “I just wanted to emphasize the fact today that there is a certain atheistic message in Christianity itself, and I am not the first to have mentioned it. Hegel said that the destruction of the gods would be brought about by Christianity.”<sup>58</sup> Or, as he puts it in the same seminar: “Christianity, in effect, offers a drama that literally incarnates that death of God.”<sup>59</sup> 2. To be qualified as “a true religion” is for Lacan not something good *per se*. As he puts it in his seminar XX: “That it is the true religion, as it claims, is not an excessive claim, all the more so in that, when the true is examined closely, it’s the worst

<sup>54</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XVI: D’un Autre à l’autre*, p. 280.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>56</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar XX, Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton & Co., New York 1998, p. 45.

<sup>57</sup> Jacques Lacan, “*Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord américaines*”, *Scilicet*, Nos. 6–7, Seuil, Paris 1976, p. 32.

<sup>58</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 178.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

that can be said about it. Once one enters into the register of the true, one can no longer exit it. In order to relegate the truth to the lowly status it deserves, one must have entered into analytic discourse.”<sup>60</sup> 3. To say that Christianity is the true religion is to connect it with truth, but to deal with truth properly one has to enter into analytic discourse. What does that mean? What is truth for Lacan?

Lacan’s only condition that we can say about truth is that we connect it to speaking. No speaking, no truth, we could say – the truth for Lacan is somehow related to speaking and to language. But how? For Lacan, man is not only a speaking being, a “*parlêtre*,” “a being that speaks,” but also “a spoken being,” a being that (others/the Other) constantly speak about, spoke about even before his/her birth, a being that cannot master its own speech, which is why it does not speak, but it is spoken. In the same manner, for Lacan truth primarily speaks. Or, as he put it in “Freudian Thing”, the truth speaks in the first person singular, there is a prosopopeia of truth: “I, truth, speak.”<sup>61</sup> Although the later Lacan changes his relation to truth and introduces the opposition between the truth and the Real, he never changed his view that truth is connected to speaking. Or, as he put in his *Television* from 1974: “I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there’s no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it’s through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real.”<sup>62</sup> The later Lacan emphasises that “where it speaks, it enjoys”; however, it still reveals something. What? If truth is revealed, what is revealed by it? Here Lacan points out “that Christians – well, it’s the same with psychoanalysts – abhor what was revealed to them.”<sup>63</sup> The relationship to truth, the connection to truth, is not something easy. And that is why Lacan in his XXI seminar (the lecture from 9 April 1974) perhaps changed his main emphasis: now truth is linked with religion, whereas psychoanalysis is strictly linked with the Real, the Real as something impossible, as a deadlock, as something that “does not go well,” whereas religion is now connected with conferring meaning, the cure and with “what goes well.”

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<sup>60</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar XX, Encore*, pp. 107–108.

<sup>61</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 340. For more on these topics, see Mladen Dolar’s excellent *Prozopopeja*, DTP, Ljubljana 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Television. A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, Annete Michelson, Jeffrey Mehlman, ed. by Joan Copjec, W. W. Norton & Company, New York and London 1990, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar XX, Encore*, p. 114.

And while for Lacan meaning was always connected with symptom, in later Lacan symptom is more and more equated with *jouissance*, with enjoyed meaning as *jouis-sense*, which does not make sense. In his XVIII seminar Lacan emphasises the following: “The dimension of the symptom is that it speaks, it speaks even to those who do not know how to hear; it does not say everything even to those who know it. This promotion of the symptom is the turning point that we are living through in a certain register, which, let us say, was pursued, rumbling quietly through the centuries, around the theme of knowledge.”<sup>64</sup> And in that sense he emphasises now in *The Triumph of Religion* that psychoanalysis itself is a symptom: “psychoanalysis is a symptom. But we have to understand what it is a symptom of. It is clearly part of the discontents of civilization Freud spoke about. What is most likely is that people won’t confine themselves to perceiving that the symptom is what is most real.”<sup>65</sup> So, we are back to our two sides again: 1. religion=meaning=world=goes well *versus* 2. psychoanalysis=symptom=the Real=not going well.

These two sides could, of course, be understood in many ways, the task is endless. If we stay within psychoanalysis, they could be presented by the pair of fantasy and symptom. In the final section of this paper, however, I will try to illustrate them via some thoughts on contemporary capitalism. One could say that the first of our two sides coincides with what Lacan describes as “fantasy” – all we always understand are our fantasies – and the second with a symptom. Jacques-Alain Miller, who devoted one year of his “Orientation lacanienne” (1982-1983<sup>66</sup>) to the topics of fantasy and symptom, emphasised, among other things, the opposition between symptom and fantasy: while one does not want to speak about one’s fantasies (one simply enjoys one’s own fantasy), one also constantly complains about one’s symptoms, about what does not go well, about what does not work. However, the fundamental fantasy is perhaps our fantasy that “things will always go smoothly and well,” that we are indispensable and that things cannot go on out there without us. Everything works out for us in this fundamental fantasy and the gap between cause and effect (which is another

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XVIII: D’un discours qui ne serait pas de semblant*, Seuil, Paris 2006, p. 24.

