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### *Programska zasnova*

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The journal is published three times annually. Two issues are published in Slovenian, with abstracts in Slovenian and English. One issue a year is a special international issue that brings together articles in English, French or German by experts on a topic chosen by the editorial board.

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**Nothing/Nichts**

Edited by Alenka Zupančič

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**Nič**

Uredila Alenka Zupančič

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Nothing needs no introduction.



# **NOTHING IN ACTION**





“... *CE SEUL OBJET DONT LE NÉANT  
S’HONORE*”

Slavoj Žižek

Let us take a closer look at Marx’s classical description of the passage from money to capital, with its explicit allusions to the Hegelian and Christian background. First, there is the simple act of market exchange in which I sell in order to buy – I sell the product I own or made in order to buy another one which is of some use to me: “The simple circulation of commodities – selling in order to buy – is a means of carrying out a purpose unconnected with circulation, namely, the appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of wants.”<sup>1</sup> What happens with the emergence of capital is not just the simple reversal of C-M-C [Commodity-Money-Commodity] into M-C-M, i.e., of investing money into some commodity in order to sell it again and thus get back (more) money; the key effect of this reversal is the ETERNALIZATION of circulation: “The circulation of money as capital is, on the contrary, an end in itself, for the expansion of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement. The circulation of capital has therefore no limits.”<sup>2</sup> Crucial here is the difference between the capitalist and the traditional miser, hoarding his treasure in a secret hide-out, and the capitalist who augments his treasure by throwing it into circulation:

The restless never-ending process of profit-making alone is what he aims at. This boundless greed after riches, this passionate chase after exchan-

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, International Publishers, New York 1967, p. 253.

<sup>2</sup> Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 254. – It is with this shift to the universal form of circulation as an end-in-itself that we pass from pre-modern ethics, grounded in a reference to some substantial supreme Good, to the paradigmatically modern Kantian ethics in which it is ultimately only the form of duty that matters, i.e. in which duty is to be accomplished for the sake of duty. What this means is that Lacan’s emphasis on how Kant’s ethics is the ethics inherent to the Galilean-Newtonian universe of modern science, has to be supplemented by the insight into how Kant’s ethics is also the ethics inherent to the capitalist logic of circulation as an end-in-itself.

ge-value, is common to the capitalist and the miser; but while the miser is merely a capitalist gone mad, the capitalist is a rational miser. The never-ending augmentation of exchange-value, which the miser strives after, by seeking to save his money from circulation, is attained by the more acute capitalist, by constantly throwing it afresh into circulation.<sup>3</sup>

This madness of the miser is nonetheless not something which simply disappears with the rise of “normal” capitalism, or its pathological deviation. It is rather inherent to it: the miser has his moment of triumph in the economic crisis. In a crisis, it is not – as one would expect – money which loses its value, and we have to resort to the “real” value of commodities; commodities themselves (the embodiment of “real [use] value”) become useless, because there is no one to buy them. In a crisis,

money suddenly and immediately changes from its merely nominal shape, money of account, into hard cash. Profane commodities can no longer replace it. The use-value of commodities becomes value-less, and their value vanishes in the face of their own form of value. The bourgeois, drunk with prosperity and arrogantly certain of himself, has just declared that money is a purely imaginary creation. ‘Commodities alone are money,’ he said. But now the opposite cry resounds over the markets of the world: only money is a commodity. [...] In a crisis, the antithesis between commodities and their value-form, money, is raised to the level of an absolute contradiction.<sup>4</sup>

Does this not mean that at this moment, far from disintegrating, fetishism is fully asserted in its direct madness?<sup>5</sup> In crisis, the underlying belief, disavowed and just practiced, is thus DIRECTLY asserted. It is crucial how, in this elevation of money to the status of the only true commodity (“The capitalist knows that all commodities, however scurvy they may look, or however badly they may smell, are in faith and in truth money, inwardly circumcised Jews.”<sup>6</sup>), Marx resorts to the precise Pauline definition of Christians as the

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<sup>3</sup> Marx, *op.cit.*, p. 254–255.

<sup>4</sup> Marx, *op.cit.*, p. 236–7.

<sup>5</sup> This paradox is structurally homologous to that of Casanova, who, in order to seduce a naïve peasant girl, drew a circle on the grass and claimed that staying within it protects you from all dangers like being hit by lightning; when, however, immediately afterwards, an actual violent storm broke out, Casanova, in a moment of panic, himself stepped into this circle, acting as if he believed in its power although he knew very well it was just part of his deception ...

<sup>6</sup> Marx, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

“inwardly circumcised Jews”: Christians do not need external actual circumcision (i.e., the abandonment of ordinary commodities with use values, dealing only with money), since they know that each of these ordinary commodities is already “inwardly circumcised,” that its true substance is money. – It is even more crucial how Marx describes the passage from money to capital in the precise Hegelian terms of the passage from substance to subject:

In truth, however, value is here [in the capital] the active factor in a process, in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it at the same time changes in magnitude, differentiates itself by throwing off surplus-value from itself; the original value, in other words, expands spontaneously. For the movement, in the course of which it adds surplus-value, is its own movement; its expansion, therefore, is automatic expansion. Because it is value, it has acquired the occult quality of being able to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring, or, at the least, lays golden eggs. [...]

In simple circulation, C-M-C, the value of commodities attained at the most a form independent of their use-values, i.e., the form of money; but the same value now in the circulation M-C-M, or the circulation of capital, suddenly presents itself as an independent substance, endowed with a motion of its own, passing through a life-process of its own, in which money and commodities are mere forms which it assumes and casts off in turn. Nay, more: instead of simply representing the relations of commodities, it enters now, so to say, into private relations with itself. It differentiates itself as original value from itself as surplus value; as the father differentiates himself from himself qua the son, yet both are one and of one age: for only by the surplus value of 10 pounds dies the 100 pounds originally advanced become capital, and so on as this takes place, so soon as the son, and by the son, the father is begotten, so soon does their difference vanish, and they again become one, 110 pounds.<sup>7</sup>

In short, capital is money which is no longer a mere substance of wealth, its universal embodiment, but value which, through its circulation, generates more value, value which mediates-posites itself, retroactively positing its own presuppositions. First, money appears as a mere means of the exchange of commodities: instead of endless bartering, one first exchanges one's product for the universal equivalent of all commodities, which can then be exchanged for any commodity we may need. Then, once the circulation of the capital

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<sup>7</sup> Marx, *op.cit.*, p. 171–173.

is set in motion, the relationship is inverted, the means turn into an end-in-itself, i.e., the very passage through the “material” domain of use-values (the production of commodities which satisfy an individual’s particular needs) is posited as a moment of what is substantially the self-movement of the capital itself – from this moment onwards, the true aim is no longer the satisfaction of individuals’ needs, but simply more money, the endless repeating of the circulation as such ... This arcane circular movement of self-positing is then equated with the central Christian tenet of the identity of God-the-Father and his Son, of the immaculate conception by means of which the single Father directly (without a female spouse) begets his only son and thus forms what is arguably the ultimate single-parent family.

Is then capital the true Subject/Substance? Yes and no: for Marx, this self-engendering circular movement is – to put it in Freudian terms – precisely the capitalist “unconscious fantasy” which parasitizes upon the proletariat as the “pure substanceless subjectivity”; for this reason, capital’s speculative self-generating dance has a limit, and it brings about the conditions of its own collapse. This insight allows us to solve the key interpretive problem of the above quote: how are we to read its first three words, “in truth, however”? First, of course, they imply that this truth has to be asserted against some false appearance or experience: the everyday experience that the ultimate goal of capital’s circulation is still the satisfaction of human needs, that capital is just a means to bring about this satisfaction in a more efficient way. However, this “truth” is NOT the reality of capitalism: in reality, capital does not engender itself, but exploits the worker’s surplus-value. There is thus a necessary third level to be added to the simple opposition of subjective experience (of capital as a simple means of efficiently satisfying people’s needs) and objective social reality (of exploitation): the “objective deception,” the disavowed “unconscious” fantasy (of the mysterious self-generating circular movement of capital), which is the TRUTH (although not the REALITY) of the capitalist process. Again, quote Lacan, truth has the structure of a fiction: the only way to formulate the truth of capital is to render this fiction of its “immaculate” self-generating movement. And this insight also allows us to locate the weakness of the above-mentioned “deconstructionist” appropriation of Marx’s analysis of capitalism: although it emphasizes the endless process of deferral which characterizes this movement, as well as its fundamental inconclusiveness, its self-blockade, the “deconstructionist” retelling still describes the FANTASY of capital – it describes what individuals believe, although they don’t know it.

This shift from the goal-oriented stance of consumption towards the properly capitalist stance of self-propelling circulation allows us to locate desire and drive with regard to capitalism. Following Jacques-Alain Miller, a

distinction has to be introduced here between lack and hole: lack is spatial, designating a void WITHIN a space, while hole is more radical, it designates the point at which this spatial order itself breaks down (as in a “black hole” in astrophysics).<sup>8</sup> Therein resides the difference between desire and drive: desire is grounded in its constitutive lack, while drive circulates around a hole, a gap in the order of being. In other words, the circular movement of drive obeys the weird logic of the curved space in which the shortest distance between the two points is not a straight line, but a curve: drive “knows” that the shortest way to attain its aim is to circulate around its goal-object. At the immediate level of addressing individuals, capitalism of course interpellates them as consumers, as subjects of desires, soliciting in them ever new perverse and excessive desires (for which it offers products to satisfy them); furthermore, it obviously also manipulates the “desire to desire,” celebrating the very desire to desire ever new objects and modes of pleasure. However, even if it already manipulates desire in a way which takes into account the fact that the most elementary desire is the desire to reproduce itself as desire (and not to find satisfaction), at this level, we do not yet reach drive. Drive inheres to capitalism at a more fundamental, systemic, level: drive is that which propels the entire capitalist machinery, it is the impersonal compulsion to engage in the endless circular movement of expanded self-reproduction. We enter the mode of drive the moment the circulation of money as capital becomes “an end in itself, for the expansion of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement. The circulation of capital has therefore no limits.” (One should bear in mind here Lacan’s well-known distinction between the aim and the goal of drive: while the goal is the object around which drive circulates, its (true) aim is the endless continuation of this circulation as such.) The capitalist drive thus belongs to no definite individual – it is rather that those individuals who act as direct “agents” of capital (capitalists themselves, top managers) have to display it.

Miller recently proposed a Benjaminian distinction between “constituted anxiety” and “constituent anxiety,” which is crucial with regard to the shift from desire to drive: while the former designated the standard notion of the terrifying and fascinating abyss of anxiety which haunts us, its infernal circle which threatens to draw us in, the latter stands for the “pure” confrontation with *objet petit a* as constituted in its very loss.<sup>9</sup> Miller is right to emphasize here two features: the difference which separates constituted from constit-

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<sup>8</sup> See Jacques-Alain Miller, “Le nom-du-père, s’en passer, s’en servir,” available on [www.lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com).

<sup>9</sup> See Miller, *op. cit.*

uent anxiety concerns the status of the object with regard to fantasy. In a case of constituted anxiety, the object dwells within the confines of a fantasy, while we only get the constituent anxiety when the subject “traverses the fantasy” and confronts the void, the gap, filled up by the fantasmatic object – as Mallarme put it in the famous bracketed last two lines of his “Sonnet en –yx,” *objet petit a* is “ce seul objet dont le Néant s’honore / this sole object with which Nothing is honoured.”

Clear and convincing as it is, Miller’s formula misses the true paradox or, rather, ambiguity of *objet petit a*: when he defines *objet petit a* as the object which overlaps with its loss, which emerges at the very moment of its loss (so that all its fantasmatic incarnations, from breasts to voice and gaze, are metonymic figurations of the void, of nothing), he remains within the horizon of desire – the true object-cause of desire is the void filled in by its fantasmatic incarnations. While, as Lacan emphasizes, *objet petit a* is also the object of drive, the relationship is here thoroughly different: although, in both cases, the link between object and loss is crucial, in the case of *objet petit a* as the object-cause of desire, we have an object which is originally lost, which coincides with its own loss, which emerges as lost, while, in the case of *objet petit a* as the object of drive, the “object” IS DIRECTLY THE LOSS ITSELF – in the shift from desire to drive, we pass from the lost object to loss itself as an object. That is to say, the weird movement called “drive” is not driven by the “impossible” quest for the lost object; it is a push to directly enact the “loss” – the gap, cut, distance – itself. There is thus a DOUBLE distinction to be drawn here: not only between *objet petit a* in its fantasmatic and post-fantasmatic status, but also, within this post-fantasmatic domain itself, between the lost object-cause of desire and the object-loss of drive.

This is why one should not confuse the death drive with the so-called “nirvana principle,” the thrust towards destruction or self-obliteration: the Freudian death drive has nothing whatsoever to do with the craving for self-annihilation, for the return to the inorganic absence of any life-tension; it is, on the contrary, the very opposite of dying – a name for the “undead” eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain. The paradox of the Freudian “death drive” is therefore that it is Freud’s name for its very opposite, for the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis, for an uncanny EXCESS of life, for an “undead” urge, which persist beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption. The ultimate lesson of psychoanalysis is that human life is never “just life”: humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life in excess, passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things.

What this means is that it is wrong to claim that the “pure” death drive would have been the impossible “total” will to (self)destruction, the ecstatic self-annihilation in which the subject would have rejoined the fullness of the maternal Thing, but that this will is not realizable, that it gets blocked, stuck to a “partial object.” Such a notion retranslates the death drive into the terms of desire and its lost object: it is in desire that the positive object is a metonymic stand-in for the void of the impossible Thing; it is in desire that the aspiration to fullness is transferred to partial objects – this is what Lacan called the metonymy of desire. One has to be very precise here if we are not to miss Lacan’s point (and thereby confuse desire and drive): drive is not an infinite longing for the Thing which gets fixated onto a partial object – “drive” IS this fixation itself in which resides the “death” dimension of every drive. Drive is not a universal thrust (towards the incestuous Thing) braked and broken up, it IS this brake itself, a brake on instinct, its “stuckness,” as Eric Santner would have put it.<sup>10</sup> The elementary matrix of drive is NOT that of transcending all particular objects towards the void of the Thing (which is then accessible only in its metonymic stand-in), but that of our libido getting “stuck” onto a particular object, condemned to circulate around it forever.

The basic paradox here is that the specifically human dimension – drive as opposed to instinct – emerges precisely when what was originally a mere by-product is elevated into an autonomous aim: man is not more “reflexive”; on the contrary, man perceives as a direct goal what, for an animal, has no intrinsic value. In short, the zero-degree of “humanization” is not a further “mediation” of animal activity, its re-inscription as a subordinated moment of a higher totality (say, we eat and procreate in order to develop higher spiritual potentials), but the radical narrowing of focus, the elevation of a minor activity into an end-in-itself. We become “humans” when we get caught in a closed, self-propelling loop of repeating the same gesture and finding satisfaction in it. We all recall one of the archetypal scenes from cartoons: while dancing, the cat jumps up into the air and turns around its own axis; however, instead of falling back down towards the earth’s surface in accordance with the normal law of gravity, it remains for some time suspended in the air, turning around in the levitated position as if caught in a loop of time, repeating the same circular movement on and on. (One also finds the same shot in some musical comedies which make use of the elements of slapstick: when a dancer turns around him- or herself in the air, s/he remains up there a little bit too long, as if, for a short period of time, s/he succeeded in suspending

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<sup>10</sup> See Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2001.



the law of gravity. And, effectively, is such an effect not the ultimate goal of the art of dancing?) In such moments, the “normal” run of things, the “normal” process of being caught in the imbecilic inertia of material reality, is for a brief moment suspended; we enter the magical domain of a suspended animation, of a kind of ethereal rotation which, as it were, sustains itself, hanging in the air like Baron Munchhausen, who raised himself from the swamp by grabbing his own hair and pulling himself up. This rotary movement, in which the linear progress of time is suspended in a repetitive loop, is DRIVE at its most elementary. This, again, is “humanization” at its zero-level: this self-propelling loop which suspends/disrupts linear temporal enchainment. This shift from desire to drive is crucial if one is to properly grasp the crux of the “minimal difference”: at its most fundamental, the minimal difference is not the unfathomable X which elevates an ordinary object into an object of desire, but, rather, the inner torsion which curves the libidinal space and thus transforms instinct into drive.

Consequently, the concept of drive makes the alternative “either burned by the Thing or maintain[ing] a distance” false: in a drive, the “thing itself” is a circulation around the void (or, rather, hole, not void). To put it even more pointedly, the object of drive is not related to the Thing as a filler of its void: drive is literally a counter-movement to desire, it does not strive towards impossible fullness and, being forced to renounce it, gets stuck on a partial object as its remainder – drive is quite literally the very “drive” to BREAK the All of continuity in which we are embedded, to introduce a radical imbalance into it, and the difference between drive and desire is precisely that, in desire, this cut, this fixation onto a partial object, is, as it were, “transcendentalized,” transposed into a stand-in for the void of the Thing.

This is also how one should read Lacan’s thesis on the “satisfaction of drives”: a drive does not bring satisfaction because its object is a stand-in for the Thing, but because a drive, as it were, turns failure into a triumph – in it, the very failure to reach its goal, the repetition of this failure, the endless circulation around the object, generates a satisfaction of its own. As Lacan put it, the true AIM of a drive is not to reach its goal, but to circulate endlessly around it. In the well-known vulgar joke about a fool having his intercourse for the first time, the girl has to tell him exactly what to do: “See this hole between my legs? Put it in here. Now push it deep. Now pull it out. Push it in, pull it out, push it in, pull it out ...” “Now wait a minute,” the fool interrupts her, “make up your mind! In or out?” What the fool misses is precisely the structure of a drive which gets its satisfaction from the indecision itself, from repeated oscillation. – Bruno Boostels’ central Badiouian reproach to this topic of death drive qua self-relating negativity (from his unpublished essay



“Badiou without Žižek”) is that, by way of giving priority to the Act as a negative gesture of radical (self-relating) negativity, as “death drive” *in actu*, I in advance devalue every positive project of imposing a new Order, the fidelity to any positive political Cause:

what causes are there to be kept alive from a psychoanalytical perspective, if for the latter the most radical act consists in the subject's defining gesture of pure negativity that precedes and undermines every one of the possible candidates? [...] Before any inscription of a new truth even has a chance to take place, actually blocking this process in advance by virtue of a structural necessity, the death drive always already has had to come first to wipe the slate clean.

The first thing to note here is how Boostels simply “axiomatically” opposes Lacan's and Badiou's respective notions of act, constraining Lacan to the paradigm of “tragic failure,” to the primacy of negativity over any of its positivizations, while, for Badiou, all “death drive” phenomena are the result of the failure (betrayal, exhaustion) of a positive emancipatory project (do we not find here an echo of the old theological notion of Evil as a mere absence of Good, not as a positive power in itself?). Such a direct confrontation says nothing about the truth value of the two competing theories: Boostels's ultimate reproach to Lacan is tautological: that he is not Badiou – of which Lacan is, for sure, guilty.

Is, however, the opposition between the primacy of negativity and the primacy of the positive Truth really as simple and symmetrical as that? Is Boostels, in order to take sides with Badiou, not compelled to conflate two notions of negativity: the “pure” self-relating negativity and negativity as an ethico-practical failure, as a betrayal of a positive project? In order to approach this topic properly, one would have to focus on the crucial, but often ambiguous, role of the Unnamable in Badiou. To cut a long story short: while, for Badiou, the unnamable Real is the unfathomable external background of a process of Truth (the resisting X which cannot ever be fully “forced” by the Truth), for Lacan, the Unnamable is absolutely inherent, it is the Act itself in its excess over its nominations. Badiou's rationalism remains at the level of the external opposition of Reason and the Unnamable (the Unnamable as the obscure background of Reason): there is no place in it for the moment of “madness” at the very core of Reason itself. A reference to German Idealism is crucial here: following Kant, Schelling deployed the notion of the primordial decision-differentiation (*Ent-Scheidung*), the unconscious atemporal deed by means of which the subject chooses his eternal character which, afterwards,

within his conscious-temporal life, he experiences as the inexorable necessity, as “the way he always was”:

The deed, once accomplished, sinks immediately into the unfathomable depth, thereby acquiring its lasting character. It is the same with the will, which, once posited at the beginning and led into the outside, immediately has to sink into the unconscious. This is the only way the beginning, the beginning that does not cease to be one, the truly eternal beginning, is possible. For here also it holds that the beginning should not know itself. Once done, the deed is eternally done. The decision that is in any way the true beginning should not appear before consciousness, it should not be recalled to mind, since this, precisely, would amount to its recall. He who, apropos of a decision, reserves for himself the right to drag it again to light, will never accomplish the beginning.<sup>11</sup>

With this abyssal act of freedom, the subject breaks up the rotary movement of drives, this abyss of the Unnamable – in short, this deed is the very founding gesture of naming. Therein resides Schelling’s unheard-of philosophical revolution: he does not simply oppose the dark domain of the rotary movement of pre-ontological drives, this unnamable Real which cannot ever be totally symbolized, to the domain of Logos, of articulated Word which cannot ever totally “force” it (like Badiou, Schelling insists on how there is always a remainder of the unnamable Real – the “indivisible remainder” – which eludes symbolization); at its most radical, the unnamable Unconscious is not external to Logos, it is not its obscure background, but, rather, the very act of Naming, the very founding gesture of Logos. The greatest contingency, the ultimate act of abyssal madness, is the very act of imposing a rational Necessity onto the pre-rational chaos of the Real.

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<sup>11</sup> F. W. J. von Schelling, *Ages of the World*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1997, p. 181–182. For a more detailed reading of this notion, see Chapter 1 of Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, Verso Books, London 1997.

# DOING NOTHING: ÜBER MATERIELLES NICHTSTUN UND IMMATERIELLE ARBEIT

Robert Pfaller

## 1 *Das Nichts und die Angst*

“Making Nothing Happen” lautet der verführerische Titel einer Reihe von Zeichnungen bzw. visuellen Handlungsanweisungen, die der Künstler Pavel Büchler 2004 veröffentlicht hat (Büchler, 2004). Gemäß dem Doppelsinn dieses Ausdrucks zeigen die Zeichnungen somit einerseits, was man (etwa im Sinn vorbeugender Maßnahmen) tun muß, “damit nichts geschieht”; aber auch andererseits, welche Handlungen man setzen kann, um zu erreichen, *daß das Nichts sich ereignet*. Gerade der auf dieser zweiten Bedeutungsebene angesiedelte “aktive Nihilismus” dieses Kunstwerks macht seine Aktualität und seine reizvolle, zeitkritische Bedeutung aus: Denn es wird gegenwärtig immer weniger Leuten möglich, auch nur kurze Momente des Müßiggangs, partielle Ereignisse des Nichts, zuzulassen oder gar bewußt herbeizuführen, um sie lustvoll auszuleben.<sup>1</sup> Eine Gesellschaft, die von immer prekäreren Beschäftigungsverhältnissen gekennzeichnet ist, ergeht sich in einer zunehmend zwanghaften Betriebsamkeit. Jeglicher Müßiggang ist aus ihr gänzlich verschwunden; und zwar nicht allein als Realität, sondern – was eine Neuerung darstellt – ebensosehr auch als Utopie. Mögen frühere Generationen wenigstens (z. B. im Bild befreiter, glücklicher Enkel) noch ein müßiges Ziel ihrer Schinderei vor Augen gehabt haben, so regiert in der no-future-Epoche neoliberaler Arbeit allein die nackte Angst vor dem Nichtstun.

Denn wenn das, was das Nichtstun verspricht, ein Glück ist, dann läßt es jenes andere Bißchen Glück, das man sich für die Selbstausschöpfung mühevoll einreden mußte, sofort zu Nichts werden. Die Idee des Nichtstuns droht jene Koordinaten aufzulösen, die man braucht, um eine Welt prekärer

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<sup>1</sup> Zur Präzisierung von Nietzsches Begriff des aktiven Nihilismus sowie zum Problem der Angst vor der “nicht ausgefüllten Zeit” siehe Zupančič, 2003: 63; 43.

Beschäftigung als sinnvoll erleben zu können. Und dadurch ist sie unerträglich – das Angst- und Abscheuobjekt par excellence.

Lediglich in der Kunst, und auch da nur in seltenen, kostbaren Momenten, gelingt es gegenwärtig, für das, was nicht nur keinen Platz, sondern nicht einmal mehr den Nicht-Ort der Utopie einnehmen darf, positive Formulierungen zu finden. Neben Pavel Büchlers Serie stellt diesbezüglich die Gruppe der “glücklichen Arbeitslosen” rund um Guillaume Paoli eine andere vereinzelte hoffnungsvolle Erscheinung auf weiter, verängstigter Ebene dar.

## *2 Es gibt nichts Gutes, außer man tut es nicht*

Wie Pavel Büchler zeigt, ist das Nichts nicht einfach da, sondern man muß es tun, damit es zur Existenz gelangt (ähnlich, wie man es sprichwörtlich vom Guten sagt). In der ehemaligen DDR scheint es davon – weit abseits der Idee der deutschen idealistischen Philosophen von der tätigen Negativität – ein verbreitetes, populäres Bewußtsein gegeben zu haben. “Wir tun so, als würden wir arbeiten, und dafür tut ihr so, als würdet ihr uns bezahlen”, lautete eine bekannte Redewendung aus der Zeit des sogenannten real existierenden Sozialismus. (Heute, d. h. 2005, hingegen kann man in den sogenannten neuen Bundesländern auf T-Shirts den Satz lesen: “Für Arbeit töte ich”.)

Mehr noch als in diesem Schein-Etwas simulierter Arbeit wird die tätige Natur des Nichts durch einen anderen DDR-Witz zur Darstellung gebracht. Zwei Männer sitzen im Gefängnis. Der eine fragt: ‘Wieviele Jahre hast du gekriegt?’ – ‘Fünf’, sagt der andere. – ‘Und was hast du getan?’ – ‘Nichts.’ – ‘Das gibt es nicht’, sagt der Frager, ‘denn für nichts kriegt man mindestens zehn Jahre.’ Wie es der materialistischen Lehre von Demokrit und Epikur entspricht, wurde aus nichts damals also keineswegs nichts; man mußte schon wesentlich mehr tun als nichts, um nichts zu bekommen.

Auch die Sprache des Sozialismus scheint diese verschiedenen durch Tätigkeit erzeugten Abstufungen des Nichts unterschieden zu haben – und zwar viel präziser, als es, der bekannten Warnung des Aristoteles zufolge, die Sprache des antiken Griechenland in bezug auf das Sein vermochte. Bei einem Treffen von Kunst-Kuratorinnen, das zur Vorbereitung für ein internationales Kooperationsprojekt dienen sollte, schlug kürzlich jemand als gemeinsames Thema “Doing Nothing” vor. Daraufhin meinte eine rumänische Kollegin, daß ihr das als sehr schwierig zu übersetzen erscheine, denn im Rumänischen gebe es dafür sehr viele – vielleicht siebzehn – verschiedene Ausdrücke und Redewendungen. In der Sprache des real existie-

renden Sozialismus scheint es also für das Nichtstun einen ähnlich reichen Wortschatz gegeben zu haben wie in der Eskimosprache für den Schnee. Dieser Nuancenreichtum, diese sorgfältige Differenzierung im Negativen zeigt sich auch an einem anderen DDR-Witz. Eine Kundin fragt im Kaufhaus: ‘Haben Sie hier keine Socken?’ – ‘Oh nein, antwortet die Verkäuferin. Hier haben wir keine Pullover. Keine Socken gibt es eine Etage höher.’

Entgegen der in den realsozialistischen Staaten verbreiteten Propaganda von den “Helden der Arbeit” wie zum Beispiel vom sprichwörtlich gewordenen DDR-Idol Adolf Hennecke, der am 13. 10. 1948 mit einer gigantischen Schichtleistung eine Normerfüllung von 387% in der Steinkohlegewinnung erreichte, scheint es in ebendiesen Staaten eine verbreitete Realität von Heldentum in der Nichtarbeit gegeben zu haben (das Sprichwort lautete dementsprechend: “Bin ich Hennecke?”). Ein politisches System, das viel stärker auf der Macht der repressiven Staatsapparate beruhte als auf jener der ideologischen, war offenbar eher imstande, die Leute an jeglicher Tätigkeit zu hindern, als sie zu freudigem Engagement zu verleiten. Und diese Leute hatten einen klaren Begriff von Arbeit und verfügten über eine spontane, materialistische Renitenz dagegen.

### *3 Von der Arbeitsverweigerung zum Lob der immateriellen Arbeit*

Anders verhält es sich kapitalistischen Westen von heute. Hier ist eine neue Begeisterung für die Arbeit ausgebrochen – und zwar ausgerechnet bei denjenigen, die in den Jahren nach 1966 den Zumutungen der kapitalistischen Fabriksarbeit den entschlossensten Widerstand entgegengebracht hatten. Damals hatten sie die “Verweigerung der Arbeit” ausgerufen.<sup>2</sup> Nun hingegen singen sie das Loblied einer neuen Art von Arbeit, die sie als “immaterielle Arbeit” bezeichnen. Sie schwärmen von der “Kreativität”, die darin enthalten (oder wenigstens möglich) sei, und manche erblicken darin sogar eine schleichende Revolution. So schreiben Michael Hardt und Antonio Negri:

Indem sie ihre eigenen schöpferischen Energien ausdrückt, stellt die immaterielle Arbeit das Potenzial für eine Art des spontanen und elementaren Kommunismus bereit [...] (Hardt/Negri, 2002: 305)

Das klingt wieder ganz so begeistert wie im 19. Jahrhundert, als der Arbeiterführer Josef Dietzgen ausrief: “Arbeit heißt der Heiland der neuen

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<sup>2</sup> s. dazu Moulier-Boutang, 1998: 7–11.

Zeit”.<sup>3</sup> Aber aus anderen Gründen: mit ihrem Begriff der immateriellen Arbeit beziehen sich Maurizio Lazzarato, Hardt/Negri und andere Autoren auf eine Veränderung der Arbeitsbedingungen in den westlichen kapitalistischen Staaten seit Anfang der 80er Jahre. Da es den kapitalistischen Staaten des Westens gelungen ist, die typische fordistische Fabriksarbeit in die Schwellenländer Asiens und Afrikas zu verlagern, können sie selbst in anderer Weise arbeiten. Sie werden nun gleichsam zur Verwaltungsetage der Weltfabrik. Ihre Ökonomie erscheint darum “postfordistisch”: die “blue collar”-Arbeiter verschwinden zugunsten von “white-collar”-Angestellten. Die Hauptaufgabe dieser neuen Angestellten besteht darin, die Produkte mit technologischem, juristischem Wissen sowie kultureller Information (z. B. Image- und Distinktionswerten) aufzuladen; diese Anteile – die Autoren bezeichnen sie etwas vorschnell als “immateriell”<sup>4</sup> – machen den größten Teil vom Wert dieser Produkte aus, wenn sie nicht überhaupt erst deren Verkaufbarkeit ermöglichen.

Die für den Fordismus typische strikte Trennung von manueller und intellektueller Arbeit scheint damit (wenigstens im Westen) zu verschwinden. Dies weckt weitreichende Hoffnungen – zumindest bei jenen Theoretikern, die in der Trennung von Hand- und Kopfarbeit das entscheidende Prinzip der Klassenverhältnisse erblicken. So schreibt Maurizio Lazzarato:

Die Unterscheidung von Konzeption und Ausführung, von Mühe und Kreativität, oder auch von Autor und Publikum wird innerhalb des Arbeitsprozesses überwunden [...] (Lazzarato, 1998a: 40)

Der entscheidende Schwachpunkt dieser Analyse Lazzaratos besteht darin, daß sie alleine den Arbeitsprozeß betrachtet und die Frage des Wertbildungsprozesses ignoriert:<sup>5</sup> sie kümmert sich nur darum, ob die Arbeit den Ausführenden kreativ erscheint, aber nicht darum, wer am Ende den Mehrwert einstreift. Es mag schon richtig sein, daß man heute im Westen oft nicht mehr zu fixen Arbeitszeiten einer stumpfsinnigen, “entfremdeten” Tätigkeit nachgehen muß, um einen fixen Niedriglohn zu erhalten. Stattdessen kann man sich die Arbeitszeit selbst einteilen, man darf sich mit der Aufgabe identifizieren, eigene Ideen einbringen

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<sup>3</sup> zit. nach Asholt/ Fährnders (Hg.), 1991: 12.

<sup>4</sup> s. Lazzarato, 1998a: 39. Diese Begriffswahl ist auch innerhalb der operaistischen Tradition nicht unumstritten. S. dazu Franco “Bifo” Berardi, der gegen Lazzarato klarstellt, daß Arbeit nie immateriell ist (s. das Gespräch mit Stephan Gregory [http://www.nadir.org/nadir/periodika/jungle\\_world/\\_2000/24/15a.htm](http://www.nadir.org/nadir/periodika/jungle_world/_2000/24/15a.htm), last visited: 2005-06-09).

<sup>5</sup> Denselben Fehler machen Hardt/Negri, wenn sie schreiben, daß der Einsatz des Computers die Arbeit “in Richtung abstrakter Arbeit” verschiebe (Hardt/Negri, 2002: 304).

und muß, wenn nötig, Nächte durcharbeiten – aber die Frage bleibt: zu wessen Vorteil? Nach wie vor kassiert der Chef, den man nun duzen darf, weil es “flache Hierarchien” gibt, den Gewinn – und drückt den Lohn seiner (oft outgesourcten und dadurch um die Sozialleistungen gebrachten) Mitarbeiter nicht selten noch mit eben dem Argument, daß sie ja froh sein müßten, von einer so feinen Arbeit, die quasi ein Hobby ist, überhaupt leben zu können.

So renitent die operaistischen Theoretiker gegen die stumpfsinnige fordistische Arbeit waren, so wehrlos zeigen sie sich gegenüber den Verführungen der ebenso kapitalistisch strukturierten postfordistischen Arbeit. Daran erweist sich, daß die am Sichtbaren orientierten Unterscheidungen von “Hand- und Kopfarbeit” bzw. von “Mühe” und “Kreativität” viel zu simple und darum untaugliche Instrumente zur Kritik kapitalistischer Klassenverhältnisse sind. Das Strukturelle läßt sich eben, wie Bertolt Brecht bemerkte, nicht immer mit freiem Auge sehen.

#### 4 Freiheit ohne Materie? Eine Dame ohne Unterleib

Auf der Ebene ihrer zentralen Begriffe vollziehen die Anhänger der immateriellen Arbeit eine Operation der Verkettung, die sich schematisch wie folgt darstellen läßt: “Intellektualität” – “Kreativität” – “Immaterialität” – “Identifizierung” – “Freiheit”. Aufgrund des Umstands, daß die postfordistische Arbeit größere “intellektuelle” (d. h. bürokratische, kommunikative, designerische) Anteile aufweist, wird geschlossen, daß sie “kreativ” sei. Schon dieser erste Schluß ist höchst fragwürdig, denn viele manuelle Tätigkeiten erscheinen heute weitaus “kreativer” als jenes sogenannte “bullshitting” aus umfassender schriftlicher Konzepterstellung, Lobbying, *networking*, *branding*, *merchandising*, Evaluierung und Monitoring, welches den großen Anteil intellektueller Arbeit an heutigen Produktionen ausmacht.

Intellektualität und Kreativität werden im nächsten Schritt als ausreichende Gründe dafür betrachtet, von “Immaterialität” der Arbeit zu sprechen. Dies setzt allerdings einen sehr primitiven Begriff von Materie voraus. Es wird dabei unterstellt, daß die Materie nicht das Terrain von kreativer und intellektueller Arbeit sein könne und daß diese, sozusagen als Schöpfungen aus dem Nichts bzw. von Nichts, jenseits von Materie stattfänden.

Im Gegensatz dazu hatte Louis Althusser bereits Anfang der 60er Jahre gezeigt, daß selbst theoretische Arbeit nicht ohne Materie ist: denn sie vollzieht sich keineswegs in einer “schwerelosen” Sphäre reiner Geistigkeit. Vielmehr setzt sie wie jede Arbeit bei einer Grundmaterie an: bei einem durch und durch ideologischen common sense aus ersten Vorstellungen und fixen Ideen zum Thema. Und

diese Grundmaterie tut genau das, was jede Materie tut: sie leistet Widerstand gegen ihre Bearbeitung; sie bildet "epistemologische Hindernisse" gegen ihre Transformation in Erkenntnis. Aus diesem Grund hat Althusser gegen die bei bestimmten Marxisten beliebte Unterscheidung von Theorie und Praxis festgehalten, daß theoretische Arbeit selbst eine Praxis – eben "theoretische Praxis" ist.<sup>6</sup>

Auch die postfordistische Aufladung der Produkte mit Design sowie mit bürokratischer Legitimation und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit kann – jedenfalls für die marxistische Theorie – nicht als hinreichender Grund gelten, um von Immaterialität zu sprechen. Denn Design, Bürokratie und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit gehören allesamt zum Bereich der Ideologie. Und auch die Ideologie weist, wie Althusser in seinem bekannten Text von 1969 bemerkt hat, eine spezifische Materialität auf:

Eine Ideologie existiert immer in einem Apparat und dessen Praxis oder Praxen. Diese Existenz ist materiell.

Die materielle Existenz in einem Apparat und dessen Praxen besitzt selbstverständlich nicht die gleichen Eigenschaften wie die materielle Existenz eines Pflastersteins oder eines Gewehrs. Aber auch auf die Gefahr hin, als Neoaristoteliker angesehen zu werden (es sei allerdings darauf hingewiesen, daß Marx Aristoteles sehr hoch einschätzte), behaupten wir, daß 'die Materie in mehrfacher Bedeutung genannt wird' [...] (Althusser, [1969]: 137)

Wer sich mit Ideologie auseinandersetzt, darf dabei nicht auf deren Selbstverständnis als einer "geistigen" Sache hereinfließen. Die Rituale der Zusammenkunft, die Institutionen, Orte und Kanäle der Kommunikation existieren immer schon lange, bevor es für diese Zusammenkunft (z. B. in einem Fitneßclub oder in einer Musikbar) so etwas wie ein in Ideen formulierbares Programm gibt; sie können oft auch gänzlich ohne ein solches Programm auskommen.

Gerade das Nichtstun in der Freizeit, das Abhängen und die Rekreation haben eine massive materielle Existenz und erfüllen darin die entscheidende gesellschaftliche Funktion der Ideologie: die Reproduktion der Arbeitskraft. Sie leisten das, indem sie die Individuen mit dem Gefühl von Freiwilligkeit, und sogar mit dem Gefühl von rebellischer, "subversiver" Widerspenstigkeit ausstatten – freilich genau in dem Maß, in dem es ihrer Arbeitsfähigkeit sowie ihrer Eingliederung in die gesellschaftlichen Klassenverhältnisse dient: in der Arbeit z. B. ein kleiner Bürohengst, in der Freizeit dafür aber ein wilder, tätowierter

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<sup>6</sup> s. dazu Althusser, [1963]: 186–197; [1965]: 14–31.



Motorradschurke oder tougher Extremsportler. Und unter postfordistischen Bedingungen: einer, der auch beim braven Arbeiten zeigen muß, was er in der Freizeit für schräge Sachen draufhat.

Schließlich verkettet die Theorie der "immateriellen" Arbeit den Begriff der Immaterialität mit denen von Identifizierung und Freiheit. Die Beobachtung, daß unter postfordistischen Bedingungen Beschäftigte sich mit ihrer Tätigkeit in höherem Maß identifizieren können, als es fordistischen Arbeitern möglich war, mag richtig sein. Aber diese Aufhebung von "Entfremdung" sichert ihnen im ökonomischen oder politischen Sinn keinerlei Freiheit. Und die Suggestion, daß Freiheit nur in Form von Immaterialität existieren könnte, ist eine gefährliche anti-materialistische Annahme, wie sie für ein christlich geprägtes Denken charakteristisch ist: gerade dieses Denken zeichnet sich, wie Bela Grunberger und Pierre Dessuant nachgewiesen haben,<sup>7</sup> durch eine solche generelle Feindlichkeit gegen alles Materielle aus. Und es führt damit zu einer Verlierermentalität, in der alles Großartige (wie eben die Freiheit) grundsätzlich nur jenseits der Materie – und das heißt: jenseits dieser Welt – angesiedelt wird. Dadurch kann es für ein solches anti-materialistisches Denken niemals ein großartiges Gelingen, sondern immer nur ein großartiges Scheitern geben; so verliebt man sich von vorneherein in die eigenen Niederlagen, die man in der Folge auch nicht verfehlen wird.

Das besondere Augenmerk, das die operaistischen Theoretiker auf die Frage richten, ob die Beschäftigten ihre Kreativität in die Arbeit einbringen und sich dadurch mit ihr identifizieren können, entspricht jenem Zeitgeist, den Richard Sennett bereits 1974 hellichtig analysiert hat: dieser Zeitgeist ist das Imaginäre einer Gesellschaft, "in der intimes Erleben zu einem Allzweckmaßstab für die Beurteilung der Wirklichkeit geworden ist" (Sennett, [1974]: 21). Diese intime, d. h. ich-bezogene Herangehensweise an die Wirklichkeit bezeichnet Sennett als narzißtisch, und er erläutert: "Zum Narzißmus gehört die bohrende Frage, was diese Person, dieses Ereignis 'für mich bedeuten'." (Sennett, [1974]: 22).

Wie auch Grunberger/ Dessuant hinsichtlich der anti-materialistischen Position des Narzißmus bemerkt haben, tendiert dieser dazu, nichts zu dulden, was nicht von Bedeutung für das eigene Ich zu sein scheint – also zum Beispiel keine Tätigkeit, mit der man sich nicht in hohem Grad identifizieren kann. Aber zugleich macht diese scheinbar rebellische Natur den Narzißmus völlig wehrlos gegen alles, womit Identifizierung möglich ist – zum Beispiel gegen schlecht bezahlte und prekäre postfordistische Arbeit, in die in hohem Maß eigene schöpferische Fähigkeiten nicht nur eingebracht werden *dürfen*, sondern sogar *müssen*.

Und schließlich, um auf die Frage des Nichtstuns zurückzukommen, tendiert dieser ich-bezogene Weltzugang dazu, gerade jene Praktiken aufzulösen, die am

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<sup>7</sup> s. dazu Grunberger/ Dessuant, 2000: 121ff.; 272.

ehesten geeignet sind, dem gesellschaftlichen Arbeitsaufruf zu widerstehen. Denn diese besonderen, arbeitsresistenten Praktiken sind solche, die mit dem Heiligen zu tun haben. Und das Heilige ist zuallererst etwas, das durch seine "schmutzige, unreine" Natur (oder auch durch seine "dreckigen Götter"<sup>8</sup>) und durch seine Materialität jedem narzißtischen Ich zutiefst fremd und zuwider ist. Die Stärkung eines narzißtischen Ich, wie sie in der operatistischen Position zum Ausdruck kommt, wird somit auf die Liquidierung des Heiligen in der Kultur hinarbeiten und dadurch der Entstehung eines verstärkten Arbeitsethos Vorschub leisten.

### 5 *Vorgeschiedenes Nichtstun, erlaubte Arbeit: das Heilige und das Profane*

Auf den ersten Blick kann es so scheinen, als ob man im Allgemeinen arbeiten müßte (sofern man überhaupt Gelegenheit dazu hat) und es nur manchmal, in seltenen Momenten, bleiben lassen dürfte. *Zum Arbeiten gezwungen, manchmal vielleicht frei zur Nichtarbeit* – das ist die Formel eines zur Naturerscheinung stilisierten Arbeitsethos. Kulturtheoretisch ist diese Formel jedoch hochgradig irreführend. Denn in Wahrheit ist es genau umgekehrt: Oft *muß* man das Arbeiten bleiben lassen. Die Nichtarbeit ist dann nicht bloß erlaubt, sondern vorgeschrieben. Sie stellt eine Pflicht dar, die sofort (termingerecht) erfüllt werden muß. Das gilt nicht nur für jene Gesellschaften, wie sie Sigmund Freud in "Totem und Tabu" beschreibt und an denen uns (wie an jeder fremden Gesellschaft) sofort in erster Linie deren weitgehende Prägung durch zwanghafte rituelle Strukturen auffällt. Selbst in unseren utopielosen Arbeitskulturen gibt es noch kleine, unterschwellige Spuren dieser Pflicht zur Nichtarbeit. Zu bestimmten Zeiten *muß* die Arbeit im Büro unterbrochen werden; dann *müssen* Sektflaschen geöffnet werden – etwa wenn Silvester ist oder wenn ein bestimmter Kollege Geburtstag hat. Dann wäre es unanständig und *abszön*, zu arbeiten; dann *muß* vielmehr mit dem Sekt angestoßen werden; und er *muß* getrunken werden, wenigstens in kleinen, "zum Anstoßen" vorgesehenen Mengen – selbst von denen, die keinen Sekt mögen oder nach Vorschrift ihres Arztes keinen Alkohol trinken dürfen. Genauso müssen wohl die Mitglieder einer totemistischen Stammesgemeinschaft an bestimmten Tagen Stücke vom Totemtier verzehren, ob sie wollen oder nicht. An den übrigen Tagen des Jahres hingegen ist ihnen der Genuß dieses Fleisches strikt untersagt; aber ebenso wirkt der Sekt, als typisches "Anlaßgetränk", ja auch in unserer Kultur eigentümlich deplaziert und na-

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<sup>8</sup> s. dazu Freud, [1912–13]: 311; vgl. Marinelli (Hg.), 2000.

hezu unappetitlich, wenn man ihn abseits der Anlässe konsumieren möchte. Man muß die Feste feiern, wie sie fallen – das bedeutet auch, daß man sie sonst eben nicht feiern darf.

Das Fernsehen übt heute, unter der neidvollen Beobachtung der Vertreter der christlichen Religionen,<sup>9</sup> diese Zwänge zur Arbeitsniederlegung wohl am stärksten aus. Insbesondere bei bestimmten Sportereignissen sind Belegschaften und Privatpersonen zum live-Zusehen verdammt, ob sie wollen oder nicht. Und wenn (etwa bei Olympiaden, die in einem anderen Erdteil stattfinden) die Übertragungen mitten in der Nacht ausgestrahlt werden, dann muß eben mitten in der Nacht ferngesehen werden. Nicht einmal die weitverbreitete Existenz von Videorekordern kann diesem Brauchtum Abbruch tun.

In diesen heute noch auffindbaren, jedoch leicht übersehbaren Spuren von zwanghafter ritueller Resistenz gegen das Arbeiten zeigt sich, was die stärkste Kraft des Widerstands gegen die Zumutungen der Arbeit bildet: Es ist etwas Kultisches,<sup>10</sup> mithin etwas Kulturelles – und keineswegs etwa die angebliche natürliche Trägheit der Menschen, die sogenannte, von Lenin heftigst bekämpfte “Oblomowerei” (s. dazu Mierau, in: Asholt/ Fähnders, 1991: 210ff.). Nur eine kulturelle Ressource kann diese notwendige Steigerung herbeiführen: jenes Heilige, das zum Nichtstun zwingt – und das die Arbeit regelrecht obszön (und nicht etwa nur mühevoll) erscheinen läßt.

Dieses Heilige ist übrigens keineswegs Erfindung oder Eigentum der institutionalisierten Religionen. Vielmehr ist es, wie die Beispiele des Fernsehsports oder des Sektrinkens zeigen, ein populäres, alltagskulturelles, theologieloses, meist ohne Bekenntnis und Programm ausgestattetes Heiliges, das von den Akteuren selbst oft als ein wenig blödsinnig, läppisch oder sogar lästig erachtet wird, aber seltsamerweise gerade deshalb zwingend verrichtet werden muß.

### *6 Wenn die Arbeit zur heiligen Pflicht wird: Max Weber und Francis Fukuyama*

Gerade dieses populäre Heilige, das seine alltäglichen Riten zwingend an jenen Platz setzt, den es der Arbeit damit versperrt, ist von den verschiedenen Kulturen (ebenso wie von deren Religionen) in sehr unterschiedlicher Weise

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<sup>9</sup> s. dazu z. B. Albrecht, 1993; Thomas, 1996; Jochum, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Zurecht hat darum Paul Lafargue in seiner Verteidigung der Utopie der Faulheit mehrfach auf das Heilige – insbesondere des Heidentums – verwiesen; s. Lafargue, [1883]: Vorwort und *passim*.

behandelt worden. Das wird an ihrem Verhältnis zum Müßiggang deutlich – insbesondere an ihrem Verhältnis zum Müßiggang als Utopie.

Solange der Müßiggang für eine Kultur – und sei es nur in der Vorstellung – das ersuchte Andere der Arbeit bildet, findet sich das Heilige dieser Kultur im Gegensatz zur Arbeit. Damit das süße Nichtstun hingegen sich in eine Angstvorstellung verwandelt, die im Imaginären dieser Kultur keinen Platz mehr einnehmen kann, muß das Heilige seine Stellung gegenüber der Arbeit verändert haben. Es muß, statt das Andere der Arbeit zu bilden, zur Arbeit selbst geworden sein. Wenn die Arbeit selbst heilig geworden ist, dann ist für das Nichtstun, ebenso wie für seine Vorstellung, nur noch ein völlig „gottverlassener“ Ort übrig (in dem Sinn, in dem man zum Beispiel ein Dorf auf dem Land, wo es keinen schönen Dorfplatz und nicht einmal ein Kino gibt, einen „gottverlassenen“ Ort nennt).

Max Weber hat diesen Ortswechsel des Heiligen – seine Verwandlung vom Anderen der Arbeit in die Arbeit selbst – am Beispiel des calvinistischen Protestantismus präzise nachgezeichnet und den Zusammenhang seiner Konsequenzen analysiert (s. Weber, [1904/05]). Zum hundertsten Jahrestag der Veröffentlichung von Webers klassischem Text hat ihn der Vordenker der amerikanischen Rechten Francis Fukuyama vor kurzem gefeiert – in einem Artikel mit dem programmatischen Titel „The Calvinist Manifesto“ (Fukuyama, 2005).

Fukuyama zeigt unverhohlen seine Faszination durch einen Theoretiker, der durch seine These von der religiösen Bedingtheit einer ökonomischen Entwicklung den Materialisten Marx von den Füßen auf den Kopf zu stellen scheint – und der überdies geeignet erscheinen kann, den Kapitalismus US-amerikanischer Prägung als einzigartige Kulturentwicklung zu glorifizieren und dessen imperialistische Absichten als welthistorische Mission, insbesondere gegenüber Kulturen mit anderer Religion, zu legitimieren.

