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Contents

Filozofski vestnik | Volume 44 | Number 1 | 2023

Economy, Ideology, Psychoanalysis

Kazalo

Filozofski vestnik | Letnik 44 | Številka 1 | 2023

Ekonomija, ideologija, psihoanaliza

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Towards a Materialist Reading of Thorstein Veblen's Notion of (Economic) Institution[1]

Keywords
Veblen, Cantor, institutions, set theory, habits of thought, instincts

Abstract
Thorstein Veblen once considered his work on instincts to be his only important contribution to economic theory. Instincts are the conditions and causes behind the formation of habits of thought, while the latter are the *sine qua non* elements of institutions. The article poses the question: If Veblen's relation instincts-habits of thought-institutions were to be thought of as a formal system, what role would they conceptually occupy? It interprets habits of thought as pure ideas in a Platonist fashion (eidos)—multiplicities thought as Ideas—conceived by Georg Cantor's theory of manifolds and philosophically assessed by Alain Badiou positing that "mathematics is ontology". The article aims: (1) to show how habits of thought, as institutions, abstracted from all content can be thought of as set-theoretic multiplicities; (2) to relate Veblen's prime instinct, the instinct of workmanship, in equivalence with set theory's axiom of the empty set—pointing towards Veblen's materialist orientation.

K materialističnemu branju pojma (ekonomske) institucije pri Thorsteinu Veblenu

Ključne besede
Veblen, Cantor, institucije, teorija množic, miselne navade, instinkti

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Povzetek
Thorstein Veblen je nekoč dejal, da je študij instinktov njegov edini pomembnejši doprinos k ekonomski teoriji. Instinkti so pogoji in vzroki v ozadju oblikovanja miselnih navad, medtem ko so slednje *sine qua non* gradniki institucij. Članek zastavlja sledeče vprašanje: kakšno konceptualno obliko bi zavzela Veblenova relacija med instinkti-miselne navade-institucije, če bi jo zastavili kot formalni sistem? Pri tem miselne navade razume kot čiste ideje v Platonovem smislu (*eidos*) – množtva mišljena kot Ideje –, kot jih podaja teorija matematičnih množic Georga Cantorja ter filozofsko osmišlja postulat Alaina Badiouja »matematika je ontologija«. Namen članka je: (1) pokazati, kako so miselne navade, ki privzamejo obliko institucij, abstrahirane od vse vsebine, lahko formalno mišljene kot matematične množice; (2) povezati Veblenov ključni instinkt, delovni instinkt, v ekvivalenco z aksiomom prazne množice in s tem nakazati Veblenovo materialistično orientacijo.

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Introduction: What Institution?

Imagine yourself entering a building that rises on rough cut black granite blocks in Brunkebergstorg, Stockholm. Or standing in front of a thirteenth-century mansion at *rue Cabanis*, a complex overstretching the fourteenth arrondissement in Paris. Or perhaps taking a boat tour to the Isla de los Alcatraces lying in front of the San Francisco Bay area, known under its more famous sobriquet of The Rock. How would an ordinary person generally describe all of these sites? What would they deem them to be when thinking about their actual representations, or rather, what would they signify to them? If they were to use just one word, what reference would they grant them? They would probably claim to be seeing an (economic, medical, correctional) institution. Or perhaps even something more emphatic—*the* Institution. We can take any number of other examples, also from the business world: the greenish park-like Googleplex in Mountain View, or the sturdy, brown brick Volkswagen façade in Wolfsburg. Indeed, when called upon to make factual generalizations of any great societal achievements, a cautious observer would most surely succumb to such eloquent *prima facie* reasoning. Unquestionably, these kinds of exercises tend to promote a "romanticized" and entertainment referencing of institutions in their appearances, highlighting their positive content, accumulated in the course of cultural growth. What is far more

seldom observed is a critical debunking of the mediation between their content and forms—to verify this conjecture, one need not go further than to ask whether one would also consider and elaborate on marriage and family, religion, state, money, law, and language as also counting as institutions.

Abstracted from specific names and sites, our above itinerary implicitly postulates a determinate social fabric, composed of different entities and phenomena, that come to be experienced by human subjects as their immediate social objectivity—*an institutional framework*. But to posit a determinate social fabric, or an institutional framework, one inevitably has to presuppose a variant of materialism (or idealism), out of which this entire "social fabric" can initially originate. The history of Western philosophy traditionally attributes the first appearance of materialism to the work of the atomists, who were simultaneously also the first to emphasize the material significance of the void, i.e. non-being, against being. This latter duality inaugurates the primordial choice and decision in Western philosophy, one proposed by Parmenides, i.e. that one can either follow the path of being (*truth*) or that of non-being (*void*). This implied choice gave modern figures such as Hobbes (mechanical materialism), Feuerbach (anthropological materialism), Marx and Engels (historical materialism), and Veblen (technological materialism/determinism) grounds to introduce their own versions of materialist thought.