<sup>65</sup> Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 70.

<sup>66</sup> See: Jacques-Alain Miller, “From Symptom to Fantasy and Back”, trans. by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Symptom*, No. 14: [www.lacan.com/symptom14/from-symptom.html](http://www.lacan.com/symptom14/from-symptom.html). (Last accessed 31 May 2019).

name for us as subjects) is simply eliminated, erased. In that way, everything can be understood, mastered, and controlled. The only trouble is that this is only a fantasy. Perhaps the fantasy of the Master and of those in power that they are in control, handling and managing things, relying on a fantasy that there is no gap between cause and effect, a fantasy that things can and will always run like this, i.e. more or less smoothly and well. This is the fundamental fantasy of any power, and here we could leave strict psychoanalytical waters and move towards contemporary ideology using a suggestion by Clayton Crockett that if religion for Lacan triumphs in his *The Triumph of Religion*, it does so only “as ideology, not as theology itself.”<sup>67</sup>

### Capitalism and the cult without what?

So, the triumph of religion can also be understood as the triumph of ideology. Which ideology? Perhaps the dominant ideology of today is the ideology of “the end of ideologies”, ideology of “the only game in town,” of capitalism and its triumph. It is capitalism that for Walter Benjamin (in his short fragment “Capitalism as Religion” from 1921) serves to satisfy the same worries, anguish, disquiet that were formerly addressed by religion. So in a way, surprisingly, we get – despite the different terminology – a similar result as in Lacan: what triumphs is a “kind of religion.” But of what kind of religion? A celebration of a cult, or better, of “the permanence of the cult. Capitalism is the celebration of the cult *sans rêve ET sans merci* [without dream or mercy]. There are no ‘weekdays’. There is no day that is not a feast day.” So, for Benjamin, capitalism is first of all very similar to what Lacan describes as “world”: “The world goes on, it goes round – that is its function as a world.”<sup>68</sup> It goes around and turns around in the same manner as capitalism does for Benjamin – without ever meeting any impossibility or limit, without rest and without end: there are no weekdays. And if there are no “weekdays” in capitalism, if every day is a feast day and a holiday, there is also no final day of capitalism. There is no end of capitalism (yet); it seems that capitalism is here forever.

Here, of course, a lot could and should be said concerning the limits of the system and its main conviction not only that “the show must go on,” but that it will

<sup>67</sup> Clayton Crockett, *Theology after Lacan*, Cascade Books, London 2014, p. 251.

<sup>68</sup> Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 61.

go on forever by itself, naturally. But without going into that, I will try to present three different variations on these same topics presented by different authors. One of them, of course, is Lacan and his (optimistic) insistence on the Real as impossible; the second is Jonathan Crary, who tackles the topics of endlessness in his work on 24/7; and the third is Laurent de Sutter with his claim that all capitalism is narcocapitalism.

Since for Benjamin capitalism is a cult without dreams, it is perhaps interesting to see how Lacan relates the Real to dreams in his XI seminar, where he dealt with famous dreams analysed by Freud in *Interpretation of Dreams*. A father dreamt “that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: ‘Father, don’t you see I’m burning?’ he awoke and noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child’s dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them.” This, for Freud, proves that dreams are the realisation of the dreamer’s unconscious desire as well as that dreams are the protector of sleep, so they sometimes include even outside noises, smells, or other outside occurrences (as in the case of the unfortunate father). Lacan, however, pointed out something different. For him, the father does not awaken himself when the external irritation became too strong, but for other reasons. As Žižek puts it: the sleeper “constructs a dream, a story which enables him to prolong his sleep, to avoid awakening into reality. But the thing that he encounters in the dream, the reality of his desire, the Lacanian Real – in our case, the reality of the child’s reproach to his father, ‘Can’t you see that I am burning?’, implying the father’s fundamental guilt – is more terrifying than so-called external reality itself and that is why he awakens: to escape the Real of his desire, which announces itself in the terrifying dream. He escapes into so-called reality to be able to continue to sleep, to maintain his blindness, to elude awakening into the Real of his desire.”<sup>69</sup> If for Freud dreams protect sleep, for Lacan they try to avoid the Real or that which “does not work.” In order to do that, we are even prepared to not fall asleep (and to meet the Real in our dreams), but to continue to sleep awake, so to speak, to sleep in reality. Reality and the Real are opposed, one does everything to escape the Real, the impasse, or what “goes wrong.”

<sup>69</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, London and New York 1989, p. 45.