Immerhin ist Fukuyama hellichtig genug, die Schwäche Webers gerade in diesen beiden Punkten – in seinem „Anti-Marxismus“ sowie in seiner Eignung als „US-Legitimator“ – zu erkennen und einzugestehen: Webers „anti-marxistische“ Annahme einer religiös-ökonomischen Kausalität ist angesichts der Komplexität der Entstehungsbedingungen von Produktionsweisen selbst in Fukuyamas Augen nicht zu halten. Und anders als Weber annahm, können auch andere Religionen (wie z. B. Taoismus und Buddhismus) eine kapitalistische Ökonomie mit entsprechendem, vielleicht sogar noch rigorosem Arbeitsethos hervorbringen bzw. begleiten.

Und noch eine dritte mögliche US-Erwartung wird durch Weber enttäuscht: Gerade die unter den derzeitigen Krisenbedingungen boomende, aggressive neue US-amerikanische protestantische Religiosität findet bei

Weber keine Stütze. Denn Weber betonte, daß der Protestantismus bei der Entstehung eines kapitalistischen Arbeitsethos die Rolle eines verschwindenden Vermittlers einnimmt: so notwendig er am Anfang dieser Entwicklung gewesen sein mag, so sehr muß sich der Protestantismus, Weber zufolge, aus dieser Entwicklung zugunsten eines aufgeklärten, völlig profanisierten Arbeitsethos zurückziehen – dies läßt die neuen religiösen protestantischen Fundamentalismen, die sich derzeit der neoliberalen Politik so willfährig andienen, durch Webers Theorie nicht nur nicht gerechtfertigt erscheinen, sondern sogar als hinderliche Anachronismen.

Und was schließlich das protestantische Ethos und den von ihm angeblich hervorgerufenen kapitalistischen Geist betrifft, ist gerade Weber weit davon entfernt, darin eine hervorragende kulturelle Errungenschaft zu erblicken. Dementsprechend schreibt Weber diesen “Geist” fast immer unter Anführungszeichen.

### *7 Das Nichts als Gipfel des Menschentums*

Das Charakteristische dieses vom protestantischen Ethos hervorgerufenen kapitalistischen “Geistes” besteht, Weber zufolge, darin, daß die Arbeit im Verhältnis zum Heiligen ihren Platz wechselt. Anstatt das zu sein, *wovon* die Menschen leben, wird sie zu dem, *wofür* sie leben – ein Selbstzweck. Arbeit wird damit zum “Beruf”, das heißt: zur Berufung, zur Mission, zum Lebensinhalt (s. Weber, [1904/05]: 171; 163). Die bis dahin als weltabgewandte religiöse Praxis betriebenen Formen der Enthaltbarkeit verwandeln sich damit in eine innerweltliche Tätigkeit – in “innerweltliche Askese”.

Jenes Erwerbsstreben, das in früheren Kulturen in der Form der Habgier existierte und dementsprechend als niedriges Motiv gewertet wurde, erscheint nunmehr als eine hoch respektable, heilige Pflicht. Erstmals, so Weber, entsteht dadurch eine Lebenshaltung, die der Arbeit eine ethische Dimension zuspricht – ein vom Pflichtgedanken geprägtes Arbeitsethos. Obwohl Weber die damit verbundene kulturelle Umwertung bemerkt und erkennt, daß damit in “perverser” Weise etwas bislang Schändliches in ein kulturelles Ideal verwandelt wird (s. Weber, [1904/05]: 55), und obwohl ihm Nietzsches Analyse dieses Ethos als einer von Neid und Rache gekennzeichneten “Ressentimentkultur” bekannt ist (s. ebd.: 241), vermag Weber dieser Pflicht dennoch nicht zu mißtrauen. Es gelingt ihm nicht, diese Pflicht anders zu lesen, als sie sich selbst begreift. Als guter Kantianer scheint Weber außerstande, im Pflichtbewußtsein etwas anderes zu sehen als eine hohe sittliche Qualifikation. Die verdächtigen Besonderheiten ebendieser

Pflicht – die niemandem nützt und nur den Ausübenden das Gefühl “eigener Vollkommenheit” verschafft (wobei sie nichts anderes tun, als den bisherigen Neigungen weiter nachzugeben; nun allerdings mit dem Gefühl der Selbstüberwindung, bei verringerter manifester Lust) – erscheinen Weber nicht kritikwürdig und mit theoretischen Mitteln analysierbar.

Allerdings macht Weber sich über die Tatsache lustig, daß dieses Arbeitsethos, ähnlich wie die Besen von Goethes Zauberlehrling, zum Herrn seiner ehemaligen calvinistischen Herren wird und sich letztere als seine Sklaven unterwirft. So schreibt Weber:

Nur wie ‘ein dünner Mantel, den man jederzeit abwerfen könnte’, sollte nach [Richard] Baxters Ansicht die Sorge um die äußeren Güter um die Schultern seiner Heiligen liegen. Aber aus dem Mantel ließ das Verhängnis ein stahlhartes Gehäuse werden. Indem die Askese die Welt umzubauen und in der Welt sich auszuwirken unternahm, gewannen die äußeren Güter zunehmende und schließlich unentrinnbare Macht über den Menschen, wie niemals zuvor in der Geschichte. (Weber, [1904/05]: 203f.)

Anders als Kant, der im pflichtgemäßen Handeln das genuine Betätigungsfeld menschlicher Freiheit erblickte, erkennt Weber, daß gerade in diesem Feld sich eine bis dahin ungeahnte Unterworfenheit des Menschen abzeichnet – und zwar noch dazu unter die von der Pflichtethik wenigstens theoretisch so sehr verachteten “äußeren Güter”. Weber liefert damit – weit mehr als Marx mit seinem analogen Befund im Fetischkapitel des “Kapital” – eine sehr präzise immanente Kritik der Kantschen Pflichtethik.

Aus der theoretischen Sympathie für das Arbeitsethos entwickelt sich bei Weber eine hellsichtige Kritik – und mitunter sogar eine lautstarke Beschimpfung (wenn auch unter dem Schutzschild fremder Zitate). Für das “stahlharte Gehäuse” der Moderne, in dem sich Fukuyama so wohlfühlt, sowie für dessen Propagandisten findet Weber die folgenden starken Worte:

Niemand weiß noch, wer künftig in jenem Gebäude wohnen wird und ob am Ende dieser ungeheuren Entwicklung ganz neue Propheten oder eine mächtige Wiedergeburt alter Gedanken und Ideale stehen werden, oder aber – wenn keins von beiden – mechanisierte Versteinierung, mit einer Art von krampfhaftem Sich-wichtig-nehmen verbrämt. Dann allerdings könnte für die ‘letzten Menschen’ dieser Kulturentwicklung das Wort zur Wahrheit werden: ‘Fachmenschen ohne Geist, Genußmenschen ohne Herz: dies Nichts bildet sich ein, eine nie vorher erreichte Stufe des Menschentums erstiegen zu haben.’ (Weber, [1904/05: 204)

Keineswegs wertfrei beobachtend, sondern mit deutlichem Abscheu kommentiert Weber auch das aus dem Arbeitsethos hervorgehende "Banausentum" der Puritaner in bezug auf die Kultur und die schönen Künste (Weber, ebd.: 184). Er zeigt, wie die protestantische (und später von der Aufklärung betriebene) "Entzauberung der Welt" alles hinwegfegt, was ihr der Magie verdächtig erscheint. Darin beseitigt der Puritanismus nicht allein die Sakramente und prunkvollen Zeremonielle der christlichen Religion, sondern überhaupt alles, was symbolischen Charakter hat und demnach als nutzlos erscheint: auch diejenigen Dinge, die – wie zum Beispiel der "chevalreske Prunk" mit äußerer Erscheinung und Illusion zu tun haben, – und damit letztlich alles, was das Leben glamourös, charmant und "zauberhaft" erscheinen läßt und in der Kultur Freude macht.

### *8 Arbeitsbienen und Luxusbienen*

Die präzise Erwiderung auf Max Webers These, wonach das protestantische Arbeitsethos die Ursache für die Entstehung des Kapitalismus gewesen sei, wurde genau 200 Jahre vor Webers Text formuliert: Bernard de Mandevilles 1705 erstmals veröffentlichtes Lehrgedicht "Die Bienenfabel" ("The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits").

Zum Glück, schreibt Mandeville darin, gibt es Ungerechtigkeit, Betrug, Geschäftemacher, korrupte Richter, habgierige Quacksalber-Ärzte, windige Advokaten, Diebe und Räuber. Andernfalls könnte eine große, moderne Gesellschaft nicht blühen. Gesetzt den Fall, die Götter hätten eine solche Gesellschaft, wie sie es selbst manchmal heuchelnd wünschen mag, mit Ehrlichkeit und Anstand versehen: sie würde binnen kürzester Zeit zugrunde gehen. Wenn die Schurken ("knaves") einmal ehrlich und anständig geworden sind, dann ist mit der Prosperität Schluß. Wer Ehrlichkeit und Anstand haben will, der muß bereit sein, auf die Annehmlichkeiten einer großen Gesellschaft zu verzichten, und sich in einer primitiven Dorfgemeinschaft von Eicheln ernähren:

Bare Virtue can't make Nations live  
In Splendor; they, that would revive  
A Golden Age, must be as free,  
For Acorns, as for Honesty  
(Mandeville, 1980: 79)

Aus Mandevilles Perspektive erscheint Webers Theorie somit nicht so sehr falsch als vielmehr verkehrt: das, was Weber für seine Erklärung hält, wä-



re für Mandeville vielmehr das Rätsel. Zu erklären wäre nicht, inwiefern der Kapitalismus *dank* des protestantischen Geistes zustandekam, sondern vielmehr, wieso er sich *trotz* dieses Geistes überhaupt entwickeln konnte. Wenn wirklich durch den Protestantismus der Verschwendung, der Korruption und dem Betrug ein Ende gemacht worden wäre, dann müßte man erklären, wieso der Kapitalismus nicht an dieser Beseitigung seiner wichtigsten Stützen zugrunde ging.

Francis Fukuyama zum Beispiel zeigt sich vom protestantischen Geist und dessen Weberianischem Selbstverständnis angetan, wenn er auf das Nord-Süd-Gefälle hinsichtlich der Korruption in der Europäischen Union hinweist. Erst die Intervention der protestantischen Skandinavier hätte, so Fukuyama, der Korruption innerhalb der EU unter französischer (katholischer) Führung 1999 ein abruptes Ende bereitet. – Abermals müßte man sich hier nach Mandeville fragen, inwiefern das der EU gutgetan haben könnte: inwiefern könnte im Ende der Korruption nicht nur eine moralische Verbesserung, sondern auch ein wirtschaftlicher Gewinn liegen?

Mandevilles Erklärung dieses Paradoxons würde wohl lauten, daß die “honesty” des protestantischen Geistes und dessen Pflichtethik eben etwas ganz anderes sind als das, wofür sie sich selbst halten. Findet sich denn hinter diesem ethischen Verhalten nicht immer ein Element des Stolzes – eines Stolzes, der sich gerade durch die Dezenz seiner Äußerung noch in ungeahntem Maß steigern läßt (s. Mandeville, 1980: 106)? Ist folglich die nach außen getragene Bescheidenheit nicht eine noch viel massivere Anmaßung, als es der billige chevalreske Prunk jemals gewesen war? Und ist somit das Pflichtgefühl nicht bloß eine infame, verlogene Bemäntelung rücksichtsloser Verfolgung egoistischer Interessen? Sind also die “fools” des reinen protestantischen Gewissens in Wahrheit nicht viel hinterhältigere “knaves”, als es die “knaves” je fertigbrachten?

Unter dieser Perspektive würde Mandeville wohl auch das von Fukuyama angesprochene Verschwinden der Korruption aus der EU betrachten. Wenn in der EU vor 1999 anscheinend Gelder in finsternen Kanälen verschwanden – wohin fließen sie denn jetzt? Wohl in die massiven bürokratischen Apparate, die durch Kontrolle, Monitoring und Evaluierung das unkontrollierte Verschwinden der Gelder verhindern sollen. Eine gewaltige Apparatur aus nicht endenwollenden, unüberschaubaren Antragsprozeduren hat die einstige Willkür ersetzt. Die früheren heimlichen, illegalen Günstlinge der Korruption sind nun durch weitaus zahlreichere, legale Begünstigte ersetzt worden, die noch mehr Geld verschlingen, indem sie angeblich die Korruption bekämpfen. Und an die Stelle offener Willkür ist eine andere, hinter dicken Aktenbergen versteckte, “objektivierte” Willkür getreten: Unliebsamen



Institutionen und Initiativen zum Beispiel dreht man als Politiker heute nicht einfach den Geldhahn ab; vielmehr läßt man sie evaluieren. Und sobald die Evaluierer, die von denselben Politikern abhängen, das gewünschte Ergebnis geliefert haben, geben die Politiker sich einsichtig und erklären, daß sie gar nicht anders handeln können, als nun den ineffizienten Institutionen die Förderungen zu entziehen.

Aus Mandevilles Sicht wäre das Paradoxon damit gelöst: das Auftreten der protestantischen "honesty" hat der Prosperität in der EU nur deshalb nicht geschadet, weil diese honesty eben etwas ganz anderes ist als das, wofür sie sich selbst hält und ausgibt; weil die bürokratische Kontrolle des Verschwindens von Geldern selbst ein noch weitaus umfassenderes Verschwinden ebendieser Gelder möglich macht; weil die korrekte Wirtschaft eben noch viel mehr Bürokraten ernährt, als die korrupte Wirtschaft an Günstlingen versorgen konnte.

### 9 Arbeit macht Arbeit

Durch das massive Anwachsen bürokratischer Apparate unter den Bedingungen der "honesty" wird Arbeit in immer höherem Maß durch das Aufzeichnen von Arbeit begleitet. Weil sich beides aber aus denselben Ressourcen speist, geht dies auf Kosten der Arbeiter; sie werden zunehmend durch Aufzeichner verdrängt. In sämtlichen Unternehmen werden Produzierende also ersetzt durch Leute, die über das Produzieren berichten: durch PR-Leute, Juristen, Evaluierungsspezialisten etc. Anders als die produktive Arbeit aber hat die berichtende nie ein Ende: denn jeder Bürokrat macht mindestens einen weiteren Bürokraten notwendig, der seine Berichte liest, und jede PR-Lady, die ein Produkt bekanntmacht, erobert damit ein Stück öffentlicher Aufmerksamkeit, die eben dadurch immer knapper wird und darum von immer mehr gegnerischen PR-Ladies unter immer größeren Anstrengungen wieder zurückerobert werden muß. Mandeville hat dafür treffende Worte:

Millions endeavouring to supply  
Each other's Lust and Vanity;  
While other Millions were employ'd,  
To see their Handy-works destroy'd  
(Mandeville, 1980: 68)

Erst für diesen Typ von parasitärer Arbeit gilt das, was ein Anarcho-Spruch auf deutschen T-Shirts behauptet: "Arbeit macht Arbeit". Insofern

diese parasitäre “Sozius-Arbeit” (im Sinn von Deleuze/ Guattari) nie ein Ende hat und insofern sie sich anderer Arbeit entgegengesetzt, kann sie auch als negative Arbeit, als Nichtstun im emphatischen Sinn, als Vernichtung und Annihilierung von Arbeit, mithin als luxuriöse Konsumtion begriffen werden. Die Agenten dieser Entwicklung hatte Weber als jenes “Nichts” bezeichnet, das sich für den Gipfel des Menschentums hält. Dieses Nichts bringt also einen Exzeß des Nichtstuns hervor – allerdings in der verhohlenen Form der Betriebsamkeit.

Unter diesem Blickwinkel wird nochmals klarer, weshalb der Müßiggang derzeit nicht einmal mehr als Utopie existieren kann: denn diese Betriebsamkeit ist selbst ein gigantischer Müßiggang, ein gesteigertes Nichtstun, ein Nichtstun auf “erweiterter Stufenleiter”, das jedes einfache Nichtstun mit gleicher Notwendigkeit zum Verschwinden bringt wie der Autobus die Postkutsche. Diese Realität ist selbst eine Utopie; eine nie geahnte, gesteigerte Utopie des Nichtstuns, die jeden Gedanken an das bloße Nichtstun als eine naive und unschuldige, viel zu bescheiden gefaßte Utopie verschämt erröten läßt.

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HANDELN,  
“OB ICH GLEICH NICHTS ANDERES WOLLTE”:  
KANTS PRAKTISCHE PHILOSOPHIE ALS  
THEORIE DES SUBJEKTIVIERENDEN  
HANDELNS

Rado Riha

Die Herausforderung, die Kants Moralphilosophie für das gegenwärtige philosophische Denken darstellt, liegt genau in jenem Merkmal, das auch Kants innovativen Einschnitt in die traditionelle Moralphilosophie ausmacht: in der Begründung der universellen, für alle vernünftige Wesen geltenden Moral. Interpretationsversuche, die den Kantschen moralischen Ansatz im Prinzip zwar annehmen, ihn aber gleichzeitig abschwächen, indem sie seinen angeblich zu abstrakten moralischen Universalismus mit der Dimension einer moralischen Berücksichtigung des unverwechselbar Besonderen zu ergänzen wünschen, sind unserer Meinung nach obsolet, weil sie vom Anfang an den produktiven Kern der Kantschen Moralphilosophie verfehlen. Kants praktische Philosophie bahnt als Begründung der universellen Moral nicht nur einer begriffliche Artikulation der jeweiligen Besonderheit des menschlichen Handelns den Weg, sondern erweist sich auch, gerade als Moral des bedingungslosen Universellen aufgefasst und analysiert, als *Theorie des praktischen, d.h. subjektivierenden Handelns*. Die Willensbestimmung durch die reine Vernunft begründet und führt einen spezifischen Handlungsmodus mit sich, der sich negativ als Handeln bestimmen lässt, das nicht im “Dienste der Güter” steht und bei dem der Mensch nicht, um einen Ausdruck aus Kants Aufklärungsschrift zu gebrauchen, als “Teil der Maschine”<sup>1</sup> wirkt. Kurz, als Handeln, das von keinem empirisch-pathologischen Interesse der Selbsterhaltung oder der Glückseligkeit bestimmt wird, wie kultiviert, wie

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?”, in: *Kant-Werkausgabe*, hrsg v. W. Weisschedel, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main 1974, Bd. XI, S. 56.

sublim sich diese auch gestalten mag. Auf eine mehr positive Weise kann dieses subjektivierende Handeln, obwohl nur in formeller Hinsicht, als Akt bestimmt werden, in dem sich einerseits ein empirisches Individuum subjektiviert, d.h. in die Zusammensetzung des praktischen Subjekts tritt, und in dem andererseits dieses praktische Subjekt überhaupt erst zu seiner Existenz kommt. Das empirische Individuum subjektiviert sich dabei so, dass es sein Handeln auf ein irreduzibel subjektives Prinzip gründet, das aber gleichzeitig mit dem Anspruch auftritt, für niemanden, wenn nicht bedingungslos für alle zu gelten, und vom Vermögen des Individuums getragen wird, diesen Anspruch fortwährend praktisch zu verifizieren. Das praktische Subjekt wiederum, das sich im Subjektivierungsprozess zusammensetzt, kann als Instanz der Bedingung der Möglichkeit dafür verstanden werden, einen Handlungsmodus denken und praktizieren zu können, der nicht nur dem Prinzip der Selbsterhaltung und der Glückseligkeit unterordnet ist. Die Rolle dieses Subjektes können wir im Rahmen des Kantschen Ansatz dem freien, durch die bloße Vernunft bestimmten Willen und dem Moralgesetz als seiner realen Manifestation zuschreiben.

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Im Folgenden wollen wir versuchen, unsere Behauptungen über Kants praktische Philosophie als Theorie des subjektivierenden Handelns etwas bestimmter auszuarbeiten. Zunächst einmal möchten wir aber unsere Begriffskonstruktion eines *subjektivierenden Handelns* anhand von zwei aus der Psychoanalyse J. Lacans entlehnten Bemerkungen verdeutlichen.

Die erste, aus der "Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache" genommene Bemerkung lautet: "das Subjekt ist berufen, als Objekt *a* des Begehrens von Neuem geboren zu werden um zu wissen, ob es dasjenige will, was es begehrt".<sup>2</sup> Bei der zweiten handelt es sich um Lacans bekannte Analogie zwischen seinem Begriff des Begehrens und dem Kantschen Moralgesetz, wonach "das Moralgesetz [...] näher besehen, nichts anderes ist als das Begehren in Reinzustand, genau jenes Begehren, das zur Aufopferung, im wahren Sinne des Wortes, von allem führt, was ein Liebsobjekt der menschlichen Zärtlichkeit ist, ich sage zur Aufopferung und zur Tötung, nicht bloss zur Verwerfung des pathologischen Objektes"<sup>3</sup>.

Beginnen wir mit der zweiten Bemerkung. Die in ihr aufgestellte Analogie zwischen dem Begehren und dem Moralgesetz betrifft natürlich mehrere Ebenen, angefangen damit, dass weder das Begehren noch das

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Seuil, Paris 1966, S. 682.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, Livre XI, Seuil, Paris 1973, S. 247.

moralische Gesetz dem Register des "Humanen", der Anthropologie im weitesten Sinn zuzuschreiben ist, dem alles jene angehört, vom Verstand bis zu den Bedürfnissen, Neigungen und Wünschen, was der Mensch als kultiviertes Naturwesen bedarf, um sich selbst und seine Gattung zu erhalten und dabei das höchst mögliche Grad von Glückseligkeit zu erreichen. Für uns sind aber hier nur zwei Momente der Analogie wesentlich. Erstens, so wie vom Moralgesetz jeder empirisch-pathologische Inhalt oder Zweck des Wollens zurückgewiesen, wie Kant sagt, "niedergeschlagen" wird, so ist auch das Begehren in seinem prinzipiell unbefriedigten, unaufhörlichen metonymischen Gleiten von Objekt zu Objekt seinem Wesen nach eine die jeweilige Materialität des Objektes gerade auslöschende, *nichtende* Instanz. Und zweitens, das Begehren kennt zwar kein ihm gemässes Objekt und ist, streng genommen, das Begehren eines Nichts, es ist aber keineswegs leer, ohne Objekt. Ein Nichts ist es, was das Begehren bewegt, aber ein Nichts, das als Voraussetzung und Produkt seiner unaufhörlichen Bewegung fungiert und materielle Wirkungen hat, also ein reales Objekt, ein realer Bewegungsgrund des Begehrens ist. Nun, der gleiche Sachverhalt lässt sich, wie wir noch sehen werden, auch beim Moralgesetz feststellen: die Bestimmung des Willens durch die reine Vernunft ist ein Prozess, der unter fortwährender Absehung von allem empirischen Inhalt und Beweggründen vor sich geht, so dass der reine Wille eigentlich nichts zu wollen hat. Wie inhaltslos aber das Gebot des Moralgesetzes auch sein mag, so dass der vernunftbestimmte Wille letztendlich nur ein Nichts wollen kann, dieses Nichts ist dennoch nicht leer, es ist ein Etwas. Die Kehrseite der Auslöschung jeder empirischen Bedingung ist die unauslöschbare Anwesenheit des Moralgesetzes in Form eines nichtempirischen Faktums der reinen Vernunft, das "sich für sich selbst uns aufdringt"<sup>4</sup>. Wie das Lacansche Begehren überschneidet sich auch der Kantsche vernunftbestimmte Wille mit etwas Realem, das als Voraussetzung und Produkt seiner Bewegung unablässig da ist. Diesem reinen Willen, der mit etwas Realem artikuliert ist, schreiben wir hier, wiederholen wir es noch einmal, die Rolle eines Subjektes zu.

Kommen wir jetzt auf die Formel vom Begehren, das vom Subjekt auch noch gewollt werden soll, in der ersten der beiden angeführten Bemerkungen Lacans zurück. Im Kontext der Lacanschen Psychoanalyse macht uns diese Formel auf Folgendes aufmerksam: das Begehren, diese Grundbestimmung des Menschen als redenden Wesens, ist in einem ersten Moment als Abwehr

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<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, [KpV], hrsg. v. Horst D. Brandt/ Heiner F. Klemme, Philosophische Bibliothek, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 2003, A 56. Die angeführten Seitenzahlen beziehen sich auf die Erstausgabe der KpV.

vor dem organisiert, was es fortwährend selbst als seinen Bewegungsgrund produziert. Es funktioniert sozusagen im Modus einer fortwährenden Flucht vor seinem Bewegungsgrund, dem Nichts des Objektes, das die Voraussetzung und gleichzeitig eine Art Mehr-Produkt seines Wirkens ist. Erst in einem zweiten Moment, in dem derjenige/diejenige, den/die die Sache des Begehrens jeweils angeht, auf diese oder jene Weise zum Entschluss kommt, einen anderen Zugang zu seinem Begehren zu finden, und zwar so, dass er/sie das, was er/sie als Subjekt begehrt, jetzt auch noch zu wollen imstande ist, kann die Fluchtbewegung des Begehrens aufgehalten werden. Dies ist genau der Moment, in dem sich das Begehren mit seinem realen Bewegungsgrund, dem Nichts als Etwas wirklich auseinanderzusetzen beginnt und nicht mehr vor ihm flieht oder in ihm, sich selbst auslöschend, aufgeht. Dieser andere Zugang zum Begehren kann, eine gewisse Vereinfachung in Kauf nehmend, folgendermassen beschrieben werden: als sprechende Wesen sind wir zwar immer schon Subjekte des Begehrens, doch stimmt das Subjekt nur dann mit seinem Begehren zusammen, oder auch, nur dann lässt es hinsichtlich seines Begehrens nicht nach, wenn wir in unserer jeweiligen empirischen Besonderheit das, was wir als Subjekte begehren, auch noch wollen. Diese "Zusammenstimmen", dieses "en règle"-Sein des Subjekts mit seinem Begehren bzw. mit dessen nichtigen Bestimmungsgrund fassen wir selbst als subjektivierenden Akt eines empirischen Individuums auf. Wenn wir jetzt beide zitierte Bemerkungen Lacans miteinander verbinden, können wir das Resultat dieser Verbindung durch die Formel "Subjekt als Subjektivierung"<sup>5</sup> ausdrücken. Genau dieser Formel entspricht unserer Meinung auch das Subjekt des Kantschen Moralgesetzes, d.h., das praktische Handeln als Figur des Subjektes: es ist nur in Form eines Subjektivierungsprozesses möglich, in dem jemand das, was er als Subjekt begehrt, auch noch will.

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Wenden wir uns jetzt Kants Begründung der Moral selbst zu. Die kritische Untersuchung des praktischen Gebrauchs der Vernunft beschäftigt sich in der zweiten Kritik bekannterweise mit dem Problem der Bestimmungsgründe des Willens als Vermögens, "den Vorstellungen entsprechende Gegenstände entweder hervorzubringen, oder doch sich selbst zur Bewirkung derselben [...] d.h. seine Kausalität zu bestimmen"<sup>6</sup>. Die Untersuchung wird durch die Frage eingeleitet, womit die Vernunft als Bestimmungsgrund des Willens

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. zu dieser Formel A. Badiou, *Saint-Paul. La fondation de l'universalisme*, puf, Paris 1997.

<sup>6</sup> *KpV*, A 29.



selbst bestimmt wird. Das Dilemma lautet: langt die reine Vernunft "für sich alleine" zu, den Willen zu bestimmen, oder ist sie bei der Willenbestimmung selbst wiederum empirisch bedingt?<sup>7</sup> Kommt also ihre Bestimmung, wie dies in einer ähnlichen Fragestellung von der "Architektonik der reinen Vernunft" in der ersten Kritik formuliert wird, letztendlich immer von "anderwärts"?<sup>8</sup> Oder langt die reine Vernunft, mit der zweiten Kritik gesprochen, "für sich alleine" zu, ohne also selbst wiederum empirisch bedingt zu sein, den Willen zu bestimmen?

Kants Antwort auf dieses Dilemma ist unzweideutig: die Vernunft kann nur als reine Vernunft auf eine dem Menschen als *vernünftigen Wesen* entsprechende Weise praktisch, d.h. willensbestimmend sein. Durch die reine Vernunftbestimmung wird der *Wille als Wille*, als *blosses Wollen* gesetzt: nicht die Vorstellung des Gegenstandes und der erwarteten Lust, sondern nur noch die blosse allgemein-gesetzgebende Form der Maxime ist sein Bestimmungsgrund. Ein durch seine blosse gesetzliche Form bzw. allein durch "das formelle Prinzip des Wollens überhaupt"<sup>9</sup> bestimmter Wille ist ein im doppelten, negativen und positiven Sinn freier Wille. Er ist frei, weil er einerseits gänzlich unabhängig von der Naturkausalität ist, und er ist frei, weil er andererseits sich selbst die allgemein gesetzgebende Form seiner Maximen, d.h. das kategorische Imperativ als das Grundgesetz der Sittlichkeit gibt. Und im autonomen Willen, der sich dem für alle vernünftigen Wesen geltenden moralischen Gesetz nur darum unterordnet, weil er es als ein selbstgegebenes Gesetz anerkennt, kommt nun der Vernunftbegriff der Freiheit, der ja im Rahmen der theoretischen Vernunftkritik nur ein problematischer Begriff war, "zum ersten Male" zu seiner *objektiven*, zwar nur *praktischen*, nichtsdestoweniger aber, wie Kant hervorhebt, "*unbezweifelten Realität*"<sup>10</sup>.

Die sich im Moralgesetz manifestierende *objektive Realität* der Freiheit bzw. Kausalität der reinen Vernunft ist Kant nach natürlich nicht die Realität

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<sup>7</sup> *KpV*, A 30. An einer weiteren Stelle heisst es dann, dass die Frage, wie die reine Vernunft unmittelbar der Bestimmungsgrund der Kausalität des vernünftigen Wesens in Ansehung der Wirklichkeit der Objekte sein könne, nur die Erklärung fordere, "wie die Vernunft die Maxime des Willens bestimmen könne, ob es nun vermittelt empirischer Vorstellung, als Bestimmungsgründe, geschehe oder ob auch reine Vernunft praktisch sein und ein Gesetz einer möglichen, gar nicht empirisch erkennbaren Naturordnung sein würde" *KpV*, A 78 f.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in: *Kant-Werkausgabe*, Bd. III/IV, B 864/ A 836.

<sup>9</sup> *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, [GSM], herausgegeben und eingeleitet von B. Kraft und D. Schönecker, Philosophische Bibliothek, F. Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1999, BA 14. Die Seitenzahlen beziehen sich auf die zweite und erste Ausgabe der *GMS*.

<sup>10</sup> *KpV*, A 85.

der Sinnenwelt, sie gehört vielmehr dem Begriff der intelligibilen Welt an, also einem “*Standpunkt*, den die Vernunft sich genötigt sieht, ausser den Erscheinungen zu nehmen, *um sich selbst als praktisch zu denken*”<sup>11</sup>. Wir stehen hier an der Schwelle einer Problematik, die bei Kant nicht nur eng mit der Untersuchung der praktischen Vernunft verbunden, sondern auch grundlegend für die Kantsche Transzendentalphilosophie in Gänze ist: wir sprechen natürlich von Kants “transzendentelem Unterschied” von Phänomen und Noumenon und seiner Theorie der zwei Welten, einer intelligibilen und einer sinnlichen. Unserer Meinung nach sollte aber die Schwelle dieser Problematik auf dem Gebiet der praktischen Philosophie erst dann überschritten werden, wenn die immanente Logik der Vernunftbestimmung des Willens und ihre begrifflichen Konsequenzen analysiert worden sind. Erst eine solche Analyse machte es uns nämlich möglich, Rolle und Bedeutung des Noumenons für die phänomenale Erfahrungswelt dem transzendentalen Ansatz gemäss aufzufassen<sup>12</sup>. Wir werden also hier von der Frage nach der Bedeutung des “transzendentalen Unterschiedes” abstrahieren und uns bei der Behandlung des Begriffs der praktischen Realität der reinen Vernunft nur auf die Ebene der phänomenalen Erscheinungswelt beschränken<sup>13</sup>.

Welchem Sachverhalt sehen wir uns also dadurch gegenübergestellt, dass der Vernunft transzendente Freiheit, das Vermögen absoluter Spontaneität zugeschrieben, und die objektive Realität dieses Vermögens in der Autonomie des Willens geortet wird? Genau jenem Sachverhalt, der uns auch ermöglicht, Kants Begründung der universellen Moral als Theorie des praktischen, d.h. subjektivierenden Handelns zu verstehen. Es handelt sich zunächst da-

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<sup>11</sup> GSM, BA 119.

<sup>12</sup> Deswegen ist es unserer Meinung nach auch verfehlt, von einer “ontologischen Superiorität der Verstandeswelt” bei Kant zu sprechen, wie dies von B. Kraft und D. Schönecker in ihrer ansonsten sehr instruktiven Einleitung zu der Edition der GSM in der Meinerschen Philosophischen Bibliothek getan wird (cf. GSM, S. XXXV.) Die Verstandeswelt ist für Kant nicht wegen ihres ontologischen Vorrangs, sondern wegen ihrer *begrenzenden Funktion* wesentlich. Ihre Aufgabe ist es, darzustellen, dass die sinnliche Erfahrungswelt, und dass obwohl sie die *einzigste Welt* ist, die wir Menschen haben, obwohl es also “hinter” ihr keine Welt von ansichseienden Substanzen gibt, *nicht Alles ist*. Cf. z.B. GSM, BA 126: die intelligible Welt ist “[...] nur ein Etwas, das da übrig bleib, wenn ich alles, was zur Sinnewelt gehört, von den Bestimmungsgründen meines Willens ausgeschlossen habe, bloß um das Prinzip der Bewegursachen aus dem Felde der Sinnlichkeit einzuschränken, dadurch, daß ich es begrenze und zeige, daß es nicht alles in allem in sich faßt.” Heben wir noch hervor: der die phänomenale Wirklichkeit transzendierende Status des Noumenons ist eine Folge seiner Grenzfunktion, nicht ist umgekehrt die Grenzfunktion des Noumenons eine Folge seines transzendenten Statuses.

<sup>13</sup> Dabei natürlich nicht vergessend, dass die phänomenale Welt eben *nur* eine phänomenale, also keine ansichseiende Welt ist.

rum, dass die reine Vernunft, die "als Wille eines vernünftigen Wesens"<sup>14</sup> nur jenen meinen Handlungsgrundsatz zulässt, der für niemanden, wenn nicht bedingungslos für alle gilt, dass also das reine Denken, das von jeder empirischen Bedingung absieht, unmittelbar in etwas Reales, in eine praktische Realität umschlägt, also als eine praktische kausale Macht auftritt.<sup>15</sup> Die Behauptung der zweiten Kritik, dass im Moralgesetz die Vernunftidee der Freiheit objektive Realität bekommen hat, bedeutet nicht, dass die Vernunft vermittels des Moralgesetzes ihren Ideen irgendwie, etwa auf eine regulative Weise, Einfluss in der empirischen Wirklichkeit verschafft habe. Sie sollte vielmehr in einem *ontologisch starken* Sinn verstanden werden: sie zielt darauf ab, dass die Vernunft unmittelbar mit einem Stück Realität behaftet ist, als reine Vernunft auf spezifische Art und Weise mit dieser Realität artikuliert ist. Das reine Denken, ein Denken, das sozusagen nur für das Denken gut ist, bewirkt dort, wo es wirklich zu Worte kommt, etwas Reales, bringt eine Realität *sui generis* hervor. Dieses unmittelbare Zusammenfallen von Vernunft und Realem im autonomen Willen hat aber neben ihrer ontologischen auch eine *epistemologische* Dimension. Die praktische Vernunft, die mit etwas Realem artikuliert ist, führt auch eine neue Form des Allgemeinen ein: als reine Form der allgemengültigen Gesetzgebung existiert das Moralgesetz in Form eines nichtempirischen Faktums. Seine Allgemeinheit kommt also so zustande, dass sie vom Punkt einer irreduziblen Singularität supplementiert wird. Es ist dieser singuläre Punkt, der das Allgemeine der praktischen Vernunft als ein in sich geschlossenes Ganzes auseinander- und als ein offenes Nicht-Ganzes zusammensetzt.

Es ist nicht schwer einzusehen, dass sowohl auf ihrer ontologischen als auf ihrer epistemologischen Ebene die objektive Realität der reinen Vernunft, dieser Punkt des unmittelbaren Zusammen- und Auseinanderfallens von Denken und Realität, von Universellen und Singulären, wir können auch sagen, von Symbolischen und Realen, eine streng genommen unmögliche Entität bildet. Und in dieser Hinsicht kann Kants praktische Philosophie als eine breit angelegte Antwort auf die Frage verstanden werden, wie diese unmögliche Entität eines reinen Wollens, das mit etwas Realem artikuliert ist, *möglich*, und das heisst für den transzendentalen Ansatz auch, *wirklich* gemacht werden könnte. Nicht der paradoxe Sachverhalt eines unmittelbaren

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<sup>14</sup> GMS, BA 101.

<sup>15</sup> Und das Problem liegt nicht darin, dass die praktische Realität der Vernunft sozusagen "nicht von dieser Welt", auf die Naturkausalität der phänomenalen Welt irreduzibel ist: es liegt vielmehr darin, dass die phänomenale Vorstellungswirklichkeit nur auf Grund dieser nichtempirischen Realität der Freiheit überhaupt etwas Wirkliches, also kein blosses "Hirngespinnst" sein kann.

Zusammenfallens von reinem Denken und seiner objektiven Realität interessiert Kants praktische Philosophie. Sie möchte uns vielmehr zeigen, wie die objektive Realität der praktischen Vernunft, die sowohl von ihr untrennbar, als auch auf sie irreduzibel ist, *für die Vernunft selbst* bestimmbar wird. Mit anderen Worten, wie im Rahmen der phänomenalen Erfahrungswirklichkeit die nichtempirische objektive Realität der praktischen Vernunft und damit das empirische Tun und Lassen des Menschen als Handeln eines endlichen vernünftigen Wesens wirklich möglich wird. Diese Möglich- bzw. Wirklichmachung des moralischen Subjektes, d.h. der objektiven Realität der Vernunft, nennen wir hier “das Subjekt als Subjektivierung”.

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Sehen wir uns jetzt an, wie von Kant die konzeptuellen Sackgassen der objektiven Realität der Vernunft in der *Grundlegung* formuliert werden und wie die nachfolgende *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* einen Weg aus dieser Sackgasse ausarbeitet. Beginnen wir mit der *Grundlegung*, und zwar mit den Sätze, mit denen Kant ihren zweiten Abschnitt abschliesst. In ihnen fasst Kant noch einmal kurz den Unterschied zwischen dem hypothetischen und dem kategorischen Imperativ zusammen. Der hypothetische Imperativ setzt fest, schreibt Kant, dass ich etwas tun soll, “*weil ich etwas anderes will*”. Demgegenüber gebietet der kategorische Imperativ, “ich soll so oder so handeln, ob ich gleich nichts anderes wollte”.<sup>16</sup> “Handeln müssen, auch wenn man nichts anderes will”, dies bedeutet im Rahmen des Kantschen moralphilosophischen Ansatzes, keine vorausgesetzte Materie, kein Objekt und keinen Zweck durch das willentliche Handeln zu erreichen suchen – *und dennoch wollen*. Den kategorischen Imperativ zeichnet also keineswegs bloss aus, dass durch ihn das blosses Wollen durch die Absehung von jeder Materie des Willens bestimmt wird. Vielmehr wird durch ihn das Wollen dazu gebracht, weiter zu wollen, obwohl der Wille nichts mehr will: es ist das Nichts selbst, das Nichts gewissermassen als ein, um die Redeweise der dritten Kritik zu gebrauchen “gegenstandsloser Gegenstand”, das hier gewollt werden soll. Der reine Wille setzt sich dann in Gang, wenn der einzige Gegenstand meines Wollens die Abwesenheit des Gegenstandes selbst ist. Die Antwort auf die Frage, wie ein kategorischer Imperativ als synthetischer Satz a priori möglich ist, reduziert sich so letztendlich auf die einfache Frage: wie kann ich aufgrund dessen willentlich handeln, dass ich “nichts anderes” will, affirmativ ausgedrückt, dass ich streng genommen das Nichts selbst, die Abwesenheit des Objekts als Objekt selbst will? Auf ein solches Wollen des “Nichts als Etwas” reduziert sich

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<sup>16</sup> GSM, BA 88.

nämlich das Autonomieprinzip des Willens, das "einziges Gesetz, das sich der Wille eines jeden vernünftigen Wesens auferlegt, ohne irgendeine Triebfeder und Interesse derselben als Grund unterzulegen"<sup>17</sup>.

Gehen wir jetzt zu einer anderen Stelle aus der *Grundlegung* über, und zwar zum Begriff des "guten Willens". Erinnern wir uns kurz daran, dass der Wille nicht durch seine "Tauglichkeit" zur Erreichung dieses oder jenen Zweckes gut, sondern durch sein blosses Wollen, also an sich gut ist. Und das ist er nur im Fall, wenn er in seinen Maximen gleichzeitig "sich selbst zum allgemeinen Gesetz" machen kann<sup>18</sup>. Sein guter Wille bringt das empirische Individuum so dazu, sich von jeder Triebfeder und jedem empirischen Interesse loszusagen, nichts anderes als die reine Form des Wollens zu wollen – um am Ende vor die keineswegs problemlose Tatsache gestellt zu werden, dass er nicht nur einem Gesetz unterworfen ist, das er sich selbst gegeben hat, sondern dass dieses Gesetz für ihn nur insofern gilt, als es unmittelbar für alle als unbedingter kategorischer Imperativ gebietend ist.

Das Problem, das sich hier abzeichnet, betrifft bekannterweise den kategorischen Imperativ als einen synthetischen Satz a priori: aus dem Begriff eines dem endlichen vernünftigen Wesen angehörenden guten, d.h. autonomen Willens kann durch die Zergliederung dieses Begriffes, also analytisch, nicht die Eigenschaft seiner Maxime herausgefunden werden, gleichzeitig als allgemeines Gesetz zu gelten. Mit anderen Worten, es ist nicht möglich aus der Autonomie des endlichen Willens die sich in ihr verwirklichende Kausalität der Freiheit herauszubekommen. Die Freiheit bleibt mit dem Moralgesetz gewissermassen als "etwas ganz anderes" verbunden, sie ist eine ständige Voraussetzung des Handelns eines mit Vernunft und Willen begabten Wesens, kann aber als solche nicht bewiesen werden.<sup>19</sup>

Vom Standpunkt des moralisch handeln wollenden empirischen Individuums, das sich bei seinem besten Willen immer wieder im Anderen, im Horizont der Allgemeingültigkeit entfremdet sieht, äussert sich das Problem der apriorischen Synthetizität des kategorischen Imperativs in der Frage, die Kant im letzten Abschnitt der *Grundlegung* formuliert, und zwar: "Warum aber soll ich mich denn diesem Prinzip [der Allgemeingültigkeit meiner Maximen] überhaupt unterwerfen [...]?"<sup>20</sup>. Und obwohl Kant die-

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 444, [BA 96].

<sup>18</sup> *GSM*, BA 95.

<sup>19</sup> Dieser Überschuss der Freiheit des Willens über seine Autonomie, die nichts als deren positiver, gesetzlicher Begriff, als das Gesetz der Freiheit ist, gründet natürlich darin, dass der Wille eines Jeden/einer Jeden, um wirklich frei zu sein, imstande sein muss, die Wahl, die ihn frei macht, die Wahl des Moralgesetzes, abzulehnen.

<sup>20</sup> *GMS*, BA 102.

se Frage durch die Einführung des intelligibilen Standpunktes beantwortet, dürfen wir nicht aus den Augen verlieren, dass sie gleichzeitig für uns als endliche vernünftige Wesen dennoch immer offen, unbeantwortet bleiben muss. Letztendlich wird auch aus diesem Grund die *Grundlegung* mit den Worten abgeschlossen: wir begreifen “zwar nicht die praktische unbedingte Notwendigkeit des moralischen Imperativs, wir begreifen aber doch seine *Unbegreiflichkeit* [...]”.<sup>21</sup>

Offen muss aber die Frage deshalb bleiben, weil dadurch überhaupt erst Platz für die Freiheit geschaffen wird. Man könnte auch sagen, dass die Frage “warum soll ich mich dem Moralgesetz unterwerfen”, kürzer, “*warum soll ich es auch noch wollen?*” ihre eigene Antwort ist. Diese Antwort könnte auch so lauten: “weil du nur insofern vom Moralgesetz, d.h., dem Gesetz der Freiheit in dir sprechen kannst, als du dieses Gesetz auch noch wollen können musst”. In der Frage klingt an, dass erst durch ein zusätzliches Wollen, durch das Wollen eines empirischen Individuums das Moralgesetz wirklich möglich wird. Dieses sich in der Frage anmeldende zusätzliche Wollen muss also als ein konstitutiver Bestandteil des moralischen, d.h. praktischen Handelns betrachtet werden. Im Rahmen unseres eigenen Ansatzes werden wir sagen, dass dieses zusätzliche Wollen seinem Wesen nach ein subjektivierendes Handeln ist. Als solches schliesst es, wiederholen wir es noch einmal, ein Doppeltes ein. Einerseits subjektiviert sich das empirische Individuum, indem es das, was es als praktisches Subjekt, d.h. als vernunftbestimmter Wille begehrt, auch noch will. Andererseits kommt dadurch das praktische Subjekt überhaupt erst zustande. Frei sein bedeutet somit für das endliche vernünftige Wesen nicht einfach: “alles wollen können”. Ganz im Gegenteil, es bedeutet, dass es gerade nicht alles wollen kann, sondern vielmehr nur das wollen können muss, was es wirklich, d.h. als moralisches, praktisches Subjekt begehrt. Und das ist ein Nichts, aber ein Nichts, das dennoch Etwas ist, ein Nichts als “Triebfeder” des reinen Wollens. Die “Warum-soll-ich-es-wollen-Frage” wandelt sich somit in folgende Frage um: wie kann durch ein zusätzliches empirisches Wollen dieses Nichts als Etwas des praktischen Handelns verwirklicht werden?

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Mit unseren letzten Ausführungen haben wir natürlich die Problemlösungen der *Grundlegung* überfordert. In der Tat antwortet der Text der *Grundlegung* weder auf die Frage, wie ein Nichts als Etwas positiv bestimmt werden könnte, noch auf die Frage, wie durch ein zusätzliches Wollen das Nichts als Etwas ins Spiel gebracht werden kann. Beide Fragen, mit ihnen

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, BA 128.

aber auch die Frage nach der Möglichkeit des kategorischen Imperativs als synthetischen Satzes a priori, finden ihre Lösung erst in der zweiten Kritik. Und zwar in einem Begriff, dessen Gebrauch auf dem Gebiet der praktischen Vernunft man oft als "konzeptuelles Monster" eingeschätzt hat,<sup>22</sup> im Begriff des *Faktums*. Das Moralgesetz und sein Bewusstsein werden von nun an von Kant als ein Faktum vorgestellt, und zwar nicht als ein empirisches, sondern als einziges Faktum der reinen Vernunft<sup>23</sup>.

Durch den Begriff des Faktum wird zunächst noch einmal bekräftigt, dass das Moralgesetz nicht aus der Erfahrung und der besonderen Bestimmtheit des Menschen abgeleitet werden kann. Wir entdecken es vielmehr in uns als etwas unmittelbar Gegebenes und absolut Unzweifelbares, als ein unanfechtbares Gebot, wie gehandelt werden soll. In einem ersten Sinn kann so die Faktizität des Moralgesetzes als ein unbedingtes Handlungsgebot der reinen Vernunft verstanden werden, das von "jeder natürlichen Menschenvernunft" völlig a priori erkennbar, obwohl letztendlich unerklärbar immer schon da ist.<sup>24</sup> Seine Faktizität gibt dem Moralgesetz das Merkmal eines "Es ist so" und scheint es einer apriorischen gesetzlichen Regelung vom Typ "für jedes x Fy" anzugleichen. Die Aufgabe der Moral wäre es dann nur noch, von Fall zu Fall nachzuprüfen ob das konkrete Handeln unter das Gesetz der Allgemeingültigkeit der Maxime subsumiert werden kann.

Viel strenger kann nun das Faktum der Vernunft dann bestimmt werden, wenn wir davon ausgehen, dass in der Faktizität des moralischen Gesetzes, wie Kant sagt, die objektive Realität des reinen Willens bzw. der reinen praktischen Vernunft gegeben ist<sup>25</sup>. Hier tritt also das Faktum als ein Begriff auf, durch den die irreduzible Äusserlichkeit der reinen praktischen Vernunft, die aus dem Inneren der praktischen Vernunft selbst kommt, positiv bestimmt wird. Es ist jene begriffliche Erfindung, die es möglich macht, die unbestimmte objektive Realität, mit der die reine Vernunft unmittelbar zusammenfällt, als solche zu bestimmen und auf diese Weise dieses Zusammenfallen denkbar zu machen. Der Begriff des Vernunftfaktums erlaubt uns, dieses Zusammenfallen als *disjunktive Synthese* der reinen Vernunft und ihrer praktischen Realität aufzufassen, also als Verbindung zweier Glieder, in welcher das eine Glied nur in seiner Verbindung mit dem anderen selbstständig, d.h. "es selbst" und unabhängig ist. Im autonomen Willen als Faktum tritt die Reinheit und Allgemeinheit des Denkens für einen Augenblick, blitzartig, in

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. z. B. J. Rogozinski, *Le don de la loi. Kant et l'enigme de l'éthique*, puf, Paris 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. z. B. *KpV*, 31, A 56

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *KpV*, A 163.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, A 96.



Erscheinung, um im nächsten in der opaken Singularität eines bloss daseienden “Sinns ohne Bedeutung” zu verschwinden, d.h., eines unbedingten Gebots, das von uns in Wirklichkeit nichts Inhaltliches fordert und also unser Wollen dem Phantom eines nichtigen Etwas nachjagen lässt.