In France, the last decades have slowly brought a new (potential) turn in contemporary philosophy, particularly through the works of Cornelius Castoriadis and Alain Badiou, whose oeuvres fall under the mathematical field of "set theory ontology." Our claim in this paper will be that such an approach to ontology, relying either on Cantor's naïve set theory or Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, can be fruitfully extended to rearticulate the "ontological" plane of Thorstein Veblen's institutionalist social fabric—*via the habits of thought conceived as formal preconditions for institutions*.

From the above two paragraphs we can deduce our main thesis and object of analysis (1) and the auxiliary background thesis (2):

(1) Thorstein Veblen is one of the very last *materialist* economic thinkers to have significantly questioned the object of knowledge in economic theorizing;

(2) A new turn is potentially unfolding in the field of contemporary philosophy—let us, speculatively, call it—a (neo)mathematical turn.

To approach Veblen through the postulate "mathematics is ontology," we will commence with the following question: What if the economic-anthropological institutionalist thought of Thorstein Veblen already entails a determinate *formal* inscription of social categories and ontology on its own? What if his theory of instincts elaborated in *The Instinct of Workmanship* already delineates an ontological schema of the social realm? Here we steer our inquiry to the concurrently renewed interest in Veblen's theory of instincts,[2] adding to the scarce research done compared to other aspects of Veblen's work. In order to progress towards a conclusion, we will seek a new formalization of his institutional framework, a model,[3] resting on his theory of instincts while echoing in the background the mathematical "set-theory ontology" project of Badiou.[4] Consequently, with this article, we expect to complement the immense research already done by opening up new grounds for mitigating the hampered conjunction of contemporary (heterodox) economic discourse with recent developments in contemporary philosophy. We will therefore work and deliver our arguments in a new discur-

2 Cf. Felipe Almeida, "The Psychology of Early Institutional Economics: The Instinctive Approach of Thorstein Veblen's Conspicuous Consumer Theory," *EconomiA* 16, no. 2 (May–August 2015): 226–34, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econ.2015.05.002; Christian Cordes, "Veblen's 'Instinct of Workmanship,' Its Cognitive Foundations, and Some Implications for Economic Theory," *Journal of Economic Issues* 39, no. 1 (March 2005): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.2005.11506778; Noriko Ishida, "Thorstein Veblen on Economic Man: Toward a New Method of Describing Human Nature, Society, and History," *Evolutionary and Institutional Economics Review* 18, no. 2 (September 2021): 527–47, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40844-020-00194-x; William Waller, "Reconsidering Thorstein Veblen's Use of Instincts," in *The Anthem Companion to Thorstein Veblen*, ed. Sidney Plotkin (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 39–68.

3 Here, the word model is understood as a concept within the mathematical *model-theoretic* approach, positing natural or formal languages as set-theoretic structures with a determinate logic and universal algebra, i.e. syntax, semantics, truth values, and relations between them. Following Alfred Tarski, model theory accounts for a "semantic" conception of truth, where every "true" interpretation of a formal system represents a model of it. Thus, a model "interprets" a formal system if the axioms of this system hold true for primitive elements and objects along with the relations between them.

4 See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005).

sive and methodologically heterodox approach—resembling a kind of *archaeology of knowledge*.[5]

We accordingly focus our efforts on a close reading of Thorstein Veblen's theorizing on institutions *qua* habits of thought, mediated through instincts. Due to spatial constraints, we will focus our discussion only on the first and by far the most important of Veblen's instincts, *the instinct of workmanship*, and derive its equivalence to the first axiom of ZF set theory, *the Axiom of the Empty Set*, as far as they both reflect precisely the materialist core of the respective projects.

We proceed with the following section, which introduces our own set-theoretic grounding of the habits of thought and institutions, conceived as (in)different multiplicities. We further proceed by establishing a link between Veblen's instincts and formal axioms of ZF set theory and focus on the most basic of instincts and axioms to expound on the materialist comprehension of Veblen's and Badiou's oeuvres. In the last section, we give some concluding remarks and propose avenues for further research.

Institutions as Sets of Indifferent Multiplicities

Before going into our elaboration and argument for a more "generalized" working definition of Institution, let us first provide some definitions of the notion of institution as they are forwarded by (economic) institutionalists such as Veblen—and his successor on the topic, Clarence Ayres—supplemented by the philosophical definitions of John R. Searle and Alain Badiou:

> As a matter of course, men order their lives by these [the current, business-like scheme of economic life] principles and, practically, entertain no question of their stability and finality. That is what is meant by calling them institutions; they are settled habits of thought common to the generality of men. [. . .] Like all human culture this material civilization is a scheme of institutions—institutional

5 See Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002).

> fabric and institutional growth. But institutions are an outgrowth of habit. The growth of culture is a cumulative sequence of habituation.[6]

> All are forms of social organization and as such parts of a larger whole which is organized society. Thus it appears that what we mean by institutions is the parts, and sub-parts, and sub-sub-parts, into which analysis resolves the whole substance or content of organized society. [. . .] the term "institution" is not a structural category. That is, it does not refer merely to the division of the total substance of society into its constituent parts. It is rather a functional category. As such it has reference to a certain type of social organization, or a certain aspect of social behaviour, which is qualitatively different from another aspect, or aspects, one in which different forces are at work to different effect from those to be observed in the other aspect, or aspects, of social organization.[7]