Even if Lacan is not speaking explicitly about capitalism here, let alone about contemporary capitalism, it is clear that the latter's (neoliberal) dreams follow the same logic: they are stubbornly here just to protect "our sleep" and "our dreams" that this is the only possible system, that its growth is here forever, that the system is invincible (and even "*increvable*") and that it somehow "knows" how to deal with troubles. However, these dreams are not dreams about a perfect world without catastrophes and negativities; on the contrary, the negativities are here, but sterilised, tamed and even incorporated into dreams. In these (neoliberal) dreams some parts of the world might even be burning, but dreamers continue to dream their dreams, because they want to simply sleep further: although they *know* (that capitalism/neoliberalism is a system with antagonisms and contradictions), they nonetheless *believe* that this system works (or better, that it is the only system that, more or less, works).

But this sleep and these dreams are perhaps not to be taken literally or taken in the usual sense; here Benjamin is right – capitalism does not want to dream or sleep, it wants to run forever, without end. As Jonathan Crary has shown, capitalism as religion and cult *sans rêve* should be understood literally: capitalism operates constantly, it operates 24/7 and as such needs sleepless workers and/or sleepless consumers. "Nothing is ever fundamentally 'off' and there is never an actual state of rest [...]. More importantly, within the globalist neoliberal paradigm, sleeping is for losers."<sup>70</sup> However, sleep – despite the pharmaceutical industry and its drugs – cannot be eliminated and "sleep will always collide with the demands of the 24/7 universe."<sup>71</sup> For Crary, sleep is our last refuge from the affront of neoliberalism and the uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism. Crary argues that under late capitalism even the notion of everyday life – long a bastion of habits and rhythms beyond and beneath the regimentation of time by work and other institutions – has been thoroughly occupied by the logic of participation in an unremitting globalised economy. Today, he writes, "no moment, place, or situation now exists in which one can *not* shop, there is a relentless incursion of the non-time of 24/7 into every aspect of social or personal life. There are, for example, almost no circumstances

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<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Crary, *24/7. Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, Verso, London and New York 2014, pp. 13–14.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

now that can *not* be recorded or archived as digital imagery or information.”<sup>72</sup> In order to boost productivity and to intensify 24/7 consumption, in order to be numbed and awake at the same time, or, as Pink Floyd put it, to be “comfortably numb,” one also needs a “global market in psychoactive drugs, both legal and illegal, including the growing blurred area between them (painkillers, tranquilizers, amphetamines, and so on).”<sup>73</sup> Perhaps this market of psychoactive drugs is not something marginal, but central,<sup>74</sup> as Laurent de Sutter claims in his recent book: “Every capitalism is, necessarily, a narcocapitalism – a capitalism that is narcotic through and through, whose excitability is only a manic reverse of the depression it never stops producing, even as it presents itself as a remedy. [...] Narcocapitalism is the capitalism of narcosis, that enforced sleep into which anaesthetics plunge their patients so as to unburden them from everything that prevents them from being efficient in the current arrangement – which means, work, work and more work.”<sup>75</sup> In this sense, one can speak about the (capitalist) economy as a “Prozac economy,” as Franco Bifo Berardi has suggested.

Sutter’s thesis relies on the actual historical invention of anaesthesia, patented in 1844, continues in the same century with Freud’s infamous popularisation of cocaine, and ends in the contemporary misuse of Prozac and other drugs. This led to the pharmaceutical mass production of all kinds of antidepressants and relaxants, whose purpose was less to calm than to extinguish the person or personality, to artificially eliminate all symptoms positive or negative. The key factor here is anaesthesia, which shuts down every motor of being: the libido, sensibility, excitement, rebellion, dark thoughts, sunny thoughts, and so on. Anything that is disturbing or troubling has to be silenced, anything that “goes wrong” or that might go wrong. In that sense, all of capitalism is narco-capitalism, and in that sense it tries to be what Lacan has called “the triumph of religion.”

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I said “it tries,” because “the triumph” as a “final victory” is (for now) just imagined; it is but a pure fantasy, perhaps *the* fantasy of the system and of its advo-

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>74</sup> Here, I cannot go into other troubling aspects of these topics. For a recent analysis of the drug epidemic in the USA, see: Sam Quinones, *Dreamland. The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*, Bloomsbury, London and New York 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Laurent de Sutter, *Narcocapitalism*, trans. by Barnaby Norman, Polity Press, Cambridge 2018, pp. 43–44.

cates. On the other hand, capitalism as a system is amazingly resourceful and stubbornly resilient; it is constantly inventing new techniques and new methods of control and surveillance. This is, of course, a long and a complicated story that I cannot go into further here. But we should eventually tackle it, since, as Deleuze succinctly put it, there “is not a question of worrying or of hoping for the best, but of finding new weapons.”<sup>76</sup> And of retaining – I would add – some of the old ones, too. One of them certainly is – Deleuze would of course disagree – Lacan’s version of psychoanalysis with its emphasis on the Real as “what does not work.” The fight with “religion” is not over, not yet.

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<sup>76</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Control Societies”, in: *Negotiations. 1972–1990*, trans. by Martin Joughin, Columbia University Press, London and New York 1995, p. 178.