Dieser Augenblick genügt aber, damit das Vernunftfaktum den Platz dieses nichtigen Etwas als inhalts- und substanzloser “Triebfeder” des autonomen Willens einnimmt und damit die Antwort auf die Frage ermöglicht, wie dem grund- und absichtslosen reinen Wollen eine seinem nichtigen Gegenstand gemässe positive Bestimmung gefunden werden könnte. Sehen wir uns nun an, auf welche Weise der Begriff des Vernunftfaktums auch die oben angeführte Frage der *Grundlegung* “warum ich das Moralgesetz auch noch wollen sollte” beantwortbar macht. Oben haben wir schon bemerkt, dass in dieser Frage die Notwendigkeit eines zusätzlichen Wollen anklingt, vermittels dessen ein empirisches Individuum das, was es als moralisches Subjekt, d.h., als vernunftbestimmter Wille begehrt, auch noch will. Wir können jetzt dazusetzen, dass dieses zusätzliche Wollen in einem Handhaben des empirischen Individuums mit dem Faktum des Moralgesetzes besteht.

Die Frage, warum ich das Gesetz der Handlungsfreiheit eigentlich noch wollen soll, beantwortet das Vernunftfaktum auf eine ziemlich sonderbare Weise: so, dass es das Aufkommen dieser Frage überhaupt nicht zulässt, die Frage also gewissermassen auslöscht. Das Faktum der Vernunft ist sozusagen die Begriffskonstruktion einer Antwort, die vor ihrer Frage gegeben wird, den Ort der Frage leer lässt, um an ihrem leeren Ort dann die Wirklichkeit eines moralischen bzw. praktischen Handelns einzusetzen. Das wird vom Begriff des Faktums so zustande gebracht, wir verlassen mit dieser Behauptung natürlich Kants Gedankengang, dass er die *Unbegreiflichkeit* des Moralgesetzes, die von der *Grundlegung* als höchster Punkt seiner philosophischen Reflexion vorgestellt wurde, in seine *prinzipielle Grundlosigkeit* umkehrt. Diese Umkehrung stellt sich jedem Versuch in den Weg, das Vernunftfaktum als eine sich dem Begriff entziehende Entität zu verstehen, etwa als einen auf immer verborgenen Sinn oder als Chiffre einer uns unerreichbaren Transzendenz. Durch seine Grundlosigkeit wird das Faktum vielmehr zum abgründigen Grund des praktischen, d.h. subjektivierenden Handelns des empirischen Individuums. Man könnte auch sagen, dass dort, wo die Frage nach dem “es”, nach dem Wollen des Moralgesetzes war, jetzt das Handeln des empirischen Individuums, genauer gesagt, sein Handhaben mit diesem in Form des Vernunftfaktums auftretenden “es” erscheint.

In der Frage, wie es möglich ist, als freier Wille das Gesetz der Freiheit noch wollen zu müssen, erklingt ein gewisses Nicht-Wissen, das von der Unbegreiflichkeit des Moralgesetzes noch hervorgehoben wird. Durch die



Grundlosigkeit des Moralgesetzes als Faktums wird dieses Nicht-Wissen in ein *Ungewusstes* verwandelt, das als Bedingung der Möglichkeit, genauer gesagt, als Rahmenbedingung des praktischen Handelns wirkt. Von einer Rahmenbedingung kann hier insofern gesprochen werden, als dieses Ungewusste aus dem Bereich des praktischen Handelns immer ausgeschlossen bleibt und es gerade als ausgeschlossenes möglich macht. Das praktische Handeln gründet einerseits auf der absoluten Gewissheit, dass es gilt, so und nicht anders zu handeln, eine Idee oder ein Projekt unbedingt auszuführen, aber diese faktische Gewissheit wird andererseits von keiner positiven, objektiven Handlungsnorm getragen. Sie ist und bleibt die Gewissheit eines irreduzibel subjektiven und sich faktisch aufdringenden Handlungsprinzips. Subjektiv und faktisch ist dieses Prinzip, weil seine Begründung weder im diskursiven Netz der Überlieferung oder der empirischen Situation noch im Horizont einer regulativen Idee gesucht wird. Die Letztbegründung des Handlungsprinzips bleibt das ständig ausgeschlossene Ungewusste, an ihrer Statt tritt der Anspruch der handelnden empirischen Individuums, dass die grundlose Faktizität seiner subjektiven Handlungsmaxime doch etwas Wahres, etwas Sinnvolles beinhalte, und zwar insofern, als immer wieder, von Fall zu Fall ausgewiesen werden kann, dass sie für niemanden, wenn nicht bedingungslos für alle gelte. Wobei dieses "für alle" immer offen bleibt, da es durch keine prädikative Bedingung als ein exklusives, geschlossenes Ganzes gesetzt werden kann. Das Ungewusste der Letztbegründung fungiert somit als die unendliche Wiederholung, warum nicht, als *ewige Wiederkehr* eines irreduzibel subjektiven Aktes, von dem beständig die Frage "warum soll ich so oder so handeln" ausgeschlossen und an ihrer Stelle ein Handeln gesetzt wird, das seine eigene Sinnkonstruktion ist. Nur dass diese Sinnkonstruktion davon abhängt, dass der/die praktisch Handelnde in seinem/ihrem Handeln immer wieder von neuem einen Modus der bedingungslosen, nichtexklusiven Adresse an alle erfindet. Die ewige Wiederkehr des irreduzibel subjektiven Aktes ist das Eine des Mannigfaltigen, sich unendlich Unterscheidenden.

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Kommen wir abschliessend noch einmal auf unsere an Kants Begründung der universellen Moral anknüpfende Begriffs konstruktion der subjektivierenden praktischen Handlung zurück. Die Grundlosigkeit des Vernunftfaktums impliziert auch, dass das praktische Subjekt, wir haben es im vernunftbestimmten Willen gefunden, nicht im voraus gegeben ist, vor der Handlung eines empirischen Individuums existiert. Das praktische Subjekt *ist* nicht, es kann nur werden, und zwar im Prozess der Subjektivierung. Dieser Prozess bezieht sich auf das subjektivierende Handeln des empirischen Individuums.

Von einer subjektivierenden Handlung kann in Rahmen der Kantschen praktischen Philosophie in dem Masse gesprochen werden, als ein empirisches Individuum sich bereit erklärt, sein, mit Kant gesprochen, "eigentliches Selbst", mit anderen Worten, sich selbst als praktisches Subjekt im Faktum des Moralgesetzes anzuerkennen. Dort also, wo es nichts anzuerkennen gibt, wo es weder ein empirisches Individuum noch ein empirisches Mitsein mit anderen gibt, im Punkt einer radikalen Unterbrechung jeder empirischen Ordnung. Was wir hier "Anerkennung" nennen besteht in einer irreduzibel subjektiven Handlungsmaxime, die empirisch gesehen grund- und absichtslos ist, durch das ausgeschlossene Ungewusste ihrer Letzbegründung konstituiert wird und nur in ihrem Anspruch insistiert, für niemanden als etwas Wahres zu gelten, wenn nicht bedingungslos für alle. Durch diesen Handlungsmodus führt das empirische Subjekt gleichzeitig einen minimalen, nichtigen Abstand ein zwischen sich und dem unheimlichen, bloss faktischen Punkt eines "Sinns ohne Bedeutung", in dem es als "eigentliches Selbst", als praktisches Subjekt existiert. Genau diesen minimalen Abstand drückt auch die Formel aus, dass sich das empirische Individuum subjektiviert, indem es das, was es als praktisches Subjekt, d.h. als vernunftbestimmter Wille begehrt, auch noch will. Und genau dieser Abstand ist auch jenes Moment, das die Zusammensetzung des praktischen Subjekts möglich macht, d.h. die disjunktive Synthese des reinen, vernunftbestimmten Willens und seiner praktischen Realität. Das praktische Subjekt ist also der Akt, in dem ein empirisches Individuum eine minimale, nichtige Distanz zu jenem Punkt herstellt, in dem es selbst als Subjekt existiert – die Aufgabe einer weiteren Begriffsbestimmung des subjektivierenden Handelns wäre es nachzuweisen, dass dieser Akt die Struktur eines reflektierenden Urteils hat.

## **NOTHING ON THE COUCH**



## LACAN AND BADIOU: LOGIC OF THE *PAS-TOUT*

Russell Grigg

Logically, nothing is a universal: “Nothing is permanent” is equivalent to “Everything is non-permanent”. This raises the question whether there is a logic of nothing that escapes the universal and remains on the side of incompleteness. The question has an important link with psychoanalysis, at least since Lacan, because of its centrality to the topic of sexuality, and female sexuality in particular.

The logic of the nothing that is non-universalizable is precisely the logic of Lacan’s “*pas-tout*”, which Lacan explores principally in *Seminar XX, Encore* (1972–1973) and in “Étourdit” (1973) in the form of the four formulas of sexuation.<sup>1</sup>

$(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$	$\sim(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$
$(\forall x)\Phi x$	$\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$

The *pas-tout* is expressed by the formula on the lower right-hand side,  $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$ . As is well known, the *pas-tout* corresponds to the negative particular statement of Aristotelian logic, variously expressed as “Some As are non-B”, “Not all As are B”, or “Not every A is B”, all of which are logically equivalent. It also, in some way, corresponds to the formula of predicate calculus,  $\sim(\forall x)(Gx \rightarrow Hx)$ .

The difference between Lacan’s formulas and the formulas of the predicate calculus, below,

Lacan’s formulas	Predicate calculus
$(\forall x)\Phi x$	$(\forall x)(Gx \rightarrow Hx)$
$(\exists x)\Phi x$	$(\exists x)(Gx \& Hx)$

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<sup>1</sup> *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, Norton, New York 1975; “L’Étourdit”, *Scilicet*, Paris, no. 4 (1973), pp. 5–52. I have changed the symbols to ones easier to print; this alters nothing since the formal relations between the expressions remain the same.

is that in Lacan's formulas the variable,  $x$ , ranges over only those things that fall under  $\Phi$  (i.e. speaking beings), whereas the formulas of the predicate calculus are formulated in such a way that the variables,  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$ , etc., range over everything.

### “Pas-tout” in English

I shall take Lacan's own approach at face value and address the *pas-tout* as a conceptual or logical category, without assuming any direct link with sexuality. While it is true that Lacan introduces “*pas-tout*” in reference to female sexuality, it is not used only with that reference in mind. The *pas-tout* is a logical category, invented by Lacan, that is best taken as a formulation of a non-universalizable nothing. If we do this then we see, first, that the *pas-tout*, and thus the formulas of sexuation in general, have no intrinsic link with the field of sexuality but are independent of it. This is the radical novelty of the approach; the formulas tell us something about the nature of sexuality precisely because they do not attempt to say what sexuality is. This is why, and this is the second point, they can legitimately be applied to different fields. There are numerous examples of this: see, for instance, the use to which Jean-Claude Milner puts it in *L'Amour de la langue* and *Les penchants criminels de l'Europe démocratique*, where his use of the *pas-tout* is central to a study of the incompleteness of language, on the one hand, and of social organization on the other.<sup>2</sup>

Given the importance of the logic of the *pas-tout*, it becomes imperative to examine this logic in and for itself, and this is what I propose to do here. This is not such an easy task, because the logic is not conventional and because, as Alain Badiou points out, it gives the appearance of being rather confused.

First, though, some comment is called for on the actual term itself, “*pas-tout*”, for which I retain the French because not only is it frequently mistranslated into English but also there is an underlying ambiguity in the term in French which is exploited by Lacan but which cannot be retained in English. The term is sometimes translated into English as “not-all”, this being the most obvious rendering, as is the case in *Television*.<sup>3</sup> Most of the commentaries do the same. The respected translator Bruce Fink, in his rendition of *Seminar XX*, prefers “not-whole”, while some authors alternate between the two, often

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<sup>2</sup> *L'Amour de la langue*, Seuil, Paris 1978; *Les penchants criminels de l'Europe démocratique*, Verdier, Paris 2003.

<sup>3</sup> J. Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, Norton, New York 1990, p. 40.

without explanation. And, as if this weren't enough confusion, a rendering that retains the Aristotelian link ought to encompass "not every", given the negative particular that has the form of "Not every A is B".

While I agree with Fink that his choice most accurately captures Lacan's use of the term, I don't believe that he sufficiently justifies it when he says that in speaking in terms of "*quanteurs*" rather than "*quantificateurs*", or quantifiers, Lacan is indicating that his concern is not with quantity or quantification.<sup>4</sup> In *The Lacanian Subject* Fink renders "*pas-tout*" as "not the whole of" or "not all of", which he justifies on the same grounds – we are not dealing with quantifiers but with something different. Yes, I agree that Lacan *is* saying something different – and I will explain just what this is – but I also think the reference to quantification theory as well should not be neglected.

Thus what is not explained by saying that "*quanteurs*" are not quantifiers is this: if we are not dealing with quantification, then what *are* we dealing with? Also, the link to Aristotelian logic and its treatment of quantification, which is explicitly made by Lacan, becomes mysterious, as is the point that we are first and foremost dealing with a logical issue and only secondarily with one of sexuation.

It would appear then that the issue of translation cannot be solved simply by adopting "not-all", or indeed by adopting any other single term or phrase, as the English equivalent. This is a difficulty that is further compounded by the fact that the entire series of English terms dealing with quantification – "all", "each", "some", "any", "no", etc. – behave in slightly but significantly different ways from the corresponding French terms – "*tout*", "*tous*", "*chaque*", "*aucun*", "*nul*", "*quelque*", "*quelques*".

Furthermore, I think Lacan uses the terms "*pas-tout*" in *both* the partitive ("Not all of  $x$  is  $\Phi$ .) *and* distributive ("No  $x$  is  $\Phi$ ") senses. This has been a source of confusion for English-language readers because while "*pas-tout*" can be used in both senses in French, there has never been any proper explanation of why no single term in English will do. So much for the issues of translation. Let us now move on to a more substantive question.

### *Badiou's critique of the pas-tout*

Alain Badiou is critical of Lacan's theory of the *pas-tout* on two counts.<sup>5</sup> He argues that Lacan is confused over his use of mathematics and logic and he accuses him of being "pre-Cantorian" in his conception of the infinite.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 & 72.

<sup>5</sup> See his "Sujet et Infini", in: *Conditions*, Seuil, Paris 1992, pp. 287–305.

The first critique arises out of his criticism of the manner in which Lacan justifies the lack of logical equivalence, affirmed by both Aristotelian logic and modern predicate calculus, between “ $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$ ” and “ $(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$ ”. Now, as Badiou points out, since castration,  $\Phi$ , is supposedly universal, there can be no  $x$  whose access to jouissance assumes that not  $\Phi x$ , that is, it has to be false that  $(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$ . How, then, does the Lacanian  $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$  avoid the logical implication that  $(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$ ? Lacan’s explanation of how, quoted by Badiou, is set out in this lengthy passage.

In [Aristotelian] logic, on the basis of the fact that one can write ‘not-every (*pas-tout*)  $x$  is inscribed in  $\Phi x$ ,’ one deduces by way of implication that there is an  $x$  that contradicts it. But that is true on one sole condition, which is that, in the whole (*tout*) or the not-whole (*pas-tout*) in question, we are dealing with the finite. Regarding that which is finite, there is not simply an implication but a strict equivalence. It is enough for there to be one that contradicts the universalizing formula for us to abolish that formula and transform it into a particular. This *pas-tout* becomes the equivalent of that which, in Aristotelian logic, is enunciated on the basis of the particular. There is an exception. But we could, on the contrary, be dealing with the infinite. Then it is no longer from the perspective of extension that we must take up the *pas-toute*. When I say that woman is *pas-toute* and that that is why I cannot say Woman, it is precisely because I raise the question (*je mets en question*) of a jouissance that, with respect to everything that can be used in the function  $\Phi x$ , is in the realm of the infinite.

Now, as soon as you are dealing with an infinite set, you cannot posit that the *pas-tout* implies the existence of something that is produced on the basis of a negation or contradiction. You can, at a pinch, posit it as an indeterminate existence. But, as we know from the extension of mathematical logic which is qualified as intuitionist, to posit a ‘there exists,’ one must also be able to construct it, that is, know how to find where that existence is.<sup>6</sup>

Badiou’s criticism of Lacan is that his solution to this problem adopts two inconsistent lines of argument which he confuses. Following the first line, Lacan argues that the underlying logic is not classical but a variant of

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<sup>6</sup> *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, pp. 102–03. Translation slightly modified.



intuitionist logic. The second appeals to Cantor's set theory and introduces what Lacan describes elsewhere as the "abyss" of the actual, or completed, infinite. The immediate and obvious objection is that he appeals both to intuitionism, which rejects the actual infinite, and to Cantor whose work presupposes it.

I grant that Lacan is grasping, sometimes tentatively, for some way of formulating in logic something about the *pas-tout* and its essential incompleteness, and that this has to do with the infinite. But Badiou illegitimately attributes a Cantorian conception of the infinite, the *actual* infinite, to Lacan in his treatment of the logic of the *pas-tout* at this point. The logic of the *pas-tout* has to do with the infinite; Lacan says as much. But it is unwarranted to ascribe to him the view that this infinite is actual; in fact, the whole point is that the *pas-tout* can only function with an indeterminate or incomplete series, not an actual infinite one.

Badiou points out that there is something else going on in the above passage, however, and that this apparent "contradiction" (which is in fact not one, as I have just pointed out) can be resolved. He correctly emphasizes Lacan's point that  $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$  is not to be taken "in extension". What Lacan means here can be explained with the help of a mundane example. "Apples are not all red" can mean i/ not every apple is red, or ii/ no apple is completely red. The first meaning is the interpretation "in extension" and implies that some apples are not red, or  $(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$ . On the other hand, the second, ii/, does not imply that there are non-red apples, that  $(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$ , but only that no apple is entirely red, that is, that there is at least one  $x$  that does not come entirely under  $\Phi$ . This is the sense in which Lacan's  $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$  is to be taken: no woman comes entirely under the phallic function. Badiou glosses this by saying, a little obscurely, that not all  $x$  "support" the  $\Phi$  from the position of all, and that the formula thus indicates a "breaching" of the  $\Phi$  function.

The essential logical point is that henceforth one cannot deduce a negative existential affirmation from the (apparent) negation of the universal in the form of the *pas-tout*. It is not true that ' $(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$ ' follows from ' $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$ '.<sup>7</sup>

So far so good. But Badiou is unhappy with Lacan's appeal to intuitionism. In pure logic, Badiou says, intuitionism amounts to a limitation of the powers of negation. It rejects

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<sup>7</sup> "Sujet et Infini", p. 291.

- the principle of the excluded middle, i.e., that either  $p$  or  $\sim p$ ;
- the equivalence between a double negation and affirmation, i.e., that  $\sim\sim p$  is equivalent to  $p$ ; and
- that the negation of a universal,  $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$ , is equivalent to the affirmation of a negative existential,  $(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$ . In this respect, “intuitionism coincides perfectly with Lacan’s wish”.<sup>8</sup>

And why is it such a crime to be an intuitionist? Badiou considers that the fundamental reason intuitionists reject the above principles is their Canute-like reluctance to accept one of the most magnificent achievements of modern mathematics, the actual infinite, which they consider to be the effect of an uncontrolled and not clearly conceptualized negation of the finite. Intuitionists also reject the *reductio* argument, a form of reasoning where to prove that  $p$  one assumes that  $\sim p$  and then demonstrates that this leads to a contradiction;  $\sim\sim p$ , therefore  $p$ . Of course, refusing to accept that a double negation is equivalent to an affirmative entails the abandonment of *reductio* arguments, but this is not the main reason for rejecting that a double negation is equivalent to an affirmative. The main reason is that the intuitionist wants to reject the *reductio* argument because, being an indirect proof, it does not offer a direct proof of  $p$ , but merely proceeds by way of demonstrating that something else is false.

Badiou also argues that Lacan is otherwise unsympathetic to the intuitionist program, since elsewhere he has no objection to using a *reductio* argument, and, moreover, he explicitly appeals to the existence of an actual infinite, which can only be proved by means of techniques rejected by intuitionists. This leads him to conclude that the appeal to intuitionist logic in *Encore* is opportunistic, since he is happy to appeal to it in support of his argument, but is otherwise unwilling to comply with the intuitionist’s austere program.

### *Response to Badiou*

My response will consist of showing that Lacan can both be intuitionist about mathematics – or rather, not so much intuitionist as “constructivist” – and dump intuitionism as too “restrictive” as concerns logic.

Badiou is a little too hasty in his rejection of intuitionism. And he is thus a little too hasty in his criticism of Lacan. Badiou is a realist about mathematics and, while the extent and nature of his realism is a complex issue because

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

he cannot be described as a straightforward Platonist about mathematical objects, his opposition to intuitionism is clear, categorical and constant.<sup>9</sup> It is his realism, along with his conviction that set-theory is ontology, that leads him to so strongly oppose intuitionism, designed as it is to perniciously limit one to a pre-Cantorian universe.

I would like to show why the rejection of all things intuitionist is quite possibly a mistake. First, it is possible to go intuitionist about mathematics but be quite conventional about logic, as more than one philosopher has done. Quine, for instance, claims:

One can practice and even preach a very considerable degree of constructivism without adopting intuitionist logic. Weyl's constructive set theory is nearly as old as Brouwer's intuitionism, and it uses orthodox logic; it goes constructivist only in its axioms of existence of sets . . . Constructivist scruples can be reconciled with the convenience and beauty of classical logic.<sup>10</sup>

Why one would want to adopt this line is that there are competing constructions of set-theory, but not, or not so obviously, of classical logic, and so it would be nice to be able to see set theory as a construction without the consequences of doing so filtering all the way down into logic itself. What this does is make it apparent that Badiou's anti-intuitionist stance is a little misplaced, since, I suggest, Badiou's *real* debate is actually with constructivist views of mathematics, and this is a philosophical rather than a mathematical debate. Thus both Badiou and the constructivist can agree on the existence of an actual infinite, and disagree over the nature, not just of the actual infinite, but of *all* mathematical objects.

Note that Quine's "constructivism" is not acceptable to the intuitionist (any more than it is to Badiou, for that matter) because the intuitionist, for whom mathematics is more fundamental than logic, considers that one would be rejecting what is primary and retaining what is secondary. In any case, the consequence of cleaving logical intuitionism off from mathematical "constructivism" is of course that the logical operations Badiou refers to as being unacceptable to the intuitionist – the law of the excluded middle, etc – need not be abandoned by the mathematical constructivist: one can

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<sup>9</sup> He declares his Platonism in "Platonisme en mathématiques", *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire, Seuil*, Paris 1998, pp. 95–109. On Badiou's anti-intuitionism and his realism, see the sensitive and informed treatment by Oliver Feltham, *Of Ontology, Praxis and Functional Work*, PhD, Deakin University 2000, spec. pp. 108–15.

<sup>10</sup> W. V. O. Quine, *Philosophy of Logic*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1970, p. 88.

be constructivist about mathematical objects even as one adheres to classical logic. This then leaves Lacan free *both* to accept these principles *and*, on other grounds, to abandon the logical equivalence

$$\sim(\forall x)\Phi x \quad \longleftrightarrow \quad (\exists x)\sim\Phi x$$

The intuitionists were historically motivated by their opposition to Cantor, it is true, but there are other grounds for being anti-Platonist, or for being “constructivist”, about mathematics. Crispin Wright’s work on Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mathematics is outstanding in this regard.<sup>11</sup> There is also Michael Dummett who reasons that the realist about mathematics operates with a notion of truth and falsity for mathematical statements that is independent of our means for recognizing their truth value.<sup>12</sup> The realist view makes the intuitively compelling assumption that, say, Goldbach’s conjecture, which asserts that every even number larger than two is the sum of two primes, is either true or false; and this is so whether it can be proved or not. This is what is intuitively compelling about the Platonist position: there is a fact of the matter independent of whether we have demonstrated it, and the mathematical proof is like a discovery of something that is already there. If Goldbach’s Conjecture is true but cannot be proved, or has not been proved, then it follows that there is a mathematical reality independent of our capacity to know it. Now, Dummett claims that the assumption that what makes a mathematical proposition true is some mathematical fact or state of affairs to which it corresponds is false. As a matter of fact, it is not difficult to think of many true sentences for which there is nothing by virtue of which they are true. Consider the sentence: “There will never be another Napoleon”, which no fact makes true. If this is so, then there are no grounds simply to assume that what makes a mathematical statement true is a mathematical state of affairs; it would be wrong just to assume that mathematical realism is true.

What the above discussion implies is that on reflection we can draw a distinction between intuitionism and constructivism, and contrast realism not with intuitionism but with constructivism. It is now more apparent that Lacan should be considered a constructivist, and to maintain that when in *Encore* he appeals to intuitionism, whereas elsewhere he demonstrates a rejection of its

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<sup>11</sup> Crispin Wright, *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Duckworth, London 1980; see also his *Frege’s Conception of Numbers as Objects*, Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen 1983.

<sup>12</sup> See his “Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mathematics”, in: *Truth and Other Enigmas*, Duckworth, London 1978; and *Elements of Intuitionism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1977.

methodological strictures, it is because he is a constructivist about mathematics and not intuitionist about logic.

Badiou quotes Lacan saying, “Mathematical formalization is our goal, our ideal”,<sup>13</sup> as evidence for the view that Lacan is not intuitionist; but if what I am saying is correct, it is evidence that Lacan is constructivist – this, I think, could be the only reason for such a remark – that is, Lacan can remain constructivist about mathematics while still not embracing the “prohibitions” of intuitionism.

Moreover, I think that to consider Lacan a constructivist is right on other grounds as well. And if I insist on this distinction between intuitionism and constructivism, it is because I think that Lacan is constructivist about mathematics, and for reasons that are importantly related to what he elaborates concerning the formulas of sexualization.

It is true that Lacan commits himself to the view that  $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$  does not imply that  $(\exists x)\sim\Phi x$ , and appeals to intuitionist logic in support; that is, he endorses one of the “prohibitions” of intuitionism. And it has to be acknowledged that in his use of the “*pas-tout*” Lacan thinks that intuitionism provides support. But this is a long cry from accepting the other strictures of intuitionism, as ascribed to him by Badiou.

### *Aristotle and the pas-tout*

This brings us to what has been left out of the discussion so far and yet which must, somehow, be fundamental to the discussion: Aristotelian logic and predicate calculus. A careful analysis of the relationship of Lacan’s *pas-tout* with Aristotelian logic reveals the correctness of the above interpretation of what Lacan means when he declares that  $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$  is not to be taken “in extension”. I will now show why.

Aristotle distinguished between three forms of statement that affirm a predicate of a subject: the singular, the universal and the particular.<sup>14</sup> Leaving the singular to one side, combining negation and affirmation with the universal and the particular produces statements of four logically different forms: universal affirmative, universal negative, particular affirmative and particular negative.

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<sup>13</sup> *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 119.

<sup>14</sup> The substance of Aristotle’s logic is found in his two works, *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics*. The first contains the analysis of argument in the form of the syllogism, Aristotle’s most important contribution to logic, which is under discussion here.

There is no straightforward correlation between the universal and existential quantifiers of Aristotelian formal logic and the terms that express quantification in natural languages. This fact becomes particularly relevant when language refers to nothing, as we shall see, for the behaviour of natural language and the intuitions of its speakers diverge from the structure of formal languages.

This contrast between the grammar of natural language and Aristotelian logic underlies a discussion of the particular in Aristotle in a work by Jacques Brunschwig that had a great impact on Lacan's theory of the *pas-tout*.<sup>15</sup> Brunschwig argues that Aristotle came to realize that he had initially been misled by the workings of natural language, and that this led to an internal problem. Aristotle eventually devised a consistent logic, but it is one in which certain intuitions implicit in natural language have been disallowed, specially in relation to particular statements.

The matter that caused problems for Aristotle, which Brunschwig analyses, is one that the particular statement produces in natural language; namely, the usual meaning of the particular leads to three mutually inconsistent propositions, as can be seen in the following three intuitively obvious assumptions:

1. The particular and the universal of opposite "quality" (i.e., where one is affirmative and the other negative) are contradictory. Ordinary usage thus treats the following as axiomatic:

All As are B       $\longleftrightarrow$        $\sim$ Some As are not B

2. A particular statement is implied by its subalternant:

All As are B       $\rightarrow$       Some As are B

As Brunschwig points out, ordinary usage is somewhat divided on this point. If I say to you that some (a lot, many) As are B, without knowing that all are, you could reply in either of two ways: *either* with the remark, "Actually, what you say is not wrong, because in fact all As are B", *or* with the comment, "No, no, it's not just *some* As that are B; *all* As are B." My own view is that natural language is not so equivocal on this point since in the second scenario one could come back with the rejoinder that since all As are B, it must be the case *a fortiori* that *some* As are B. Now, if one accepts this, then one accepts that "All As are B" implies "Some As are B".

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<sup>15</sup> "La proposition particulière et les preuves de non-concluanace chez Aristote", *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, 10 (1969), pp. 3–26.

3. The two particular statements imply one another. Ordinarily, the statement “Some As are B” would be true in circumstances in which “Some As are not B” is equally true. If, for instance, I make the claim, “Some cats are black”, this would seem to imply that there are also cats that are non-black.

Some As are B  $\leftrightarrow$  Some As are not B

The problem with these three formal relations is that they are mutually inconsistent, as is easily shown. From “All As are B” it follows both (by 1) that it is false that some As are not B, and (by 2 and 3) that some As are not B, which is a contradiction. The contradiction can only be avoided by rejecting one of the above natural language axioms, 1, 2 or 3.

Rejecting axiom 3, the equivalence of the two particular statements, would produce the classical Aristotelian square of oppositions. The contradiction between “All As are B” and “No A is not B”, remains, as do the relations of subalternation between “All As are B” and “Some As are B” and between “No As are B” and “Some As are not B”. The equivalence of the two particular statements, “Some As are B” and “Some As are not B”, becomes one of subcontraries, or compatibility, where both may be true together but not false. The particular “Some As are B” thus becomes interpreted as saying, “At least one A is B”, where it is not excluded that all are. Brunschwig calls this interpretation of “Some As are B” and “Some As are not B” where *it is not excluded that all As are (not) B* the “minimal particular”.

If on the other hand we reject axiom 2 and retain axioms 1 and 3, we obtain a system in which the two particulars imply one another. If one wishes to maintain as contradictories “All As are B” and “Some As are not B”, and “No As are B” and “Some As are B”, then one is obliged to allow, paradoxically, both that each of the particulars is contradictory with the universal of the same quality and that each is still the contradictory of the universal of the opposite quality. In effect, both universals must contradict both particulars, since the latter are equivalent. And, moreover, the two universals must be equivalent because they are contradictories of equivalent propositions.

The particular statement “Some As are B” becomes “At least and at most some As are B”, and “No As are B” becomes “At least and at most some As are not B”. That is, if it is true that “not all As are B”, then it is false that *no* As are B and equally false that *all* As are not B; there is no universal, whether affirmative or negative, that is true of As and B. Brunschwig calls this the “maximal particular”.

*The “maximal particular” as source of the pas-tout*

J.-A. Miller holds that this maximal particular is the origin of Lacan’s *pas-tout*.<sup>16</sup> This means, then, that  $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$  implies not only that  $(\forall x)\Phi x$  is false but also that  $(\forall x)\sim\Phi x$  is as well. On consideration, it is obvious that this implies that the “quanteurs” are not to be taken in extension and that the only possible way to understand the maximal reading of “ $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$ ” is as “Not all of  $x$  is  $\Phi$ ”.

Miller further claims, incorrectly I believe, that Lacan’s *pas-tout* differs from Aristotelian quantification in another respect, which is that the universe of discourse in Aristotelian logic is finite, with the consequence that, irrespective of whether the *pas-tout* is interpreted as maximal or minimal, it is concerned with lack and incompleteness. He adds that because the Lacanian *pas-tout* assumes an infinite universe, and because it is constructed on the intuitionist model of a sequence of choice, it is impossible to state the universality of the predicate. If the law by which the series, all  $A$ s are  $B$ , is defined is not stated at the outset, it will be impossible, no matter how many  $A$ s have been shown to be  $B$ , even without ever having found an  $A$  that is not  $B$ , to draw a conclusion about all. The sequence is “lawless”, which is an attribute of the Lacanian real.<sup>17</sup>

The claim that the universe of discourse of Aristotelian logic is finite while Lacan’s *pas-tout* assumes an infinite universe of discourse is, I believe, incorrect because Aristotelian logic holds of finite and infinite universes equally well; it makes no difference to the *logical* relations between the statements whether they refer to a finite or an infinite number of things. It makes a difference if the universe is empty. But from all  $A$ s are  $B$ s, it follows that no  $A$ s are non- $B$ , whether there is a finite or infinite number of  $A$ s.

Perhaps Miller’s point can be made in a different way, one that brings us back to the intuitionism / constructivism distinction. The quantifiers, “ $\forall$ ” and “ $\exists$ ”, make it possible to refer to an infinite number of objects, and hence to a totality – but on the proviso that it is possible to characterize, by way of a predicate, all members of the class. For instance, “ $(\forall x) [(x>1)\rightarrow(x>0)]$ ”, that is, “If a number is greater than 1 then it is greater than zero”, is true of an infinite number of cases because the class of numbers is infinite. However, if there is *no* way to define the members of an infinitely large class, then the truth of the statement cannot be established. Because the class is infinitely

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<sup>16</sup>Jacques-Alain Miller, “Notice de fil en aiguille”, in: Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII, Le sinthome 1975–1976*, Seuil, Paris 2005, pp. 207–8.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 208.



large, enumeration of cases cannot exhaust them all; and because there is no suitable predicate they cannot be referred to as a totality.

Again, we can see how the question of actual infinity is irrelevant to the issue, since the issue is merely one of the impossibility of defining a *potential* infinity (and of course the impossibility of enumerating an infinite number of cases).

Badiou's criticisms of Lacan seem misplaced, then, and to my mind result from his realist views about mathematics and unnecessary reference to the concept of an actual infinite.

There is one further issue that I should signal, which unfortunately I cannot go into here. A moment's reflection is enough to see that the reference to the enumeration of cases, that is, to the impossibility of doing so in the case of  $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x$ , implicitly means taking the formula "in extension": not a, not b, not c, ... In other words, there are two readings of the *pas-tout* which, one suspects, are a real source of confusion in the glosses on Lacan. How this impacts upon the logic of the *pas-tout* is another matter.



## NOTHING IS NOT ALWAYS NO-ONE: (a)VOIDING LOVE

Adrian Johnston

### *Introduction*

What is it that one loves in another when one can truly speak of love? Furthermore, what does speaking have to do with the amorous? When it comes to love, Jacques Lacan says a lot of things. In his tenth seminar on anxiety, Lacan asserts that, “*l’amour est la sublimation du désir*.”<sup>1</sup> During the ensuing discussion of this assertion, he mentions La Rochefoucauld’s 136<sup>th</sup> maxim: “Some people would never have fallen in love if they had never heard of love.”<sup>2</sup> Lacan consistently maintains that nothingness/negativity is introduced into human reality via signifiers, through the symbolic order’s capacity to put phenomenally absent, lacking, non-instantiated elements into circulation within the field of the *parlêtre*’s mediated experience. Similarly, love, in Lacanian thought, is often described (in marked contrast to desire) as linked to an indeterminate *je ne sais quoi* in the beloved Other, to the void of an un-specifiable “x” that eludes being captured in a catalogue of determinate empirical attributes, characteristics, qualities, and so on (i.e., features of the other as an object bearing marks or traits responsible for igniting the emergence of desire – what one could call “libidinal predicates”).

So, if desire and love are to be contrasted in this manner – desire remains tied to the little-o other as a “thing” *qua* bundle of determinate attributes, whereas love is directed toward the Other as a “no-thing” *qua* indeterminate “x” – then, if love is indeed the sublimation of desire, how, exactly, does love arise from desire? How is a desired object elevated to the status of a beloved void? Is it even possible to develop an account according to which the height of the amorous immanently emerges out of the depth of the libidinal?

<sup>1</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire X: L’angoisse, 1962–1963*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2004, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*, Penguin Books, New York 1959, p. 54 (*M*).

Several years prior to the above definition of love as the sublimation of desire, Lacan, in his well-known commentaries on courtly love poetry, observes that these literary productions tend to dehumanize their addressees. The figure of “the Lady” in such poetry is an inhuman structural position, a prearranged place into which flesh-and-blood women are deposited. In other words, this figure marks the clearing of a vacancy, a space hollowed out by signifiers, whose occupant, by virtue of inhabiting this vacant space, is (at least temporarily) “raised to the dignity of the Thing.”<sup>3</sup> The Lady’s position is characterized as totally depersonalizing.

Thus, one might justifiably ask: Is courtly love poetry even really about love, or is this an unfortunate misnomer? If genuine, true love is inextricably intertwined with the non-empirical nothing(ness) of a void (i.e., the “x” of a certain *je ne sais quoi* in the recipient of one’s amorous passions), isn’t there then a difference between a dehumanized, impersonal void and another sort of void, one that is utterly specific and unique – more precisely, the beloved Other as an irreplaceable non-object? Posing the question at a greater level of philosophical generality, must a void be, in essence, anonymous and faceless? Can there be a (rather than the) void, namely, an absolutely singular no-thing, a purely particular incarnation of nothingness? If nothing else, love points to this possibility: One, the beloved Other is different from the other reduced to the status of a desired object – that is, the beloved Other is loved not for his/her positive attributes and qualities, for his/her manifest libidinal predicates; Two, the beloved Other, although the void/no-thing of a non-object in relation to the libidinal predicates displayed by desired objects, is nevertheless distinct to the point of uniqueness – put differently, no two beloved Others are equivalent; Three, voids, consequently, can manifest themselves in an absolutely singular fashion, more specifically, as the no-thing of the beloved Other *qua* “x” transcending the determinate marks and traits usually governing the vicissitudes of the libidinal economy, an economy that tends to operate on the basis of substitution and replacement, on iterability. There are indiscernible differences distinguishing beloved Others, despite one’s inability to specify, within a language relying upon the identification of delineable predicates, precisely what these differences are between distinct loved partners. The broadest philosophical upshot here is hence that at least two separate types of void need to be pinpointed: the void as an asubjective ontological notion versus a void (or, voids in the plural) as a unique instance of an “x” eluding capture within a catalogue of determinate empirical attributes. There are fungible and non-fungible voids.

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<sup>3</sup> Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York 1992, p. 112.

Conceptualizations of alterity are also affected by a consideration of the intimate rapport between love and nothingness: in particular, the Freudian-Lacanian thematic of the Real Other, of the *Nebenmensch* (neighbor) as *das Ding*. Lacan's Other-Thing is often characterized as being horrible, monstrous, and terrifying, an overwhelming abyss that draws the subject into it but, nonetheless, mustn't be approached too closely. This Real of the *Nebenmensch*, the unfathomable vortex of the Other, must be tamed and domesticated at all costs through incorporation into the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, lent a reassuringly human face through inscription into the familiar fabric of reality. And yet, at the same time, this unknowable, mysterious Otherness is involved in love as well. Maybe there are two sides to this coin, two faces of the Real Other: On the one hand, the Real Other can be encountered as unbearably frightening, as an ominous, threatening enigma; On the other hand, the Real Other can be encountered as an unspeakably cherished ineffability, an incredibly intimate familiarity defying representational mediation. Succinctly stated, the status of the Real Other *qua das Ding* is radically ambiguous. This alterity can be repulsive or alluring, hated or loved, fought or fucked. The position the subject cannot maintain with respect to it is one of safe, tepid indifference, a risk-free aloofness. Maybe this is one of the reasons why Lacan warns, "There is nothing more dangerous than approaching a void."<sup>4</sup>

*Part one: Love is not without its lust*

In his *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou proclaims that, "In the order of love, of the thinking of what it conveys with respect to truths, the work of Jacques Lacan constitutes an event."<sup>5</sup> Several pages later, at the end of the sequence of remarks explicating this proclamation, he concludes by insisting that, "the anti-philosopher Lacan is a condition of the renaissance of philosophy. A philosophy is possible today, only if it is compossible with Lacan."<sup>6</sup> Coming from Badiou, this is high praise indeed. Philosophy itself, as depicted in the Badiouian portrait of it, doesn't produce truths as an independent intellectual discipline. Instead, the truths it thinks through come to it from else-

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<sup>4</sup> Lacan, *Seminar III: The Psychoses, 1955–1956*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York 1993, p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1999, p. 81 (MP).

<sup>6</sup> MP, p. 84.

where, from separate domains of truth-production that “condition” it (i.e., the “generic procedures” of art, science, politics, and love). Philosophy’s task is to grasp how the current constellations of artistic, scientific, political, and amorous truths are “compossible.” Thus, whatever truth about love Lacan discloses is a disclosure that demands to be included in anything that could be dignified today by the title Philosophy.

However, a few years later, Badiou qualifies this praise. He contends that Lacan flirts with a problematic view of love linked to “a pessimistic tradition of French moralists,” a perspective according to which “love is merely an ornamental semblance through which passes the real of sex.”<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly, one of those pessimistic French moralists Badiou has in mind is La Rochefoucauld. Deeply cynical observations about the underlying nature of amorous passions in human life are peppered throughout La Rochefoucauld’s *Maxims*. This potential proximity between Lacan and someone like La Rochefoucauld is quite troubling for Badiou due to his insistence that the amorous, with its subject(s), isn’t merely epiphenomenal in relation to the carnal desires of the human animal’s sexuality. He treats the distinction between the lust lurking in the sexual individual and the love constituting the amorous subject as corresponding to his fundamental, overarching distinction between being and event respectively.

In attempting to construct a philosophically satisfying vision of love, Badiou seeks to avoid reducing it to either the “One” of a symbiotic fusion that drowns and dissolves the lovers in an undifferentiated ocean or the “Other” of a scenario orchestrated around the domination of an idealized alterity. Desire, as opposed to love, is bound up with the “One,” with a sexuality riveted to the immanence of a stifling corporeal sameness of entangled parts and holes, caught up in the *mélange* of copulation. Furthermore, the Badiouian approach insists that the “Two” of the amorous link is neither a situation in which one of the two is abjectly subjugated to the other as a prostrate, rapt supplicant nor a “couple” *à la* a pair of pre-existent individuals who are combined together to form a new unit through a rudimentary gesture of addition.

Although it might sound as if Badiou clings to a rigid and naïve dichotomy opposing love to lust, he is well aware of the complications involved in pondering the relations between these two notions. He’s no proponent of so-called Platonic love. For Badiou, the amorous is delicately situated between the Scylla of sexual triviality and the Charybdis of desexualized sublimity, be-

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<sup>7</sup> Badiou, “What Is Love?,” *Sexuation*, Duke University Press, Durham 2000, p. 265 (WL).

ing neither one nor the other. Love cannot be grounded exclusively on either sordid fornication or serene friendship.

Badiou's philosophical efforts addressing questions about the bond between the amorous and the sexual directly tackle what makes this bond so slippery, so hard to grasp adequately: The amorous is (to put it in Lacanese) "not without" (*pas sans*) the sexual. Although love cannot be dismissed as an insubstantial illusion deceptively veiling mere lust – there is a real distinction to be recognized between these two – lust is somehow involved in the nuanced, subtle genesis of love's Two. In Badiouian terms, maybe one could say that the sexual furnishes the "evental site" out of which immanently arises, thanks to the chance occurrence of the encounter, the amorous thereafter transcending this sphere of corporeality.

Badiou readily acknowledges that, in relation to love, "the sexual disjunction is simultaneously its material and its obstacle."<sup>8</sup> Sexuality is, at one and the same time, both a facilitator and an inhibitor of the amorous Two of love. Without, as Badiou designates it, the guidance of "the obscure star of the object,"<sup>9</sup> the event of the encounter and the amorous "excess" it generates might not flash across the surface of drab, ordinary reality. But, one must avoid the genetic fallacy of treating love as reducible to lust simply because lust plays a part in sparking the emergence of love. Against (again) "the pessimistic French moralists, who see in love only an empty parade whose sexual desire is the only real,"<sup>10</sup> Badiou proposes a reversal declaring that, "it is love which makes the truth of which sex is capable, and not the inverse."<sup>11</sup>

Unlike these moralists, Badiou distinguishes between the individual and the subject. Just as Lacan tirelessly protests that psychoanalysis is not a branch or sub-category of psychology, so too does Badiou situate his analysis at the level of structures irreducible to empirical investigations into the anthropomorphic individual *qua* psychological creature of nature. Whereas an author such as La Rochefoucauld allegedly focuses on the natural passions animating the all-too-human animal, Badiou seeks to affirm love as, in its essence, something other than this mundane domain of the passions, this realm of impulses and urges.

And yet, is this sweeping dismissal of any and every "psychological" appreciation of the affects associated with the amorous really defensible? Couldn't Badiou's subjectifying process of love, although not itself simply a sentiment

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<sup>8</sup> Badiou, "The Scene of Two," *Lacanian Ink*, no. 21, Spring 2003, p. 45 (ST).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

to be handled by a psychology, also accurately be described as “not without” its proper passionate emotions? If loving feelings have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with love, then what makes the Two-subject between lovers different from, for example, a Two-subject between friends who remain faithful to the fortuitous event of their having met? Isn’t the more interesting question/problem the mystery of how the volatile libidinal-affective ground of the sexual individual internally generates an amorous subjectivity that subsequently comes to achieve an autonomous status irreducible to its lustful origin? Much of Badiou’s work can be read as a plea for the forging of a secular conception of grace. The concept of transubstantiation cries out for a comparable reinvention.

Before returning to Lacan, the issue of whether La Rochefoucauld in particular is guilty of the unromantic cynicism condemned by Badiou merits further investigation. La Rochefoucauld’s 69<sup>th</sup> maxim speaks of “pure love” in a hypothetical mode – “If pure love exists, free from the dross of our other passions, it lies hidden in the depths of our hearts and unknown even to ourselves.”<sup>12</sup> As a hesitantly posed hypothesis, it remains uncertain whether love isn’t just mixed in with and contaminated by a swirl of other less-than-pure emotions and instincts; and, even if such a purified passion exists, people are unable to directly access it due to its concealed, obscured status. But, several of the immediately following maxims affirm that love proper is indeed something real. Both the 74<sup>th</sup> (“There is only one kind of love, but there are a thousand copies, all different”<sup>13</sup>) and 76<sup>th</sup> (“True love is like ghostly apparitions: everybody talks about them but few have ever seen one”<sup>14</sup>) maxims testify to this, although they emphasize the exceptional rarity of the amorous. Nonetheless, it appears that the stipulation of the 69<sup>th</sup> maxim is still in place: This one kind of true love whose existence is conceded by La Rochefoucauld “lies hidden in the depths of our hearts and unknown even to ourselves.”

The topic of “chance” is an important thematic thread running through the *Maxims*. La Rochefoucauld mentions it repeatedly (his basic idea being that individuals’ virtues and vices are dormant potentials buried within their natures, and that these various potentials are summoned to actualize themselves in relation to the unpredictably shifting vicissitudes of their life histories). The 344<sup>th</sup> maxim proposes that, “Like plants, most men have hidden properties that chance alone reveals.”<sup>15</sup> Perhaps one could posit that the “pure love” lying “hidden in the depths of our hearts” spoken of in the 69<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *M*, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.



maxim is just such a “hidden property.” Despite being extraordinarily uncommon, the genuinely amorous can indeed flower into full bloom if eventual chance happens to smile upon individuals in a special manner. Admittedly, the overall tenor connected with the insinuations of La Rochefoucauld’s parallel, cross-resonating reflections on love and chance is a pessimistic one. However, interpreted somewhat against the grain, La Rochefoucauld can be understood as not quite fitting the mold of the cynical, pessimistic French moralist as cast by Badiou. In fact, he seems to believe, like Badiou, that a love irreducible to lust actually does exist – and, moreover, that such love is a precious rarity arising from the grace of events, instead of being an everyday occurrence guaranteed to take place by the failsafe workings of an emotional nature pre-programmed to invariably transubstantiate all human individuals into amorous subjects.

Jacques-Alain Miller’s brief discussion of the role of chance in the genesis of the amorous underscores that love is a complex mixture of contingency and necessity. The event of the encounter prompts love’s emergence only if certain aspects of the object or situation forming part of the encounter fall within a pre-established fantasmatic frame, only if the contingent peg accidentally encountered (*tuché*) happens to fit the necessary hole (*automaton*). One side of this coin, the side revealing what Miller dubs “the *automaton* of love,”<sup>16</sup> is typically identified as representing the sole depiction of “love” formulated by Freudian psychoanalytic thought. Analysis is often viewed as unromantically reducing the amorous passions to the lowly status of overdetermined epiphenomenal residues of repetitive mechanisms at work behind the scenes within the bowels of the libidinal economy. Freud does indeed emphasize (perhaps to the point of overemphasizing) this dimension of humanity’s love life – and, he does so because it had previously been underemphasized. Nonetheless, this doesn’t mean that analysis entirely discounts the possibility of an amorous encounter *qua* Badiouian event, namely, the unforeseen irruption of the New within the domain of desires and sentiments.

The psychoanalytic equation of love with transference epitomizes the risk analysis runs of theoretically foreclosing in advance the potential for the newness of eventual ruptures coming to disrupt libidinal life. However, in the eighth seminar on transference, Lacan hints at the illegitimacy of equivocating between it and love. He explains that transference is something which resembles love (i.e., they aren’t simply the same thing), that transference is capable of setting amorous trajectories in motion from time to time – importantly, this leaves open the possibility that the love generated by the subtle *tuché-au-*

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<sup>16</sup> Miller, “Love’s Labyrinths,” *Lacanian Ink*, no. 8, Spring 1994, p. 8.

*tomaton* dialectic of transferentially falling in love subsequently exceeds/transcends the disposable libidinal ladder of transferential triggers catalyzing its emergence. Lacan suggests that the phenomena grouped under the heading of transference aren't just faithful reproductions of a perpetually returning past subsisting as a frozen, static, and unchanging network of ideational traces; there's a transformative process of creation at play in these phenomena. Maybe a key indication that a person honestly loves another is that this Other actually makes enough of an impact upon the lover that the latter's libidinal template is significantly restructured by this new *rapport*. Additionally, given the nuances of metapsychological models of time, a great deal of space is cleared in the ontogenetic-temporal currents of psychical life for the radical alteration of the forces shaping these currents. How big a difference the little differences constantly creeping into the repetitions punctuating the unfolding of life's libidinal-amorous trajectories can or do make depends on a cluster of thus-far obscure factors and variables. It must be asked: What distinguishes the minor variations of desire from the major breaks of love?

*Part two: Desiring something, loving nothing*

Lacan's gloss on La Rochefoucauld's 136<sup>th</sup> maxim is well suited to serve as a productive point of departure for a philosophical-psychoanalytic highlighting of a few select facets of love. In his 1953 "Rome discourse," he has a suggestion for how to re-read this particular maxim:

To confine ourselves to a more lucid tradition, perhaps we can understand the celebrated maxim by La Rochefoucauld – 'There are people who would never have fallen in love but for hearing love discussed' – not in the romantic sense of a thoroughly imaginary 'realization' of love that would make this remark into a bitter objection, but as an authentic recognition of what love owes to the symbol and of what speech brings with it by way of love.<sup>17</sup>

During the tenth seminar, Lacan alludes to a similar interpretation of this maxim. In the Lacanian view, falling in love as a result of having heard of love isn't some sort of degraded semblance of true love, an artificial imitation of "the real thing" of genuinely amorous passion.

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<sup>17</sup> Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," *Écrits: A Selection*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York 2002, p. 54.

These remarks about La Rochefoucauld from the tenth seminar appear immediately after Lacan's definition of love as the sublimation of desire. Lacanian sublimation is when an object within Imaginary-Symbolic reality is raised to the dignity of the Real Thing, that is, when a flawed and imperfect substitute for a supposedly lost primordial *jouissance* is treated as the very incarnation of this *jouissance*. In short, sublimation is when the libidinal economy somehow allows an inadequate object of *désir* to be the adequate Thing of *jouissance*. This conceptualization of sublimation surfaces as part of a discussion involving the figure of the Lady in courtly love poetry. In the twentieth seminar, Lacan refers to his earlier handling of courtly love in the seventh seminar: He identifies such "love" as "fake," arguing that the transformation of select women within reality into sublime, inaccessible Ladies is "a highly refined way of making up for (*suppléer à*) the absence of the sexual relationship" through "feigning that we are the ones who erect an obstacle thereto."<sup>18</sup> One can therefore conclude that the genuinely amorous isn't to be conceived of as merely a screen raised in order to conceal the underlying inherent lack of a natural bond conjoining sexuated beings. On a couple of contemporaneous occasions, Lacan stipulates that love isn't related to the *rapport sexuel*.

However, elsewhere in the twentieth seminar, Lacan comments that, "What makes up for the sexual relationship is, quite precisely, love."<sup>19</sup> Although it sounds as though he is at risk of contradicting himself – love has nothing to do with the sexual relationship, and yet love compensates for the sexual relationship – the stage has been set here for distinguishing between true love and its all-too-common semblances. The genuinely amorous and the disingenuously pseudo-amorous are each supplements for the non-existence of the *rapport sexuel*. But, the manners in which they supplement this lacking *rapport* are utterly and completely distinct. Courtly love, as an exemplification of the pseudo-amorous, is an ornate, stylized technique for preserving the illusion that a harmonious, symbiotic fusion-union between the sexes is possible, that flawless, perfect incarnations of the retroactively romanticized Real Thing of lost past enjoyment indeed do exist somewhere in present reality. The conventions of courtly love are designed so as to shield this fantasy from falsification, since to approach the Lady too closely would reveal that she is just another woman. Semblances of love are veils employed to conceal the truth that, "*Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel.*" By contrast, the genuinely amorous entails an acceptance of this truth.

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<sup>18</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX: Encore, 1972–1973*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York 1998, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> S., XX, p. 45.

What distinguishes love from its semblances is the mode through which the desiring subject is reflexively positioned with respect to his/her desire (it's crucial to recall Lacan's axiomatic proposition that desire is essentially self-reflexive, a "second order" structural phenomenon always involving questions in the form of, "Do I desire to desire what I desire?"). The pseudo-lover, impatiently and urgently demanding the beloved's love, desires while not desiring this desire, whereas the lover actually desires desire. In this vein, Lacan proposes that love arises out of the conjunction between desire and its necessarily inadequate object, out of the moment when desire chooses to maintain a tie with its object warts and all. An essential aspect of love is that the desired object comes to be desired not only in spite of its shortcomings, despite what it's missing in relation to the whims and wishes of the lover – it comes to be desired precisely because of these shortcomings, insofar as these deficiencies are inseparable from the beloved's absolutely singular and unique status as something more than a simple tangible object of lust, a bundle of libidinal predicates.

In the same session of the tenth seminar where Lacan both describes love as the sublimation of desire and cites La Rochefoucauld, he also proclaims that, "*Seul l'amour permet à la jouissance de condescendre au désir.*"<sup>20</sup> Examining this tangled knot of claims in the tenth seminar through the lens of the preceding analyses permits stating that Lacanian love entails raising *désir* to the dignity of *jouissance*. Expressed differently, love involves the realization that "the real thing" is nothing other than the specific Other that one is enmeshed with in a web of less-than-ideal (relative to desire's impossible fantasmatic standards) libidinal threads – and, the abandonment of these impossible fantasmatic standards is a prerequisite for desire becoming love through ceasing to measure the desired partner with respect to an idealized template of positive libidinal predicates. The fungible desired little-o other thereby becomes the non-fungible beloved Other. But, what does language have to do with this? Why does Lacan tirelessly insist on the crucial contribution of the register of the Symbolic to the dimension of the amorous?

The Lacanian reinterpretation of La Rochefoucauld's 136<sup>th</sup> maxim speculates that falling in love is, for everyone, always and necessarily conditioned by language. This reinterpretation asserts that the amorous is conjured into existence *ex nihilo* thanks to the intervention of the signifiers of the symbolic order. Lacan proposes that love is made in and by language, that one makes love with signifiers. Making sense of this requires returning to some fundamental Lacanian concepts, especially the need-demand-desire triad.

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<sup>20</sup> S., X, p. 209.

Lacan does not believe that what truly deserves to be called “love” is an innate libidinal force or affective tendency hard-wired into the human individual’s natural constitution. The amorous emerges. Ontogenetically speaking, love arises through the passage of “need” into the defiles of “demand.” Humans are born saddled with a variety of different organically determined requirements for living. What’s more, during the first few years of life, they are unable to meet their own needs due to being stuck in a prolonged period of prematurational helplessness. Thus, as Freud underscores, infants and children are made to rely upon those older than them for vital required nurturance; this physiological fact of helplessness predestines human nature to come to be dominated by social nurture. Those adult significant others surrounding the child, forming his/her earliest social environment, instantiate and represent the symbolic order. In order to have their needs taken care of, young human beings are compelled to take up the signifying resources of the adults’ linguistic universe in which they find themselves inserted. Need becomes demand in being expressed by the child to another in and on the other’s terms. However, this signifying deflection of need, the routing of it into the Symbolic register of demand, introduces a set of foreign, extraneous concerns and implications within the realm of life’s material being, the domain of physiological requirements. More specifically, in becoming a demand, a need is no longer satisfied simply through the gratification of it as a basic impulse or urge. The organic body of need is overwritten by the signifiers it’s pushed into embracing in framing demands.

Lacan insists that every demand is ultimately a demand for love. In coming to be articulated as demands, needs and their gratification come to symbolize not only the meeting of rudimentary physiological requirements, but the attention and affection of the others to whom the demands are addressed. Demands point to this dimension of the desires of Others as something stretching beyond the circumscribed sphere of particular forms of satisfaction corresponding to corporeally dictated needs.

Desire, according to its Lacanian definition, is what remains when the gratification of need is subtracted from the demand articulating this same need. There’s a remainder precisely because a demand demands something in excess of the straightforward satisfaction of a particular need. Once introduced into the symbolic order, the human individual’s needs are transformed from vital organic phenomena into litmus tests of his/her status in relation to those significant others responsible for responding to these requirements. Demands go beyond the needs that trigger their emergence insofar as the love of Others is demanded (rather than just the offering of goods or services). In other words, love makes for the difference between need and

demand. An answer has been found here for why Lacan maintains that love exists solely for the *parlêtre* – “*L’amour ... ne se conçoit que dans la perspective de la demande. Il n’y a pas d’amour que pour un être qui peut parler.*”<sup>21</sup>

But, what does it mean to say that every demand is, at root, a demand for love? What is this thing called “love” that the demander demands from those he/she addresses? Time and again, Lacan responds to such queries by asserting that the demand for love aims, beyond all possible satisfactions *qua* gratifications of needs, at the being of the (Real) Other. This raises another question: What, precisely, is the Other’s being at stake in the demand for love? Lacan specifies that the “being” in question is the desire of the Other, the Other’s very capacity for loving as the nucleus of his/her amorous existence.

One of Lacan’s oft-repeated one-liners describes love as being a matter of giving what one does not have. The beloved Other addressed by the demand for love is asked to give his/her desiring being to the demander. However, this is impossible. Individuals don’t possess this aspect of “their” being as a piece of personal property; one doesn’t own one’s “own” libidinal-amorous core. Their desire is neither an object-like entity capable of being gift-wrapped and handed over to another for good nor a dynamic of psychical life operating under conscious ego-level control. This desiring being is closer to being a no-thing, given its ephemeral elusiveness, than a thing (as an entity that can be captured and manipulated). Consequently, in response to the lover’s request to be given love, the beloved is, on a certain level, powerless to adequately respond – “*aimer nécessite toujours de refuser.*”<sup>22</sup> There is nothing the beloved can give, no pleasure or promise, that would truly be equivalent to what is initially demanded in the demand for love.

So, what is elicited as a response instead? Given the impossibility of giving another the gift of one’s desiring being, how can and does the beloved Other answer the lover’s call to love? The sole possible gesture here is to produce signs of love, to repeatedly offer indicators of the amorous being within oneself that falsely purport to be the same as this being itself. Inadequate stand-ins are all that can be extended across the gap between lovers. Lacan names this gap “*l’amur*” – the “love-wall,” the barrier functioning as both the condition of possibility and condition of impossibility for love. Maybe one of the reasons why signs of love continually must be produced in an amorous relationship – a single once-and-for-all declaration of love never suffices – is that no one sign ever amounts to the wholesale transfer of the beloved’s desiring being to the lover. The interminably iterated failure of each and every

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<sup>21</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire VIII: Le transfert, 1960–1961*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2001, p. 418.

<sup>22</sup> S., VIII, p. 419.

amorous indicator produced as a reply to the demand for love leaves a margin of dissatisfaction permanently in place, a margin out of which repeatedly arises yet another demand for ever more signs (“*Encore!*”).

Due to the impossibility of the one addressed by the demand for love satisfactorily responding to this demand by handing over his/her entire desiring being, the beloved resorts to engaging in acts of simulation, acts in which he/she pretends to give the lover what he/she doesn’t have (i.e., his/her “own” libidinal-amorous kernel). The beloved who loves the lover doesn’t tell the truth by honestly saying something like, “My heart is not my own to give” or “I can’t make promises that I’m unable to promise keeping in the future.” Instead, oaths of amorous fidelity are sworn in the face of the absence of any possible meta-level guarantee reassuringly cementing this fidelity in place for all time by freezing the unpredictable flux of desire. In the eighth seminar, Lacan proposes that, “*seuls les menteurs peuvent répondre dignement à l’amour.*”<sup>23</sup> Only liars can respond with dignity to love precisely because what amorous passion demands cannot actually be offered or obtained. Signs of love, produced in such a way as to elide or ignore this desire-arousing impossibility, are beautiful lies, futile phantasms vainly striving to embody a non-exchangeable no-thing.

### *Conclusion*

Near the very end of his teaching, Lacan wonders aloud, “*Pourquoi le désir passe-t-il à l’amour?*”<sup>24</sup> – he concedes that there’s something enigmatic about this transubstantiation-like process. Herein resides love’s miracle: How is it that the genuinely amorous immanently arises out of the quagmire of need, demand, and desire? A passing invocation of the etymology of a certain French word might be of help at this juncture: *le rien*. This word originally derives from the Latin *res*. The etymological transformation of *res* into *rien* literally amounts to turning something into nothing. An analogous transformation must occur in the genesis of the genuinely amorous: Something (i.e., the fungible little-o other *qua* object of desire reducible to its libidinal predicates) must become nothing (i.e., the non-fungible Other *qua* beloved non-object of love irreducible to its libidinal predicates).

Interestingly, the word *rien* features prominently in the genre of courtly love poetry. In the twenty-fourth seminar, Lacan tries to tie together some of these threads:

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>24</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XXV: Le moment de conclure, 1977–1978*, 4/11/78.



*L'amour n'est rien qu'une signification ... Le désir, lui, a un sens, mais l'amour – tel que j'en ai déjà fait état dans mon Séminaire sur l'Éthique, soit tel que l'amour courtois le supporte – l'amour est vide.*<sup>25</sup>

Despite courtly love being an elaborately contrived imitation of the amorous, its figures and themes harbor a grain of truth about true love. The idealized Lady is a particular version of *le rien*. As a structural position, the Lady is a name for a vacant slot in the libidinal matrix of her suitors, a slot into which they drop various mere women as representative substitutes. And, the suitors' desire is sustained insofar as no single woman-object ever quite perfectly fills in for the absent, missing Real Thing. In this arrangement, desire feeds on the gap between form (*das Ding*) and content (*die Sache*). Here, there is no specificity or uniqueness to *le rien*. The void of the Lady-Thing is an inhuman place, an unattainable locus never fully fleshed out by the dehumanized bodies of its temporary empirical occupants. Nonetheless, courtly love poetry confusedly discerns something essential about love: Whereas desire “has a sense” (i.e., like the meaningful Saussurian sign, it possesses a referent to which it's coupled), “*l'amour est vide*” – in other words, love is decoupled from the referents of desire, from signified objects as bundles of libidinal predicates. Courtly love is a distorted rendition of this truth about love's *rappor*t with the nothingness of the void, the distortion being the misrecognition of *le rien du vide* as a formal structure permanently divorced from those beings forcibly placed in relation to this fantasmatic *topos*. The genuinely amorous requires the collapse of the form-content distinction sustaining dissatisfied desire. The void must directly embody itself in a singular incarnation.

Desire becomes love when the demanding desirer's second order desire ceases to be one in which he/she vainly desires the impossible extinguishing of his/her desire itself through the Other at long last offering up its very being and finally filling up the structural vacancy of *das Ding*. Desire per se is accompanied by a meta-desire that doesn't desire to desire, a desire that desires the annihilation of the Real as the inaccessible dimension of alterity. Love, by contrast, is born when this meta-desire moves from discontent to acceptance, from desiring the death of desire to embracing Real Otherness at the level of its unique manifestation in the person of the beloved. The void of this particular Real is constituted by both the peculiar ways in which the singular loved Other fails to be a perfect desired object as well as how he/she negotiates this failure. Additionally, an authentic amorous fidelity establishes a love that en-

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<sup>25</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XXIV: L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre*, 1976–1977, 3/15/77.



dures with a constancy which isn't simply contingent upon changes and variations in the libidinal predicates of the desired little-o other as thingly object; the beloved Other is a no-thing insofar as he/she is loved apart from his/her shifting and unstable set of predicates. The demander of love becomes a true lover when he/she goes from desiring something to loving nothing.

And yet, although desire and love are different from each other, the amorous arises from and always involves the libidinal. Love is not without its lust. A love without desire wouldn't be genuine love as smoldering *eros*, but, instead, a Platonic "love" as temperate *philia*. As Badiou articulates it, "Love passes through desire like a camel through the eye of a needle."<sup>26</sup> The rarity of the genuinely amorous is due precisely to its unavoidable (but often unsuccessful) passage through "the eye of the needle" formed by the other tiers of the libidinal economy. Reduced to desire, love is nothing more than disguised lust. Without desire, love is mere affectionate acquaintance.

By describing the event of love as an "amorous encounter," Badiou is in danger of inadvertently helping to preserve the romantic myth of "love at first sight," an intoxicating-yet-superficial experience that's almost entirely reducible to fantasy-driven transference (and, if a true love does indeed blossom out of such a sudden meeting, it's more in spite of than because of this flashy emotional explosion). The event of love might very well happen much later, long after the heated infatuation of the initial encounter cools. It might not be an abrupt occurrence, but, rather, a gradual transformative transition, a slow coming-to-love that laboriously pulls itself out of the bog of libidinal life in fits and starts. Although many of the questions posed here haven't been satisfactorily answered, progress has been made through pinpointing with greater precision the mysterious, magical moment when desire is transubstantiated into love. Maybe the most opaque aspect of this is the reason why it happens, which perhaps even lovers themselves cannot really say.

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<sup>26</sup> *WL*, p. 274.



## ONE HAND CLAPPING: THE PHONEME AND THE NOTHING

Geoff Boucher

Towards the end of the difficult essay “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” Lacan produces an “unthinkable list” of objects (*a*) that includes, amongst the apparently heteroclitic candidates, “the phoneme, the gaze, the voice – the nothing” (Lacan, 1977: 315). While the gaze and the voice have received extensive critical commentary, the phoneme and the nothing have gone practically unnoticed. This is unfortunate, I suggest, because of the possible confusion (perhaps supported by a careless reading of Seminar XI) between the object (*a*) as an absent cause and the anamorphic object that renders the structural causality of the object (*a*) manifest. By contrast with the gaze and the voice, the phoneme and the nothing cannot be conflated with experiential phenomena, but instead materialise the fundamental function of the object (*a*) as a form of structural causality that is everywhere “present only in its effects” in the Symbolic Order.

Indeed, the apparently descriptive nature of the “voice” and the “gaze” has constituted a temptation to refer these objects to the phenomenological experience of a subject. It is in this light that critics of Lacan, such as for instance Judith Butler, persistently accuse psychoanalysis of preserving an ideal psychic interiority under the rubric of the object (*a*) (Butler, 1993: 67–91; Butler, 1997: 120–129). Butler echoes the deconstructive “standard criticism” of psychoanalysis, that the object (*a*), qua placeholder for the “imaginary phallus,” is a “transcendental signified” that founds the subject in meaning, so that this ideal interiority implies a hidden recourse to the transparent intentionality of the phenomenological subject (Butler, 1993: 76). Additionally, Butler criticises the Lacanian concept of the Real – the castration complex – as a transcendental structure that, as the non-symbolisable ground of the Symbolic Order, operates theoretically as “a truly felicitous instrument of [heteronormative, masculine] power” (Butler, 2000: 147). In other words, at

the centre of the Lacanian system stands the classical subject of representation in its phenomenological acceptance – with all of the hidden ratification of social norms that this implies – only occulted by a so-called “bar resisting signification” that is better thought of as a shield deflecting criticism.

But how can the “cut” be the transhistorical institution of culture, without being a transcendental signified? How can the notion of the subject – unlike the deconstructive “dispersed multiple subject-positions” – avoid the phenomenological resort to a transparent intentionality? And how is the object (*a*) not an ideality founding the identity of the subject? In reply to these questions, I suggest that Butler’s criticisms of psychoanalysis rely on a misunderstanding of the theoretical status of the object (*a*), which is a logically necessary consequence of Lacan’s subversion of scientific linguistics. Because the object (*a*) is not a phenomenological object but a structural “object-cause,” a theoretical object that explains the gap in signification, the nothing and the phoneme (as opposed to the gaze and the voice) are exemplary objects of inquiry. I propose to theoretically construct the object (*a*) by means of an explication of Lacan’s enigmatic allusion to the phoneme and the nothing. I contend that the phoneme is the “ur-form” of the object (*a*), whose ontological status is nothing. As the ur-form of the object (*a*) (both structurally and genetically), the phoneme exemplifies the primary function of the structural causality of the Lacanian Real within the Symbolic Order, namely, the function of the bar resisting signification between signifier and signified. As such, this object is “the least signifying of signifiers, the cut” (Lacan, 1989: 3 June 1959). At the same time, the phoneme functions to enable linguistic reference to the object in desire as the absent cause of signification.

### *Alienation: the nothing*

The “cut” between Symbolic and Real refers us to the Saussurean thesis of the arbitrary character of the sign, which Lacan interprets in terms of the impossibility of any direct reflection of somatic need in the discourse of the speakingbeing. It is the arbitrary character of the sign that introduces a distinction between need and demand: responding to the somatic impulse of a corporeal need, the speakingbeing must articulate its request for satisfaction as a demand to the other, thereby submitting its need to the “defiles of the signifier”. Following Saussure’s celebrated hypothesis of the differential character of the sign, however, the signs employed by the speakingbeing are entirely reducible to their formal properties as a network of differential

marks, lacking positive signification or substance. The structural matrix of the sign therefore slices the “too, too solid flesh” of the speakingbeing into the alternation of presence and absence characteristic of its relational network. Indeed, most radically, the presence of the sign implies the absence of the thing, so that the entry of the speakingbeing into language necessarily involves its mortification/disappearance in the signifying chain. The natural body is divided within the differential network, becoming a signifying corpse that is reduced to the nothingness of insubstantial diacritical relations and animated only by the Symbolic Order. Of course, the ontological status of the subject as “nothing,” a lack of being or “want-to-be,” is by now a commonplace of Lacanian theory, and as the syntax of Lacan’s sentence (above) indicates, the nothing is not merely another item, but the very “substance” of which “the phoneme, the gaze, the voice” are specifications. The major difference between materialist psychoanalysis and idealist deconstruction, however, concerns not the signifying operation, but that for psychoanalysis, this does not happen without remainder. And the really surprising thing is that this remainder is neither a material leftover, a body part excised from the signifying chain, nor a spiritual ideality, a reserve of psychic interiority exempted from the decentring movement of language.

In the entry into language, the speakingbeing loses its “ineffable singular existence” because it lacks a proper signifier. Indeed, the arbitrary character of the sign entails the recognition of the radically auto-referential nature of language, so that any signification only refers to another signification (Lacan, 1977: 150). But Lacan’s subversion of scientific linguistics really begins from his rejection of “the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified” (Lacan, 1977: 150). Breaking the necessary link between signifier and signified involves radicalising Saussure’s hypothesis of value, according to which the diacritical determination of the signification of a term is contextually decided with reference to what a term is not. The alternation of absence and presence in the differential elements of a language implies that the value of a signifier is null taken alone – only by means of a detour through the entire field of signification can the meaning of a term be conferred. But the limit of this process is the determination of the term by means of all of the rest of the signifiers of a language – Saussure’s synchrony – which would finally fix the meaning of the chain of signification and assign to every term its signified. Lacan’s radical proposal is that since the presence of any signifier entails the absence of its opposite, the presence of all of the signifiers – necessary to finally fix the chain – implies the absence of a final signifier. This lacking, phallic signifier “without signified” is “intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified in that the signifier

conditions them by its presence” (Lacan, 1977: 285). So the signifying corpse has something missing – a signifier, not a body part or ideal interiority – and this is the key to the remainder from the signifying operation.

Lacan’s hypothesis of the phallic signifier and the postulate of a bar resisting signification are all corollaries to his thesis of the primacy of the signifier, according to which the signifier does not represent the signified, but only refers to another signifier, in a “signifying chain” that is in principle limitless. Certainly, this is the transhistorical institution of all culture, a “law of culture” or Symbolic Law – for how can there be culture without signification? – but as an “instrument of power” this is surely (to use the terminology of speech act theory) *infelicitous*, since it causes the signifier to misfire. Indeed, the evanescence of meaning (its transitory and provisional character) implied by this line of argument destroys every effort to locate the function of language in the representation of reality or the incarnation of ideality. The absent phallic signifier therefore cannot be the same as the “transcendental signified” that deconstruction critiques. The transcendental signified is a presence that founds the self-identical subject in transparent meaning, whereas, on Lacan’s account, it is precisely the absence of the phallic signifier that enables meaning to provisionally emerge at all. Instead of the transparent subject certain of its self-present intentionality, Lacan’s radical demotivation of the signifier – which is equivalent to the postulate of a bar that resists signification – results in radical semantic uncertainty and the division of the subject. Let us consider these consequences for a moment.

1. For Butler, “the phallus, as a privileged signifier ... appears to control the significations that it produces” (Butler, 1993: 76). For Lacan, by contrast, the lacking phallic signifier creates a “barrier resisting signification, which implies the “incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier” (Lacan, 1977: 149, 154). This fundamental opacity in the signifier-signified relation – the “duplicity” of the signifier – means that the signified is not the foundation of the signification, but its vanishing effect. The signifier, Lacan contends, “always anticipates meaning by unfolding its dimension before it,” forcing us to concede that “... it is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning ‘insists’ but that none of its elements ‘consists’ in the signification of which it is at the moment capable” (Lacan, 1977: 153). Indeed, this semantic uncertainty results in a complex polyvalence, because the connotations of signifiers remain suspended in the possible meaning of every sentence (Fink, 2004: 90–91; Lacan, 1977: 151). The absence of the phallic signifier means that there is no fixed synchronic correspondence between signifier and signified, because the meaning of the chain of signification remains open to the effects of a subsequent punctuation.

2. The Lacanian conclusion is that the entry into language has the effect of the subjective division of the speakingbeing. To see why, consider the transparent and self-identical classical subject for whom reflexive nomination constitutes both self-representation and auto-signification. For the Lacanian subject, by contrast, the shifter “I” refers only to a supplementary chain of signifiers (for instance, “Hamlet the Dane”) that, because the final signifier is lacking, cannot be the final, “proper name” of the speakingbeing. The shifter “I” in the statement designates the subject of the enunciation, but fails to signify it, missing it in the alienated “me” of an imaginary identity (Lacan, 1977: 298). For the Lacanian subject, therefore, naming becomes the problematic site of an inherent impossibility and the very mechanism for the instigation of desire qua lack, or want-to-be.

Perhaps the deconstructionist might reply that Lacan’s theory of the evanescence of signification threatens the volatilization of meaning and a consequence evaporation of reference. Yet, following the logic that led Lacan to posit a phallic signifier, a synchronic order (a context for the determination of the value of the chain of signification) provisionally emerges from diachrony. This happens only on the condition that one element of the signifying chain act as a meaningless element, excepted from the flow of discourse. This is a corollary to the hypothesis of the phallic signifier: the element that enables meaning – the anchoring point – holds the place of the non-signifying absent element. The Lacanian distinction between “signifyingness” [*signifiance*] and signification is critical in this connection, because the anchoring of signifyingness to signification involves the action of the signifier in the subject. While signification describes the emergence of meaning from the signifying chain, signifyingness, the automatism of the operations of language is non-referential and meaningless. The primacy of the signifier implies the separation of connotation and denotation, so that Lacan discusses signifyingness in terms of the rhetorical tropes of metaphor and metonymy (Fink, 2004: 91–101). Lacan’s formula for metonymy indicates the maintenance of the resistance to signification in the diachronic syntagma of the combination of signifiers. The formula for metaphor, by contrast, designates the crossing of the bar resisting signification in the synchronic paradigm of the selection of signifiers. For instance, the substitution of /sheaf/ for /Booz/, while meaningless within the binary oppositions of the linguistic code, nonetheless generates meaning through this signifying substitution. But if signification emerges from signifyingness, then this is equivalent to the crossing of the “bar resisting signification” – which implies the transitory production of both meaning and reference.

Lacan’s conclusion is illustrated in “The Agency of the Letter,” where the signification of the signifying couplet /Gentlemen/ and /Ladies/ is not

at all the two signifieds, “Ladies” and “Gentlemen,” but instead the pure difference in places between signifying marks, interpreted by Lacan as “the law of urinary segregation” (Lacan, 1977: 151). For Lacan, then, the minimal signifying structure – the opposition between two signifiers – has as its signification the pure difference of the law of culture, or Symbolic Law. At the same time, the auto-referential character of language implies that the referent of this signification is this structure of self-differing itself, that is, not conceptual difference but the system of empty positions that generates a structural opposition between differential elements (Fink, 2004: 91–101). Lacan designates this as a “hole” in discourse and subsequently identifies it with the impossibility of the sexual relation. Lacan’s exploration of the logical consequences of the primacy of the signifier leads to the conclusion that the signified of this opposition – sexual difference – refers to something lost “in the Real” and not to an anterior reality. But what could this “something” be? To anticipate my argument somewhat, contrary to the deconstructive position, the Lacanian subject is not the subject of the signified: this vanishing signification (the Symbolic Law) is “signified *to* the subject” (Lacan, 1977: 200 *my italics*), not the subject-as-signified. In turn, and following from the auto-referential nature of language, what is “signified to the subject” makes reference only to “stuff” of the signification itself. It is when this “stuff” is a reflexive nomination that things become interesting, however, for then this subject, as the object of a discourse that cannot finally signify anything (determinate), cannot coincide with itself as referent of its own speech, but must recede infinitely as the retroactive effect of signifyingness. The subject of the signifier, as a subject, is the vanishing effect of the signifying operation – the place of inscription of the signifying marks – qua pure self-difference. But as the object of this discourse, it is the localisation of the impossible place of the lack, which necessarily appears as a lost *structure*. It follows that the signifying body not only lacks a final signifier (proper name), but has also lost any positivity, becoming nothing but the locus of an oppositional structure in the Real. This is why Lacan calls it a “hole” and comments that the “cut in the signifying chain verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity in the Real” (Lacan, 1977: 299).

Surprisingly, Lacan suggests that the element that this signifying structure ultimately refers to is the phoneme, which materialises the structure of language. The phoneme, as a differential marker, is the fundamentally senseless “stuff” of the signifier, conceptualised by Lacan in terms of the “materiality” and “localisability” of the signifier. If the subject of the signifier “is” nothing but the empty location where the signifier is engaged, then this subject, considered as the object of a discourse, is only a non-signifying marker – the



phoneme. The phoneme, meanwhile, as a “letter,” namely, “that material support that concrete discourse borrows from language” (Lacan, 1977: 147), is only a diacritical marker lacking all positivity. This has to be conceptualised as a literalisation: the speakingbeing borrows the material support of its discourse from the structure of language, and in the process is “literalised,” transformed into a subjective nothingness whose ontological nullity “is” the letter itself. Lacan’s radicalisation of linguistics therefore does not *abolish* the representational and referential character of language – it *subverts* it. Language represents the divided subject whose ontological status as a lack of being is nothing and constructs the lost object of linguistic reference as a material letter.

*Separation: the phoneme*

Lacan’s theory indicates that the signifier functions autonomously as an algebraic chain, composed of a series of differential marks that have no inherent meaning, except their reciprocal positions and the combinatory through which signification proceeds. The big question is why Lacan reintroduces the subject (and its object) into the discussion of what seems to be an automatic combinatory that is fundamentally non-subjective. The key is the signifying selection that governs the emergence of a signification from the signifyingness of the chain of combinations. Despite the “automatism” of the signifier – its inherently senseless character as a meaningless string of material letters – the signifying chain does not operate according to the principle of linear causality characteristic of the natural world, but instead according to the retroactive conversion of contingency into necessity characteristic of language. No necessary mechanism regulates the selection of those markers in the slippery signifyingness which “cross the bar” and halt the sliding of signification. Instead, these are contingent events that momentarily close the gap between synchrony and diachrony, disclosing the subjective instance in the agency of the letter.

Correlatively, for Lacan, the “spark” of meaning that “springs forth” across this gap happens in the place of the subject, considered as the fundamental hypothesis of psychoanalysis. This subject only emerges in the momentary passage of signifyingness into signification, and so is temporarily signified by the signifier. “The whole signifier can only operate ... if it is present in the subject,” Lacan proposes, which leads him to suppose that “it has passed over to the level of the signified” (Lacan, 1977: 155). This ambiguous “it” is *the signifier*, not the subject: the subject only “is” in the locus of the Other as its ef-

fect when signification emerges. Lacan's proposition is clarified by his theory of the paternal metaphor, where the effect of a signifying substitution is the repressed "signified to the subject = x" of the phallus, absent "signified" of the Other (Lacan, 1977: 200) that is also the "representative of representation" (Lacan, 1977: 312). The chain of signifiers that operates in the place of the Other is opaque to the subject itself: it discovers its meaning only in the field of the Other, in the repressed "message" of its own signification, namely, the absence of the phallic signifier. Instead of the classical subject, then, founded in meaning through the transcendental signified, the divided subject (qua vanishing effect of the chain of signification) is dispossessed of mastery over language and recedes to the horizon of signification.

In the light of this analysis, Lacan does not hesitate to ascribe a signifying intention to the retroactive vector of the synchronic arc in the graph of desire (Lacan, 1989: 18 March 1959 and 27 May 1959). Lacan is proposing that the provisional relation between the slipping of signifyingness and the sliding of signification is created only by a subjective intention whose metaphor is the phallic signifier. The "anchoring point" established by the master signifier expresses an empty, structural – *not phenomenological* – signifying intention: hence Lacan's claim that the signifier is what represents the subject for another signifier (Lacan, 1977: 316), since the metaphor of the subject represents the subject in the metonymy of desire. The existence of a signifying intentionality in the synchronic vector of the graph of desire implies that the divided subject requests something more than the object of the demand when it speaks. The formulation of demand as a chain of signification implies its inscription beyond the other in the Other, qua "treasury of the signifier," where its registration as demand implies a supplementary signification beyond need, namely, the desire for recognition. Lacan effectively equates the desire for recognition with the intention to signify: recognition means foremost the ratification of meaning, and desire indicates in the first instance a *vouloir-dire*, a want-to-mean in the desire-to-speak. But this signification is conferred by the Other, remaining opaque to the subject, so that "the state of nescience in which man remains in relation to his desire is not so much a nescience of what he demands ... as a nescience as to where he desires" (Lacan, 1977: 312). The "ineffable singular existence" of the speakingbeing, once floated in the element of the signifier, is ineluctably lost – correlatively, the nothing that the subject has become is borne in language, and so the speech that demands recognition ineluctably stakes the existence of the subject on the reply of the Other. The speakingbeing therefore asks the Other for a guarantee that ratifies its desire for recognition and it stakes its existence qua subject in this speech.

To understand the implications of Lacan's position for the question of the object we need to turn to the duplication of the diachronic axis of the utterance in the distinction between the statement and enunciation. If the anchoring point represents a signifying intention in the metonymy of the desire for recognition, then this signifying intention is nonetheless the vanishing "signified to the subject" and so only the horizon (not the "substance") of the discourse of the speakingbeing. Equally, every statement of demand is a betrayal of enunciated desire, and the division of the subject is inescapable. It follows that everything the speakingbeing says represents the subject of desire, but that this desire is nothing determinate (it exceeds every concrete object of demand), so that the divided subject is "present" (in the modality of its absence) only in the enunciation. The (empty) desire of the subject is present, then, only as the desire of the Other: even though the linking of signifier to signified is not grounded in an extra-discursive reality, it is nonetheless anchored *for the subject* in the Real of the (presumptive) desire of the Other.

How, then, can the phoneme be an incarnation of the desire of the Other for the subject? In this instance, it is the desire of the Other for meaning that is crucial. The persistence of desire beyond demand therefore implicates every utterance, at the level of the enunciation, in the dialectics of the desire for recognition. This dialectic is instigated by the structure of language as a chain of signification in a dialogical field (ego and alter), that is triangulated by its differential structure, so that every demand entails the supplementary question of desire, "*Che Vuoi?*" – what do you want? If demand involves a signifying intentionality qua *vouloir-dire*, then the reply, by adding another signifier that interprets the demand, necessarily only inverts and amplifies the question of desire, as in the implicitly enunciated dialogue:

"What do you want?"

"No, what do *you* want?"

Lacan describes this deadlock as the "reflexive abyss of desire" (Lacan, 1989: 20 May 1959), and points out that it only arises because of the lack in the Other (of a final signifier). The question of existence is posed in the "what do you want," because the speakingbeing as a want-to-be invokes its lack of being as the support for the question of desire. The being of the subject is necessarily the stake in dialogue, and the recognition of desire is at once the confirmation of identity and the ratification of an existence. Desire in this way posits its object in the locus of the Other, but this object is necessarily, as a stake of the subject in discourse qua want-to-be, all the being that the

subject will ever have. But the problem for the subject is that the enigmatic (non-)reply of the Other supplies no guarantee for the being of the subject: in the uncertainty of the dialogue, the subject encounters the castration of the Other, the lack of a final signifier that might ratify its identity and satisfy the desire for recognition.

Lacan's comment that "this object is the prototype of the significance of the body as that for which being is at stake" (Lacan, 1977: 301) now assumes its most profound dimension. Anxiety precedes the loss of the object, and anxiety is linked to the fact that the subject does not know what object it is for the desire of the Other (Harari, 2001: 29–56). Identification-objectification anticipates the desire of the Other for the subject by assuming a certain stance in the enunciation toward the statement. Specifically, the enunciation of desire (beyond the statement of demand) posits the object (*a*) as an intention ascribed, in the locus of the Other, to the subject. But this object that I am in the field of the Other is necessarily a (master) signifier – the signifier that the Other has for me. Therefore every identification is at the same time an objectification: the anticipation of the object that the subject is in the field of the Other is simultaneously an identification with this signifier. Only the phoneme is at once an object and a (proto-)signifier: the desire of the Other for the subject that is the referent of this signification is the signifier itself, as a material sequence of letters.

The object intended – aimed at – in the dialectic of desire is both the object in desire (the sublime object beyond the concrete demand) and its structural cause, because the retroactive character of signification necessarily posits this object as lost before the beginning of the signifying chain. It is therefore misrecognised as that part of the speakingbeing lost in the entry into language. Such an object (letter) is therefore characterised by its temporal non-coincidence – at once lost before signification and the horizon towards which every diachrony strives without ever arriving, the object (letter) never appears in the synchrony of the signifying intention. This is the deepest meaning of the claim that the object (*a*) is a structural causality in the field of signification, a disturbance present only in its effects (the leap from signifyingness to signification) that is manifest only as a "stain" of nonsense. The signifying intention that is structurally entailed by the intersection between diachrony and synchrony makes reference to a structural causality – an empty place where a minimal difference operates – in the very exception of a signifier that "anchors" the flow of discourse.

This analysis implies that the structural hole of the object (*a*) is the asymptotic referent of the sequence of master signifiers that constitute the style of the subject, whose ontological status is nothingness. As Lacan later says,

“what characterises, at the level of the signifier/signified distinction, the relation of the signified to what is there as an indispensable third, namely, the referent, is precisely the fact that the signifier always misses it. The collimator doesn’t work” (Lacan, 1998: 23). It also clarifies the status of the object as a structural causality in the Symbolic Order, because the object is correlative to an exceptional signifier “without signified”. This exception holds the place of the non-closure of the Symbolic Order and therefore indicates the impossibility of a terminus to the dialectic of recognition. The vanishing of the divided subject in the gap between enunciation and statement is therefore the construction of a reference to the object in desire by means of a moment of nonsense that punctuates the discourse of the speakingbeing. The ultimate form that this nonsense takes is the phoneme, an object (letter), that holds the place of an emptiness – not, I think, the “oooo” and “aaaa” of the famous signifying couplet, but the representation of nothing: the sound of one hand clapping.

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# **MUCH ADO ABOUT BEING**





## DOUBLES OF NOTHING: THE PROBLEM OF BINDING TRUTH TO BEING IN THE WORK OF ALAIN BADIOU

Justin Clemens

At first, when I had freed myself from the yoke of Aristotle, I took to the void and the atoms, for that is the view which best satisfies the imagination.

Gottfried Leibniz

And there need exist nothing for me to embrace it  
and believe in it totally  
Nothing – nothing.

Stéphane Mallarmé

### *1. Nothing resists*

It is striking that, for a philosopher whose system is founded on the equation *mathematics = ontology*, responses to Alain Badiou's work often attempt to circumvent the very precise scope, status, and strength that he assigns to mathematics. These circumventions are immediately apparent from even a glancing acquaintance with the secondary materials, though they can take – as one might expect – rather different forms. Often mathematics is treated as if it were a mere support for Badiou's positions and propositions; that is, as if one could simply quibble with what Badiou says without having to pass through mathematics at all; or as if his mathematical demonstrations were simply one possible way in which his theses might be presented. I believe this has been the dominant genre of responses to date and, as such, is fundamentally ideological (and not, therefore, properly philosophical). It is a response shared by some otherwise respectable thinkers, who do not need to be named here. In any case, it seems to me that such a response fails to come to terms with Badiou's

philosophy, whatever other justifications might be found for it. Of course, this doesn't mean that such commentaries may not have interesting points to make – only that they do not touch on Badiou's *philosophical* enterprise.

Other responses have been more complex, evading the consequences of Badiou's mathematics by seeming to grapple with it. Take, for example, a number of the essays collected by Peter Hallward in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*. There we find some very fine, interesting and forceful analyses of Badiou's philosophy by a number of thinkers. What many of these analyses share is their admirable recognition of the *intrinsic* nature of mathematics in and for Badiou; that, for Badiou mathematics cannot be instrumentally deployed by thought without loss of being (in all senses of that phrase).

Nevertheless, it is striking that these analyses also exhibit strange, often minute, turbulences in the course of their elaboration, little turbulences that are finally symptomatic of an attempted evasion. Balibar, for instance, has this to say: "Badiou is attempting to use *meta-mathematical means* – that is, mathematics applied to mathematics itself – *actually to construct a definition, theory or concept of truth.*"<sup>1</sup> Perhaps I am misunderstanding or being too ungenerous to Balibar in essaying the following correction: no, it is not "a definition, theory or concept of truth" that Badiou derives from "meta-mathematics," but an idea of the *being* of truth that *philosophy discerns* in mathematics. In this context, moreover, Balibar's distinction between "mathematics" and "meta-mathematics" is imprecise. For Badiou, mathematics itself *is* always already meta-mathematics in the sense that the axiomatic establishment and deductive fidelities of mathematics proceed by a series of immanent ruptures; in another sense, philosophy is meta-mathematical for Badiou (as Balibar also notes).<sup>2</sup> These are not merely terminological quibbles. On the contrary, I would suggest that there is a *resistance to mathematics* that goes so deep in contemporary thought its very partisans are sometimes incapable of eluding it.<sup>3</sup> This resistance is integrally also a *resistance to nothing*.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Balibar, "The History of Truth: Alain Badiou in French Philosophy" in: P. Hallward (ed.), *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, Continuum, London and New York 2004, p. 30. Balibar's emphases.

<sup>2</sup> Balibar first states that Badiou's "meta-mathematics" is "my term for the 'matheme of the indiscernible' that Badiou extracts from set theory" (p. 29), then states "I am not going to spend too long justifying that indicative term" (p. 30), before treating meta-mathematics as designating a construction of truth that evades "syntactico-semantic correspondence." All fine, but where's the actual mathematics?

<sup>3</sup> Is it then any surprise that the least-cited work of Badiou's post-*Being and Event* remains *Le Nombre et les nombres*, Seuil, Paris 1990? That this dedicated exploration of the consequences of modern mathematical thought of number goes officially untranslated, when the ethics, the aesthetics, the anti-theology, and many selected essays stream into foreign languages like a waterfall?

So if, as Desanti remarks, “a careless reader would be wholly incapable of reading Badiou: whoever enters into this text [*Being and Event*] either abandons it or else grasps its movement and perseveres with it,”<sup>4</sup> one needs to ask a further question: why do *careful* readers also find themselves retreating from the project of *Being and Event*? This question calls for a tracing of the *limits* of the mathematical in Badiou; its answer depends on the surprisingly many species of *nothing* to be located there.

## 2. Mathematics as the trebuchet of being

Badiou opens his presentation “Philosophy and Psychoanalysis,” collected in *Conditions*, with the following *captatio benevolentiae*: “I undoubtedly occupy the place of a son of philosophy itself, quickly said, a son of Plato, a son of a parricide.”<sup>5</sup> What does it mean to be the faithful son of a parricide? The father himself has a father: Parmenides *genuit* Plato. But the father is disreputable, and the son is a killer. What does this mean philosophically, to be faithful to a killer? It means that, if Parmenides’s utterance “Being and thinking are one and the same” remains foundational for philosophy, to engage in philosophy after Plato requires a rupture with the Parmenidean practice of poetry as the royal road to truth.

For Badiou, then, whence mathematics? It is a matter of fidelity to Plato. If this is a foundational requirement, it is also an operational requirement. This means: breaking with poetry by means of mathematics.<sup>6</sup> Why mathematics? For Badiou, mathematics is axiomatic and deductive. Mathematics is axiomatic: this means that mathematics makes fundamental ontological claims. This separates mathematics from logic, which rather *describes* the laws determining rational thought and proffers *definitions*: “Logic pertains to the coherence of appearance.”<sup>7</sup> But the deductions of mathematics are at once

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<sup>4</sup> J.-T. Desanti, “Some Remarks on the Intrinsic Ontology of Alain Badiou” in: *Think Again*, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> A. Badiou, “Philosophie et psychanalyse” in: *Conditions*, preface F. Wahl, Seuil, Paris 1992, p. 277.

<sup>6</sup> Although all of Badiou’s work is in some way bound up with this operation, see, above all, A. Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham, Continuum, London and New York 2005 (forthcoming); all references to this work here will retain the page numbers from A. Badiou, *L’être et l’événement*, Seuil, Paris 1988. Also crucial here are the essays collected under “Section I. Ontology is Mathematics,” in A. Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. R. Brassier and A. Toscano, Continuum, London and New York 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, p. 15. And: “*philosophy must enter into logic via mathematics, not into mathematics via logic*,” p. 15.

non-empirical and eminently rational. Mathematics does not equivocate. If its demonstrations can result in undecidabilities, this is only because mathematics is the epitome of “restrained action” (Mallarmé), which limits its own claims as it rigorously identifies the proper dilemmas on which it is necessary to decide. Moreover, following Lacan, the letters of mathematics are integrally transmissible.

As Badiou remarks, *contra* Russell, mathematics is the only discourse that knows absolutely of what it speaks. Its deductions can be recomposed and verified by anyone, anywhere, given the requisite elements. Neutral and universal, mathematical reasoning is independent of any given empirical situation and of any given natural language. Its non-empirical status means that its theorems and demonstrations are not theorems or demonstrations about empirical situations. Mathematics is not abstract, nor does it abstract from any situation. Deductive, it draws out, in the most rational, rigorous and impersonal fashion possible, all the consequences of its starting point. This means that mathematics is also radically *asubjective*, inhuman: no agent can arbitrarily decide to transform the strictures of mathematical thought (*pace* Descartes, not even God). Taken together, these aspects of mathematics render it essential for philosophy. If none of the alleged features of mathematics just listed diverge markedly from those assigned it by tradition,<sup>8</sup> the difference that Badiou makes is to take these features absolutely *literally*.<sup>9</sup> Mathematics is the place of the inscription of Being; the letters of mathematics *are* directly ontological.

This begs the question: *which* mathematics, and why? As is well known, Badiou chooses Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory (hereafter ZF) to provide him with his particular ontology. There are several reasons for this. It is crucial for Badiou that infinity, a key philosophical concept, only becomes a rigorous *ontological* concept with Georg Cantor. Before Cantor, infinity functions as a theological, speculative or literary conceit, unable to achieve the rigour of a true idea. ZF set theory, moreover, not only renders this concept consistent, but thereby reconfigures the entire philosophical apparatus of the multiple.

How, then, does Badiou treat the axioms of ZF set theory? He treats them as if they – together and apart – contributed to the delimitation and constitu-

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the remarks by Russell in regards to the independence of mathematics, its posing a “perpetual reproof” to mere opinion and private judgements, B. Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*, Unwin, London 1974.

<sup>9</sup> On the crucial role played in Badiou’s thought by the letter, see my “Letters as the condition of conditions for Alain Badiou,” *Communication and Cognition*, Vol. 36, No. 1–2 (2003), pp. 73–102.

tion of Being. Each axiom is transliterated directly into philosophical jargon. In fact, it seems to me that Badiou does nothing other but *transliterate* the axioms of set theory *directly* into such jargon: he genuinely permits mathematics to provide, to *think*, his ontology (as he constantly proclaims, in a fashion that may occasionally seem shrill, but only because philosophers remain notoriously hard of hearing). This transliteration can be given in tabular form (see Fig. 1, a derivation from Badiou's meditations in *Being and Event*). This transliteration enables Badiou to refound ontology in such a way as to avoid the difficulties of the linguistic turn. The rigours of such a transliteration, however, also create certain difficulties entirely irrelevant to mathematicians themselves.

Badiou shows how ZF set theory authorizes some surprising propositions: that there is only one fundamental operation, that of "belonging-to"; that there are no objects in such theory, only sets; that these sets are discerned by their elements, and these elements are in their turn sets; that set theory therefore speaks only of multiples of multiples; that this multiplicity rests not on the basis of the one, but on that of the void, the empty set. Indeed, "the only possible end point of the multiple, which is always the multiple of multiples (and never the multiple of Ones), was the multiple of nothing: the empty set."<sup>10</sup> In set theory, the void is included in every set; in Hallward's felicitous phrase, it is "a kind of ontological vagrant."<sup>11</sup> The void is unique, it has unicity, but it is not one. The "one" arises in ZF – not as foundation nor totality nor unifying force, etc. – but as a mere *result*.

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<sup>10</sup> A. Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2000, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> P. Hallward, *Alain Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2003, p. 102. Despite Hallward's rigorous and faithful exegeses of Badiou's theses, there is something dubious about such statements as "In its quite literal insistence on the void, Badiou's ontology is perhaps the only consistent formulation of Lacan's purely symbolic register," p. 102. But Badiou's set theory ontology is not quite Lacan's symbolic, for a number of reasons: for Badiou, the void is the void of being, scripted by a mathematics which subtracts itself precisely from the divagations of the symbolic and of *lalangue*, for Lacan, the subject is a void, the correlate of a void object (*objet a*) fallen from the void of the signifier. These voids are logically distinguished by Lacan, very differently from Badiou. More compellingly, this is a distinction that Badiou himself treats towards the end of the section "Theory of the pure multiple: paradoxes and critical decision," where the real (void) is distinguished from the symbolic, as the institution of being is distinguished from what is discernible in language, *L'être et l'événement*, p. 58. It is possible that Hallward's detours – unnecessary to his exegesis and slightly misleading as examples – are symptomatic of the widespread "resistance to mathematics" that I began by noting.

Fig. 1. Tables of Axioms and their Ontological Schema

Axioms	Formal Notation	Ontological Schema
– <i>Extensionality</i> . A set is determined solely by its members. Two sets are the same if they have the same members.	$\forall\alpha \forall\beta \forall\gamma (\gamma \in \alpha \leftrightarrow \gamma \in \beta) \rightarrow \alpha = \beta$	– The schema of “same” and “other.”
– <i>Empty Set</i> . There exists a set which has no members.	$\exists \alpha \forall \beta (-\beta \in \alpha)$	– The empty set is the proper name of Being.
– <i>Separation</i> . Given a set $\alpha$ , there exists a subset $\beta$ of elements of $\alpha$ which possess a particular, definite condition.	$\forall\alpha \exists\beta \forall\gamma (\gamma \in \beta \leftrightarrow \gamma \in \alpha \ \& \ \varphi(\gamma))$	– Being is prior to language. Or: presentation precedes discernability.
– <i>Union</i> . There exists a set whose elements are the elements of the elements of a given set.	$\forall\alpha \exists\beta \forall\gamma (\gamma \in \beta \leftrightarrow \exists\delta (\gamma \in \delta \ \& \ \delta \in \alpha))$	– The schema of the dissemination of multiples, which ensures the presentative consistency of those multiples.
– <i>Power Set</i> . There exists a set whose elements are the subsets of a given set.	$\forall\alpha \exists\beta \forall\gamma (\gamma \in \beta \leftrightarrow \gamma \subseteq \alpha)$	– The schema of the state of the situation.
– <i>Infinity</i> . There exists an infinite set. Or: there exists a limit-ordinal. (The first limit-ordinal is known as $\omega_\alpha$ ).	$\exists\alpha (\emptyset \in \alpha \ \& \ \forall\beta (\beta \in \alpha \rightarrow \beta \cup \{\beta\} \in \alpha))$	– Natural-being admits the infinite. The schema of the “Other-Place.”
– <i>Replacement</i> . If a set $\alpha$ exists, there also exists a set obtained by replacing the elements of $\alpha$ by other existent multiples.	If $\forall\alpha \forall\beta \forall\gamma (\alpha \in A \ \& \ \varphi(\alpha, \beta) \ \& \ \varphi(\alpha, \gamma) \rightarrow \beta = \gamma)$ then $\exists B \forall\beta (\beta \in B \leftrightarrow \exists\alpha (\alpha \in A \ \& \ \varphi(\alpha, \beta)))$	– Being-multiple (consistency) transcends the particularity of its members. Members are substitutable, and the multiple- <i>form</i> retains its consistency following such substitutions.
– <i>Foundation</i> . Every non-empty set possesses at least one element whose intersection with that set is empty.	$\forall\alpha \exists\beta (\alpha = \emptyset \vee (\beta \in \alpha \ \& \ \forall\gamma (\gamma \in \alpha \rightarrow -\gamma \in \beta)))$	– Of the event (which belongs to itself), ontology can say nothing: the latter deals only with well-founded multiples.
– <i>Choice</i> . Given a set, there exists a set composed of a representative of each of the non-empty elements of the initial set. With regards to infinite sets, such a “choice” set may not be constructible.	If $\alpha \rightarrow A_\alpha \neq \emptyset$ is a function defined for all $\alpha \in x$ , then there exists another function $f(\alpha)$ for $\alpha \in x$ , and $f(\alpha) \in A_\alpha$	– The schema of the being of intervention: the procedure by which a multiple is recognised as an event, and which decides the belonging of an event to the situation where it has its site. It involves giving a name to an unrepresented element of the site.

One can immediately see how Badiou uses the axioms of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory to provide a clear, distinct, and consistent ontology. Moreover, Badiou relies on the *necessary incompleteness* of such an ontology in order to found the possibility of ontology's supplementation by events (of which more below).

### 3. *Atomic meditations*

If analytic philosophy from Bertrand Russell to Michael Dummett has usually identified the axiom of infinity as opening onto existential problems, Badiou offers a rather different account. It is not the axiom of infinity that is determining for ontology, but the axiom of the empty set. This axiom, as can be seen from the table, posits the existence of a set with no members; it is, for Badiou, the only truly existential axiom of ZF. In tandem with the other axioms of ZF, infinite infinities can be generated out of the empty set itself. As we shall see, this is also the mark of Badiou's Parmenidean fidelity, for in ZF being and thought can indeed be rendered one and the same.

Such claims are compelling, if their elaboration proves tricky. After all, for a multiple to be registered as *a* multiple, it clearly must be – must *have been* – counted as one. What was it before it was counted? Nothing can be said of it, except that whatever it is (or isn't) must be prior to the very distinction “one” and “multiple.” In Badiou's words:

‘Multiple’ is said in fact of presentation, retroactively apprehended as not-one from the moment that being-one is a result. But ‘multiple’ is said also of the composition of the count, being the multiple as ‘several-ones’ counted by the action of structure. There is a multiplicity of inertia, that of presentation, and a multiplicity of composition, which is that of number and of the effect of structure.<sup>12</sup>

Badiou names the first multiplicity “inconsistent,” the second “consistent,” and proclaims that ontology is ultimately a theory of *inconsistent* multiplicity, of the “presentation of presentation.” Such inconsistency is what founds mathematics as ontology in the very gesture of its foreclosure. One cannot circumvent this “law of thought.” This law – essentially an irreducible Fact of Reason – arises here precisely as a consequence of the transliteration of axioms from mathematical writing to philosophical concept. A logical deadlock supplements the mathematical axiomatic in order for philosophy

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<sup>12</sup> Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*, p. 33.



to effect a transliteration into ontology. This immutable “law of the count-for-one” has certain consequences for the ontology itself.

The problem is this: inconsistent multiplicity cannot appear as such anywhere within a constituted situation (from which it is foreclosed), yet inconsistency continues to haunt the entirety of the situation. Badiou: “Every [toute] situation implies the nothing [rien] of its whole [tout]. But the nothing [rien] is neither a place nor a term of the situation.”<sup>13</sup> And: “from the moment that the whole of a situation is under the law of the one and of consistency, it is necessary that, from the point of immanence of a situation, the pure multiple – absolutely unrepresentable according to the count – be nothing [rien]. But being-nothing [l'être-rien] is distinguished as completely from non-being [non-être] as the “there is” [il y a] is distinguished from being [l'être].”<sup>14</sup> The imperceptible rift that is the nothing [rien] of a situation is to be distinguished from non-being [non-être] and from what is not [pas]. Indeed, this nothing, it turns out, is nothing other than being itself (and it strikes me that the *non*-appearance of the loaded Sartrean term *néant* is critical here). So if nothing  $\neq$  non-being  $\neq$  nothingness, then nothing = being = inconsistent multiplicity.

More precisely, nothing becomes “the proper name of being.” This thesis, so redolent of classical ontologies, immediately encounters further terminological difficulties. It turns out that we have (at least) two possible proper names for the nothing. Indeed, “it is a question here of names, ‘nothing’ [rien] or ‘void’ [vide], because being, which these names designate, is not by itself either global or local. The name that I choose, the void, indicates precisely at the same time that nothing [rien] is presented, no term, and that the designation of this unrepresentable ‘voids’ itself, without thinkable structural

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66. Hence Badiou can also declare that the statement “inconsistency is nothing” is true, whereas the “structuralist thesis” “inconsistency is not [n'est pas]” is false, p. 67. But we should also underline the very peculiar distinctions made in this short passage. How is Badiou using the “*il y a*”? As he has earlier remarked “The power of language won't institute the '*il y a*' from the '*il y a*.' It is limited to positing what there is of the distinguishable in the '*il y a*.' Whence one marks the principles, differentiated by Lacan, of the real (*il y a*) and the symbolic (there is [*il y a*] some distinguishable.)” P. 58. Note the play between inverted commas and their disappearance. I am also reminded of a passage elsewhere, on Spinoza, where Badiou remarks: “When a proposition in the thought of being presents itself, outside mathematics, as originally philosophical, it bears on the generality of the '*il y a*.'” *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire*, Seuil, Paris, 1998, p. 73. For Badiou, this situation requires 3 fundamental operations from a philosophy: 1) the construction and legitimation of the name(s) of the “*il y a*,” names which bear on the juncture between one and multiple; 2) the unfolding of the relations by which the consistency of the “*il y a*” is evaluated; 3) grasping the relations which are supported by the names of the “*il y a*.”



references.”<sup>15</sup> Undoubtedly Badiou has also been swayed in his decision here by the French for the empty set axiom, *l’axiome du vide*.

Perhaps there is an almost-imperceptible wavering in Badiou’s argument here. “Nothing” has been briefly characterised as more appropriate to characterising the global dimension of being, “void” the local. The (local) void is then denominated as primary, insofar as “nothing” implies a “whole” that comes after everything else. The being of a situation can thereafter be denominated as a delocalised, empty, local point: “The insistence of the void in-consists as delocalisation,” says Badiou.<sup>16</sup> Badiou’s conception of the void magnificently reconfigures the atomistic tradition here. On the basis of ZF, the void becomes *the* atom of being, as it is out of the void alone that ZF generates its infinities of infinite sets. There is no longer any absolute duality of “atoms” and “void.” Moreover, as we will see, the local, punctual nature of the void is crucial for Badiou’s transition to the event. The decision on the proper proper name is not and cannot be neutral in this context. As Badiou notes later in *Being and Event*, a proper name is a pure *quality*, hence, the act and fact of a situated decision.

What is also striking is that there are now at least two things in Badiou’s ontological situation that cannot be counted for one. The first is, as we have seen, the void; the second is the count-for-one itself. This always-already-accomplished operation must, by definition, also be “subtracted” (one of Badiou’s favoured verbs) from the count itself. Let us mark this as a first moment in the doubling of the void, at once mathematical and logical, of the production of inconsistency through an operational necessity of thought.

#### 4. *Ratiocinations upon and*

As we have seen, philosophy: 1) identifies mathematics as ontology (the Platonic gesture par excellence); 2) presents the consequences of this in a meta-mathematical frame. But this double presentation does not exhaust the task of philosophy. Rather, such a task delimits mathematics as it turns philosophy towards truth and truths. Being and truth are at once disjoint for Badiou, and yet philosophy ensures their compatibility.

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<sup>15</sup> Badiou, *L’être et l’événement*, p. 69. Cf. also the preceding paragraph: “I say ‘void’ rather than ‘nothing,’ because the ‘nothing’ is rather the name of the void correlated to the *global* effect of the structure (*all* is counted), and it is more pertinent to indicate that the not-having-been-counted is also rightly *local*, since it is not counted *for one*. ‘Void’ indicates the failure of the one, the not-one, in a more originary sense than the not-at-all [*pas-du-tout*].” Pp. 68–69.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

So mathematics is not the whole or heart of Badiou's work: on the contrary. But one must pass through the defile of mathematics to capture its singularity. Rather, as for Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard in their very different ways, and as the title of Badiou's magnum opus *Being and Event* suggests, the real work of philosophy consists in transontological conjugations, in *ratiocinations upon "and."* Philosophy is the conjugation of the disjoint. For Badiou, mathematics inscribes being, whereas science, art, politics and love are truth-processes in the wake of events, which fracture the closure of being.

This is, again, why Badiou favours the name "subtractive" as shorthand for his essential philosophical affirmation. "Subtractive" is what cannot be counted by mathematics, what escapes the law of the count-for-one, and philosophy must locate these powers and events through subtraction at the very limits of mathematics (rather than repudiating mathematics as a secondary form of thought). It is at the edges of deductive reasoning, in the places where such thought runs into an *aporia*, that a philosophy establishes itself and examines what becomes of its conditions there. Whence Badiou's theory of the event.

In Badiou's terms, an event gives rise to a truth that is indiscernible from within the situation itself. The event is paradoxical from the point of view of mathematics: it is not quite being itself, but "a vanishing surplus of being," "extra-being," etc. It can only be written as a paradoxical multiple, one which belongs to itself. The matheme of the event is thus this:  $e_x = \{x \in X, e_x\}$ . That is, the event makes one-multiple of one part of all the multiples that belong to its site, the other part is the event itself. From the point of view of established knowledge (i.e., ontology), then, an event is at once impossible and illegal, and, to the extent that it has any being whatsoever, it is pure illusion. At no point does an event have being. Every event is *punctual*, and takes place in a particular site, in a volatile historical situation. The eventual site itself *presents* no elements, and requires for its own identification a subjective intervention which gives a supplementary name to one of its unrepresented elements. The site is unlocalisable from the point of view of beings; it is itself nomadic, unpredictable, hazardous. An event-site is the place of the void in a situation.

A event must also have a witness of some kind, and an intervention must be made: "The intervention's initial operation is to make a name of an unrepresented element of the site in order to qualify the event by which this site is the site."<sup>17</sup> An intervention makes a supernumerary name of an unrepresented element of an event-site, in a doubly undecidable fashion. On the one hand,

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

it is undecidable whether the name belongs to the event itself (it may just be a subjective misapprehension, for instance); on the other, the intervention itself names on the basis of a prior, unnamed event. The intervention is therefore subtracted from the law of counting-for-one, because its procedure is linked to a foundational Two without concept (the unrepresented element and its supernumerary name). The numeration of Badiou's thought of the event proceeds from zero to Two to the infinities – without ever passing through the (or a) one. But this movement, by recourse to the mathematics of forcing, captures the new knowledge in the real that is produced by truths, that is, a number-being – and thus the one, the one as result.

To recapitulate: an event is the re-emergence of the void as it rises to the surface of a situation. Precisely because the irruption of the void (a “fragment of being”) cannot be thought according to the terms of the situation in which it arises, it can be “thought” only as a paradox, an emergence which belongs to itself (auto-belonging being strictly prohibited by ZF). The void founds any situation, but at the cost of its exclusion or subtraction. When it re-emerges into any situation, it can only be apprehended as an extra-rational apparition. The names it can be given are legion, if the *designatum* of such names is always the irruption of the void. This re-emergence cannot not be named, and this name must thus be thought as an irreducible, absolutely singular quality. An event is therefore thought philosophically as extra-mathematic: an event, quite simply, is the emergence-disappearance of the void in a particular situation, along with the supplement of its nomination. This extends Badiou's terms, to *rien*, *vide*, *néant*, *événement*, etc., and provokes the question: is this “event” Badiou's philosophical name for the nothingness or non-being that ontology excludes?

### 5. *Avatars of the void*

Let me reiterate: only if one maltreats Badiou's equation *mathematics* = *ontology*, is it possible to quibble with those propositions that he issues in a more familiar “philosophical” vocabulary, as if these were simply fodder for argument. If there is already abundant evidence of the diverse benefits gained by such maltreatment or misunderstanding, these benefits are not of the order of philosophical purchase. If, as Badiou holds, mathematics does indeed think being *intrinsically*, then the ontological propositions Badiou emits are essentially nothing more than terminological transliterations of the set-theoretical axioms. If one genuinely wishes to contest Badiou's ontological dictates, it seems to me that the major touch-points are restricted to the following:

- 1) To deny the legitimacy of the equation mathematics = ontology, or that mathematics is the *only* acceptable ontology;
- 2) To accept the equation, but deny that Badiou's own deployment of it is the (only) acceptable way of doing so;
- 3) To accept the equation, but deny that set theory is the (only) appropriate form of contemporary mathematics (e.g., what about category theory?);
- 4) To accept set theory, but deny that the form of set theory Badiou deploys is the (only) appropriate form of set theory (e.g., that there are variant forms of set theory that are at least equally acceptable);
- 5) To accept ZF set theory, but deny that Badiou's transliterations are the (only) acceptable transliterations thereof;
- 6) To provisionally accept Badiou's ontology *in toto*, but only in order to show how it harbours symptomatic gaps, contradictions, paradoxes, or inconsistencies.

Depending at which of these points one decides to intervene, the philosophical means and consequences will necessarily differ. It is therefore necessary to be extremely clear and careful about one's point of entry into such a system. Otherwise, it is more than likely that prospective critics will themselves fall into an implausible scattergun approach, and/or ensnarl themselves in contradictions. If 1), for instance, then one must junk Badiou wholesale; if 4), then it is necessary to prosecute the disagreement by way of positive constructions, on the basis of the specific variant of set theory one wishes to promulgate. Whatever the case, it will also be necessary to dispute Badiou's extra-mathematical arguments in support of his particular procedure – and these arguments, it seems to me, are all very strong.

In other words, any intervention in this context must beware the jaws of a dilemma. First, these “moments” I have identified are bound together by Badiou with an intricate and ramified argumentation, which shuttles between the historical, the polemical, the deductive, and the eventual. To give an example: we have already seen how the equation mathematics=ontology is at once historical (Platonic), polemical (rupturing with romanticism), and eventual (linked to the apparition and development of set theory from Cantor to Cohen). It can also offer an explanation of why, for instance, mathematics is *the* discourse necessary to found experimental science. Moreover, Badiou's subsequent deployment of this equation as if it conditioned a strict transliteration of mathematics into philosophy evades the hermeneutical problems endemic to language-turn philosophy. There are no longer “horizons,” “dialogisms,” or interpretations-endless-in-principle, and the question concern-

ing language no longer precedes truth. Indeed, as he transliterates its terms into more classical philosophical ones, mathematics enables Badiou to reread philosophy according to the dictates of mathematics itself. *Being and Event* is accordingly also structured by ontological meditations upon Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and so on – readings which are themselves part of the work, the hard labour, of thought.

Second, and despite the intricacy of his procedure, Badiou simultaneously declares his own argumentation *an inseparable act*: any attempt to intervene critically at any particular point entails exiting the system. Any putative critique is thus slung back to a position of exteriority, necessitating a clash of axioms. Badiou's system forces divergent thoughts to either meet its challenges at the most basic level, as irreconcilable enemies, or consign themselves to impotent quibbling. This is a crucial aspect of Badiou's construction of a genuine post-critical philosophy. Philosophy, as Badiou everywhere presumes (perhaps surprisingly, with such thinkers as Arthur Danto) is a *warring discourse*.

Although I believe that the current attempts to discern a residual Hegelianism in Badiou are deeply mistaken, one can certainly see how a first reading could discern a rather abstract consonance in the procedures of the two philosophers. As their arguments move or develop from moment to moment, the terms of each argument, as well as their very status, necessarily shift, implicating their antecedents and descendents at once. But such an analogy is ultimately just that, a loose analogy. It not only says nothing about what's singular about each philosopher, but implicitly attempts to reduce the antagonistic nature of philosophy by rendering the study of conceptual affiliations a matter of academic enumeration. In particular, it has to reduce Badiou's radical *coupling* of the thought of knowledge and being by mathematics and, simultaneously, his *separation* of truth from this knowledge-being exemplified by maths. Yet this separation is *only properly thought by passing through mathematics and then passing back again*. First, philosophy thinks the event as subtracted from onto-mathematical subtraction; second, philosophy thinks the being of a truth-process sparked by an event according to concepts derived from mathematics (in this case, of forcing). Neither scission nor recuperation, the work of thought to which Badiou has submitted himself is nothing other than the singular movement from meditation to meditation, from mathematics to philosophy to event-truth-process and back again.

If one follows Badiou in this, one finds that certain interesting problems continue to arise. As one might expect, it is nothing that poses the greatest difficulties in this regard. First of all, a hint of nothing arises in the very identification, by philosophy, that mathematics=ontology. Working mathemati-

cians need not care at all for ontology; one presumes most would remain entirely unmoved if they were apprised of the allegedly existential dimensions of their activity. A separation thus emerges, between mathematics and philosophy. This separation is that of a pure *epistemic* cut: mathematics need not know itself ontology; philosophy must know and declare mathematics ontology, so that it might reconstitute the rights of mathematics. Such restitution therefore depends on a *knowing*. Despite Badiou's absolute hostility to the use of mathematics as epistemology, it seems to me that the effect of this hostility is to effectively short-circuit the gap between epistemology and ontology. What is the status of this (philosophical) knowledge, this *knowing that mathematics knows what it doesn't know*? For Badiou, there is an epistemic gap *within* mathematics, as there is a gap *between* mathematics and philosophy. Are these gaps avatars of the nothing, or rather of what Badiou calls "the unnameable" in his truth-process matheme? What, in any case, is the relation between the unnameable and the nothing? For Badiou, this relation must bear a subjective, ethical determination, for which he provides the Mallarmean slogan of "restrained action."

Moreover, how are such philosophical propositions articulated with the Parmenidean watchword, affirmed by Badiou, about thought and being being one and the same? This question is tantamount to asking: what is the being of philosophy? If philosophy is necessary to identify mathematics as the inscription of being, does mathematics also provide the resources necessary to capture the being of philosophy? Not quite. For Badiou, philosophy is an intervention, an act which corrals its truth-conditions. It cannot be simply an act of knowledge: the truth conditions are not "objects" and what philosophy does is not reducible to positive statements. Badiou therefore qualifies the philosophical act as a void, a nothing.<sup>18</sup> By the same token, this void of the philosophical act cannot be the same as the void of being that contemporary mathematics presents as the empty set. A doubling of the void: the void of being and the void of the act, ontology drilling a hole in the very knowledge that it founds, and knowledge incarnating itself in the hole it excludes.

So the void of being is not the void of the count-for-one. Neither void can be identified with the void *act* of philosophy, which, in turn, cannot quite be the void *place* constructed by philosophy to harbour the truths of its time. Neither can it be the same as the "holes" that a truth-process burrows into being. And given that Badiou builds into his event-subject-truth nexus an unforceable point of the real ("the unnameable") at the vector's arrow-head, I cannot see how this point isn't the void returning in another guise, as the

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<sup>18</sup> Badiou, *Conditions*, p. 66.

apocalyptic *telos* of a form of thought. What interdicts totalization is precisely what thought must guard against: nihilistic terrorism, the drive of those seized by a truth to say it all. The void is thus the *alpha* and *omega* of Badiou's system, which begins by being named and ends by losing even its name. Nothing returns to nothingness. These features are not just indices of the system's necessary incompleteness, and thus of its possible consistency. Rather, they are indices of how the incessantly doubling void drives the system itself into inconsistency.





# DIE AUFERSTEHUNG DES BEGRIFFS AUS DEM GEISTE DES NIHILISMUS ODER HEGELS SPEKULATIVER KARFREITAG

Zdravko Kobe

Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts, im Jahre 1799, als Diskussionen über den ontologischen Status des Nichts zum Teil des Alltagslebens wurden, erhob Jacobi im Sendschreiben an Fichte einen Einspruch, den die Philosophie als Versuch der reflexiven Begründung des Wissens seitdem nicht endgültig zurückzuweisen vermag. Wenn sie in der Tat streng konsequent vorgeht, so gelangt sie, behauptet Jacobi, “im Ergründen des Mechanismus, sowohl der *Natur* des *Ichs* als des *Nicht-Ichs*, zu lauter *An-sich-Nichts*”: ihr Unternehmen erweise sich als “philosophisches Wissen des Nichts”. Dem entgegen bekennt der Antiphilosoph Jacobi kräftig seine Angehörigkeit zur “Philosophie des Nicht-Wissens”:

Wahrlich, mein lieber Fichte, es soll mich nicht verdrießen, wenn Sie, oder wer es sey, Chimärismus nennen wollen, was ich dem Idealismus, den ich *Nichilismus* schelte, entgegensetze.<sup>1</sup>

Der Einwand war keineswegs neu. Fast alle im Brief an Fichte vorkommenden Hauptargumente waren schon vorher in zahlreichen Schriften von Jacobi selbst ausgedrückt worden. Er war auch nicht der erste, den Ausdruck Nihilismus zu verwenden: unmittelbar vor ihm hatten ihn in einem kaum abweichenden Zusammenhang mehrere Autoren gebraucht, z.B. Jenisch.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> F. H. Jacobi, *Werke* (hrsg. von Jacobi), III, S. 44. – Chimäre ist, nebenbei bemerkt, ein beliebter Ausdruck von Fichte, der sich auf willkürliche Vorstellungen ohne jegliche Entsprechung in der Ordnung der Dinge bezieht und so vorzüglich gerade Jacobis “Sprung des Glaubens” trifft. Da so das Entgegensetzen von Chimärismus und Nihilismus eine *Wahl zwischen zwei Nichts* einschließt, geht es in der Nihilismus-Diskussion von Anfang an auch um das Problem der richtigen Bestimmung dessen, was eigentlich das Nichts sei.

<sup>2</sup> Für eine gute Übersicht der Nihilismus-Debatte vgl. Otto Pöggeler, “Hegel und die Anfänge der Nihilismus-Diskussion”, *Man and World*, 3, S. 163–199, und Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, “Nihilismus als Konsequenz des Idealismus”, in: Alexander Schwan (Hrg.), *Denken im Schatten des Nihilismus*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1975, S. 113–163.

Überhaupt war Jacobi eher Propagator und Katalysator als Innovator. Sein Verdienst liegt vor allem darin, dass es ihm gelungen war, im geeigneten Zeitpunkt eine treffend zugespitzte Wendung für ein Problem zu finden, das eine strukturelle Verlegenheit der Philosophie als solcher darstellt. Was sowohl der Spinozismus als auch der Kritizismus jeder in seiner Weise verkörpern, das soll jetzt im extremen Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre zum reinen Ausdruck kommen. So würdigt Jacobi zuerst Fichte, dass die "Philosophie aus einem Stück" allein auf seine Weise möglich sei; er tut es aber nur, um die Philosophie überhaupt danach umso nachdruckvoller schlagen zu können.

## I

Jacobis Verfahren kann man als Folge von drei Argumenten darstellen. Den allgemeinen Rahmen bildet die These, die einst Jacobi auf die philosophische Bühne katapultierte: Jede Philosophie, sofern sie konsequent ist, ist Spinozismus.<sup>3</sup> Wenn nämlich Philosophie für das Unternehmen des Verstandeserkennens steht und ferner der Verstand allein nach dem Verhältnis der Notwendigkeit vorgehen kann, so kann die Welt, wie sie von dem Verstand erkannt wird, nur die mechanische Welt<sup>4</sup> sein, worin keine Freiheit, keine Liebe, keine Schönheit zu finden ist. Nicht alle Philosophen haben freilich ein solches System verteidigt. Doch Jacobi zufolge kann man darin gerade den *Beweis ihrer Inkonsequenz* sehen, einen Beleg dafür, dass sie in einem gewissen Punkt und zwar *im unmittelbaren Gegensatz zum Prinzip des Verstandes* etwa die Möglichkeit der Freiheit behaupteten. Der exemplarische Verdienst von Spinoza, gewissermaßen sogar sein Heroismus, liegt dagegen gerade darin, alle von dem Grundsatz des Verstandes auferlegte Konsequenzen ohne sich zu weigern ausgeführt zu haben. Spinoza war einfach durch und durch Philosoph und dafür muss man ihm alle unsere Anerkennung zollen. Das Problem ist, dass sich auf diesem Weg alles, was die Größe des Menschen ausmacht, in eine blinde Folge von wirkenden Ursachen verwandelt: Liebe wird zum Strömen von Körpersäften und Shakespeares Tragödie zum Nacheinander von Buchstaben. "Wer nun dieses annehmen kann", stellt Jacobi fest, "dessen Meynung weiß ich nicht zu widerlegen. Wer es aber nicht annehmen kann, der muss der Antipode von Spinoza werden."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Vgl. z.B. F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, IV.1, S. 55f.

<sup>4</sup> Vgl. z.B. F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, IV.2, S. 149: "Wir begreifen eine Sache, wenn wir sie aus ihren nächsten Ursachen herleiten können, oder ihre unmittelbaren Bedingungen der Reihe nach einsehen: was wir auf diese Weise einsehen, oder herleiten können, stellt uns einen mechanischen Zusammenhang dar."

<sup>5</sup> F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, IV.1, S. 60–61.

Spinozas Standpunkt ist für Jacobi offenbar unhaltbar, aber trotz seiner Wertblindheit noch nicht nihilistisch, da Spinoza doch eindeutig das Dasein der Materie behauptete.<sup>6</sup> Diese Anschuldigung kommt erst in einem zweiten Schritt hinzu, wenn Jacobi bestimmter gegen Fichtes Idealismus als "Materialismus ohne Materie" antritt. Zu diesem Behuf gibt er einfach eine summarische Beschreibung des Erkennens an, wie es sich vom Standpunkt des erkennenden Subjekts darbietet und wie es zuletzt auch vom transzendentalen Idealismus selbst angenommen wird. Denn beim Erkennen kann es unmöglich darum gehen, sich der unabhängig von uns seienden Sache zu bemächtigen; im Gegenteil, um sie erkennen zu können, muss man sie erst in etwas Vorstellungsartiges umsetzen: man muss die Sache selbst vernichten und an deren Stelle ihre Vorstellung setzen.

Der Mensch erkennt nur indem er begreift; und er begreift nur indem er – Sache in bloße Gestalt verwandelnd – *Gestalt zur Sache, Sache zu Nichts macht*.<sup>7</sup>

Die Annihilation schließt aber keineswegs bloß eine Versetzung in ideelle Seinsweise ein, womit angeblich nichts Inhaltliches verloren gehen soll. Denn "wir begreifen eine Sache nur in sofern wir sie construiren, in Gedanken vor uns entstehen, *werden* lassen können".<sup>8</sup> Statt ein adäquater Ersatz der verlorenen Sache zu sein, bringt eine solche Erkenntnis vielmehr die faktisch gegebenen Schranken unseres Erkenntnisvermögens zum Ausdruck. Was auf diese Weise erkannt wird, ist bloße *Konstruktion des erkennenden Subjekts*, ein Gespenst, dessen Wert im Vergleich zur Sache selbst nichtig ist. "Das Philosophiren der reinen Vernunft muß also ein chemischer Proceß seyn, wodurch alles außer ihr in Nichts verwandelt wird."<sup>9</sup> Seine Wahrheit ist, die Welt, wie sie ist, zu vernichten und stattdessen sozusagen aus Nichts eine Welt zu erschaffen, die nichts gilt, da sie vom Subjekt selbst gesetzt ist und bloß für dieses, als Bestimmung seines Daseins existiert.

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<sup>6</sup> Das Nichtsein droht bei Spinoza eher aus einer anderen Richtung her. In seinem Gespräch mit Lessing soll Jacobi als Geist des Spinozismus "das Uralte: aus nihilo nihil fit" erklären; ernst genommen, geht daraus von selbst hervor, dass eigentlich nichts entsteht und vergeht und dass alle angebliche endliche Dinge bloß Bestimmungen des Einen sind, das allein wahrhaft ist. "Die einzelnen Dinge also, in so fern sie nur auf eine gewisse bestimmte Weise da sind, sind die non-entia." (*Werke*, IV.1, S. 182–183.)

<sup>7</sup> F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, III, S. 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* – Vgl. auch *op. cit.*, S. 21: "Wenn daher ein Wesen ein von uns *vollständig* begriffener Gegenstand werden soll, so müssen wir es *objectiv – als für sich bestehend* – in Gedanken aufheben, vernichten, um es durchaus *subjectiv*, unser eigenes Geschöpf – *ein bloßes Schema* – werden zu lassen."

Als ob es noch nicht genug wäre, kommt nun der entscheidende Schlag. Jacobi, der die philosophische Entwicklung der letzten Jahre offenbar aufmerksam verfolgt hat, wendet hier ein im Grunde von Kant stammendes Argument gegen den transzendentalen Idealismus selbst. Für die Erkenntnis vom Ich gelten nämlich, wie Kant mit Nachdruck zu wiederholen pflegt, dieselben allgemeinen Bedingungen, denen sonst die Erkenntnis als solche unterliegt. Es ist uns aber inzwischen klar geworden, dass Erkennen die Sache selbst zu vernichten und sie aus Nichts wieder zu schöpfen bedeutet: das Ich kann sich der Welt bemächtigen, nur indem es zugleich als ihr Schöpfer auftritt.

Aber auch sein eigener Schöpfer kann er nur unter der angegebenen allgemeinen Bedingung seyn; er muß sich dem *Wesen* nach vernichten, um allein im *Begriffe* zu entstehen, sich zu haben: in dem Begriffe eines reinen absoluten Ausgehens und Eingehens, ursprünglich – *aus* Nichts, *zu* Nichts, *für* Nichts, *in* Nichts.<sup>10</sup>

Da sich auch das Subjekt ebenfalls durch Vorstellen gegeben ist, muss ihm unausbleiblich dasselbe widerfahren: wie alles, erweist auch es sich als etwas Nichtiges, als Blendwerk seiner selbst, Form einer Form,<sup>11</sup> das Nichts, das sich einem Nichts dartut, kurz, als ein Grundloses, das sich im hochmütigen Versuch, sich allein auf sich selbst begründen zu wollen, im Abgrunde seines eigenen Nichts auflösen muss. In diesem endlich bis zur höchsten Spitze getriebenen Nihilismus sieht Jacobi keinen Ausweg, wenn man nicht das Dasein von etwas uns Übersteigendem annehmen will, das uns allein das Sein, nicht zuletzt unser eigenes, verschaffen kann.

Eine solche Wahl aber hat der Mensch; diese Einzige: das *Nichts* oder einen *Gott*. ... Ich wiederhole: Gott ist, *außer mir*, ein *lebendiges, für sich bestehendes Wesen*, oder *Ich* bin Gott. Es giebt kein drittes.<sup>12</sup>

Wer die Philosophie wählt, den führt eine konsequente Anwendung der Verstandeslogik zum Idealismus von Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre, worin das Ich gleichsam das Absolute seiner Welt ausmacht. Wie wir nun aber schon wissen, ist seine Allmacht flüchtig und bloß scheinbar. Denn wenn eine

<sup>10</sup> F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, III, S. 21–22.

<sup>11</sup> Vgl. F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, II, S. 217: "Ich bin alles, und außer mir ist im *eigentlichen* Verstande Nichts. Und Ich, mein Alles, bin denn am Ende doch auch nur ein *leeres Blendwerk* von Etwas; *die Form einer Form*; gerade so ein Gespenst, wie die andern Erscheinungen die ich Dinge nenne, wie die ganze Natur, ihre Ordnung und ihre Gesetze."

<sup>12</sup> F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, III, S. 49.

Philosophie wirklich konsequent ist, und sie ist Philosophie nur insoweit, als sie konsequent ist, wenn sie also hier nicht inne hält, sondern weiter denkt, so entlarvt sich das absolute Ich unvermeidlich als absolute Leere, woraus es sich nur durch die Annahme eines Überseienden retten kann. Das ist die absolute Wahl, vor die die Philosophie gestellt ist, es gibt kein Drittes. Die Ironie des Schicksals wollte es, dass mit dem Untergang von Fichtes absolutem Ich, das ohne Gottes Fürsorge in den Abgrund des Nichts stürzte, auch Fichtes empirisches Ich den Vorwürfen von Gottlosigkeit unterlag.

## II

Die Anschuldigung des Nihilismus fand schnell großen Widerhall. Nicht nur gelang es Jacobi, noch einmal den Rahmen der philosophischen Diskussion zu bestimmen, die Nihilismus-Frage gewann rasch Eingang in das allgemeine Bewusstsein des gelehrten Publikums. Als ungemein empfänglich zeichneten sich vor allem Literaten aus, deren besondere Aufmerksamkeit in der Zeit der Frühromantik ohnehin den abgründigen Tiefen der (eigenen) Subjektivität galt und denen die Wahl zwischen Alles und Nichts eine Spannweite bot, die gerade noch breit genug war für ihre Person. In der Faszination durch Nichts entwickelte sich in diesem Kreise ein wahrhaft nihilistischer Diskurs, worin Ausdrücke wie *Nichts* und *Nacht*, *Abgrund*, *Leere*, *Gespens*t usw. die Hauptrolle übernahmen; er wurde zu solchen Ausmaßen ausgeweitet, dass die Erwähnung von dergleichen Wörtern oft nichts anderes als ein Merkmal des Zeitgeists zu betrachten ist. Als ein zufällig gewählter Beleg dafür mag angeführt werden, dass etwa Jean Paul seine *Vorschule der Ästhetik* mit der Kategorie von "poetischen Nihilisten" eröffnete.<sup>13</sup>

Freilich hinterließ Jacobis Verfahren der Vereinfachung zu erzwungenen Alternativen bei den Philosophen tiefste Spuren. Wenn Hegel in der *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* etwa sagt: "Spinoza ist Hauptpunkt

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<sup>13</sup> Vgl. auch Jean Paul, *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, Felix Meiner, Hamburg 1990, S. 32: "Der Verächter des All achtet nichts weiter als sich und fürchtet sich in der Nacht vor nichts weiter als vor seinen Geschöpfen." – Für eine gute Darstellung der Jenaer literarisch-ästhetischen Parallelen zum Nihilismus vgl. die einleitende Studie des Herausgebers in: Dieter Arendt (Hrg.), *Nihilismus. Die Anfänge von Jacobi bis Nietzsche*, Verlag Jakob Hegner, Köln 1970, bes. S. 9–38. Es wäre interessant zu erforschen, welchen Einfluss damals die literarische Dimension auf die philosophische Nihilismus-Diskussion ausüben konnte; siehe z. B. bildreiche Darstellungen der reinen Subjektivität als Gewühl von Vorstellungen bei *Jacobi* (etwa in *David Hume*, s. o., Anm. 11), *Fichte* (etwa in *Bestimmung des Menschen*, Werke [hrg. von I. Fichte], II, S. 245) oder *Hegel* (etwa in *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, wo das reine Selbst als die "Nacht der Welt" bezeichnet wird).

der modernen Philosophie: entweder Spinoza oder keine Philosophie”,<sup>14</sup> so bekennt er damit die Richtigkeit des *Jacobischen* Ansatzes. Sogar die berühmte Erklärung, das Wahre sei nicht als Substanz, sondern eben so sehr als Subjekt aufzufassen, darf man mit vollem Recht als Niederschrift der Aufgabe betrachten, wie man durch Spinoza (Substanz) hindurch doch die Freiheit (Subjekt) erhalten kann, wie man an der Philosophie festhalten und doch alle Konsequenzen vermeiden kann, die nach Jacobi untrennbar an ihr haften.

Auch zur Nihilismus-Diskussion nahm Hegel mehr oder weniger dieselbe Haltung ein. Seine einleitende Geste war, Jacobis Einschätzung beizustimmen und so anzuerkennen, dass sich die Philosophie auf Fichtes Weise notwendig als leerer Formalismus ergibt. Er konnte aber keineswegs dem Jacobischen Ausweg beipflichten: der “Sprung des Glaubens” ist nach ihm mit dem Verzicht auf Philosophie gleichbedeutend, wodurch das eigentliche Problem nur vermieden, ja, als ungelöst verfestigt wird. Während sich Jacobi in der Alternative entweder Nichts oder Gott, ein Drittes gebe es nicht, verschanzte, setzte Hegel hinzu:

*Es gibt ein Drittes, sagt dagegen die Philosophie, und es ist dadurch Philosophie, daß ein Drittes ist.*<sup>15</sup>

Das Weiterbestehen der Philosophie hängt nach Hegel davon ab, inwiefern es ihr gelingen wird, die Nihilismus-Falle auszuräumen, und dies kann ihr nur insofern gelingen, als sie – die ausschließende Logik der Reflexion durchbrechend – das Nichts selbst zu ihrem Gegenstand nimmt und dadurch doch etwas Positives hervorbringt.

Dabei konnte sich Hegel in seinen ersten Jenaer Jahren stark an Schellings Ausführungen anlehnen. Schelling hatte schon vorher Ansätze für eine Philosophie des absoluten Nichts entwickelt, worin *das Nichts positiv bewertet* wurde, und zwar vor allem in Beziehung auf die intellektuelle Anschauung als denjenigen Erkenntnismodus, der nicht an die gewöhnlichen Schranken der Reflexion gebunden ist. “Denn wenn Nichts das heißt, was schlechterdings kein *Objekt* ist, so muß das Nichts gewiß da eintreten, wo ein Nicht-Objekt doch objektiv angeschaut werden soll.”<sup>16</sup> Dasjenige, worauf die ganze Totalität von endlich, nur bedingterweise Seiendem beruht,

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<sup>14</sup> G. F. W. Hegel, TWA (= *Werke*, hrg. von Moldenhauer und Michel bei Suhrkamp), 20, S. 163–164.

<sup>15</sup> G. F. W. Hegel, TWA, 2, S. 411.

<sup>16</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *Werke* (hrsg. von K. F. A. Schelling), I/1, S. 326.

kann wohl nicht ein Ding der Reflexion sein. Für *Reflexion* stellt dieser Punkt – mag er als reines Ich, das Sein selbst oder auch als das Absolute näher bestimmt werden – vielmehr das reine Nichts dar. Der Grund dafür liegt aber keineswegs in der angeblichen Nichtigkeit dieses Ichs oder Seins, sondern in der Gebundenheit der Reflexion an das Endliche und Beschränkte, in ihrem Unvermögen, das Unbedingte selbst zu fassen. Denn die Reflexion, die sich mit dem Grundsatz *omnis determinatio negatio est* (der nachmals als spinozistisch galt) identifiziert, arbeitet im Modus des Entgegensetzens, sie setzt ihre Bestimmungen durch Verneinung des Gegensatzes und ist daher wesentlich in die Sphäre der Entzweiung eingebunden. Wenn also die Philosophie für Jacobi in dem Nichts endet, erklärt nun Hegel, so geschieht es nur darum, weil Jacobi (zusammen mit Fichte) selbst die Reflexion in ihrer Endlichkeit absolutisiert und sie als die einzig mögliche Erkenntnisweise betrachtet. Der Nihilismus seiner Philosophie ist *ein selbstverschuldeter Nihilismus*; er ergibt sich als *notwendige Folge einer willkürlichen Beschränkung* der Philosophie auf die Logik der Reflexion, dessen also, dass sie *vor dem Nichts inne hält*. Umgekehrt kann der Nihilismus erst durch jene Philosophie überwunden werden, die dieses Nichts wirklich in Anspruch zu nehmen wagt: *vollständige Philosophie fällt mit dem Denken des Nichts zusammen*.

Das Erste der Philosophie aber ist, das *absolute* Nichts zu erkennen, wozu es Fichtesche Philosophie so wenig bringt, so sehr die Jacobische sie darum verabscheut.<sup>17</sup>

Um das absolute Nichts zu erkennen, muss man offenbar über die Logik des Entgegensetzens hinausgehen, aber ebenso offenbar nicht in der Weise, sie einfach zu verwerfen, wie es Jacobi tat, da er dadurch jenes ausschließende Entweder–Oder nur verfestigte und so noch einmal und noch tiefer in den Schranken der Reflexion stecken blieb. Nach Hegel besteht die einzige Möglichkeit der Überwindung der Reflexion darin, dass sie als *ein inneres Moment* der Selbstentwicklung des Absoluten anerkannt wird. Schließlich kann auch die in der modernen Welt herrschende Entzweiung nicht durch ein Streben, die verlorene Einheit wieder herzustellen, aufgehoben werden: Entzweiung ist eine unwiderrufbare Tatsache, sie ist selbst “ein Faktor des Lebens”, so dass sich jede mögliche Einheit nur vor ihrem Hintergrund hervorbringen kann. In ähnlicher Weise ist Hegel der Meinung, die Schranken der Reflexion sind nur zu überwinden, wenn sie *in ihrer vollen Kraft bejaht* und *ihre eigene Negativität für ihre Selbstüberwindung* in Anspruch genommen wird.

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<sup>17</sup> G. F. W. Hegel, TWA, 2, S. 410.



Wie es sich Hegel näher vorgestellt haben könnte, ist in groben Umrissen der *Differenzschrift* zu entnehmen. Hegel betrachtete darin die Reflexion von zwei Gesichtspunkten, als schlechte formelle und wahre absolute Reflexion bzw. als Verstand und Vernunft: beides sei dem Wesen nach identisch, der Unterschied bestehe eigentlich nur darin, dass dem Verstand das Bewusstsein von seiner Identität mit der Vernunft fehle. Verstand soll einfach Vernunft sein, die an einem gewissen Punkte inne gehalten habe, sich dort verfestigt und diesen partiellen Punkt als absolut zu betrachten angefangen habe. Deswegen sei, fährt etwa Hegel fort, für das Erheben des Verstandes auf den Standpunkt der Vernunft nichts weiter nötig, als bloß bis zu Ende auf der Reflexion in ihrer *ganzen Negativität* zu beharren und sie "verführerisch" nach ihren eigenen Gesetzen bis zu ihrem äußersten Rande zu bringen. Sobald das erreicht wird, so Hegels Überzeugung, gehen der Verstand und seine objektive Welt unter. Da nämlich die Reflexion entgegengesetzt vorangeht, kann sie sich *als diese endliche Reflexion* nur dann erhalten, wenn sie diesen ihren inneren Zwiespalt an den Rand auswirft, also wenn ihr Bestimmtes "ein Unbestimmtes vor sich und hinter sich" hat und so irgendwo "zwischen zwei Nächten" liegen bleibt; wenn sich aber die Logik der Reflexion zur vollkommenen Totalität entwickelt, bricht ihre negative Seite unausweichlich als zerstörender Widerspruch hervor. Wie sie auf dem Nichts beruht ("denn das Unbestimmte ist Nichts für den Verstand"), so endet sie dann im Nichts: sie geht als diese formelle Reflexion zugrunde und verwandelt sich in die absolute Reflexion oder Vernunft.

Insofern die Reflexion sich selbst zu ihrem Gegenstand macht, ist ihr höchstes Gesetz, das ihr von der Vernunft gegeben und wodurch sie zur Vernunft wird, ihre Vernichtung; sie besteht, wie alles, nur im Absoluten, aber als Reflexion ist sie ihm entgegengesetzt; um also zu bestehen, muß sie sich das Gesetz des Selbsterstörung geben.<sup>18</sup>

### III

Wie schon erinnert, ist dieses Denkmodell weitgehend dem Schelling-schen Entwurf eines Selbstmanifestierens des Absoluten verpflichtet. Das Endliche ist streng genommen nicht: seine Nichtigkeit manifestiert sich, indem es – kraft seiner immanenten Notwendigkeit – *als Endliches* zugrunde geht und so sein wesentliches Einsseins mit dem Absoluten wiederherstellt. Die Aufgabe der Philosophie und des Wissens im Allgemeinen soll folglich darin liegen,

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<sup>18</sup> G. F. W. Hegel, TWA, 2, S. 28.



diese absolute Identität zu erkennen; da es aber für die formelle, verständige, endliche Reflexion gleichsam den Tod bedeutet, kann sie es gewissermaßen nur negativ erreichen, indem sie bei einer gegebenen endlichen Bestimmung ebenso sehr ihren Gegenteil behauptet, derart beide in ihrer Endlichkeit vernichtet und auf das Absolute bezieht. Dieses Nichts des Endlichen soll ein Zeichen des Unendlichen inmitten des Endlichen selbst darstellen und so das höchste Erkenntnis sein, dessen die Reflexion imstande ist.

Na, und?! Welches ist *das positive Resultat* der angegebenen Vernichtung der Reflexion? Ist es nicht so, dass sich daraus nicht das absolute Nichts ergibt, sondern genau jenes immer einerlei bleibende leere Nichts, jene Abstraktion von Leerheit, die wir durch das absolute Erkennen gerade vermeiden wollten? Sind wir also nicht durch solche Bemühungen, die Jacobische Alternative zu überwinden, in ein und dasselbe Nichts geraten, dem vorher schon Jacobi verfiel?

Der Verdacht einer strukturellen Ähnlichkeit zwischen dem Schelling-schen absoluten Erkennen und dem Jacobischen Glauben wird durch eine ungewöhnliche Verwandtschaft in der subjektiven Haltung beider Philosophen weiter bekräftigt. Im *Glauben und Wissen* wirft Hegel der "Reflexionsphilosophie der *Subjektivität*" nicht nur die Absolutisierung des Endlichen und der formellen Reflexion vor, er tadelt bei Jacobi noch besonders das, was er gleichsam als sein pragmatisches Paradox ansieht. Hegel gibt zu, dass es bei einem tatsächlich unmittelbaren, unbefangenen Glauben im Grunde gestattet sei, ein unmittelbares Wissen des Absoluten zuzulassen, das die gewöhnlichen Schranken der Reflexionserkenntnis überwinden würde. Er besteht aber fest darauf, dass ein solcher Glauben, indem er als philosophische Einstellung auftritt, "jene reine Unbefangenheit" völlig einbüsst, die eben seine Tugend ausmachen soll, da er durch Versetzung in das Verhältnis zur Reflexion *auch als Glaube* "affiziert" und "verunreinigt" wird. Dazu ist er philosophisch ohnehin belanglos.

Die ganze Sphäre der Endlichkeit, des selbst etwas Seins, der Sinnlichkeit versinkt im wahrhaften Glauben vor dem Denken und Schauen des Ewigen, was hier eins wird; alle Mücken der Subjektivität verbrennen in diesem verzehrenden Feuer, und *selbst das Bewußtsein* dieses Hingehens und Vernichtens ist vernichtet.<sup>19</sup>

Das Subjekt eines solchen wahrhaften Glaubens wird aller seiner Besonderheit beraubt und ist so zugleich unvermögend, sich mitzutei-

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<sup>19</sup> G. F. W. Hegel, TWA, 2, S. 382.

len. Das einzige, was es von sich abgeben kann, ist nur der Stempel des Misserfolgs. Wenn es nämlich seinen Erfolg deklariert, beweist es damit sein Scheitern. Jedenfalls verfügen wir bei solchem Glauben über kein äußerliches Kriterium, so dass uns allein das Verhalten des Subjekts die objektive Wahrheit seines Wissens vermitteln kann. Indem nun aber die Subjektivität des Jacobischen Glaubens nach Hegels Feststellung “in ihrer Vernichtung selbst gerettet” wird, erweist sich damit auch positiv seine Falschheit – welche bei Jacobi umso verdrießlicher wirkt, weil sein Glauben zugleich *listig* ist, listig in dem Sinne, dass er “diese Verunreinigung des Glaubens” gerade durch das deklarierte Beharren auf seiner Reinheit und “diese Heiligung der Subjektivität” eben durch weitgehendes Reden über das Bedürfnis von ihrer Tilgung vornimmt. Vermöge seiner Listigkeit ist er gewissermaßen unzugänglich und kann anscheinend mühelos alle Einsprüche wegen angeblicher Unreinheit und “Selbstvergötterung” zurückweisen.<sup>20</sup> Es scheint wohl schon die bloße Verbindlichkeit von Wörtern unmöglich zu machen, einem, der die Desubjektivierung heftig fordert, entgegenzuhalten, dass sein Verfahren gerade das faktische Bestehen auf der partikulären Subjektivität und deren Mücken zur Folge und Wahrheit habe. Der Streit läuft bestenfalls in trockenes Versichern hinaus, das eigentlich ein Zusammenfallen des gemeinschaftlichen diskursiven Raumes bedeutet. Eben darum muss man aber, um es noch einmal zu betonen, in der Situation, wo sich eine Beurteilung nach inhaltlichen Kriterien verbietet, *die Wahrheit auch in der subjektiven Einstellung suchen*.

Was dies für die Jacobische Glaubens- oder Gefühlsphilosophie besagt, liegt auf der Hand: es genügt, sich die Gestalten von Allwill oder Woldemar anzusehen.<sup>21</sup> Allein, auch die Schellingsche Theorie des absoluten Erkennens erweist sich nach diesem Maßstab als ebenso unwahr! Objektiv gesehen ist ihr Ergebnis das immer *selbe Versichern des leeren Nichts*, das der Nacht, in der alle Kühe schwarz sind, gleicht; subjektiv genommen ist *die höchste Weisheit*

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<sup>20</sup> Vgl. *op. cit.*, S. 383: “Und weil in ihm beides, vernichtete und gerettete Subjektivität ist, so ist diese gerechtfertigt, denn sie beruft sich auf ihr Vernichtetein.”

<sup>21</sup> Vgl. *op. cit.*, S. 386–387: “Der Grundton aber dieser Gestalten ist dieser bewußte Mangel an Objektivität, diese an sich selbst festhängende Subjektivität, ... ein Betrachten seiner selbst, welches mit schöner Individualität eben die Verwandlung vornimmt, die mit dem Glauben vorging, nämlich durch dies Bewußtsein individueller Schönheit sich das Bewußtsein der aufgehobenen Subjektivität und des vernichteten Egoismus zu geben, aber durch dies Bewußtsein gerade die höchste Subjektivität und inneren Götzendienst gesetzt und sie zugleich gerechtfertigt zu haben.” – Für eine interessante Deutung, die teilweise von der unseren abweicht, aber keineswegs damit unvereinbar ist, vgl. Kazimir Drilo, “Aneignung des Absoluten in Jacobis ‘Woldemar’ und Hegels Kritik in ‘Glauben und Wissen’”, *Hegel-Jahrbuch 2005*, S. 215–220.

*mühe*los erreicht, durch gleichsam mechanische Anwendung des geforderten Behauptens des Gegenteils. Statt das absolute Nichts in seiner Bestimmtheit zu *denken*, gibt sich diese Theorie mit dem Nichts der Unbestimmtheit zu-frieden, das dazu noch von einem ebenso unbestimmten Vermögen der transzendentalen Anschauung zusammengehalten wird. Da sie nur durch das subjektive Versichern beglaubigt wird, besteht auch ihre Wahrheit in der Affirmation der Subjektivität. Kurz, in diesem Lichte gesehen unterscheidet sich Schellings absolutes Erkennen kaum von Jacobis Glaubensphilosophie!

Wir sind der Auffassung, dass darin einer der Gründe liegt, die Hegel schon in der Schrift über *Glauben und Wissen* dazu gebracht haben, sich vom Schellingschen Standpunkt allmählich zu entfernen. Seinen vermutlichen Programmansatz könnte man, glauben wir, ungefähr in zwei Thesen zusammenfassen: die Aufgabe der Philosophie ist *das absolute Nichts tatsächlich zu denken*, es in den Begriff zu fassen, was unter anderem bedeutet, dass das Ergebnis der Selbstvernichtung der Reflexion ebenso sehr reflexionsartig, positiv oder bestimmt begriffen werden muss; und dann, *das Denken ist wesentlich anstrengend*, es schließt das Daransetzen der eigenen Subjektivität ein. Beide Thesen sind in den beschließenden Bemerkungen zu finden, denen wir darum eine besondere Geltung verleihen müssen.

Der reine Begriff aber oder die Unendlichkeit als der Abgrund des Nichts, worin alles Sein versinkt, muß den unendlichen Schmerz, der vorher nur in der Bildung geschichtlich und als das Gefühl war, worauf die Religion der neuen Zeit beruht – das Gefühl: Gott selbst ist tot ... –, rein als Moment, aber auch nicht als mehr denn als Moment der höchsten Idee bezeichnen und so dem, was etwa ... der Begriff formeller Abstraktion war, eine philosophische Existenz geben und also der Philosophie die Idee der absoluten Freiheit und damit das absolute Leiden oder den spekulativen Karfreitag, der sonst historisch war, und ihn selbst in der ganzen Wahrheit und Härte seiner Gottlosigkeit wiederherstellen, aus welcher Härte allein ... die höchste Totalität ... auferstehen kann und muß.<sup>22</sup>

Der Begriff selbst muss sich dem unendlichen Schmerz aussetzen, das reine Denken – und “die Aufgabe des Nihilismus liegt allerdings in dem reinen Denken” – muss bis auf den Punkt des Zusammenbruchs getrieben werden, wo ihm alles Feste ins Wanken gerät und alles Bestimmte durch seine eigene Negativität endgültig zugrunde geht. In dieser Versenkung in Nichts darf

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<sup>22</sup> G. F. W. Hegel, TWA, 2, S. 432.

der reine Begriff aber eben nicht verzweifeln und entweder zum Glauben Zuflucht nehmen (Jacobi) oder ein solches leeren Nichts voreilig als sein Alles behaupten (Schelling). Er muss vielmehr den unendlichen Schmerz auf sich nehmen, er muss die äußerste Verlassenheit erfahren und trotz der vollkommenen Hoffnungslosigkeit – *weiter denken*. Denn wenn das Gefühl der grenzlosen Abgründigkeit des Nichts wohl ein Moment der absoluten Idee ausmacht, macht Hegel geltend, dass *es nicht das Letzte sein soll*, es muss vielmehr in der Tat nur *ein Moment* sein. Das Denken muss folglich nicht nur als “negative Seite des Absoluten – welche die reine Vernichtung des Gegensatzes oder Endlichkeit” ist – auftreten, sondern zugleich als “der Quell der ewigen Bewegung oder der Endlichkeit, die unendlich ist, d.h. die sich ewig vernichtet, aus welchem Nichts und reinen Nacht der Unendlichkeit die Wahrheit ... sich emporhebt”.<sup>23</sup> Die Aufgabe der wahren Philosophie, die eben damit mit dem konsequent durchgeführten Nihilismus zusammenfällt, besteht also darin, am Ende des Kreuzwegs der Reflexion durch Beharren in ihrem Nichts die inhaltvolle Wahrheit entstehen zu lassen.

Der historische Karfreitag wird nicht von ungefähr erwähnt. Er weist nicht nur auf die Vernichtung alles unmittelbar Seienden hin, sondern will zugleich betonen, dass – wie im Religiösen das Leiden zugleich das Leiden des Menschen in seiner Gottverlassenheit ist – auch in der Philosophie das Moment der subjektiven Bewährung eine Rolle bei der Wiederauferstehung des Begriffs spielt. Hegel scheint zu behaupten, die absolute Negativität muss sich entsprechend auf der subjektiven Ebene niederschlagen. Diese Manifestation pflegte er zunächst in der Anlehnung an den *Tod* – als die Erscheinung des “negativ Absoluten, der reinen Freiheit”<sup>24</sup> – zu denken, später aber erweiterte er sie zu einer Sammlung von Begriffen wie etwa *Furcht*, *Härte*, *Ernst*, *Arbeit*, *Anstrengung*, deren gemeinschaftlicher Zug darin besteht, dass sie alle das subjektive Erlebnis jener Negativität ausdrücken, die die Freiheit, das Denken und zuletzt das Absolute vorantreibt. Sie sind die Art, wie sich das negative Wesen des Absoluten in das Sein des Subjekts selbst einverleibt.

Das soll freilich nicht heißen, dass das bloße Leiden ein hinreichender Beleg der Wahrheit eines Wissens wäre. Aber insofern die Verselbstständigung der formellen Reflexion und folglich das Steckenbleiben im Nichts eben aus der vorzeitigen Unterlassung der Aufgabe des Denkens, gleichsam aus einer konzeptuellen Faulheit folgt, in dem Maße bleibt die subjektive Verpflichtung zum Gebot des Denkens eine notwendige Bedingung der Möglichkeit der

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<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, S. 431.

<sup>24</sup> G. F. W. Hegel, TWA, 2, S. 479.

spekulativen Auferstehung. Zum Glück macht sie aber nicht den einzigen Maßstab aus. Wie man den Baum nach seinen Früchten erkennt, so ist in Hegels Sicht für die erfolgreiche Überwindung des Nihilismus vor allem die Frage entscheidend, inwiefern es der Selbstvernichtung der Reflexion wirklich gelingt, ein neues, vorher nicht bestehendes Gebiet zu erschließen oder eine neue, positiv bestimmte Erkenntnis hervorzubringen. Erst dann kann die frohe Kunde verbreitet werden, dass auch die Philosophie durch den reinen Begriff aus dem Abgrund des absoluten Nichts auferstanden sei.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Die vorgeschlagene Deutung von Hegels impliziter Schelling-Kritik deckt sich weitgehend mit den Ausführungen, die Robert Pfaller in hervorragendem Aufsatz ("Negation and Its Realities: An Empty Subject for Ideology?", *Sic* 2, S. 225–246) über Žižeks Modell einer "Transgression durch explizite Immanenz" vorgelegt hat. Etwas vereinfacht gesagt, scheint Žižek davon auszugehen, dass man von der Ideologie fliehend desto mehr ihrer Macht unterworfen bleibt, da die angebliche ideologiefreie Wahrheit eben eine typische Konstruktion der Ideologie selbst darstellt; das einzige Mittel ihrer Negation soll also darin liegen, sich jedes Jenseits zu verbieten und durch eine inhaltslose Geste der Verneinung seinen Standpunkt ausdrücklich als ideologisch zu bekennen. Dem entgegen weiß Pfaller zunächst darauf hin, dass solche "listige Verneinung" der Ideologie eigentlich ein weit verbreiteter Bestandteil mancher (post)modernen Ideologien ist, die, mögen sie in ihren Überwindungsversuchen noch so listig sein, allenfalls ihre eindeutige Materialität besitzen. Vor allem aber betont er, "wenn wir einen Raum überschreiten wollen, so müssen wir zu einem anderen Raum gelangen", ferner dass dieser Raum dazu "eine positive Natur haben" muss und dass endlich aus ihm andere positive Wirkungen folgen müssen. Da aber die beschriebene Transgressionsart in der "bloßen Geste" der Negation bestehen und keine spezifische Bedingungen und Wirkungen haben soll, fällt Pfallers Urteil unerbittlich aus: "Der dialektische Begriff von der Transgression durch explizite Immanenz ist ein Begriff der ideologischen Integration." (*Op. cit.*, S. 236.) Pfaller knüpft daran weitere Überlegungen über dem ontologischen und topologischen Status von Negativität an und sieht darin auch einen Beleg für die behauptete Überlegenheit von Spinoza (und Althusser) im Vergleich mit Hegel (und Lacan). Pfallers Argumentation ist freilich nur beizustimmen. Allein, wenn unsere Deutung richtig ist, ist es offensichtlich, dass sie keineswegs gegen Hegel, sondern gegen Schelling gerichtet werden soll, da sie eigentlich den Gedankengang von Hegels Schelling-Kritik nachvollzieht. Denn obwohl Hegel zusammen mit Schelling den Nihilismus mit der Negativität selbst überwinden wollte, beharrte er darauf, dass diese Überwindung nur durch das begreifende Durcharbeiten des Nichts, also unter spezifischen Bedingungen geschehen kann, und dass sie ein bestimmtes, also positives Resultat haben muss. In diesem Sinne schreibt er in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, wenn der Vorhang der Erscheinung fällt und es offenbar wird, dass hinter ihm nichts zu sehen ist: "Aber es ergibt sich zugleich, daß nicht ohne alle Umstände geradezu dahintergegangen werden könne." (TWA, 3, S. 136.) Und als er ganz in der verkürzten Weise einer Transgression durch explizite Immanenz zu erklären scheint: "Das Übersinnliche ist also die *Erscheinung* als *Erscheinung*", zögert er nicht hinzusetzen: "Wenn dabei gedacht wird, das Übersinnliche sei also die sinnliche Welt ..., so ist dies ein verkehrtes Verstehen; denn die Erscheinung ist vielmehr nicht die Welt des sinnlichen Wissens und Wahrnehmens als seiende, sondern sie als *aufgehobene* ... gesetzt." (TWA, 3, S. 118–119.) Wenn uns also Hegel verbietet, das Übersinnliche jenseits des Sinnlichen

## IV

Zum Zeitpunkt, da es geschrieben wurde, musste das Programm des spekulativen Karfreitags weitgehend Programm bleiben. Hegel stand damals kaum ein konzeptuelles Mittel zur Verfügung, um in positiver Weise jenes Nichts zu denken, das durch die Selbstvernichtung des Endlichen entsteht. Das ist ihm erst gelungen, nachdem er den Begriff des Anderen seiner selbst entwickelte und die Negativität noch tiefer in das Absolute selbst, nicht bloß in seine Erscheinung hineintrug, – mit Einem, als er das Absolute als Geist aufzufassen anfang. Der Nihilismus-Diskurs verlor danach allmählich seinen Stellenwert und verschwand fast von der Bildfläche. Trotzdem kann behauptet werden, der Hegelsche Standpunkt des spekulativen Idealismus habe sich gerade in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Nihilismus gebildet. Und während der Ausdruck in den Hintergrund trat, ist die Problematik von Negativität, Nichts und Nihilismus ein fester Bestandteil des endgültigen Systems geblieben.<sup>26</sup>

In der *Phänomenologie des Geistes* kann man z. B. fast greifbar spüren, wie sich die frühere Nihilismusdebatte zur Skeptizismusfrage verwandelt hat. Das Fortgehen des Bewusstseins wird als Weg des Zweifels und der Verzweiflung,<sup>27</sup> als "sich vollbringender Skeptizismus" beschrieben. Dieser Skeptizismus muss aber, fährt Hegel fort, von jenem gewöhnlichen Skeptizismus der Philosophie unterschieden werden, "der im Resultate nur immer das *reine Nichts* sieht" und "mit der Abstraktion des Nichts oder der Leerheit endigt". Damit er nicht bloß als eine negative Bewegung erscheint, muss man nur zum Begriff der "bestimmten Negation" gelangen, deren Nichts eigentlich das Nichts dessen ist, woraus es entsteht, und so selbst bestimmt ist. Und für diese "an sich ganz einfache Betrachtung" sind keine inhaltlich bestimmten Eingriffe oder anderswo beigebrachten Zusätze nötig, sondern man muss "nur nicht abstrahieren" und vom Negativen wegsehen. Hegel festigt so das Wissen ge-

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oder darüber zu suchen, so bedeutet es *weder*, dass das Übersinnliche einfach identisch mit dem Sinnlichen ist, *noch*, dass es kein Übersinnliches gibt; im Gegenteil, was er sagen will, ist, dass man das Übersinnliche nirgendwo anders als in dem Sinnlichen selbst suchen und es gerade da *erkennend hervorbringen* muss. Gegen Pfallers spinozierende These von dem Vorrang der Positivität würde so, kann man vermuten, Hegel die Auffassung vertreten, dass während jener jenseitiger Raum allerdings positiv und produktiv sein muss, braucht er trotzdem nicht unmittelbar von außen den alten Raum zu begrenzen, da er ohne die Arbeit der Negativität eben noch nicht vorhanden ist und bis dahin, wenn überhaupt, nur in den Spalten und Rissen des alten Raums existiert.

<sup>26</sup> Vgl. Wolfgang Bonsiepen, *Der Begriff der Negativität in den Jenaer Schriften Hegels*, Bouvier, Bonn 1977.

<sup>27</sup> Am Schluss wird es sogar als "die Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes" bezeichnet.

gen skeptische Angriffe gerade durch die vollständige Durchführung des Skeptizismus, wie er zuvor das Mittel zur Überwindung des Nihilismus in dem vollständigen Nihilismus sah. Gewissermaßen ist aber schon in dem Begriff der – negierend affirmativen – Aufhebung das volle Erbe des vollständigen Nihilismus enthalten.

In diesem Sinne ist es vielleicht nicht verfehlt, Hegels Philosophie als spekulative Vollendung der christlichen Grundlehre zu bezeichnen. Nur muss dabei berücksichtigt werden, dass die Religion in dem Gefühl, die Philosophie dagegen in dem reinen Begriff besteht. Mag also das Denken für immer schwer bleiben, da der Begriff wesentlich anstrengend ist, ist sofern das Pathetische ein Zeichen der unvollständigen Philosophie. Das Vorkommen von starken Bildern lässt eher an die Schwäche des Begriffs denken. Genauer, je unbestimmter ein Begriff ist, desto stärker ist die Anwesenheit des Subjekts im Denken; die Stärke des Begriffs erweist sich umgekehrt erst im Verschwinden des denkenden Subjekts. Das ist auch der Grund, warum die Aufgabe des Denkens für das Subjekt wesentlich anstrengend ist: sie verlangt seine *Selbstverleugnung*. Und das ist auch der Grund, warum das Subjekt durch die *Erfahrung* des spekulativen Karfreitags hindurch muss: das absolute Leiden besteht eben im Auslösen seiner Besonderheit, die sich hinter die Allgemeinheit des Denkens stellen muss.

Zum Schluss möchten wir so in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes* auf jene Erfahrung des Bewusstseins verweisen, die nach Hegels Auffassung die unmittelbare Voraussetzung des Eintritts in die Ordnung des Denkens darstellt. Es handelt sich freilich um die Erfahrung des dienenden Bewusstseins, die keineswegs darin besteht, dass es um dieses oder jenes gefürchtet habe, mag es auch als Leben bezeichnet werden. Dem reinen Selbstbewusstsein ist es nicht schwer zu sterben, ihm fällt es vielmehr schwer, auf seine Selbstständigkeit zu verzichten. Man kann dieses Moment auch Ehre nennen und es so ausdrücken: Das Subjekt kann Allem und Jedem entsagen, seiner Ehre, seinem Namen jedoch nicht. Aber damit bestätigt es eben, dass es noch immer an etwas Partikuläres gebunden ist, dass in ihm ein Rest von Dinghaftem geblieben und dass es folglich nicht vollständig Selbstbewusstsein ist, das ja gerade in der Negation alles Festen besteht. Dagegen hat das knechtische Bewusstsein ins Antlitz des Todes schauend die absolute Furcht erfahren: "Es ist darin innerlich aufgelöst worden, hat durchaus in sich selbst erzittert, und alles Fixe hat in ihm gebebt."<sup>28</sup> Nun aber stellt dieses "absolute Flüssigwerden alles Bestehens", setzt Hegel hinzu, eben diejenige "absolute Negativität" dar, die das Wesen des Selbstbewusstseins ausmacht. Das knechtische Bewusstsein

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<sup>28</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, TWA, 3, S. 153.



hat demnach in der alle Mücken der Subjektivität verbrennenden Furcht nicht nur sein eigenes Wesen erlebt, sondern ist vor allem zur Erkenntnis gekommen, dass es in ihm als reinem Selbstbewusstsein nichts gibt, was in der Weise des Seins seiend sein würde. Was als Feigheit erscheint, ist kein Zeichen der Schwäche, es ist vielmehr der Ausdruck der höchsten Kraft des Selbstbewusstseins, das dem, was seinen wertvollsten Schatz ausmacht, seiner Eigenheit zu entsagen imstande ist und auch ohne seine Ehre und ohne seinen Namen *doch weiterzuleben vermag*.

Diese subjektive Departikularisierung ist eine notwendige Bedingung für das Erheben auf den Standpunkt des Allgemeinen oder des Denkens. Der Herr, der solche Erfahrung nicht auf sich nehmen wollte, wird für immer eine Sackgasse in der Entwicklung des Geistes darstellen, das Feld des Allgemeinen wird ihm verschlossen bleiben: Der Herr mag Einfälle, interessante Ideen haben, denken kann er nicht! Es ist also ein Knecht, der die Aufgabe des Begriffs – die bekanntlich Geduld, Anstrengung und Arbeit, Arbeit der Selbstverleugnung, verlangt – auf sich nehmen und eines Tages eine *Wissenschaft der Logik* verfassen wird. Was bis dahin in bunte Gestalten einer bodenlosen Abgründigkeit des Nichts verkleidet worden ist, das wird nunmehr in stillem Gang des Begriffs fortgehen. Und erst als diese negative Beziehung zu sich selbst, als absolute Reflexion, als diese

*Bewegung von Nichts zu Nichts, und so zu sich selbst zurück*<sup>29</sup>

wird Philosophie ihr Nichts endlich überwinden. Jacobi hatte in gewissem Sinne recht, die Reflexion besteht wirklich im bloßen Ein- und Ausgehen von Nichts zu Nichts; aber, voreilig von dem Negativen weggehend, bemerkte er nicht, wie es dadurch zu sich selbst kommt, eine Gleichheit mit sich erreicht und so in ein Sein umschlägt.

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<sup>29</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, TWA, 6, S. 24.



## ANNIHILATION OF NOTHING?

Aleš Bunta

The central thesis of Hegel's *Science of Logic* runs as follows: being is nothing. If traditional metaphysics has built upon the *exclusion* of negativity from reality, appearance from truth, and of nothing from the pureness of being, then according to Hegel, it's impossible to understand reality if it hasn't been comprehended in its equality with negation. There's no other way to behold the truth but through its *Erscheinung*: It's impossible to recognize being if it hasn't been understood as nothing.

On the other hand, Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics might have been summed up in the following words: metaphysics is unable *not* to think of being as nothing. It has always thought of being as nothing, only this fact remained hidden to it. The simplest reason for this incapacity lies in the fact that as soon as metaphysics puts being *beyond* life, it actually puts it in nothing. There is, however, another, deeper reason, which can only be fully understood through an analysis of Nietzsche's complex relation to Hegel's concept of negativity.

### 1. *The equinox*

Hegel introduced the phrase "being is nothing" as a necessary logical conclusion. Nevertheless, it has to be understood as an ontological thesis. In order to justify this claim, two questions have to be solved: First, how does *nothing actually intervene as being*? That means, in what manner does nothing itself prevent the world from falling into the abyss of nothing? And secondly, how is it possible to perceive *nothing as nothing else but being*? In other words, how does nothing converge into being? Both answers are to be found in the concept of the "negation of negation", logical operation, and ontological constellation in which a crush of nothing into nothing always results in

“something” and through which it becomes possible to gain the insight “that the negative is just as much positive.”<sup>1</sup>

Pure (abstract) being is defined as “indeterminate immediateness”. As such, that is to say, as something that can’t be a result of external mediation or an object of external determination, being is “simple equality with itself”; it is something that is neither *equal* to anything else, nor *different* from anything else. It is a region of absolute ontological independency. As simple self-equality it also can’t contain any kind of content or difference: it is only a “pure indeterminateness and emptiness” in which nothing is to be thought, “or it is equally only this empty thinking”.<sup>2</sup> Pure being is therefore an empty non-reflexive thought or abstract nothing.

On the other hand, pure (abstract) nothing is also simple equality with itself, a region of absolute ontological independency. Not only being, but nothing as well can’t be equal to anything else nor different from anything else: what is identical to nothing is already nothing, and because nothing doesn’t have any positive characteristics it also can’t differ from anything. *Par definitionem* it also can’t contain any content or difference. However, the moment it becomes an object of thought, it’s no longer just nothing, but also something that exists in the given thought and as this thought: an *empty non-reflexive* thought which is, as has been shown above, exactly pure being.

This brings us to a paradoxical situation: “pure being and pure nothing are ... the same”, but nevertheless they exist as two spheres of equality-only-with-itself. What binds them together – the fact that they are both simple, empty self-equalities, also tears them apart. Their truth can therefore be neither in their sameness nor in their difference, but only in their immediate passing over into each other. The basic parameters of the relation of being and nothing are thus set.

The basic difference that separates “determinate being” from pure being lies in the fact that pure being *is* nothing, while determinate being *incorporates* it. As such, it is the determination of totality – of everything that belongs to a certain totality and of everything that this totality lacks. For the same reason, namely the inclusion of nonbeing into being, determinate being is being that is also itself a subject of determination: what a certain totality lacks co-determines this totality as a whole. Determinate being is being *determined* by nonbeing, and is therefore the *negation* of the *indeterminate* immediateness of pure being. In Hegel’s universe in general, everything that is *different* or *contains*

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<sup>1</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Allen & Unwin, London & New York 1969, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

*difference* becomes subjected to negation. On the other hand, however, everything identical or equal to itself is already identical to nothing.

As existing determination, determinate being is defined as “quality”, which can be posed in two different ways. To put it very simply, in case quality appears as existing quality, it is “reality”, and if it represents a certain lack, it is “negation”. What’s crucial is that both reality and negation retain characteristics of determinate being, which is to say, first, that *negation exists*, and, second, that *reality also includes negative mediation*.

We have thus reached the first crucial point in the argument. – Determinate being has fallen into two different subspecies: existing negation and reality imbued with nothing. *These two however are again one and the same*. “Reality itself contains negation, and is determinate being, not indeterminate abstract being. Similarly, negation is determinate being, not the supposedly abstract nothing, but posited here as it is in *itself*, as affirmatively present, belonging into the sphere of determinate being.”<sup>3</sup> The qualitative difference in determinate being is sublated in the same moment it’s been established. That doesn’t mean, however, that it has been abolished. – Through sublation of its inner difference, determinate being becomes again equal to itself, *but different from its first episode*. What we are dealing with here is determinate being that is at the same time the *other* of determinate being. Being that reinstated itself through the transgression of its inner difference and which exactly in this *transgression of difference* again *differs* from determined being as such (that means from itself). Now, if determinate being as such was the negation of indeterminate pure being, than the “second” determinate being appears through the sublation of the inner difference that constituted determinate being as such. The “second” determinate being is therefore the negation of the “first” negation of being, and because of that it is the *negation of negation*, or as Hegel puts it: “something”.

What is “something”? Hegel is rather sparing of words: “*Something* is the negation of negation in the form of being; for this second negation is the restoring of the simple relation to self; but with this, something is equally *the mediation of itself with it self*.”<sup>4</sup> Negation of negation thus signifies the moment of the reinstatement of the indeterminate immediateness that defines being. The only difference is that what’s at stake this time isn’t pure being, but concrete particular existence. Once again, “something” establishes itself by transgressing the difference that created a rupture in determinate being (itself), and exactly through this transgression of difference again differs from

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

determinate being as such (itself). It differs from itself, but in the middle of itself. It's mediated and determined only by itself and nothing else. That means, however, that we are again facing a paradoxical situation. – Both pure being and its reinstatement in something particular exist as “equalities only with itself”, that is, as something that can't be determined by anything else but itself, which actually means that at the same moment that being reestablishes itself as equality with itself, *it becomes its own independent other*. It becomes being that exists in full independence of being; being that is separated from being; being that has therefore itself for its object, and that's exactly Hegel's definition of the *subject*.

The stage is set, key elements arranged. How did the negation of negation actually occur? From this point onwards it's necessary to proceed through the hypothesis. The basic situation is the following. “Negation” is opposed to “reality” and *recognizes itself in it*: reality also is imbued with nothing. Negation negates reality only to find itself redundant, negated, which makes it disappear in its (identical) opposite. In simple academic jargon: nothing stumbles into nothing, the annihilation of nothing produces being without lack, being redeemed of its identity with nothing, which means concrete being, which is no longer an empty abstraction but “something”. There's a catch however, for this is only the first part of the story – the same that happened to being *happened also to nothing itself*. The annihilation of nothing produced something; through this process, however, *nothing was not really obliterated but was actually produced, reinstated as real nothing*: in the same way that being shook off its identity with nothing and became *something* that really exists, nothing got rid of its identity with abstract being and *became true nothing that exists, which is therefore also something*. *Something is Two in one*: first, being that has broken its identity with nothing and, second, nothing that has broken its identity with being and become “absolute negativity”.

It is thus necessary to start again. Negation negates, annihilates the whole of reality – with one sole exception: *what can't be annihilated is the nothing itself that already exists in reality*. Nothing can't be annihilated because it already is nothing. And if it is annihilated it becomes – nothing. The only remainder that survives the cataclysm of the total negation of reality is nothing itself. Or, in other words, only nothing in the midst of reality prevents the total destruction of reality and its absorption into the abstract identity of being and nothing. Schematically put, nothing was redoubled into the nothing that annihilates and the nothing that blocks annihilation. On the ontological level, however, both nothings are still posited in the relation of identity – if they weren't, negation would indeed be able to negate also the instance of nothing in the midst of reality (everything different is subject to negation). We

have still not achieved the absolute negativity; an additional micro-turn is needed. – The nothing that can't be annihilated *negates* the capacity of total annulment that defines *negation*. If the first step consisted of negation negating reality, now the annihilated remainder of reality *negates negation*: negation (the instance of nothing in reality) makes it impossible for negation to become the total negation of what it negates. It prevents it from becoming “simple self-equality”, and thus renders its return to pure being impossible. The normal flow of becoming is thwarted, first negation is left hanging outside the possibility of return into being, it falls out of the sphere of abstraction and thus becomes indeterminate “something”, *centered around its inherent impossibility (negation), which however as negation is nothing else but itself. Two, which is exactly the same.*

The given situation can be explained following Rado Riha's analysis of Malevich's painting *Black square on white background*, the painting that consists of what its title says: a black square on a white background. At the starting point there's an empty white background – abstract nothing, which, in its totality, is identical to pure being (a white screen is indeterminate immediateness, which can represent both being and nothing). On this background a black square appears, in our case the instance of nothingness in reality, which renders it impossible for the first nothing to achieve totality (a reinstatement of complete self-equality), and thereby its return into abstract being. Yet, this second nothing is also just a mere abstraction and is therefore identical to being. Where is the absolute negativity – this nothing, which is no longer just a mere abstraction, but something – to be located in this configuration? Exactly in the interval between both squares, which gives Malevitch's picture the effect of depth. In the appearance of an interval between both squares. In the interval, which in reality doesn't exist, because “*behind the surface there's nothing else but surface itself.*”<sup>5</sup> *In the non-existing interval, which is literally nothing and at the same time the minimal difference of the same.* The disappearing difference, which constitutes the subject's self-reflexive structure.

What is crucial here is the following: what prevents negation from being totalized, or, in other words, what prevents the annihilation of the whole of reality, and thus its return into the sphere of abstraction (empty appearance), is not some irreducible remainder of *otherness*, but the instance of *sameness* – a *nothing* that can't be *annulled*. Negation of negation is thus the moment when *the sameness intervenes as its own other*. This is to say that particular *sameness* arises as *causa sui*: it's no longer conditioned by Other (being, life, God, *etc.*),

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<sup>5</sup> Rado Riha, “Scene dvojega I. Črni kvadrat na beli podlagi”, in: *Filozofski vestnik* XXII/3, Ljubljana 2001, p. 184. See also: Gérard Wajcman, *L'objet du siècle*, Verdier, Paris 1998.

but centered around its own lack, its constitutive gap, which it is itself. That is, however, only the first step.

In order for the second step, and with it the whole of negation of negation, to be fully grasped, the story has to be brought into a wider context. Hegel's idea of "absolute negativity" occurs on two levels. The difference between them might be understood as the dividing line between the Hegel that still remains bound to metaphysics, and the Hegel that in a certain manner already goes beyond it. Of course it is obvious that neither of "them" is possible without the other.

The first level can be introduced in relation to the above argument: what exactly exists as its own other? What universal is at the same time particular, and what particular is at the same time universal? In Hegel's conceptual framework, only one answer is possible: everything or nothing. Fundamentally, definitely nothing: *the immediate identity of universal and particular* can take place only in absolute negativity and nowhere else than in absolute negativity. – Nothing pervades the whole of reality, more than that – *only* nothing prevents reality from coming crumbling down into the nothingness of abstraction. Nothing and not being, or more accurately, also being, but only insofar as *nothing is being*: "to be the negation of a nothing constitutes being."<sup>6</sup> Only what contains nothing exists. Everything else is already nothing. Nothing unites existing and non-existing. Nothing binds the world into a whole. *Nothing is universal*. On the other hand, however, nothing is also the *only absolute particularity*, which can't be determined by anything else, which exists as *causa sui*, and which *can't be subdued even by its own negative power*. Nothing is universal and particular in one; it's the universal of particularity and the particularity of the universal. Further on, absolute negativity is "indeterminate immediateness" – self-equality, which however doesn't represent some substantially separated world: it is situated in the world (nothing is not different from anything else) but remains untouched by it (nothing else but nothing can determine nothing); it can be found in everything, and at the same time it remains in the relation "only with it self". It exists in time, but as infinity. A spiritualised slut who sleeps with everybody and still remains a virgin.

Absolute nothing thus exists in the middle of reality and at the same time above it. *As such, it is the foundation of all the spheres of absolute ontological independency (subject, spirit, appearance, being); spheres that belong to reality (world, community, life, time) in such a way that (as absolute self-equalities) while entering reality, they already step out of it*. What is the Hegelian subject? The *negativity of desire*. As desire it has always-already been thrown out of its empty shell into the opposed

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<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 400.

substance, and only the fact that the subject already *was absolute nothing* protects her from being crushed by the social substance, in its massive superiority in weight and strength. The subject's particularity is nothing. The subject reinstates herself in her unity only at the point where she has become an existing nothing and thus an empty irreducible gap in substance. Yet, nothing is also the foundation of the subject's community: an individual becomes a subject only when she becomes a link in society, an element of the "social substance". But what is this community? "*Nothing* as the absolute common spirit, – because it is one."<sup>7</sup> Nothing is therefore also the basis of the particularity of the universal itself, the reason why spirit transgresses all the possible forms of its finite incarnations. Spirit surmounts finitude by being infinite nothing. Spirit is also the world, but only insofar as the world, which would have the spirit subtracted from it, wouldn't be anything else but absolute nothing, that is – the spirit. *The world is unable not to be the spirit, although the world is not the spirit*: "This common substance is not worldly; the worldly powerlessly opposes it."<sup>8</sup> – What thus is being? Nothing. Being cannot be anything else but nothing.

This line of interpretation was of course already present in Derrida's analysis. – The key moment of Hegel's philosophy "consisted – it is almost tempting to say consisted *simply* – in taking the negative seriously" and changing it into a "resource".<sup>9</sup> Hegelian negativity is the "reassuring *other* surface of the positive", which actually neutralizes the negative itself: a bumper that amortizes any kind of loss and turns it into something positive. In the final instance, Hegelian absolute negativity is a resource which helps to neutralize the most radical and absurd face of negativity – death, which in Hegel's philosophy takes the place of unimportant "abstract negativity". With the notorious exception of the execution of a criminal who, with his death, represents the highest level of *Sittlichkeit* and "personal freedom": "while excepting and glorifying his punishment, ... a criminal recognizes the law and is thus free."<sup>10</sup> This also matches the general scheme: only by becoming nothing am I reinstated in my particularity; only by becoming nothing, do I truly enter the community; my death can become the source of my freedom. It is all too obvious which tradition is at work on this cross.

On the second level, everything is turned upside down. As Hegel stresses at various points, absolute negativity represents only the starting point of sub-

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<sup>7</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, Lasson & Hoffmeister, Meiner 1955, p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Routledge, London & New York 2001, p. 328.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, Galilée, Paris 1974, p. 114.



jectivity. Furthermore, he often identifies the immediate presence of absolute negativity with the deficiency that irreparably separates the Judaic state of consciousness from the Christian one. One of the best conceptualizations of this last turn was given by Žižek: “Herein lies the ‘last secret’ of dialectical speculation: not in the dialectical mediation-sublimation of all contingent, empirical reality, not in the deduction of all reality from the mediating movement of absolute negativity, but in the fact that this very negativity, in order to attain its ‘being-for-itself’, must embody itself again in some miserable, radically contingent corporal leftover.”<sup>11</sup> Žižek is referring to the infinite judgment “spirit is a bone”; however, a similar point can also be made in relation to the reinstatement of the particularized “something”. – The basic paradox is of course that “being without lack”, the absolute self-equality produced by the “annihilation of nothing”, actually is nothing. However, absolute nothing itself exists only under condition that it, so to speak, “materialize” itself in a nameless particular existence (something). If it doesn’t, it remains mere abstraction, empty, abstract nothing. Absolute negativity only has to obey one condition – it has to enter the world, one of its own creations. Hence, absolute negativity only exists under condition that it stops being the opposite of positive and enters its ranks.

From this perspective it’s possible to focus again on the process of the negation of negation that has been discussed above. In the first step *the same* intervenes as *other* – nothing itself that cannot be annihilated prevents the annulment of reality. This moment correlates to nothing stepping out of reality: only nothing survives the total collapse of reality, even if the whole of reality disappears, nothing will remain. *Nothing is by no means dependent on reality*, while reality as a whole stands on its shoulders. In the second step the whole story is repeated: the same again intervenes as its other, only this time *nothing negates its own transcendent position*. Negation negates the absolute power of negativity; it renounces its capacity to be found in heaven and earth at the same time. How? The circle is thus completed – negation opposes itself to reality and recognizes itself in it. Negation and reality are *two, which is one*. Yet how is it possible to think of this duality? How is it possible to think of a nothing, which is at the same time reality? If in the first stage nothing transgressed reality, *now reality transgresses itself in nothing*. Nothing is nothing else but a segment of a missing reality; it is a gap that separates reality from reality and thus creates the dimension of inter-space, void, *the world*.

Nevertheless, even if one has taken into consideration this last “turn of the screw”, a certain fact remains; a fact that Žižek’s apology of Hegel, to some

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<sup>11</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, London & New York 1989, p. 207.



extent at least, tries to conceal: The autonomy of the negative, its privilege not to be determined by anything else, remains even at the point where negativity ceases to be pure negativity. Nothing is and remains autonomous, androgynous power, which reproduces itself only by itself: only nothing prevents the decomposition of reality; yet at the same time, only nothing is capable of denouncing the escape of negativity out of reality as an illusion, and is thereby capable of creating nothing as a minimal difference. Hegel has argued in favor of *creatio ex nihilo* and this will turn out to be the key to Nietzsche's criticism.

## 2. *Death of a certain nothing*

In a certain moment, the Hegelian world finds itself in the position where only the gravity of nothing still prevents it from being swallowed by the stratosphere of infinite nothingness. Nietzsche's "answer" is clear. *It happened*. The power of nothing (God) has failed, "the horizon has been wiped out", there's hardly "any up and down left ... we are straying as through an infinite nothing."<sup>12</sup>

The "death of God" relates to nothing in two ways. On the one hand, it actually defines the decline of a certain nothing, since for Nietzsche, God is nothing, God is the name of a specific constellation of nothing.<sup>13</sup> *God is dead* means that a certain nothing no longer lives. From the other perspective, however, the effect of the death of God is the very opposite of this: everything becomes crisscrossed with nothingness. "Is not night continually closing in on us ... Do we not smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition?"<sup>14</sup> It seems as if the destruction of nothing (God) only opened the bottle in which the spirit of negativity has been stored. This can be explained in the language of Deleuze's interpretation: the *negative nihilist* who denies life with his belief in values that are higher than life, has been replaced by the *reactive nihilist* who openly declares the nullity of the world of higher values, without being able to reaffirm life. His principle remains the same: *negation*. However, if the religious jingoist at least believed in nothing itself (the super-sensuous world), then the "modern man" sees everywhere and in everything just nothing: everything is relative, all higher projects are from the beginning due to fail. The shadow of the obliterated nothing has only strengthened its rule.

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<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Vintage, New York 1974, p. 181.

<sup>13</sup> "One does not say 'nothingness': one says 'the beyond'; or 'God'." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Penguin, London 1990, p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.

How is this duality (the death of nothing and the proliferation of nothingness) reflected in the problematic that was introduced at the beginning of this paper, namely in the question of Nietzsche's critique of the metaphysical constitution of reality? To repeat our basic thesis: the essence of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics lies in the argument that metaphysics is unable *not* to think of being as nothing.

Nietzsche's basic question a propos of reality is: Where does the need for reality come from in the first place: "Why should the world that is relevant to us not be a fiction?"<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche's argument of course isn't skeptical or relativistic. What he basically wants to say is that the dividing line between real and unreal originates in the belief in the existence of the eternal supersensible world that exists independently from the fugacious sensible world. The belief in supersensible reality, however, is itself the result of a metaphysical struggle against sophism. The constitutive metaphysical blind spot, its *error sine qua non*, is thus represented in suppression of the question "how *could* something arise from its opposite? Truth from error, for example?"<sup>16</sup> Would it be possible to imagine Plato's *The State*, if the sophistical argument that "altruism" may originate in "egoism", prevailed? If metaphysics wanted to put into force its eternal common law, it had to make the conclusion that "those things of highest value must have a different origin; *their own*." In other words, because the highest values can't be derived from this "confusion of desire and delusion ... their basis must lie in the womb of existence, in the imperishable, in the hidden God, in "the thing in itself". In its effort to tame the sensible world, a world pervaded with nonbeing, metaphysics created the fiction of the supersensible world and named it true reality. *Thus it has opposed nonbeing with nothing*. However, there's yet another, deeper and more contemporaneous reason why "metaphysics" remains unable *not* to think of being as nothing.

If, in the first episode, the basic problem was that metaphysics could not allow that something originates from its opposite, now the perspective is turned upside down: "The metaphysicians fundamental belief is the belief in the opposition of values ... For may there not be doubt, first of all, whether opposites exist and, second, whether these popular value judgments and value oppositions upon which metaphysicians have placed their seal may be no more than foreground evaluations, temporary perspectives ..."<sup>17</sup> From this new point of view, the basic problem of metaphysics no longer lies in putting

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<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

all of the truth on the side of reality (being, One, Good), but rather in the very manner in which metaphysics *generates its perspective*, its sense: through thinking in opposites; through the production of contrast; through thinking in the framework of the popular tradition of Good and Evil.

The story has more than one layer. To bring the basic constellation into focus once again: metaphysics opposes *nonbeing* (the illusion of the sensible world) with *nothing* (the fiction of the true being beyond the world). Now, how is it possible to perceive this eternal being? The answer is at hand – if only what's *true* exists eternally, then it's sufficient to test the world using the method of fire – let's burn everything and only what's really imperishable will remain, while illusion and nonbeing shall become what they already are – nothing. This was Parmenid's method. That's also how the first type of dialectics Socrates' *maevtics* – was born: the truth can be grasped only by vanquishing erroneous appearance. The procedure of Cartesian doubt is, of course, no different: what is true is only what can't be subjected to doubt any longer. That's the first key: metaphysics reinstates itself through exclusion of the negative; yet this exclusion coincides with the *invention of the autonomous power of the negative*. In order to transgress the negative (nonbeing, appearance), metaphysics has to reactivate the negative as a resource in the fight against the negative. Negation is called upon to neutralize the force of the negative. However, does the autonomous power of the negative really exist? Negation by itself, for Nietzsche, is nothing but the impotence of *ressentiment*.

The act of the metaphysical constitution of reality thus proceeds as the exclusion of the negative from reality, whereby, reality in its true form and authenticity, emerges only at the end of the operation – at the moment when nonbeing and appearance have disappeared back into nothing. In other words, one is unable to behold reality in its wholeness till something has been taken away from it – something that doesn't even exist: nonbeing, appearance. The paradox of course lies in the fact that, by that means, the excluded, non-existing negativity itself becomes the condition of reality, because reality appears only through this exclusion, under the condition of the *possibility* of this exclusion. The second metaphysical myth thus lies in the conviction that there exists a *certain negative that can be isolated* from the positive reality. The myth that preaches the independent life of a shadow dragging behind one's tail.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The role of the negative that can be separated from the positive is given to Zarathustra's shadow: "My shadow calls me? What does my shadow matter? Let him run after me! I shall run away from him." The shadow however didn't yield and chased Zarathustra through mountains and valleys, until Zarathustra decided that he should not "be afraid of a shadow". And as a matter of fact, when Zarathustra turned around "he almost threw his follower and shadow to the ground: so close was the shadow by then, and so weak too. And

The third moment is also closely related to the second. If the act of exclusion was constitutive of reality, then the question arises of where the negative can be excluded to. Metaphysics demands that nonbeing returns to nothing. Where to nothing? The third myth is thus *the true place of the negative beyond reality*, the zero point, *the (anti)-substance of the negative*. Metaphysical truth is the moment when nothing steps out of reality into its own field and thus leaves reality intact. Or, to put it differently, metaphysical reality exists only under condition that there is a sphere which *really* exists outside of *reality*, and which, by its very withdrawal from reality, enables this reality: nothing. That's why opposition is the metaphysical truth. And precisely in this sense nothing has always already taken the place of being. – The being of reality is the withdrawal of nothing from reality into the position of absolute contrast to reality.

One can see now where Nietzsche's story leads to. Metaphysics doesn't produce only the fiction of a supersensible world, it also and foremost produces the fiction of nothing. Nothing is not only the place where all the fiction is to be found, *nothing is this fiction itself*. It is this fiction in three different ways: as belief in the *autonomous power of the negative*, as the conviction that *the negative can be isolated from the positive* and as the creation of the *nothing beyond reality*, or the invention of nothing as the constitutive opposition to reality. That's also the reason why Nietzsche continuously stresses that the mutilation has always been double: the fiction of the supersensible world, or in other words, everything that is equal only to itself, has its foundation and sense in the three forms of the fiction of nothing. – The fiction of the autonomous power of the negative (the negation of negation) enables one to think of the fiction of eternal being as the truth beyond contradiction. Yet the fiction of the withdrawal of nothing from positive reality enables the fiction of pure positive reality. Nothing-beyond, the anti-substance of nothing, *is the same* as eternal being: the untouchable infinity, which is in everything and *truly* beyond everything.<sup>19</sup>

How can the "death of God" be placed into the given matrix? If one speaks of the death of God, it is necessary that one keep in mind the awkward

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when Zarathustra examined him with his eyes he was startled as by a sudden ghost: so thin, swarthy, hollow, and outlived did this follower look." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Penguin, New York 1978, pp. 272, 273.

<sup>19</sup> The double mutilation is also depicted in the chapter "Shadow": "... so that soon there were three runners, one behind the other, first the voluntary beggar, then Zarathustra, and the third and last his shadow. It was not long that they ran this way before Zarathustra realized his folly ... Verily, my folly has grown tall in the mountains. Now I hear six old fools' legs clattering along in a row." The voluntary beggar, "friend of the poorest", "herdsman of the cattle of cows" might have been Jesus Christ, in any case it is sure that he represents Christian/democratic values, the shadow is of course the anti-substance of nothing. *Ibid.*, pp. 272, 273.

temporality that marks this event: although it is us by ourselves who have murdered God, the news of his death hasn't yet reached us. "This tremendous event is still on its way ... Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds though done require time to be seen and heard."<sup>20</sup> That way the consequences of God's death are always spread between the "real situation" and the future yet to come, whereby the relation between them remains blurred: what is in reality, *might* once occur. If the death of God is to signify going beyond "Good and Evil" (the rule of negative as the essence of both metaphysics and Christianity), then it has to be the death of both fictions – the death of the fiction of the supersensible world, as well as the death of the fiction of the negative anti-substance in which the first one is founded. Both "the voluntary beggar" and "the shadow" must go. At least that's what (should have) happened. But it hasn't (yet). We've transgressed the Good and remain stuck with Evil. The "new age" has (more or less) relinquished the supersensible world, but the negative anti-substance has by no means shared its fate. As both, first Heidegger and then also Deleuze pointed out, all that happened was that man himself occupied the place of God. Man himself steps in the position of nothing that extends beyond reality: "God-man, the moral man, the truthful man and the social man ... These are the new characters proposed in place of God."<sup>21</sup> We remain stuck at "evil" and we've modeled the new "good" on its figure. Everything is based upon change in the way one perceives individuality: the new age thinks of the individual by stripping her of her Aristotelian *primary ousia* (the concrete unity of form and matter) and replaces it with nothing. Descartes had to annihilate almost the whole constitution of the subject in order to reach *cogito* (empty thought), Kant criticized Descartes' substantiation of the subject in *cogito*, Hegel took a step even further and put the subject in the void of desire. From Nietzsche's point of view, this development is nothing but a common fraud – we are supposedly renouncing our control over our being, pound by pound we are tearing flesh from our wretched bodies, only to reinstate ourselves as *causa sui* in the form of *nothing*. Subjects of free will, Men-Gods.

In this new situation we are thus caught in between two levels of the death of God: the death of nothing, which has already occurred, and the possible future erasure of its shadow. The belief in a supersensible world has faded away, but the fiction of nothing, now embodied in *us* ourselves, still regulates the value of life. The only difference is, as Deleuze puts it, that life is no longer

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<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, New York 1983, p. 151.

negated from the outside, but rather from the inside, although precisely by means of the negating element (us) representing itself as something exterior to life, as something that can position itself beyond life: the Hegelian master, man of free choice. Now, life itself is a junction of two elements: becoming and nonbeing. In contrast to the whole philosophical tradition, which has understood becoming only as a negative determination of being, and also in contrast to Hegel, who defined becoming as the vanishing moment of mediation between being and nothing, Nietzsche understands becoming as the only element that positively exists. All the *hypostases* of being, understood as self-equality, are a result of both the “physical and psychological perversion” that covers the fact that everything that really exists, does so as becoming. Becoming doesn’t become being or nothing, but continuously returns back to itself. It doesn’t have a horizon depicting its outer limit and it doesn’t have the opposite. *Nonbeing is not the opposite of becoming: becoming differs from nonbeing, which on its own behalf doesn’t have its proper place, proper time, or proper anti-substance.* It’s entirely integrated in becoming. But how? Everything is concentrated around one question: How should one think of nonbeing without negating it, and together with it also life in its entirety? In other words, how should one *affirm* nonbeing and at the same time *neutralize* negativity?

Only at this stage does “double affirmation” enter the play.<sup>22</sup> What does affirmation actually mean to Nietzsche? Certainly affirmation of life, but what does it mean to affirm life? Deleuze argues that “to affirm is not to take responsibility for, to take on the burden of what is, but to release, to set free what lives.”<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche’s affirmation is thus not Hegelian freedom in recognition of necessity, even less so quietist acceptance of all the burdens life may bring along, but affirmation of becoming, which is the only element that positively exists and which by itself implicates the breakdown of all types of fixed figures. Namely, as was shown above, all fixed figures have their foundation in negative anti-substance. Affirmation therefore (as Deleuze demonstrated) already includes negation, because affirmation of becoming demands negation of all the static forms. This negation however already originates in affirmation; it springs out of affirmation. – What we are dealing with is not the negation of fixed figures that leads to the affirmation of becoming, but on the contrary, with the affirmation of becoming, which by itself already negates the static figures. Negative is no longer an autonomous force; it’s only

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<sup>22</sup> This paper relies on the version elaborated by Alenka Zupančič, which is closer to the moment Deleuze defines as the transsubstantiation of nothing than to his own theory of double affirmation. This fact however doesn’t change the basic point.

<sup>23</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 185.

a consequence of affirmation. Nevertheless, at this stage one still remains caught within the framework of the logic of opposition: affirmation dislocates the negative from its presupposed position, yet by doing such it only reinstalls the negative in the position of the nothing-beyond. Becoming still remains in opposition to nothing. That's why a second affirmation is needed. It is only when the object of affirmation becomes affirmation itself, when affirmation ceases to oppose negativity and instead affirms itself, that nothing ceases to exist as negativity and intervenes "*as interval or minimal difference of the same.*"<sup>24</sup> Double affirmation, "white affirmation on white background", as Zupančič puts it, paraphrasing yet another famous painting by Malevitch, *recreates nothing as an interval and at the same time neutralizes or even mobilizes the power of the negative*. Beyond becoming there's only becoming; nonbeing is no longer its opposite, but its internal interstice and its product.

Only from this point is it possible to see the (non)-relationship between Nietzsche and Hegel in all of its complexity. Nietzsche's project is transubstantiation of nothing, which means the reintegration of nothing-beyond into a minimal difference in the midst of becoming, which breaks the logic of one and thereby renders the possibility to grasp becoming in its infinity (eternal return). And at this point Nietzsche's thought actually coincides with Hegel's. Nevertheless, Deleuze's central argument isn't diminished by this fact. Nietzsche actually substitutes the positivity of the negative with "his own discovery: the negativity of the positive."<sup>25</sup> Hegelian negativity is and remains autonomous power. *Creatio ex nihilo*. Its only restriction comes from the fact that in order to exist, it has to be incarnated in the positive. Nevertheless, even when it stops being pure negativity, it still keeps all of its autonomy in the *spheres of absolute ontological independency* – free subject, spirit, appearance. There's no question of the subject and spirit going beyond the level of immediate absolute negativity. – Hegel's argument isn't that everything that the subject represents was nothing, on the contrary, subject is the only substance that exists. Subject enters its community; spirit enters its world. Nevertheless, *wherefrom* subject, *wherefrom* spirit, *wherefrom* irreducible appearance? All these figures were forged, while nothing was still on the *other* side; all of them came into being by means of finding their own being beyond being, their own negative substance. They all exist only under the premise that nothing can intervene as being. Even if the negative anti-substance at a certain point reveals its true illusory nature, the world has been cut out with its scissors.

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<sup>24</sup> Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow. Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 136.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 180.





# **THE SIMPLE ART OF NOTHING**



## NOTHING HAS CHANGED

Mladen Dolar

In *Whoroscope*, one of his first published texts, a poem which won a poetry competition in 1930, Beckett aims an elaborate blow at Descartes. There is the philosopher of methodical reduction, the reduction of all supports in the outside world, in perception, in the body, the reduction of all supports to questionable inner certainties, safe traditions and evident truths that unquestioningly rule our lives, the reduction of all contingency and necessity, external and internal, in order to arrive at the minimal point of certainty, the firm rock of cogito, the prop of the subject from which all other props have been taken away. But Beckett approaches the cogito (a word never mentioned in the poem, and neither is *Descartes* for that matter)<sup>1</sup> through its reverse, from the angle of irreducible contingency. Cogito is, so to speak, inserted back into the body from which it emanates and into the haphazard eventualities of historical circumstance. The Cartesian body depends on its trivial tastes (the notorious eggs which had to be hatched from eight to ten days, no shorter and no longer), the Cartesian mind is preoccupied with the trivialities of rivalry with opponents, illustrious (Galileo, Harvey, Arnauld) and obscure (Anna Maria Schurmann, Weulles). Cogito is confronted with the intricate web of trivia, which Beckett assiduously excavated from Adrien Baillet's late 17th century life of Descartes. Descartes, we learn in the notes appended at the end (in the manner of T. S. Eliot, and without which we would be quite lost), "kept his own birthday to himself so that no astrologer could cast his nativity", but to no avail: Beckett cast his horoscope, his *whoroscope*, three centuries later, the whoroscope of cogito, providing this bodiless entity with the contingency of its haphazard moment, reversing its reduction, reducing its reduction in the opposite direction,<sup>2</sup> expanding

<sup>1</sup> But we do find "René du Perron" and "Fallor ergo sum". I use *Collected Poems in English and French*, Grove Press, New York 1977.

<sup>2</sup> And also in the opposite direction of the horoscope, the moment of death: "and grant me my second / starless inscrutable hour." These are the last two lines of the poem.

it into a baroque fresco of poignant fleshy detail and overelaborate scholarly references, defying the minimalism of cogito's subjectivity with the maximal expansion of contingency, confronting its clear and distinct reason with its underside of stupidity.

*Whoroscope* has 99 lines, but only because the entries for the competition could not exceed 100 lines. It mentions some twenty names and refers to a dozen historical occasions, in a florid and heavily overlaid idiom. Compare this to the first piece of Beckett's *Mirlitonades*, some half a century later:

En face  
le pire  
jusqu'à ce  
qu'il fasse rire

That's all. The whole poem has the flavour of a slogan, the shortest possible *profession de foi*, achieved by minimal means: roughly, "The worst / into the face / until it / makes us laugh".<sup>3</sup> Haiku has the reputation of being the most reduced and economical of poetic forms, 17 syllables in all (5 / 7 / 5), but even this is too much for Beckett: the Japanese are too chatty for him, nine syllables will do, he takes the haiku and cuts it in half. The opposition between the two poems couldn't have been more drastic. It is as if Beckett has accomplished his own Cartesian reduction, the reduction of means and ends, as if to arrive at his own version of cogito, but which in its very minimalism turns out to be the anti-cogito. He strived for anti-cogito in *Whoroscope*, if one can venture to give this name to his endeavour, but in a way which fell short in its very floridity. The reduction of the reduction of cogito, yielding the contingent, trivial, and historical network in which it was inscribed, was perhaps unwittingly still caught in the workings of cogito, it was but its underside, it was caught in its web precisely due to the maximal distance it tried to establish to it. The proper way to deal with cogito was to take the Cartesian route of reduction, Beckett had to take it onto his shoulders, reduce it to the utmost, to the core, to the minimum, to the bare rock – to arrive at what? Nothing? Almost nothing? It's the 'almost' that is the problem.

First the language. *Whoroscope*, as most of Beckett's early work, clearly falls under the long shadow of James Joyce. Every detail has a tendency to be overblown, the language is thick with convoluted ramifications, the jokes are too smart, erudite, and studious to be funny, each line is a plunge into encyclopedia. But what defined Beckett's subsequent work was precisely a sharp departure from this:

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<sup>3</sup> This is my own clumsy attempt, since I couldn't find an English version.

I realised that Joyce had gone as far as he could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than adding.<sup>4</sup>

The art of subtraction (a concept whose fortune was secured by Alain Badiou) vs. the art of addition, the infinitely expandable vs. the infinitely shrinkable.

The more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance. There seems to be a kind of aesthetic axiom that expression is achievement – must be an achievement. My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has been set aside by artists as something unusable – as something by definition incompatible with art.<sup>5</sup>

The art of omnipotence vs. the art of impotence, omniscience vs. ignorance.

With such a program, in my opinion, the latest work of Joyce [*Finnegans Wake*] has nothing whatever to do. There it seems rather to be a matter of an apotheosis of the word.<sup>6</sup>

The art of apotheosis, the magic of the word vs. the art of the senselessness, “the literature of the non-word”, of the drained, barren, porous, meaningless word (as Beckett put it in his famous letter to Axel Kaun, written in German in 1937).

And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style. [...] As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, Bloomsbury, London 1996, p. 352.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Graver & Raymond Federman, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, etc. 1979, p. 148.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta. Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (ed. Ruby Cohn), Grove Press, New York 1984, p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

So the aim of the writer, by definition someone working with words, is to impoverish his means, to undo his tools; if not to entirely eliminate his means of production, then at least to make them work against themselves, to counteract the fascination with words and meaning, to stop producing more and more meaning, but to render the words senseless. Joyce's art consisted in producing an overflow of meaning, in making meaning proliferate to the point of its being expanded into infinite floating, a surplus-meaning which can never be pinned down and whose fascination lies in infinite addition, in the possibility of an eternal  $(n+1)$ , the always expandable excess propelled by enjoyment-in-language. The meaning never to be exhausted, for every surplus produces more surplus, and thus it seems that he has reached the very matrix of production of meaning, and demonstrated it to the point where generations of scholars will have to sweat over the enigmas of his ultimate book for centuries, as Joyce correctly predicted. To be sure, to describe Joyce as the writer of surplus-meaning is also misleading, for what is at stake, in his supreme artistry with words, has only in one part to do with the overflow of meaning, the other part being the overflow of sounds. Language is taken, in one and the same gesture, as a machine for the endless production of meaning and, on the other hand, as a web of infinite sound-echoes, reverberations, words contingently echoing other words and finding a surplus of meaning in the very contingent con-sonances of sounds, in sound contaminations, intersections, cross-cuts, in endless punning. *Finnegans Wake* can be read as an interminable pun, running for hundreds of pages and convoluted into itself, each pun breeding more pun, the endless text ending in a pun (the notorious and/end) which rejoins its beginning. Thus Joyce ultimately embodies, in a paramount manner, the Lacanian concept of *lalangue*, this inextricable web of meaning and sound, of the signifier and the enjoyment, where language is neither taken as the matter of the signifier nor simply under the auspices of sound echoes, but precisely through the concept of their very difference, their incommensurability, their split and their union under the same heading, in their very divergence. Hence Lacan's own fascination with Joyce, his seeing Joyce as the incarnation of *sinthome*<sup>8</sup> – the word which is itself a pun on symptom (just as *lalangue* is a pun, for that matter) and which immediately breeds more puns on *saint-homme*, *sinthome madaquin* (*Saint Thomas d'Aquin*), etc. It seems that Lacan whole-heartedly espoused Joyce as the showcase for a certain line of his teaching. But couldn't one argue that following Beckett's way would actually come much closer to the bone of his teaching? This is the argument I will briefly try to pursue here.

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le sinthome (Le séminaire XXIII)*, Seuil, Paris 2005.

Beckett's art, as opposed to Joyce's, is the art of (n-1). The words have to be deprived of their magic, hollowed (not by conjuring "hollow men" through their magic, as in Eliot, but by becoming themselves hollow), their meaning has to be subtracted from them so that they become scarce and empty, like senseless sounds,<sup>9</sup> reduced to clichés, those dead words within the seemingly living language.<sup>10</sup> What has to be explored is how much one can take away from them, how little will make do: the vocabulary has to be contracted, the references reduced to the minimum, the encyclopaedia has to shrivel, the grammar reduced to the bare necessity (what Beckett called "the syntax of weakness"). What better means to achieve this, on the external level, than to write in a foreign tongue, with diminished powers of 'expression', voluntarily forsaking the bountiful 'natural' means at one's disposal? To abandon style, to abandon the notorious 'finding one's own voice' that all the courses of 'creative writing' are massively after, to write in a voice which is completely anonymous and impersonal. Not that punning can be entirely avoided, and I can only give one simple example from *Ill Seen Ill Said*:

Farewell to farewell. Then in that perfect dark foreknell darling sound  
pip for end begun. First last moment. [...] One moment more. One  
last. Grace to breathe that void. Know happiness.

The pun on the last sentence (know happiness/no happiness) tellingly appears only in Beckett's English version, not in the French original (*connaître le bonheur*) – but the fact that for most of Beckett's works there are two originals which stem from his hand is itself highly telling. The minimal internal split, the least difference, so much at the heart of Beckett's endeavour, is externally translated into the split of two languages, two originals for most of Beckett's texts, into the minimal divergence of the two. So even in the shrunken form puns emerge as Beckett's reduced words unexpectedly work overtime, constantly doubling themselves in their reduced state.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. e. g. "Yes, the words I heard, and heard distinctly, having quite a sensitive ear, were heard a first time, then a second, and often even a third, as pure sounds, free of all meaning [...] And the words I uttered myself, and which must nearly always have gone with an effort of the intelligence, were often to me as the buzzing of an insect." (Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 47) All quotes from *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* are taken from *The Beckett Trilogy*, Picador, London 1979.

<sup>10</sup> But that cliché is dead is itself another cliché. "A cliché is a dead piece of language, of which one cliché might be that it is dead but won't lie down." Christopher Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Words*, Oxford UP, Oxford 1995, p. 78. Ricks's work is one of the best books on Beckett I know of.

One can easily imagine the two writers reading the proofs, Joyce relentlessly adding new twists, and Beckett constantly crossing out words, deleting sentences, paragraphs, pages. For one there is never enough, for the other there is never little enough.

Language itself is a veil, that was Beckett's insight already in the late thirties, not the locus of true expression, a veil to be pierced, not expanded, not a canvas to paint upon in order to conjure a new infinite universe. Rather, the veil is there only to get behind it, to what seemingly lies beyond. But what lurks behind the veil? Is there not a treacherous illusion in the very supposition of something lurking behind the veil that one should get to? "Be it something or nothing", says Beckett, and the oscillation between the two is fundamental. There is no 'something' behind the veil, no thing that one might get to and take hold of by piercing the veil, no thing with any positive features or qualities, no nameable thing, but it is not simply nothing either. The void itself, the nothing, takes on the quality of something without qualities. Piercing the language by reducing words to the function of a minimal split itself arrives at the minimal inner split of something/nothing, an irreducible split where neither of the terms can be taken by itself. There is something that always comes to supplant nothing, yet something only emerges on the verge of nothing, at the limit of being engulfed by it.

Along with the reduction of language there is the reduction of the body. Beckett's heroes constantly move from mobility to an increasing immobility. The means of transportation fail and are taken away, the legs won't work any longer, the eyes go blind, the body disintegrates, more and more is taken away from it, it is the infinitely shrinkable body in an infinitely shrinkable space. Molloy and Moran are condemned to an increased immobility, Malone is dying confined to a small room, the narrator of *The Unnamable* has shrunk to a mere voice whose origin remains uncertain. The heroine of *Happy Days* is buried to her waist in the ground in the first part, then to her neck in the second. Then in *Breath*, the strangest piece of theatre ever, there is but a mouth, suspended at some height, which breathes in and breathes out, the pure point of emission, not even of a voice in any linguistic or expressive sense, but of a mere breath, the minimal statement possible – not a statement, just a pure enunciation. The voice itself can be externalised and estranged from the body, as in *Krapp's Last Tape*, taken over by a gadget, a non-bodily point of emission, or else, more tellingly, there can be "the voice without a mouth", as in *Texts for Nothing*, so that even the existence of a point of emission is suspended.

The body is reduced in the same process as words are reduced, it is increasingly mutilated and emaciated, more and more can be taken away from



it, it is the body on the verge of dying, on the way to disappearance, to the bodily almost-nothing. On the unending way there, the bodily almost-nothing is epitomized by the voice, the voice gradually not of a person or any nameable entity, but an unnameable source of enunciation. The voice at the point of the void, the voice incessantly on the brink of getting lost itself, but nevertheless persevering, tenuously and tenaciously, always recuperating at the very point of vanishing.

The reduction of the language and the reduction of the body, they both lead to the voice. After all, the voice is what language and body have in common, it is the point of their intersection, the network of words and meanings has to be underpinned by a point of bodily emission, it is the incongruity of the two that creates their junction, their minimal overlapping, the crossing. It is as if the diminution of the words endows them with a quality which brings them closer to the body, they are reduced to pure voice, that is, the body at its most obstinate when everything else has been removed. They cling to the body in a way that becomes increasingly material, while on the other hand it is as if the flow of words drains the body, it contracts it (in all senses, contraction, contracting a disease, making a contract). There is a mutual and interdependent reduction, a reduction to the point of exhaustion. Exhaustion is something quite other than tiredness, as Deleuze has taught us in his beautiful essay on Beckett, although Beckett's 'hero' is also always tired to the point of death. Being tired implies he is not able to realize the possible, but the point is that "he exhausts himself in exhausting the possible, and vice-versa. He exhausts that which, in the possible, is not realized."<sup>11</sup> It is not that the possible is not realized, it is the possible itself that is exhausted, and the exhaustion of the possible is what is at stake in all Beckett's later work. – Taking up another of Deleuze's cues, one could say that the reduction of meaning immediately leads to the production of sense (the sense as used in *The Logic of Sense*). The less there is meaning, the more sense is produced, from one sentence to another, out of nothing, of almost nothing, with useless remains, vestiges, residues of what once was meaning. So it is an absurdity to take Beckett under the heading of the 'literature of the absurd' – the reduction of meaning can appear as absurd only by the yardstick of the lost meaning, but the point is precisely to be rid of this yardstick so that sense can be made. The two tramps in *Godot* quite literally and relentlessly *make sense*. But this is just an aside.

The voice implies a body, a bodily point of emission and a bodily point of reception, but its location is uncertain.

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<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted", in: *Essays Critical and Clinical*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1997, p. 152.

I shall transmit the words as received, by the ear, or roared through a trumpet into the arsehole, in all their purity, and in the same order, as far as possible. This infinitesimal lag, between arrival and departure, this trifling delay in evacuation, is all I have to worry about.<sup>12</sup>

The bodily apertures are interchangeable, the mouth, the anus, the ear communicate immediately, it is not a question of their location, they become all-one, just the question of a time-lag between arrival and departure; words are received and then retransmitted<sup>13</sup> through the orifices, or not even that.

Yes, my mouth, but there it is, I won't open it, I have no mouth, and what about it, I'll grow one, a little hole at first, then wider and wider, deeper and deeper, the air will gush into me, and out a second later, howling.

... do I feel an ear, frankly now, do I feel an ear, well frankly now I don't, so much the worse, I don't feel an ear either, this is awful, make an effort, I must feel something ...<sup>14</sup>

The orifices are not only interchangeable, but utterly uncertain, not only their location, but their very existence is questionable, the reception and transmission are on the verge of collapsing, yet the very fact that there is a voice, a voice which goes on and on, retransmitting words received, or at least their remnants and crumbs, devouring and vomiting words – this fact implies an opening, an opening as such, the juncture of language and body as an opening, although it may always also appear as a closure, a closed and shrinking world with no way out. An opening at the very point of the total closure.

Where is the voice coming from, this pure voice of enunciation? Is it a monologue someone is proffering to anybody who might be listening? *A bon entendeur salut?* Or is it going on in the head, the interminable rambling of an internal voice? The alternative is itself faulty, the point of enunciation cannot be sorted out in that way, it cannot be placed on either side of this roughest of divides.

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<sup>12</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, p. 321.

<sup>13</sup> "Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten, life without tears, as it is wept." (Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 31.)

<sup>14</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, pp. 353, 352.

... I'll have said it, without a mouth I'll have said it, I'll have said it inside me, then in the same breath outside me, perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either ...<sup>15</sup>

One couldn't be more precise: the enunciating voice is the very principle of division, itself not on either side and yet on both sides at once, at the intersection of the inner and the outer, and unplaceable in that division, the thinnest of foils which connects and separates the two. Beckett's literature, written as literature is, is at the same time the literature of the voice as no other, not only by virtue of it being close to the spoken idiom, but by being sustained merely by pure enunciation which propels it forward, the voice of enunciation with no other hold or footing, the voice more important than the words it utters. For the words are hollow, contradictory, clueless, digressing – the flow of words is a constant digression without the main line, without a course, its course is a dis-course, its only course is the voice undermining itself, yet carrying on. This is not a literature of sentences and statements, the statements are trivial, they are not propelled by a will to express,<sup>16</sup> they contradict and retract themselves, they keep getting lost,<sup>17</sup> and what emerges through all this is a literature of pure enunciation.

There is a traditional way of dealing with the inner voice under the heading of 'the stream of consciousness'. The term, stemming from William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), was widely applied first to William's brother, then to Joyce, to Woolf, and a number of others, thus becoming

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>16</sup> "Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition." (Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 27.)

<sup>17</sup> Cf. e. g. "Is there then no hope? Good gracious, no heavens, what an idea! Just a faint one perhaps, but which will never serve." (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, p. 336.) "... and so depart, towards my brethren, no, none of that, no brethren, that's right, take it back ... And would it not suffice, without any change in the structure of the thing as it now stands, as it always stood, without a mouth being opened at the place which even pain could never line, would it not suffice to, to what, the thread is lost, no matter, here's another ..." (p. 252.) There is a whole rhetoric of retraction in Beckett, the constant attempt to take back, make the said unsaid, but obviously this only makes the insistence of enunciation more tenacious.

like a trade-mark of the modernist novel. As far as Beckett is concerned, the term is highly misleading and inappropriate. For the stream of consciousness presupposes consciousness as a realm neatly separate from the outside world, and the writer supposedly follows its inner ramblings and faithfully records them as a scribe, just putting down its meanderings in a raw form as they appear to consciousness before being made presentable and coherent. The whole point with Beckett is that this inner voice maintains itself as unplaceable, at the very edge of the mind and the world, the speech and the body, cutting into both and being cut by both. Its inner split immediately translates into an outer split, and vice versa. It is not that consciousness is incoherent, rather the very line that separates consciousness and constitutes it as such is constantly blurred and indistinct.

The voice is a pure enunciation without a subject, or one could say, an enunciation in search of a subject. Various modes and levels of enunciation are constantly mixed, heterogeneous voices are inserted, all this without hierarchy and usual punctuation, in a flux which relentlessly implies subjectivation, but without defining its subject, except as sheer perseverance. The subject is precisely unnameable, and the multitude of diverse subjectivities which flock together in the flow are just so many aborted attempts, pursued for a while then abandoned in the middle, suspended. Neither consciousness nor the subject, rather a process of constant subjectivation without a subject.

The voice is the anti-cogito. It doesn't make sense, it rambles in all directions, the directions taken are revoked and others are taken, haphazardly. This is not clear and distinct reasoning, quite the opposite, it is the art of the indistinct. The distinctions are made and erased in the same gesture.

But it is gone clean out of my head, my little private idea. No matter, I have just had another. Perhaps it is the same one back again, ideas are so alike, when you get to know them.

It's vague, life and death.<sup>18</sup>

The indistinct rules,<sup>19</sup> the usual distinctions, the seemingly most massive and self-evident ones, get blurred and vague, the line *life/death* is obscured

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<sup>18</sup> Beckett, *Malone Dies*, pp. 207, 206.

<sup>19</sup> "... coming to the truth of being requires to think the non-separate, the in-distinct. But what separates and distinguishes, e.g. light from darkness, constitutes rather the place of non-being and of the false." Alain Badiou, "L'écriture du générique: Samuel Beckett", in: *Conditions*, Seuil, Paris 1992, p. 335.

and confused no less than the *inner/outer* divide. But it is the indistinct that opens the space for a minimal difference, a tiny split, which is something other, and far less obvious and dramatic than distinction. It lacks distinction, so to speak, it paints grey on grey, to use Hegel's words, which curiously recur in Beckett.<sup>20</sup> But not only the clear and the distinct, the rock of cogito is irretrievably rocked at the very opening of *The Unnamable*, in the justly famous first lines: "Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on."<sup>21</sup> The French original is more poignant and precise at the crucial point: "*Dire je. Sans le penser.*" It is not a question of belief, but of thought, of dissociating the 'I' from thinking. 'Say I. Without thinking it.' Say ego, without cogito. It is an 'I' which doesn't give support to thought, an unthinking 'I', an 'I' without substance, apart from the mere going on. 'I' is the vehicle of perseverance, not the demarcation of the subject, it is the place of the impersonal and anonymous, unnameable subjectivation on the verge of vanishing and resurrecting from the void. 'I' doesn't think, but speaks, and exists only as long as it goes on talking. Or does it? Is existence the proper term to describe its status? Doesn't the endless talking preclude ever saying 'therefore I am'? Isn't there a being quite different from existence, a locus of being without qualities?

How can talking ever come to an end? The fact that it doesn't, that it is endlessly propelled forward by the thrust of sheer persistence, is closely connected to its loss of meaning. Not only is it not meaning which drives it on, nor the search for some lost meaning, but also the thrust of continuation prevents the retroactive recuperation of meaning.

It's an uninterrupted flow, of words and of tears. [...] I confuse them, words and tears, my words are my tears, my eyes my mouth. [...] it's always the same murmur, streaming, without a break, like a single word with no end and therefore with no meaning [*sans signification*], for it's the end which gives it, the meaning to words.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> E. g. "Traces fouillis signes sans sens gris pâle presque blanc sur blanc." "Bing", in: *Têtes-Mortes*, Minuit, Paris 1992, p. 62, and much more along these lines. ["Muddled traces signs without sense pale grey almost white on white."] It is the literary equivalent of Malevich's *White Square on White Surface*, that epitome of subtraction and minimal difference.

<sup>21</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, p. 267.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Nouvelles et Textes pour rien*, Minuit, Paris 1955, p. 167–8. The translation is again my own clumsy effort.

Ultimately, meaning is produced retroactively, it is the end which endows the preceding element with a meaning, the provisional ending of a sentence, of a section, the final ending of the book, it is always the last element which reshapes the preceding ones and makes them tend toward that end, in both senses. It totalises what went before, it makes it a whole where meaning can dwell. The words retroactively become teleological, flowing towards their end/goal, which reclaims them, salvaging their haphazard and tentative advance with a hindsight seal. This is what Lacan's concept of *point de capiton*, the suture point, tries to account for. But with an unending flow no such point is ever reached, the *point de capiton* seems to be infinitely deferred and suspended, it is not a journey towards some end which would recover meaning. And if the novel has to end at some point, then the last novel of the great *Trilogy* ends on "I'll go on", on the endlessness of going on, the impossibility to end.<sup>23</sup>

How can talking ever come to an end? With the correlative reduction of words and bodies the question can immediately be extended to 'How can body ever come to an end?' 'How can life ever come to an end?' Indeed Beckett's 'heroes' are always and increasingly on the brink of death, they keep dying through whole novels and theatre pieces, waiting for death to come as a salvation, they are all 'heroes' who have come to the end of their journey, who have exhausted the possible, and yet they never die. They start at the point of the end of their journey, at the point where some *point de capiton* should make sense of their lives, but the end is endlessly receding, it seems that death would rescue them and that this is all they wish for, but in the space of the withdrawing end there is a time-loop, they are caught in a loop which is at the same time the opening of a space, of a sense without any meaning, they reach a rock, which however is not the firm rock of cogito, but rather a being on the verge of nothing, they enter into a space of immortality which provides all the salvation needed precisely at the point where there seemed to be a pure nothing to engulf them. The reduction of words, meanings, bodies, their utter fragmentation leads to a nothing, but *nothing is but a loop* which keeps them going on, nothing is but an 'event horizon', on the edge of the black hole, in which objects emerge, the minimal object, the least. "Least. Least best worse. Least never to be naught. Never to naught be brought. Never by naught be nulled. Unnullable least."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *The Unnamable*, p. 382. The famous ending would require a much lengthier comment.

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, Grove Press, New York 1983, p. 32.

Immortality is not the good word for this situation, it reeks of damnation and redemption, a more appropriate and less distinguished word is called for. One of the interpreters says of Beckett's 'hero': "Not able to be immortal, he is *increvable!* [*À défaut d'être immortel, il est increvable!*]"<sup>25</sup> *Increvable*, an excellent Beckettian word, hardly translatable into English.<sup>26</sup> The dictionary offers 'to kick the bucket' as a trivial expression for dying, so could one say 'unbucketable'? Could one say 'unbecketttable'? He is not immortal, he just can't kick the bucket. As another interpreter put it: "... the resurrection with Beckett doesn't open any longer on eternal life but on an interminable necessity to continue" in "a parody of immortality". It is "a lay resurrection" (*laïque, non-religious*).<sup>27</sup>

This is where one could use another, albeit highly laden, psychoanalytic word, the death drive. For the death drive is not simply a drive towards death, rather quite the opposite, despite some confusion in Freud. It is a drive which itself cannot die. It is a pure thrust of persistence which cannot be annihilated,<sup>28</sup> it can merely be destroyed from outside, a pure life in the loop of death, emerging on the verge of nothing. The reduction of words and of bodies thus runs into the realm of the death drive, impelled by the "unnullable least" that cannot be reduced and which glimmers on the edge of nothing. And this is where Beckett is the greatest answer to the massive debate about nihilism: nihilism is defeated not by clinging to meanings, values, ethical injunctions, creeds, beliefs, world-views, religions, art, hope ..., it is overcome at the point of reducing all those to the point of facing the pure nothing ("en face / le pire"), where nothing emerges as a mere loop of "unnullable least", a source of new life, a support of perseverance (could one say, the ethics of the death drive?), an opening of a new production of sense.

So nothing has changed. The double meaning of this sentence invokes on the one hand the claustrophobic and static setting of Beckett's writing, a site where seemingly nothing could ever change – already since the first sentence of his first novel, the justly famous incipit of *Murphy*: "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new." No alternative, nothing new un-

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<sup>25</sup> Alfred Simon, *Samuel Beckett*, Belfond, Paris 1963, p. 130. Simon goes on: "Through the vibration of time he goes towards his death which he never joins, yet carrying it in him."

<sup>26</sup> Used by Alain Badiou in the subtitle of his luminous book on Beckett: *Beckett. L'increvable désir*, Hachette, Paris 1995.

<sup>27</sup> Evelyne Grossman, *L'esthétique de Beckett*, Sedes, Paris 1998, pp. 69, 117.

<sup>28</sup> This is where my reading sharply differs from Badiou's, who sees in the death drive merely a morbid preoccupation with death.

der the sun, from the first sentence on. But on the other hand, nothing *has* changed, it has changed imperceptibly as we went on, following the erratic and unfocused narrating voice in its chaotic meanderings, it has appeared, almost without our noticing, that the nothing is the new in 'the nothing new' on which the sun shines without alternative. And that nothing *has* changed, glimmeringly in the last half century, to the point that it has left behind the horizon of nihilism, if we are willing to pursue it far enough.



## IT ALWAYS GIVES WATCHING: THE NOTHING AND THE PARAHUMAN IN RILKE'S *DUINO ELEGIES*

Miglana Nikolchina

A well known story has it that Rainer Maria Rilke heard the first sentence of what was to become the first of his *Duino Elegies* while a strong Bora was blowing up from the sea. It was January 1912 and Rilke was staying at the Duino Castle on the Adriatic as a guest of Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe. It is she who provides the anecdote according to which, while Rilke was walking by the sea,

it seemed to him that in the raging of the storm a voice had called to him: 'Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angelic orders?'.... He took out his notebook, which he always carried with him, and wrote down these words ...<sup>1</sup>

A voice from the storm – a disembodied voice without a source – cries out a question to Rilke. Instead of answering – and, indeed, although angelic perception of the world will run as one of the persistent queries of the *Elegies*, whom and in what capacity could Rilke answer regarding the hearing of angels? – Rilke writes the question down. The question does not expect an answer and in a way hopes that there would be no answer: for, we are told, if by any chance an angel would press the poet to his heart, the poet would be consumed in the angel's stronger existence. The question cried out at the poet by nobody is reflected back as the poet's own question to nobody.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies: Bilingual Edition*, tr. Edward Snow, North Point Press, New York 2000, pp. vii–viii. Subsequent English translations from the *Duino Elegies* will be from this edition or from Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Poems*, 2nd expanded edition, tr. Albert Ernest Flemming, Routledge, New York 1986. I find both translations excellent although, of course, no translation could be perfect for the purposes of analysis, hence I will also sometimes refer to the German original.

The *Duino Elegies*, hence, have their inception in a situation where something is heard although there is nothing and nobody to hear. It is the nothing to hear – “the ceaseless message that forms itself out of silence”<sup>2</sup> – that makes the poet exert himself to listen as only saints have listened. This listening is so intense that the saints are lifted upwards, unawares, by the gigantic call. In “The Forth Elegy” this exertion to listen to the gigantic call of the nothing is restaged as an exertion to watch. There is nothing to see: the spectator is sitting in front of a puppet theatre stage which was set to present parting and which is now, indeed, deserted, the lights are switched off, grey drafts of emptiness come drifting down, the loved ones are no longer sitting next to him and the “distance in their features” is imperceptibly transformed into cosmic space. And yet the silent observer does not give up staring. For “one can always watch.”<sup>3</sup>

*Es giebt immer Zuschau'n.* Literally: it always gives watching. The viewer keeps on watching because “it” always gives watching. And then he sees. He sees with the watching given to him by the nothing-to-see the way he hears with the listening given to him by the nothing-to-hear. What he sees is an angel. The angel appears in order to counterbalance the gaze given by the nothing.

### *Kant with Swedenborg*

The angel appears and begins to manipulate the lifeless puppets on the deserted stage. The appearance of the angel as the operator of a doll is only one of the many threads that connect the angel of the *Duino Elegies* to Heinrich von Kleist’s essay “On the marionette theatre.” With Kleist, the marionette – manipulated as it is by its machinist – is proposed as the epitome of perfect dancing and as the only match of the god in terms of “grace:” “Where grace is concerned, it is impossible for man to come anywhere near a puppet. Only a god can equal inanimate matter in this respect.”<sup>4</sup>

In its turn, Kleist’s eulogy of the marionette seems to be related to his apparently dramatic reading of Kant and of Kant’s separation of the world of phenomena, the world which we can perceive and study, from the realm of noumena, of the inaccessible things in themselves. Kleist’s essay, further-

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<sup>2</sup> Flemming, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Snow, *op. cit.*, p. 25, Flemming, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, “On the Marionette Theatre,” tr. I. Parry, in: *Essays on Dolls*, Syrens, London 1994, p. 7.

more, may be directly referring to the mention of marionettes in Kant's own writing. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant discusses two assumptions which are, for him, unacceptable: the first one concerns time and space as attributes of things in themselves, the second one concerns possessing the capacity – which some, in fact, he notes dryly, *imagine* they actually possess – to come in direct contact with noumena so that “God and eternity with their awful majesty would stand unceasingly before our eyes.”<sup>5</sup> In the first case, Kant believes, man would be like a “marionette or an automaton, like Vaucanson's, prepared and wound up by the Supreme Artist”<sup>6</sup> and in the second case man's conduct would be “changed into mere mechanism, in which, as in a puppet-show, everything would gesticulate well, but there would be no life in the figures.”<sup>7</sup>

Plato, who banished poetry from the ideal city, and Hegel, who declared poetry a thing of the past, are usually identified as the most salient examples of the philosophical efforts to render poets redundant. And yet, Kant's sanitizing of noumena may have been the deadliest blow that philosophy dealt to poetry.<sup>8</sup> With or without the city, poets knew what they knew: that gods and goddesses would whisper in their ear and open up for them, out of their earthly exiles, the hills and rivers, skies and abysses of immortal lands. “I conversed with you in a dream / Kyprogeneia” – says Sappho, obviously continuing her conversation with Aphrodite also while awake.<sup>9</sup> The positing of noumena as unknowable and, if deemed knowable, as transforming humans into marionettes, renders such conversations not only dubious (the left-handed madness was lurking all along) but, in case we consent to them, pitiful: like the lifeless gesticulations of the puppet. Seen in this perspective, Kleist's taking up the cause of the marionette was a taking up of the cause of

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<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason: The Critique of Practical Reason and Other Ethical Treatises: the Critique of Judgment*, ed. Hutchins, Robert Maynard, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Chicago 1952, p. 355.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>8</sup> Here is the complaint of another well-informed poet: in a letter from 1825 S. T. Coleridge wrote that “In Kant's Critique of the Pure Reason there is more than one fundamental error; but the main fault lies in the Title-page, which to the manifold advantage of the Work might be exchanged for – An Inquisition respecting the constitution and limits of the Human Understanding.” (Earl Leslie Griggs, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 5, Clarendon Press, Oxford, England 2000, p. 421.) Coleridge's reference to the Inquisition, whose job was precisely to take care of improper contacts with the supernatural, has more than one implication here.

<sup>9</sup> F 134, tr. Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, Vintage Books, New York 2002, p. 273.

the poet whose privileged dealings with the divine had now turned him into an automaton wound up by the Supreme Artist. One might remember at this point that Kant developed his critiques not only in order to define the legitimate uses of reason against the procedures of metaphysics but also, not so overtly, in order to barricade thinking against the temptations exemplified by the Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg and his voluminous accounts of routine exchanges with angels.<sup>10</sup>

The Kantian ban on seeing and hearing or otherwise contacting noumena (Swedenborg's angels, in fact, did not need language in order to communicate) was nevertheless compensated for by an important gift – the gift of nothing. One might argue, of course, that the nothing had been there for a long time and that “to be 100% serious about nothing, about absence, about the void which is fullness, is the destiny and task of the poet” at least since the times of Simonides of Keos.<sup>11</sup> And yet, one might argue, too, that never before had the nothing been so potent and full as the nothing produced by the Kantian limitation. I am not referring to Kant's typology of the nothing in the *Critique of Pure Reason* but to the very placeless place (*topos outopos*, utopia) that the thinking of the noumenon opened. The thing in itself could be thought of only negatively, as a lack of whatever predicates, and hence as an absence, a void, an empty place, the place of nothing. There it was. If Kant failed to notice that the thing in itself was a mirage, that limitation preceded transcendence, and that “there is nothing – no positive substantial entity – behind the phenomenal curtain, only the gaze whose phantasmagorias assume the different shapes of the Thing,”<sup>12</sup> it is worth noting that neither did the poets. In fact, the decades after Kant's first *Critique* was published (1781) were marked by a steady growth of phantasmagorias. In literature, phantasms proliferated. As Mladen Dolar observes, in this epoch “ghosts, vampires, monsters, the undead dead, etc. gain an unexpected existence [...] not as a simple remainder of the past, but as something brought about by modernity.”<sup>13</sup> There was, in addition, a growing fascination with artificial creatures, dancing, singing, talking automatons whose literary avatars were frequently inspired by the mechanisms of the selfsame famous French constructor Vaucanson, whom Kant mentions in connection with the puppet.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Monique David-Ménard, *La Folie dans la raison pure. Kant lecteur de Swedenborg*, Librairie philosophique, J. Vrin, Paris 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost (Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan)*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1999, p. 108.

<sup>12</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Duke University Press, Durham 1993, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Mladen Dolar, “I shall be with you on your wedding night,” *October* 58, 1991, p. 7.

Phantasmagoria, hence, were not confined to the literary imagination. The nothing gave the watching and the watching took care of the rest.

### *A note on gravity*

Theories on gravitation have changed since Kant and Kleist, but the carrier of the mysterious force that holds the universe together has remained as elusive as it used to be. The black holes of contemporary cosmology, objects closed off onto themselves, of which no positive statement can be made since no information whatever can escape their insurmountable gravitational pull, look like some sort of uncanny literal apparition of the noumenon, of the matchless fullness of the nothing. Isn't gravity the very texture of the all-pervading, invisible, silent, immaterial (since we haven't been able to identify what transmits it) pull of the nothing? In Kleist's essay on the marionette theatre, grace is defined through gravitation and seems to amount to the correct positioning of the center of gravity, a positioning which is always ex-positioned, always external to the marionette (which is "anti-grav," gravitationless), since this positioning is with the marionette's machinist. Gravity hence appears as the Supreme Artist who winds up and pulls the strings of grace: gravity and grace relate to each other as the machinist-god and the marionette. This relatedness, which exhibits the ungraspable strings connecting weight and weightlessness, interiority and exteriority, hidden and manifest, inanimate matter and absolute consciousness, phenomenon and noumenon, is described by Kleist through the relatedness between an asymptote and a hyperbole. This simple yet mysterious, as Kleist notes, relatedness renders the Cartesian non-coincidence of matter (the hyperbolically dancing marionette) and spirit (the straight-lined machinist-god) as the non-coincidence of an infinite approach: an asymptote (from Greek, "not intersecting") is a line whose distance to a given curve tends to zero. I will return to the zero. In Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, this gravitational mystery works as the heavy, irresistible pull of the silent, the absent and the invisible: like the pull of the gigantic inaudible call which lifts the saints, puppetwise, upwards. "Above, beyond us, the angel plays." The background provided by Kleist is necessary to remind us that Rilke's angel plays *with the puppet*.

### *A project*

In his study of the fantastic as a literary genre, Tzvetan Todorov proposes three terms – fantastic, marvelous, and uncanny – categorizing the occurrence, in literature, of an event which challenges what in the text is assumed

to be the normal world.<sup>14</sup> We are dealing with the marvelous if the occurrence imposes a re-conceptualization of the world as a place where the familiar laws do not hold sway. We are dealing with the uncanny if the familiar laws are re-confirmed and the unusual event is denied in one way or another: for example, it turns out to be the result of delusion or madness. And, finally, we are dealing with the fantastic proper if the text does not allow a decision in favor of either the uncanny or the marvelous: the fantastic is the irresolvable hesitation between the two.

Todorov specifies that this categorization implies the rejection of “allegorical as well as ‘poetic’ interpretations.”<sup>15</sup> It means that Todorov’s categorization would exclude approaches which, in the spirit of Paul de Man’s “allegories of reading,” treat Rilke’s writing as “a poetry and poetics of sheer figuration that [...] thematizes both the self-containment and the radical insufficiency of poetic language, of the poem as a figure articulating and disarticulating itself at the limits of silence.”<sup>16</sup> Such readings, which bring forth the nothing in Rilke’s poetry with great sophistication, usually point out that his poetry cannot sustain “sheer figuration” at all times and that, by “the reversal of a negativity into a promise,”<sup>17</sup> it topples over (or very convincingly seems to do so) into metaphysics or messianism – thus justifying much of Rilke criticism as well as Heidegger’s critique of Rilke. Oscillating between the figurative and the messianic, such readings of Rilke do not cover yet another mode of the challenge to the “normal world,” which Todorov’s treatment of the fantastic deliberately leaves out. This mode refers to the *topos outopos*, the placeless place of the non-existent, which, if deployed as a genre would assume the name of utopia. Such readings do not take into account the possibility of the “reversal of a negativity into a promise” to be the very placelessness of the place that is utopia; the possibility, that is, for the promise of Rilke’s angel to unfold as a utopia or, to put it in the language that Badiou has recently summoned up a propos of the twentieth century, a *project*.<sup>18</sup> More specifically, Badiou speaks of the 20<sup>th</sup> century project to transform and create anew the human being, to create a *new* human being, to create, we might

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<sup>14</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Cornell University Press, Cornell 1975.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Véronique M. Fóti, *Heidegger and the Poets: Poiēsis/Sophia/Technē*, Humanity Books, New York 1992, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1979, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> Alain Badiou, *Le Siècle*, Seuil, Paris 2005, pp. 20–21. See too the chapters “La Bête” and “L’Irréconcilié”, pp. 23–60.

add, something not exactly human, something trans- or parahuman. Most interestingly, Badiou relates projectivity to “an obsession with the real” and, so far as the poet is concerned, to the poet’s function as the “guardian of the open” who guarantees that language will preserve its power to name it. The project – which, as Badiou correctly observes, was already in full swing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – is clearly manifest in Kleist’s essay “On the marionette theatre.” The essay envisions entering paradise from the backdoor via the gaining of absolute consciousness qua marionette – a rather extreme and definitive project which Kleist seems to have acted out with his carefully planned and meticulously executed suicide. Later on in the century Dostoyevsky’s Kirillov from *The Possessed* unfurls the same logic: “If God is dead, I kill myself, I am God.” Shortly before he commits his suicide we see him standing in a corner, motionless, unnaturally pale and staring into space, as if turned into stone or wax. He becomes a puppet by way of becoming god.<sup>19</sup>

The scandal of these examples demonstrates that, with its passion for the real, projectivity is strictly opposed to sheer figuration. The nothing that gives the watching is not exactly about the abdication of “any claim to truth” that Paul de Man finds in Rilke.<sup>20</sup> When Agamben speaks of “poetic atheology” he seems to be referring to the same neighborhood of the nothing with projectivity where we find the “singular coincidence of nihilism and poetic practice, thanks to which poetry becomes the laboratory in which all known figures are undone and new, parahuman or semidivine creatures emerge: Hölderlin’s half-god, Kleist’s marionette, Nietzsche’s Dionysus, the angel and the doll in Rilke, Kafka’s Odradek as well as Celan’s “Medusahead” and “automaton” and Montale’s “pearly snail’s trace.”<sup>21</sup>

It is by way of the frequently ignored puppet that we can figure out more precisely what Rilke’s angelic project is about. The whole arrangement, however, is quadruple: it includes the human and the animal.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Boyan Manchev analyses this metamorphosis as testifying to the facelessness, imagelessness, and subjectlessness of death: Kirillov cannot have the grand death he plans for himself and is inevitably turned into “naked life” before dying. Cf. “The End and the Message: An Attempt at the Philosophy of Narrative,” in: R. Kuncheva, K. Protohristova and B. Zlatanov (eds.), *Engendering Meaning: Volume in Honour of Radosvet Kolarov*, Boyan Penev, Sofia 2004, pp. 66–67.

<sup>20</sup> Paul de Man, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Essays in Poetics*, tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1999, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> I leave out the figure of the child, which plays a part both in “On the Marionette Theatre” and, very prominently, in the *Duino Elegies* and which seems to be caught up, diachronically and in terms of “growing up,” in the same ambiguities that the animal presents.



*The creature*

The animal (*Tier*) is sometimes referred to as creature, creation (*Kreatur*) in the *Duino Elegies*. In *Parmenides*, Heidegger criticizes Rilke “Eighth Elegy” for attributing to the animal – as *Tier* and *Kreatur* – the capacity to see the Open “with all its eyes” and putting it in opposition to the human entrapment by “our eyes” which are always “reversed” and “doubled back by [the] object onto themselves.”<sup>23</sup> Heidegger’s critique of Rilke’s thoughtless use of the word Open as pertaining to the animal, attributes to Rilke a complicity in the biologism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of psychoanalysis. This complicity results in the hominization of the animal and the animalization of man and in the “inversion of the relation in rank of man and animal.”<sup>24</sup>

Whatever Rilke’s Open, with its functional affinity to Kleist’s grace, means, the problem is that there are, in fact, two kinds of animal in the “Eighth Duino Elegy.” On the one hand, there is the animal to which the Open is open. Moving like “brooks and running springs” – i.e. automatically, like inanimate entities governed only by the law of gravity – and with its God always in front of it, this animal is akin to Kleist’s marionette with its machinist-god and to Rilke’s puppet operated by the angel.

There is, however, in the same elegy, a different type of animal, which “zigzags through the air like a crack through a teacup” and whose “trace crazes the porcelain of the evening.”<sup>25</sup> Clearly, this creature whose scared flight leaves a crack on the sky is no longer the animal that has its god always in front of it and its death always behind. This animal, frightened and confused because it “has to fly” but is fleeing from a womb, shares the predicament of humans “who live their lives, forever taking leave.”<sup>26</sup> Not the open, but parting is its share, the parting which upholds the scenery on the puppet stage of the “Fourth Duino Elegy” – the scenery of the nothing – and which is repeatedly lamented but ultimately retained in the *Elegies* as the human destiny.

This duplication of the animal, which now seems to be on the side of the marionette with its god, and now on the side of the human, always saying farewell, has an analogue in Kleist’s essay where we find the same configuration of marionette, god, human, and animal. The fencing bear in Kleist’s essay exhibits the perfection of the marionette through its mastery of the human craft of fencing. Like Rilke’s *Kreatur* it seems to be now marionette, now human.

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, tr. A. Schuwer and R. Rojcewicz, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1998, p. 157.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>25</sup> Snow, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



Curiously, the quadruple of man, god, animal, and puppet makes its appearance in the staging of Kirillov's suicide: not only does the man who would be god become a puppet, he also becomes an animal – he puts off the light, jumps to the ground and bites Verkhovensky like a dog.<sup>27</sup>

What is the significance of this peculiar duplicity in the animal, a duplicity that now seems to place it on the side of the puppet, now on the side of the human? It seems to mark the emergence of the artificial creature, the autonomization of the automaton. If, as Giorgio Agamben has recently argued, the animal was crucial to the proper functioning of the anthropogenetic machine that produced man,<sup>28</sup> and if, at least since Descartes, animals have been viewed as mechanisms and machines, the emancipation of the pure mechanism from the animal shook the anthropogenetic status of the animal. In so far as it is a pure mechanism, it no longer relates to man but is related, as is the case with Kleist and Rilke, to some other entity, the god or the angel, gravity, the nothing, the noumen. *The animal sees the Open in so far as it is a marionette*. The subtraction of the automaton from the animal makes man as the link between animal and god superfluous. It is not a question of the hominization of animal and the animalization of man but, rather, of a subtraction of the puppet-and-angel (where the angel brings in the nothing of noumena) from the animal-and-man: the drama of this subtraction with its indefinable residue destabilizes the anthropogenetic machine, challenges its product, and fuels the project for a new man referred to by Badiou in a chapter most pertinently entitled "The Beast."

As Mladen Dolar has argued, the autonomization of the automaton and the ensuing fascination with artificial creatures resulted from the Enlightenment ambition to fill in the missing link between *res extensa* and spirit and posit a "zero subjectivity" at the point where the spiritual would directly spring from the material. The drive, Dolar claims, was precisely to do away with the difference between the material and the spiritual and to see the automaton not only in the body, but also in the spirit. The goal, ultimately, was "a subject beyond the Imaginary, singularly deprived of a mirror-phase, a non-imaginary subject from which the imaginary support in the world has to be taken away [...] in order to reconstruct it, in its true significance, from this 'zero' point."<sup>29</sup> The point where the hyperbole of the marionette and the asymptote of the machinist-god will finally intersect.

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<sup>27</sup> Boyan Manchev suggests the Deleuzean concept of becoming-animal to describe this last stage of Kirillov. *Op. cit.*, pp. 67–68.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Dolar, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

According to Dolar, the project of a non-imaginary subject can explain, among other things, the literary fascination with blindness. Rilke's angel, it should be noted at this point, is frequently described by him as both invisible and blind.

### *The focal point*

Sooner or later (perhaps always too late, as Dolar believes), the mirror confronts the non-imaginary subject. Frankenstein's Monster sees himself in a pool and is terrified. Stanislaw Lem's thinking machine in "The Mask" stands in front of the mirror and cuts through her female flesh from which a veritable metal automaton emerges. This occurrence acquires a peculiar twist when, with Kleist and, I believe, with Rilke, a concave mirror appears.

Unlike plane mirrors, which can produce only virtual images, concave mirrors can produce both real and virtual images. This, however, is not all there is to the concave mirror. A concave mirror is part of a sphere. For each concave mirror, there is a certain point, situated between the centre of the sphere and the reflecting surface, which is called the focal point. When an object is situated at the focal point, the light rays neither converge nor diverge after reflecting off the mirror. The reflected rays travel parallel to each other. Subsequently, the light rays will not converge on the object's side of the mirror to form a real image; nor can they be extended backwards on the opposite side of the mirror to intersect to form a virtual image. An image cannot be found when the object is located at the focal point of a concave mirror. There is no image! Or rather, the rays will converge in infinity, the image will pass through infinity.

The end of Kleist's essay "On the Marionette Theatre" promises the return of grace as the last chapter in the history of the world. Kleist exemplifies this grand finale of history by an analogy with the disappearance and sudden re-emergence, after having passed through infinity, of the image in a concave mirror. What kind of re-emergence? It seems likely that the image which will "pop up in front of us" will be real and will take us to the center of the mirror sphere where the subject will surf(ace) as a sort of blind hybrid of the image with its source, a body glued to its "real" reflection, a *www.centaur*: half here, half there. The paradise regained, hence, would materialize as a logon to one's image.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> I offer a more detailed analysis of the effects of Kleist's reference to the concave mirror in: "Med bogom in lutko. O 'Über das Marionettentheater' Heinricha von Kleista." *Problemi*, 3-4, 2004, XLII, pp.155-168.

The concave mirror makes its discreet appearance with Rilke, too: in “The Second Elegy”, in the midst of a primordial landscape, there is an unexplained mention of mirrors

scooping [the angels'] outstreamed beauty  
back into their peerless faces.<sup>31</sup>

These mirrors, popping up as suddenly (*plötzlich*) as Kleist's returning image, “scoop” (*wiederschöpfen*) the Angels' beauty the way a ladle (*Schöpflöffel*) scoops. Furthermore, they scoop the angels' beauty back into their own faces, which seem to be their own (peerless, according to Snow's most pertinent translation) precisely in the sense of not being rivaled or claimed by their own reflection. No image returns here, no image redoubles the own-ness of the angelic face. In spite of Heidegger, who describes Rilke's Angel as “the being who governs the unheard of centre of the widest orbit and causes it to appear,”<sup>32</sup> the angel must be the creature which is always at the ex-centric focal point, the point where the impossibility of the image produces infinity.

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<sup>31</sup> Snow, *op. cit.*, p. 11. In German: “... Spiegel: die die entströmte eigene Schönheit/wiederschöpfen zurück in das eigene Antlitz.“

<sup>32</sup> Martin Heidegger, “What Are Poets For”, in: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter, Perennial Classics, New York 2001, p. 131.



## REVERSALS OF NOTHING: THE CASE OF THE SNEEZING CORPSE

Alenka Zupančič

### *That uncertain limit*

As with many things, comedy is also a good place to look if one wishes to be enlightened about matters regarding the question of nothing. *Much ado about nothing*, for example, is not just the title of a comedy. Like more than one Shakespearean title, it is paradigmatic. It captures a crucial dimension of comedy. On the condition, of course, that one does not take this “nothing” too lightly, or as synonymous with insignificant, trifling, irrelevant, and immaterial, but that one takes it seriously. Comedy does a lot of things with nothing. But above all, it likes to point to the irreducible materiality of nothing.

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

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

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

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

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

First a simple example of comic retort:

*Leonato*

(...) There is a kind of merry war betwixt Senior Benedick and her [Beatrice]: they never meet but there’s a skirmish of wit between them.

*Beatrice*

Alas, he gets nothing by that. In our last conflict four of his five wits went haling off, and now is the whole man govern’d with one (...).

(Act I, Scene I)

Here we have the idea of several “wits” literally leaving a person and “haling off” on their own (causing trouble elsewhere, one could imagine). “Wit” is produced as a detachable, autonomous, self-standing object. The next example combines body parts and soul parts as if they were detachable. Beatrice complains about how Count John is too melancholic and barely speaks, whereas Benedick is too tattling. Upon which Leonato proposes a practical solution, indicating what an ideal man would be:

Then half Senior Benedick tongue in Count John's mouth, and half  
 Count John's melancholy in Senior Benedick's face, -  
 (Act II, Scene I)

Let us make a rather abrupt stop here, and introduce the central question of this paper, which is the relationship between comedy and anxiety or, more specifically, between comedy and the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*). For the "materiality of the spectral", as well the production of the "impossible" (detachable and re-attachable) objects are precisely what both phenomena seem to have in common. A wit going around by itself, half a tongue in somebody else's mouth, parts of melancholy being transposed from one face to another, or, to return to the first example, entities such as "absence-of-cream" going around all by themselves – all these seem to be precisely the kind of "objects" that we encounter both in comedy and in the uncanny.

It is also amazing how well their respective definitions seem to fit the other as well. Bergson's famous definition of the comical, "something mechanical encrusted on something living"<sup>1</sup>, with all its versions ("a person giving us the impression of being a thing") and subversions ("a thing behaving like a person"<sup>2</sup>) could function perfectly as definitions of the uncanny. On the other hand, Schelling's famous definition of the uncanny, praised by Freud in his essay on the topic, could easily be applied to the comical: "everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."<sup>3</sup> The proximity between the comical and the uncanny seems itself both comical and uncanny. We are dealing with two phenomena that are *at the same* time extremely close to one another and extremely far away. They appear to be two completely different universes, yet separated by an exceptionally thin line, very hard to pin down.

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

This odd coincidence of the comical and the uncanny is not confined to the supposedly abstract level of their definitions. We started out by indicat-

<sup>1</sup> Henri Bergson, *Laughter*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1980, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *The Complete Wild Body*, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara 1982, p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'", in: *Art and Literature*, The Pelican Freud Library, Volume 14, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1987, p. 345.

ing a certain proximity in the nature of the objects they produce and play with. In a recent paper dedicated entirely to the relationship between the comical and the uncanny, Robert Pfaller put forward four essential elements that they have in common: the advent of symbolic causality (something that starts as a play or a pretence takes the upper hand and starts functioning in the real), the success (not only that everything succeeds, it even succeeds too much, “more than intended”), the repetition, and the figure of the double.<sup>4</sup> Elaborating on Octave Mannoni’s analysis of theatrical illusion, and introducing the notion of “mental experiment” as central, Pfaller proposes the following definition of the structural difference between comedy and the uncanny: *the comic is what is uncanny for others*. Mannoni’s example of an actor playing a dead man on the stage, and suddenly sneezing, is indeed a very good illustration of this. In order to find the occurrence of a dead man sneezing comical, the following constellation would have to exist: not only do I have to know that the man is not really dead (but is merely an actor pretending to be dead), I also have to be able to presuppose that somebody could believe him to be really dead, that they could be deceived by the theatrical illusion (and could thus be horrified by his sneezing). In other words, it is as if I ran through the following mental experiment: “Just imagine that someone didn’t know that she was watching a play, and believed that the corpse was really dead. The sneezing would have scared the shit out of her!” We must be careful not to confuse this with simple mockery. The point is not that we need this ignorant other in order to feel good about ourselves (to feel “superior” or smarter). The point is rather that we need this other in order to be able to *relate* to the uncanny object, instead of being overwhelmed by it.

In what follows, I will propose a somewhat different reading of the relationship between comedy and the uncanny, focusing on the question of the status of the nothing in one and the other, as well as on the question of the real (in the Lacanian sense of the term), a reading that nevertheless remains indebted to Pfaller’s analysis at many points.

### *“Theatrical illusion”*

There are some grounds for challenging Mannoni’s reading of theatrical illusion as basically following the scheme of “fetishist disavowal” or delegated belief (we know better than to believe this or that, but we keep on believing

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<sup>4</sup> See Robert Pfaller, “The Familiar Unknown, the Uncanny, the Comic”, in: S. Žižek (ed.), *Lacan’s Silent Partners*, Verso, London 2005 (forthcoming).



it by delegating this belief to the Other(s), by presupposing it in the others).<sup>5</sup> According to this scheme, and simply put, we can follow a theatre performance most vividly, tremble for the characters, cry for them, etc., although we know very well that all this is only a play, because we identify with the gaze of the Other who is supposedly fooled by this performance. In other words: although we know that the things we see are not real (or really happening), we (can) believe they are *via* the hypothesis of the Other for whom this performance is put up, or via the presupposition of some others who would believe the performance real. According to Mannoni, at stake here is the same kind of delegated belief that helps us to maintain, against our better knowledge, some of our own archaic beliefs which are banned by the demands of rationality that we live in.

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

We know that we are watching a play, a performance, and that there is a constitutive difference between the actor and the character she is playing, so that if the character dies, the actor does not. If this does not prevent us from feeling deep distress when the character dies, is the reason really that, against our better knowledge and by presupposing this belief in the Other(s), we allow ourselves to believe that the person really died? Is it not rather because (artistic) fiction is not the opposite of the real, but one of its best vehicles? There is real in theatre (and other forms of artistic fiction), which is different from saying, both, that all that happens in theatre is unreal or that it is all real. The Lacanian distinction between reality and the real is of course of crucial importance here, as well as his argument that the real is not something to be unveiled or revealed under the always somehow deceiving reality (as essentially imaginary, or “fantasmatic”), but something to be *constructed* (which is different from being represented or imitated). This is why a certain dimension of what an artistic “fiction” produces can very well be the real.

It is true, however, that without this something of the real being framed (delimited from reality) by a more or less explicit form of fiction, there is the risk, not of confusing reality with fiction, as one often hears, but of confusing reality with the real, which is usually to say the risk of reality “running crazy”. (This is also one of the possible definitions of the uncanny: reality coincides with the real, they become indistinguishable.) So, in order to sustain this

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire*, Seuil, Paris 1969, pp. 161–183.

frame or demarcation, it is indeed necessary to rely upon the instance of the Other. Yet, does this really involve our believing (in the real of what is happening on the stage) by presupposing this belief in the Other, or delegating it to the Other? Is it not rather our explicit *knowledge* that is being delegated to the Other? Is it not that in order to “enjoy” a fiction (which is to say, at the same time, to allow it to produce the effects of the real, and to prevent this real from being confused with reality), we deposit, so to say, our knowledge with the Other, as for safekeeping, while we can relax and let ourselves “fall into” the play, be completely absorbed, “fooled” by it? In other words: we delegate our knowledge of “how things really stand” to the Other, so that we can calmly indulge in *believing* (what we see). The Other is the guaranty that outside the play, there is a reality firmly in its place, a reality to which we can return (after the play, or at any moment of the play, if we choose to). The logic at stake in this configuration is thus the following: as long as the big Other knows that this is only a play and not reality, I can enjoy its dimension of the real. For the play can indeed affect me, and it can affect me beyond the place and time of the performance. The “effects of the real” produced by the play do not necessarily go away when the curtain falls and I return to my usual reality. They can become a part of this reality, without becoming one with it.

Let’s now go back to the “sneezing corpse” example. In a theatre performance, a sneezing corpse will not strike us as uncanny – it will strike us as funny, possibly comical, and we’ll come back to that distinction in a moment. What *could* strike us as uncanny, for example, is if at the end of the play, the actor playing the corpse did not stand up to receive the applause with the other actors, but were to remain lying dead on the floor. This would imply precisely that the Other (supposed to *know* how things stand in reality and to *guarantee* that they remain standing as they do) no longer holds this knowledge and this guaranty for the subject. In other words, it would imply that our own better knowledge (of the fact that this is “only a play” we are watching) is left without the support in the Other. If we think about it for a moment, this is a very typical configuration of the uncanny: the nightmarish feeling when the subject is alone in seeing that there is something wrong with what is happening, with no Other to support her knowledge or experience, and to make it transmittable to others.<sup>6</sup> In the uncanny, the emergence of the impossible-real object in the field of the Other always involves this radical severance of the subject from the Other.

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<sup>6</sup> On this and many other crucial points of the uncanny, see Mladen Dolar, “I Shall be with You on Your Wedding-Night’: Lacan and the Uncanny”, *October* 58, 1991, pp. 5–23.

On the other hand, among the things that make us laugh we must distinguish several different configurations and feelings that are not all already comical. One is the feeling of pleasurable relief that we experience when – after a certain period of anguish and doubt – we get some reassurance that the Other is still guaranteeing the reality outside the fiction, thus supporting the constitutive division between reality and the real (for example, if, after a while, the “corpse” on the stage nevertheless got up to receive the applause with the rest of the actors). This relief, which can make us laugh, is not yet in itself comical. A further, and perhaps more interesting distinction is that between funny and comical strictly speaking. To take again the sneezing corpse example: an actor playing a corpse that suddenly sneezes can be (only) funny or (also) comical. The episode is funny when it functions as something that *displays a lack* in the edifice of representation. The conditions of the possibility of representation are not challenged themselves, the Other keeps guaranteeing the difference between the actor and his character, but the actor fails to continue filling in, covering all the representative space that is opened to him by the Other guaranteeing the difference between himself and his character. He lets his “reality-self” disturb the character. If they remain on this level of empirical reality (of actors, or setting, or something else) disturbing the “purity” of the performance (i.e. of the representation), pointing to its failures, then these kinds of incidences are merely funny, lacking the real comic quality.

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

For example, there is a difference between a “romantic” reading (including the phenomenon of “romantic irony”), according to which, in sneezing, the supposed “real” of the actor’s body is contesting the purity of symbolic

representation, refusing to be reduced to it, and a quite different, comic, reading, according to which the very guaranty of the symbolic representation itself appears on the stage as this corporal, sneezy presence.

This latter “reading” can be accentuated on the stage. We can imagine the following, incontestably comic situation: in a “serious” play, the actor playing a corpse suddenly sneezes – which leaves open both possible readings or reactions mentioned above. However, let’s say that at this point another actor on the stage interrupts a dialog in which he was fully engaged when the “accident” occurred, turns to the “corpse”, says “*bless you*”, then turns back and calmly continues his interrupted dialog. – This acknowledging of the unexpected object (sneezing without a body from which it would “naturally emanate”) on the stage, responding to it *as such*, is precisely what emphasises, even fortifies its status as an object.

We can imagine a further prolongation of the above situation: after automatically replaying “bless you” and returning to the previous dialog, the co-actor suddenly freezes and looks at the corpse again (only just realizing what has in fact happened). This delayed reaction (or delayed recognition of what is happening), which follows after an automatic response, is abundant in comic situations, and is very much a part of various “comic techniques”. It serves one of the principal comic purposes, which is: to objectify the inner contradiction of human life, and to present this contradiction itself as something.

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

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

*Nothing remains to be seen*

What both comedy and the uncanny have in common has to do with – nothing.

In the normal, or ordinary run of things (which includes a large diapason of phenomena that are “funny” and/or “scary”, without possessing the

specific feature that would make them either “comical” or “uncanny”<sup>7</sup>) we are dealing with the following configuration. There is a fundamental negativity which exists and functions as the condition of differentiability within our (symbolic and imaginary) world, i.e. of its readability. According to Lacan, the constitution of reality presupposes an element “falling out” (of it), supporting – through its very lack – the consistency of given reality. There is a constitutive lack, which is of a different order than any lack that we encounter in our reality. Differently from that constitutive lack, the lack that we encounter in reality is always-already reflective, constituted, mediated by the symbolic, manageable by the symbolic. That is to say that it includes the possibility of referring to nothing as if it were something. A symbol can fill in the lack, it can designate its place, it can designate an absence, it can make what is not here present. It is thus important to distinguish between two kinds of negativity: the fundamental negativity of a constitutive lack (which is never visible as such, but through which everything else becomes visible), and an asserted or “posited” negativity, lack, absence, etc ...

As was pointed out at the beginning, both comedy and the uncanny can involve certain “illogical” appearances that point to the collapse of that fundamental-constitutive negativity itself. Comic objects can be very similar to uncanny objects in their “spectral materiality”.

In his analysis of the uncanny (as related to anxiety), Lacan chooses to capture what is at stake in this configuration with the formula: *le manque vient à manquer*, “the lack comes to lack”.<sup>8</sup> The constitutive lack which, precisely as a lack, supports our symbolic universe and its differentiations, comes to be lacking. What emerges in its place is an “impossible”, surplus object that has no place in given reality and blatantly contradicts its laws. To a certain extent, Lacan’s formula also applies to the comical. It is implied, for example, in the figure of “surplus-success” which, according to Pfaller, is common both to comedy and to the uncanny (things have a funny way of not only succeeding, but of succeeding too much, “more than intended”).

Lacan further claims that this “lack of the lack” is what is involved in his concept of the object *a* (as real). Which is why anxiety “is not without object”<sup>9</sup>. In order to provide a more concrete rendering of these formulas on the side of the uncanny, let us look at an example. Take the image of

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<sup>7</sup> In other words, and in the same way that not all that is scary, or horrible, is uncanny (or related to anxiety), the comical should not be confused with the much larger field of what we can find “funny”. It is a specific category of funny which, indeed, has more in common with the uncanny than with some other instances of “funny”.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre X, L’angoisse*, Seuil, Paris 2004, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

someone's eyes being plucked out (and appearing autonomously), an image that seems to haunt the human imaginary from a very early stage, and which is often associated with the uncanny. When analyzing the uncanny aspect of this image, one usually points out two things: 1) instead of the eyes, two empty holes yawn in the person's face. 2) Eyes themselves, once detached from the body, appear as ghastly, impossible objects. In relation to the first point, one has the tendency to assume that the holes are terrifying because of the lack they imply, i.e. because they are holes, empty corridors leading to uncertain depths. Yet is it not rather the opposite that is really ghastly? Namely, that instead of the eyes, which – on the imaginary level – always suggest an *in(de)finite depth*, an opening into a possibly inscrutable, bottomless dimension of subjectivity (eyes being considered as “openings into a person's soul”), the holes instead of the eyes are *all too shallow*, all too finite, their bottom all too visible and close. So that, once again, what is horrifying is not simply the appearance (or disclosure) of a lack, but rather that the “lack comes to lack”, that this lack itself is removed, that it loses its support. One could say: the moment when the lack loses its symbolic or/and imaginary support, it becomes “a mere hole”, which is to say – an object. It is a nothing that, literally, remains (there) to be seen.

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

Incidentally, these observations can help us understand the tectonic shift in a subject's symbolic economy that Lacan aims at demarcating with his formula of anxiety (“the lack comes to lack”): the subject loses the very support that her desire and, broadly, her symbolic universe had in a (constitutive) lack. This is exactly why he insists that the castration complex – which is the point where both the Freudian analysis of anxiety and his analysis of the uncanny in Hoffmann's story *The Sandman* lead to and stop at – is not, in fact, the last step in analyzing anxiety. There is, claims Lacan, a more fundamental, “original lack”, a lack in the real, a “structural flaw [*vice de structure*] inscribed in the being-in-the-world of the subject that we are dealing with”<sup>10</sup>. One must be careful not to take this claim as a kind of “philosophical culturalization of psychoanalysis”, which would replace the always somehow controversial notion of castration with a much more acceptable (and much more

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160–161.

profound sounding) idea of a “structural flaw”, or “ontological defect/lack”. Lacan does not aim at dismissing the central role of the “castration complex” in human experience – on the contrary, he aims at *explaining* it. The castration complex functions as the pivotal point of our experience because it provides a symbolic rendering, a symbolic support, and hence a way of dealing with/transposing the “lack in the real”.

In other words, the point where Lacan goes further than Freud on this issue does not consist in his dismissing the castration complex as not central or fundamental, but in turning the tables around. His claim is that at the bottom of anxiety, there is not a (revived) fear or menace of castration, but a fear or menace of losing the castration itself, that is to say of losing the symbolic support of the lack – the symbolic support provided by the castration complex. This is what his formula of anxiety, “the lack comes to lack”, finally aims at. The pivotal point of anxiety is not a “fear of castration”, but instead the fear of losing the support that the subject (and her desire) have in castration as a symbolic structure. It is the loss of this support that results in the apparition of those ghastly objects through which the lack in the real is present in the symbolic as an absolute “too-muchness”; ghastly objects which dislodge the object of desire and make appear, in its place, the cause of desire.

*The realism of desire versus the realism of the drive*

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



the double is that mirror image in which the object *a* is included. The imaginary starts to coincide with the real, provoking a shattering anxiety. The double is the same as me plus the object *a*, that invisible part of being added to my image. In order for the mirror image to contain the object *a*, a wink or a nod is enough. Lacan uses the gaze as the best presentation of that missing object; in the mirror, one can see one's eyes, but not the gaze which is the part that is lost. But imagine that one could see one's mirror image close its eyes: that would make the object as gaze appear in the mirror. This is what happens with the double, and the anxiety that the double produces is the surest sign of the appearance of the object.<sup>11</sup>

One could thus say that the uncanny is based upon, and “exploits” the realism of desire: the emergence of that what “ought to have remained secret and hidden” – to use the Schellingian definition<sup>12</sup> – induces a collapse of reality (as, fundamentally, the reality of desire). The literature of the uncanny plays with the threat of this collapse, which is also to say that it plays with the fundamental ambiguity and ambivalence of desire: a desire cannot desire the real that makes it desire; yet it is also tempted to fantasize about embracing this Cause in a self-destructive (over)realisation, that is to say, precisely the “over-realisation” that we encounter in the uncanny. It is an “over-realisation” with which we pass over to the other side – which is not the case with surplus-realisation in the comical.

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

Indeed, comedy does not follow the laws of the “realism of desire”, that is to say, the laws of reality as underpinned by the structure of desire. On the contrary, it blatantly defies them. Yet, at the same time, there isn't a good comedy in which we could not feel quite distinctively that there is something

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<sup>11</sup> Mladen Dolar, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in order to see how Schelling's definition of the uncanny (“everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light”) is very close to Lacan's definition, it is enough to stress the following: “what ought to have remained secret” is to be understood in the strong sense, i.e. in the sense of a *constitutive* absence from the scene, and not in the more relative (or even moral) sense of what is “appropriate” to be seen and what not.



very real in all this unrealism. It is as if comedy referred to a different real of human experience, a real that doesn't follow the laws of desire to begin with (which is different from saying that it "transgresses them"). Comedy strangely combines the "unbelievable" with a rather down-to-earth realism. It avoids idealization, yet it remains strangely optimistic regarding the satisfactory outcome of anything that happens. In view of this, should one not say that the realism of comedy is in fact a realism of drives, which is "unrealistic" precisely in the sense described above? Drives always find their satisfaction, regardless of the objective outcome of their quest. They have a way of stubbornly returning to their place, which is de-placed to begin with.

To go back to our example: in comedy, the sneezing of a corpse is not the ghastly object/real that should not be there, it is the real of a very different human experience, which can be formulated as follows: *dead or not, the guy is still sneezing*. Or: *sneezing always returns to its place* (even when this place is no longer there). In other words, what comedy aims at enacting is precisely the object of the drive.

In this perspective, we can see how what is usually referred to as the "vitalism" of comedy (the fact that it seems to stretch life beyond all the laws of probability) is in fact nothing other than the *vitalism of the death drive*. That is to say, the vitalism of the internal contradiction of (human) life itself. Far from referring to something in us that "wants to die", or that aims at death and destruction, the Lacanian notion of the death drive refers to an excess of life itself. In the human subject, there is something that has for its one and only purpose to go on living and perpetuating itself, regardless of how the subject "feels" about it, or of how she "leads" her life.

Since this notion of the death drive is often the issue in contemporary philosophical debates, and has earned Lacan the reputation of assigning to death the determinant role in human subjectivity (along the lines of the Heideggerian Being-towards-death), one cannot stress the above point too much.<sup>13</sup> Lacan's "death drive" is precisely the reason that the subject can never be reduced to the horizon of her death. This is not to say, on the other hand, that as an excess of life the death drive saves us from our finitude, or that this "immortal, irrepressible life" (Lacan) will indeed go on living *after* we die, that something of us will survive in it. The archetypical comical figure of, say, a passionate habit or a tick that keeps persisting even after its subject

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<sup>13</sup> On this controversy, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, Verso, London & New York 2000, pp. 163–167. See also his contribution in the present volume, which makes a point of distinguishing between *objet-petit a* as object-cause of desire and as the object of drive, along lines very similar to those we are pursuing.

is already dead (or asleep or indisposed in any other way), is the way comedy renders palpable the inherent and always-already existing two-fold nature of human life, its internal separation/contradiction. The “real” life is precisely not beyond our life in reality (it does not lie with the Thing lost from reality), it is attached to it in a constitutively dislocated way. For comedy, the real life is the reality of our life being out-of-joint with itself. By drawing on the structure of the drive, comedy does not preach that something of our life will go on living on its own when we die, it rather draws our attention to the fact that *something of our life lives on its own as we speak*, that is to say, at any moment of our life. It draws our attention to the fact that, in a certain way, sneezing (or any other tick, habit, obsession that comedy chooses to bring forward) is always-already attached to us: irreducibly linked to us, yet also leading a somehow autonomous life. This is precisely what is at stake in the point we made earlier: the true object of comedy is not simply this tick, or habit, or sneezing, but precisely that interval that simultaneously separates and links the sneezing and its body, the habit and its bearer, the smile and its face, the pleasure and its cause ... It is this logic of *constitutive dislocation* (as immanent nothing) that links the comedy to the dynamics of the drives, and distinguishes it from the uncanny, which is bound to the dynamic of desire with its logics of *constitutive lack* (as transcendent nothing).

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## ABSTRACTS • IZVLEČKI

GEOFF BOUCHER

### **One Hand Clapping: The Phoneme and the Nothing**

Keywords: *Lacan, object (a), semiotics, desire, Judith Butler*

In *Écrits*, Lacan proposes an “unthinkable list” of objects (a) that includes “the phoneme, the gaze, the voice – the nothing”. While the gaze and the voice have received extensive critical commentary, the phoneme and the nothing have gone practically unnoticed. I propose to theoretically construct the object (a) by means of an explication of Lacan’s enigmatic allusion to the phoneme and the nothing. I contend that the phoneme is the “ur-form” of the object (a), whose ontological status is nothing. As the ur-form of the object (a) (both structurally and genetically), the phoneme exemplifies the primary function of the structural causality of the Lacanian Real within the Symbolic Order, namely, the function of the bar resisting signification between signifier and signified. By developing the concept of the object (a) in relation to linguistics, psychoanalysis can reply to the persistent misunderstanding of Lacan’s position by deconstructive critics, such as Judith Butler.

GEOFF BOUCHER

### **Tlesk ene roke: fonem in nič**

Ključne besede: *Lacan, objekt (a), semiotika, želja, Judith Butler*

Lacan v *Spisih* predlaga “nemišljiv seznam” objektov (a), ki vključuje “fonem, pogled, glas, – nič”. Medtem ko sta bila pogled in glas deležna številnih komentarjev, sta fonem in nič ostala tako rekoč neopažena. Predlagam teoretsko konstrukcijo objekta (a) preko eksplikacije Lacanove skrivnostne aluzije na fonem in nič. Zagovarjam tezo, da je fonem “pra-forma” objekta (a), katerega ontološki status je nič. Kot pra-forma objekta (a) (tako strukturno kot genetsko) fonem ponazarja primarno funkcijo strukturne kavzalnosti lacanovskega realnega znotraj simbolnega reda, namreč funkcijo prečke med označevalcem in označencem, ki se upira pomenjanju. Z razvitjem koncepta objekta (a) v razmerju do lingvistike lahko psihoanaliza odgovori na vztrajno nerazumevanje Lacanove pozicije s strani dekonstruktivističnih kritikov, kakršna je Judith Butler.

ALEŠ BUNTA

### **Annihilation of Nothing?**

Keywords: *nothing, negativity, Hegel, Nietzsche, negation, affirmation*

The article examines the relation between Nietzsche's and Hegel's concepts of nothing and negativity. Both concepts have to be understood as two radical answers to the metaphysical constitution of reality. Namely, if metaphysics constitutes reality through the exclusion of nothing from being, then for Hegel it is actually impossible to recognize reality if it hasn't been understood in its equality with negation, or in other words, if being hasn't been beheld in its sameness with nothing. On the other hand, the essence of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics lies exactly in the accusation that metaphysics remains unable *not* to think of being as nothing. There are several reasons for this incapacity, the crucial aspect can however only be grasped through an analysis of Nietzsche's "double affirmation" as an answer to Hegel's "negation of negation".

ALEŠ BUNTA

### **Uničiti nič?**

Ključne besede: *nič, negativnost, Hegel, Nietzsche, negacija, afirmacija*

Članek obravnava razmerje med Nietzschejevo in Heglovo koncepcijo ničā in negativnosti. Oba zastavka je potrebno razumeti kot radikalna odgovora na metafizično konstitucijo realnosti. Če je namreč tradicionalna metafizika konstituirala realnost na podlagi izključitve ničā iz biti, potem je po Heglu sploh nemogoče spoznati realnost, če je ne dojamemo v njeni istovetnosti z negacijo, oziroma z drugimi besedami, če biti ne dojamemo v njeni istosti z ničem. Po drugi strani se bistvo Nietzschejeve kritike metafizike nahaja v obtožbi, da metafizika biti ravno ne more *ne* misliti kot nič. Ta nezmožnost ima več razlogov, toda do ključnega vidika se je možno dokopati le skozi analizo Nietzschejeve "dvojne afirmacije" kot odgovora na Heglovo "negacijo negacije".

JUSTIN CLEMENS

### **Doubles of Nothing: The Problem of Binding Truth to Being in the Work of Alain Badiou**

Keywords: *Alain Badiou, mathematics, ontology, nothing*

In this article, I discuss how things go with the "Nothing" in the work of Alain Badiou, a topic which is evidently central to his thought, and which has received a great deal of attention in the commentary to date. As this problem is inaccessible outside of Badiou's deployment of mathematics, I will suggest how accounts of Badiou's work remain flawed insofar as they evade his mathematical demonstrations, and I attempt to clarify how mathematics operates in his system. I then examine the consequences that such a use of mathematics has for Badiou's doctrine of the nothing. I conclude with a discussion of some of the difficulties that the nothing continues to pose to Badiou, which have not (yet) been satisfactorily resolved. These difficulties devolve from the problematic of the *incessantly doubling void*.

JUSTIN CLEMENS

### **Dvojniki nič: problem povezave resnice z bitjo v delu Alaina Badiouja**

Ključne besede: *Alain Badiou, matematika, ontologija, nič*

V pričujočem članku razpravljam o vprašanju "niča" v delu Alaina Badiouja, kar je seveda pri njem osrednja tema, ki je bila doslej deležna že veliko pozornosti. Ker se tega problema ni mogoče ustrezno lotiti zunaj Badioujeve rabe matematike, postavim tezo, da razlage Badioujevega dela ostajajo pomanjkljive, kolikor se izognejo njegovim matematičnim prikazom, ter poskušam pojasniti, kako v njegovem sistemu deluje matematika. Nato preučim konsekvence, ki jih ima takšna raba matematike za Badioujevo doktrino nič. Zaključim z razpravo o nekaterih težavah, ki jih Badiouju še naprej postavlja nič in ki (še) niso bile zadovoljivo rešene. Te težave izhajajo iz problematike *nenehno podvajajoče se praznine*.

MLADEN DOLAR

### **Nothing Has Changed**

Keywords: *nothing, cogito, voice, enunciation, nihilism*

The paper pursues the thread of nothing through the work of Samuel Beckett. Beckett started off, in one of his first texts, "Whoroscope", by taking a shot at Descartes and his cogito, but one could read Beckett's subsequent work as his own elaboration of cogito: the gradual total reduction of all redundancy, the reduction of language and the reduction of the body, his "heroes" becoming reduced to the pure point of enunciation, constantly on the verge of disappearance, but nevertheless persisting. The nothingness towards which this process seemingly drives finally emerges as a loop of the "unnullable least". Hence the double meaning of the title: in Beckett's universe nothing ever changes, but at the same time it appears that nothing *has* changed in the process of reduction, so that his work can be read as the strongest antidote to nihilism.

MLADEN DOLAR

### **Nič se ni spremenilo in nič se je spremenil**

Ključne besede: *nič, cogito, glas, izjavljanje, nihilizem*

Tekst zasleduje rdečo nit nič skozi delo Samuela Becketta. Beckett je začel s tem, da je (v enem svojih prvih tekstov, "Whoroscope") udaril proti Descartesu in njegovemu cogitu, toda Beckettovo kasnejše delo bi lahko brali kot njegovo lastno elaboracijo cogita: postopno popolno redukcijo vsega odvečnega, redukcijo jezika in redukcijo telesa, njegovi "junaki" so vse bolj zreducirani na golo točko izjavljanja, vseskozi na tem, da izginejo, a vendarle vztrajajo. Nič, v smeri katerega na videz vleče ta proces, se na koncu pojavi kot zanka tega, čemur Beckett pravi "unnullable least" ("neizničljivo najmanj"). Od tod dvojni pomen naslova: v Beckettovem univerzumu se nikoli nič ne spremeni, hkrati pa se zdi, da se nič *je* spremenil v samem procesu redukcije, tako da je Beckettovo delo mogoče brati kot najmočnejši protistrup nihilizmu.

RUSSELL GRIGG

**Lacan and Badiou: Logic of the *Pas-Tout***

Keywords: *Lacan, Badiou, nothing, pas-tout*

The fact that statements about “nothing” are, or are always equivalent to, a universal statement raises the question of a non-universalizable, non-completable nothing. Lacan’s *pas-tout* is an attempt to logically capture this incompleteness that can never be completed. While the *pas-tout* is relevant to the field of sexuation, its logic can be considered independent of it. This logic is, of course, a “deviant” logic, and for this reason raises questions about how it is to be interpreted. Alain Badiou criticizes Lacan for adopting a pre-Cantorian attitude towards the infinite and for advocating the strictures of intuitionism. I argue that Lacan is not an intuitionist but a constructivist about mathematics. I also consider Jacques-Alain Miller’s suggestion that Lacan’s *pas-tout* can be considered a variant of the Aristotelian negative particular statement, “Not all As are B” or “Not every A is B”.

RUSSELL GRIGG

**Lacan in Badiou: logika *pas-tout***

Ključne besede: *Lacan, Badiou, nič, pas-tout*

Dejstvo, da so trditve o “ničū” vselej univerzalne trditve oziroma so le-tem ekvivalentne, zastavlja vprašanje ničā, ki ga ni mogoče univerzalizirati in narediti celega. Lacanov *pas-tout* je poskus logično ujeti to necelost, ki jo nikoli ni mogoče dopolniti do celote. Medtem ko se *pas-tout* nanaša na polje seksuacije, pa je mogoče njegovo logiko obravnavati neodvisno od njega. Ta logika je seveda “deviantna” logika in zato zastavlja vprašanja o tem, kako jo interpretirati. Alain Badiou kritizira Lacana, češ da je zavzel pred-cantorjevske stališče do neskončnega in zagovarjal strikturo intuicionizma. Sam zagovarjam tezo, da Lacan v matematiki ni intuicionist, temveč konstruktivist. Obravnavam tudi predlog Jacquesa-Alaina Millerja, da je mogoče Lacanov *pas-tout* jemati kot različico aristotelske negativne posamezne trditve, “Ne vsi A-ji so B” ali “Ne vsak A je B”.

ADRIAN JOHNSTON

**Nothing is Not Always No-One: (a)Voiding Love**

Keywords: *Badiou, Lacan, La Rochefoucauld, desire, love*

Alain Badiou credits Jacques Lacan with the formulation of an idea of love that demands to be granted a central place in the structure of any contemporary philosophy worthy of the name. However, at the same time, Badiou is understandably wary of the psychoanalytic tendency to dismiss the amorous as epiphenomenal in relation to the libidinal, to treat love as disguised lust (a tendency allegedly shared by psychoanalysis and the sort of French moralist tradition exemplified by La Rochefoucauld). In both avoiding the indefensible move of strictly partitioning the amorous and the libidinal by situating them as two poles of a mutually-exclusive opposition as well as



refusing to reduce one to the other, it must be asked: How does desiring something (i.e., being temporarily infatuated with the little-other as a fungible object-thing of fickle desire) occasionally become loving nothing (i.e., remaining faithfully linked to the Real Other as a singular, irreplaceable no-thing/non-object)? The true challenge for a joint philosophical-psychoanalytic delineation of the amorous is to develop the basis for an explanation of how love miraculously emerges from lust, that is, of how the interplay between various libidinal factors (in particular, the factors of need, demand, and desire as defined by Lacan) creates the amorous seemingly *ex nihilo* via ontogenetic processes in the midst of which transpires what appears as a dynamic of transubstantiation elevating lust to love.

ADRIAN JOHNSTON

**Nič ni vselej nihče: (a)Voiding Love**

Ključne besede: *Badiou, Lacan, La Rochefoucauld, želja, ljubezen*

Alain Badiou prizna Jacquesu Lacanu zaslugo za formuliranje neke ideje ljubezni, ki bi ji moralo pripasti osrednje mesto v strukturi vsake sodobne filozofije, vredne tega imena. Hkrati pa je Badiou razumljivo previden ob psihoanalitični tendenci, ki ljubezensko odpravi kot epifenomen libidinalnega in ljubezen obravnava kot zakrito poželenje (tendenci, ki naj bi bila skupna psihoanalizi in tisti francoski moralistični tradiciji, ki jo ponazarja Rochefoucauld). Izogibajoč se po eni strani problematični gesti, ki strogo razmeji ljubezensko in libidinalno ter ju postavi kot dva izključujoče se pola, po drugi strani pa temu, da bi ju zvedli drugo na drugo, moramo postaviti naslednje vprašanje: Kako lahko želeli nekaj (tj., biti začasno vnet za malega-drugega kot zamenljiv objekt-reč nestanovitne želje) ob priliki postane ljubiti nič (tj., ostati zvesto vezan na Realnega Drugega kot singularni, nenadomestljivi nič/ne-objekt)? Resnični izziv za skupni filozofsko-psihoanalitični očrt ljubezenskega je, kako razviti osnovo, iz katere bi bilo mogoče pojasniti čudežni vznik ljubezni iz poželenja – se pravi pojasniti, kako igra različnih libidinalnih faktorjev (zlasti potrebe, zahteve in želje, kot jih definira Lacan) na videz *ex nihilo* ustvari ljubezensko prek ontogenetičnega procesa, sredi katerega pride do nečesa podobnega dinamični transsubstanciaciji, ki poželenje povzdigne v ljubezen.

ZDRAVKO KOBE

**Die Auferstehung des Begriffs aus dem Geiste des Nihilismus oder Hegels spekulativer Karfreitag**

Schlüsselwörter: *Nichts, Nihilismus, Subjektivität, Reflexion, Hegel, Schelling, Jacobi*

Nach einleitender Darstellung der Grundstruktur des Nihilismus-Vorwurfs, den Jacobi an die Philosophie als Unternehmen des reflexiven Erkennens machte, wird in dem Aufsatz die große Bedeutung dieser Diskussion für die Bildung der Hegelschen Philosophie, vor allem in Beziehung auf Schelling dargelegt. Sich an Schelling anlehnend versuchte Hegel in den ersten Jenaer Jahren das Nichts, in dem die Reflexionsphilosophie enden sollte, als notwendige Folge einer willkürlichen Absolutisierung

der endlichen Reflexion zu lesen und es durch ihre immanente Selbstvernichtung zu überwinden. Doch fand er dieses Modell schon bald unzureichend, weil das absolute Nichts darin objektiv unbestimmt und subjektiv bloß versichernd bleibt. So stellte er die Aufgabe der Philosophie als Gleichnis des spekulativen Karfreitags, wo der Begriff durch das absolute Leiden beide Forderungen entsprechend erfüllen soll. Anschließend werden einige Folgen angeführt, die die Nihilismus-Problematik in Hegels späteren Werken hinterließ, z. B. in dem Begriffe der absoluten Reflexion, und die auch für heutige philosophische Diskussionen von Belang sein können.

ZDRAVKO KOBE

### **Vstajenje pojma iz duha nihilizma ali Heglov spekulativni Veliki petek**

Ključne besede: *nič, nihilizem, subjektivnost, refleksija, Hegel, Schelling, Jacobi*

Po prikazu temeljne strukture očitka o nihilizmu, ki ga je Jacobi naslovil na filozofijo kot sistem refleksijskega spoznanja, poskuša članek pokazati, kako pomembno vlogo je imela debata o nihilizmu za oblikovanje Heglove filozofije, še zlasti v odnosu do Schellinga. V navezavi na Schellinga je Hegel nič, v katerem naj bi končala filozofija, najprej razumel kot nujno posledico samovoljne absolutizacije končne refleksije in ga poskušal preseči z njenim imanentnim samouničenjem. Vendar se je ta model kmalu izkazal za neustreznega, ker je absolutni nič ostal objektivno nedoločen in subjektivno stvar golega zagotavljanja. Temu nasproti je Hegel predstavil nalogo filozofije s primerom spekulativnega Velikega petka, kjer naj bi bili skozi absolutno trpljenje čiste-ga pojma ustrezno izpolnjeni obe zahtevi. Za konec so nakazane sledi, ki jih je problematika nihilizma pustila v Heglovi zreli filozofiji, npr. v pojmu absolutne refleksije, in bi utegnile biti pomembne tudi za sodobno filozofsko diskusijo.

MIGLENA NIKOLCHINA

### **It Always Gives Watching: The Nothing and the Parahuman in Rilke's *Duino Elegies***

Keywords: *Rilke, nothing, angel, automaton, animal, new man*

The essay analyses the emergence of Rilke's angel-and-puppet from (the watching of) the nothing as indicative of the fascination with artificial creatures which, according to Mladen Dolar, resulted from the Enlightenment ambition to posit a "zero subjectivity" at the point where the spiritual would directly spring from the material. This zero subjectivity, described here as the autonomization of the automaton, amounts to a subtraction of the machine from the Cartesian understanding of the animal. The question that Rilke's *Duino Elegies* posit is, hence, not a question of the humanization of the animal and the animalization of man (as Heidegger believed), but, rather, of the subtraction of the puppet-and-angel from the animal-and-man. The drama of this subtraction, with its indefinable residue, destabilizes the anthropogenetic machine analysed by Agamben and fuels the project which Badiou has recently brought forth as the 20th century project of a new man.

MIGLENA NIKOLCHINA

**Vselej se daje gledanje: Nič in paračloveško v Rilkejevih *Devinskih elegijah***Ključne besede: *Rilke, nič, angel, avtomat, žival, novi človek*

Prispevek analizira, kako je nastop Rilkejevega angela-in-lutke iz (gledanja) nič a značilen za fascinacijo z umetnimi bitji, ki je po Mladenu Dolarju izšla iz ambicije razsvetljenstva, da postavi “ničelno subjektivnost” na točki, kjer bi duhovno vzniknilo neposredno iz materialnega. Ta ničelna subjektivnost, opisana kot avtonomizacija avtomata, predstavlja umik stroja iz kartezijanskega razumevanja živali. Vprašanje, ki ga postavljajo Rilkejeve *Devinske elegije*, torej ni vprašanje počlovečenja živali in poživaljenja človeka (kot je verjel Heidegger), temveč vprašanje umika lutke-in-angela iz živali-in-človeka. Drama tega umika s svojim nedoločljivim preostankom destabilizira antropogeni stroj, ki ga analizira Agamben, in hrani projekt, ki ga je Badiou nedavno izpostavil kot projekt novega človeka, ki je zaznamoval 20. stoletje.

ROBERT PFALLER

***Doing Nothing: Über materielles Nichtstun und immaterielle Arbeit***Schlüsselwörter: *Müßiggang, Arbeitsethos, immaterielle Arbeit, Narzißmus, Materialität der Ideologie, säkulare Religion, Kult, Entzauberung der Welt, Kontrollgesellschaft*

Der Müßiggang ist verschwunden: nicht nur als lustvolle Realität, sondern auch als Wunschvorstellung. Sogar ehemalige Arbeitsverweigerer loben heute die neuen, kreativen Möglichkeiten “immaterieller” Arbeit. Was sich hingegen einst der Arbeit widersetzt hat, ist nicht natürliche Faulheit, sondern eine kulturelle Kraft: das “schmutzige” Heilige bestimmter kultischer Alltagspraktiken. Max Webers Analyse der “Entzauberung der Welt” liefert eine klare Darstellung von der fortschreitenden Liquidierung dieser arbeitsfeindlichen Kraft. Bernard de Mandevilles “Bienenfabel” jedoch korrigiert Weber in dem entscheidenden Punkt: die Beseitigung von jeglichem Zauber und Luxus ist selbst der größte Luxus; der Kampf gegen Verschwendung selbst die größte Verschwendung. In dieses gesteigerte Nichtstun, das sich für sein Gegenteil hält, hat sich der Müßiggang verflüchtigt.

ROBERT PFALLER

***Doing Nothing: O materialnem nedelu in nematerialnem delu***Ključne besede: *brezdelje, delovni etos, nematerialno delo, narcizem, materialnost ideologije, sekularna religija, kult, odčaranje sveta, družba nadzora*

Brezdelje je izginilo: ne le kot prijetna realnost, temveč tudi kot želja. Celo nekdanji nasprotniki dela danes opevajo nove, kreativne možnosti “nematerialnega” dela. Ne-koč se delu ni upirala naravna lenoba, temveč neka kulturna sila: “umazana” svetost določenih starodavnih kulturnih praks. Analiza “odčaranja sveta”, ki jo razvije Max Weber, nam poda jasno predstavo o postopni likvidaciji te delu sovražne sile. “Basen o čebelah” Bernarda de Mandevilla pa je Webra popravila v odločilni točki: odstranitev vsake čarobnosti in vsakega luksuza je sama največji luksuz; boj proti razsipno-

sti sam največja razsipnost. Brezdelje se je danes razblinilo v to naraščajočo nedelo, ki se ima za svoje nasprotje.

RADO RIHA

**Handeln, “ob ich gleich nichts anderes wollte”: Kants praktische Philosophie als Theorie des subjektivierenden Handelns**

Schlüsselwörter: *Moralischer Universalismus, Rechte des Partikulären, praktische Vernunft, Vernunftfaktum, subjektivierendes Handeln*

Der Beitrag geht, sich auf die *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* und die *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* beziehend, der Frage nach, ob es möglich ist, Kants praktische Philosophie, jenseits des Dilemmas abstrakter moralischer Universalismus vs. Rechte des Partikulären als Ansatz einer Theorie des subjektivierten Handelns zu begreifen. Das heisst eines Handelns, in dem das Individuum nicht nur im “Dienste der Güter” bzw. seiner empirisch-pathologischen Interessen und Neigungen steht. In der Beantwortung dieser Frage wird die Aussage des kategorischen Imperativs “ich soll so oder so handeln, ob ich gleich nichts anderes wollte” im ersten Schritt als eine Forderung verstanden, die nicht einfach nichts Empirisches zu wollen verlangt, sondern das Wollen an ein Nichts als Etwas bindet. Im zweiten Schritt wird dann gezeigt, dass am Ort dieses Nichts als Etwas das Vernunftfaktum als abgründiger Grund eines Handelns steht, das mit dem Anspruch auftritt, für niemanden zu gelten, wenn es nicht bedingungslos für alle geltend gemacht werden kann.

RADO RIHA

**Delovati, “tudi če nočem nič drugega”: Kantova praktična filozofija kot teorija subjektivirajočega delovanja**

Ključne besede: *moralni univerzalizem, pravice partikularnega, praktični um, faktum uma, subjektivirajoče delovanje*

Prispevek se opira na Kantova spisa *Utemeljitev metafizike nravi* in *Kritika praktičnega uma* ter na njuni osnovi sprašuje, ali je mogoče razumeti Kantovo praktično filozofijo, onstran dileme abstraktni moralni univerzalizem. vs. pravice partikularnega, kot teorijo subjektivirajočega delovanja. Se pravi, delovanja, pri katerem individuum ni le v “službi dobrin” oz. empirično-patoloških interesov. Pri odgovoru na to vprašanje je v prvem koraku izjava kategoričnega imperativa, da “moram delovati na ta ali oni način, tudi če nočem nič drugega” razumljena kot zahteva, ki ne terja enostavno od nas, da nočemo nič empiričnega, ampak veže hotenje na Nič kot Nekaj. V drugem koraku postavi prispevek nato trditev, da je na mestu tega Niča kot Nečesa faktum uma kot brezrazložni temelj delovanja, ki nastopa z zahevo, da ne velja za nikogar, čega ni mogoče uveljavljati brezpogojno za vse.

ALENKA ZUPANČIČ

### **Reversals of Nothing: The Case of the Sneezing Corpse**

Keywords: *nothing, comedy, uncanny, drive, desire*

There exists a strange proximity between the seemingly opposed genres of comedy and the uncanny. In attempting to establish what constitutes their common ground and what distinguishes them, the paper examines the status and the functioning of “nothing” in one and in the other, as well the way “nothing” relates to the question of the real. It puts forward the thesis according to which the uncanny relies on the realism of desire, with its logic of constitutive lack (as transcendent nothing), whereas comedy implies a rather different form of realism, namely the realism of the drive, with its logic of constitutive dislocation (as immanent nothing).

ALENKA ZUPANČIČ

### **Preobrati nič: primer kihajočega trupla**

Ključne besede: *nič, komedija, grozljivo, gon, želja*

Med navidez nasprotujočima si žanroma komedije in grozljivega obstaja neka nena-  
vadna bližina. Članek poskuša začrtati, kaj je obema skupno in kaj ju razlikuje, in sicer  
preko analize tega, kako v enem in drugem žanru funkcionira “nič” ter kako je ta nič  
povezan z vprašanjem realnega. Razvije tezo, po kateri grozljivo sloni na realizmu  
želje in njeni logiki konstitutivnega manka (kot transcendentnega nič), medtem ko  
komedija implicira precej drugačen realizem, namreč realizem gona in njegovo logi-  
ko konstitutivne zamaknjenosti (kot imanentnega nič).

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

### **“... ce seul objet dont le néant s'honore”**

Key words: *drive, desire, nothing, Lacan, satisfaction*

The text focuses on the different roles played by the void with regard to desire and  
to drive: although, in both cases, the invested object is *objet petit a* as the primordially  
lost object, the object which gives body to a void, desire remains caught in the infinite  
search for the lost object, while drive directly targets the loss as such. The turn from  
desire to drive is thus the turn from the lost object to the loss itself as “object”.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

### **“... ce seul objet dont le néant s'honore”**

Ključne besede: *gon, želja, nič, Lacan, zadovoljitev*

Tekst obravnava različno vlogo, ki jo igra praznina v primeru želje in v primeru gona:  
četudi je investirani objekt v obeh primerih *objet petit a* kot izvorno izgubljeni objekt,  
objekt, ki utelesi praznino, pa želja ostaja ujeta v neskončno iskanje izgubljenega ob-  
jekta, medtem ko gon direktno meri na izgubo kot tako. Premik od želje h gonu je  
torej premik od izgubljenega objekta k zgubi sami kot “objektu”.