> An institution is any collectively accepted system of rules (procedures, practices) that enable us to create institutional facts. These rules typically have the form of *X counts as Y in C*, where an object, person, or state of affairs *X* is assigned a special status, the *Y* status, such that the new status enables the person or object to perform functions that it could not perform solely in virtue of its physical structure, but requires as a necessary condition the assignment of the status. The creation of an institutional fact is, thus, the collective assignment of a status function.[8]

> A philosophical institution is a procedure of conserving a knot, a knot in danger of being cut, which would cause its components to disperse. [. . .] What is the knot in question? I announced it in the sub-title: it is a knot that ties together an address, a transmission, and an inscription.[9]

12 This shortlist is far from exhaustive, but it sufficiently outlines the scope in our searching for a "working" definition with Veblen providing the core anthropologic-economic *conceptual apparatus*, Ayres delineating its *structural/function-*

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6 Thorstein Veblen, *The Place of Science in Modern Civilisation and Other Essays* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919), 239, 241.

7 Clarence E. Ayres, *The Industrial Economy: Its Technological Basis and Institutional Destiny* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), 42–43.

8 John R. Searle, "What is an Institution?," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 1, no. 1 (June 2005): 21–22, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1744137405000020.

9 Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 27.

al configuration, and Searle describing the generally accepted *underlying operating logic* of the notion *institution*. And correlatively, is it not Badiou's (Lacanian) definition of *philosophical institution* delivered in his *Conditions*, namely of address/initiation/void, transmission/settlement and inscription/institution, precisely a synchronic counterpart of Veblen's axis instincts-habits of thought-institutions? The derivation of this axis is also the general inclination underlying this inquiry. First, however, our aim here is not to search for an "aggregate" or "the least common denominator" abstracted from the concept of *institution* in the above definitions, but rather to seek out our own coextensive definition in set-theoretic language.

Before we begin with a formal exposition of *institutions conceived as sets*, we will first make use of the above wider-context definitions to propose our working definition of the concept institution. As indicated, it would be almost impossible to derive a unifying conception of the notion institution, however we can offer some cross-sections when reiterating these elaborations. Accordingly, let us posit our definition in the following manner:

Habits of thought are in-themselves institutions. They are indifferent multiplicities, presented/counted as a collection or a set of elements and organized according to a determinate relation of belonging. Different collections of multiplicities, i.e. habits of thought, also count as one—they are made consistent, i.e. can be re-presented under some determinate law (of second count).

A scholar with an affinity for foundational mathematics will have seen a similar kind of definition in a seminal text on the grounding of set theory in Georg Cantor's *Grundlagen einer allgemeinen Mannigfaltigkeitslehre* [Foundations of the Theory of Manifolds].[10] The reason for this will be made clear; we will maintain throughout this article that the *(ontological) structure of an institutional framework adheres to the logic(s) of multiplicities*. These can be either inconsistent or consistent—i.e. presented only in the pure form of elements of sets, or in the latter case, a collection of determinate elements being counted-as-one, again presenting a (new) set (of multiplicities). The further act of distributing

[10] Georg Cantor, "Foundations of the Theory of Manifolds," trans. Uwe Parpart, *The Campaigner. The Theoretical Journal of the National Caucus of Labor Committees* 9, no. 1–2 (January–February 1976): 69–96.

and aggregating elements/multiplicities therefore comes as an effect of counting elements that count-as-one—a new set as a part of a given collection of multiplicities—produced under some determinate law (of second count, the first already present in what was to be presented/made consistent at all). We say that to consist means to be existent. Consequently, to be subsumed under a *determinate relation*, to paraphrase Cantor, is to be *thought* as a One or a totality, thus bringing us in parallel with Plato's positing of forms, or rather, *ideas* (εἶδος).[11]
In the article, we will focus on the analysis of *settled habits of thought* as proposed in Veblen's institutional economics. Veblen, to whom we by all means attribute a thorough philosophical comprehension of economics, for instance, deals with the category of the *idea* in relation to the *habits of thought*—the particular substance that "makes" the institutions. This fact can be most clearly extracted in his *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, where he tracks them in the context of pecuniary norms invading the domain of older institutions to which "the notion of a pecuniary liquidation seems to have been wholly remote from the *range of ideas—habits of thought*—on which these relations and duties were originally based."[12] A few pages later he expresses them even more correlatively:

> With this change in the dominant interests of everyday life came a corresponding change in the discipline given by the habits of everyday life, which shows itself in the growth of a *new range of ideas* as to the meaning of human life and a new ground of finality for human institutions. *New axioms* of right and truth supplant the old as new habits of thought supersede the old.[13]

Veblen here enigmatically indicates that he might be endorsing a conception of *the idea*[14] premised as a system of axioms[15] (Veblen also uses the term princi-

11 See Cantor, 93.

12 Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 70; italics added.

13 Veblen, 76; italics added.

14 The question can be raised as to what kind of understanding of the notion of the idea Veblen presupposes. In this regard, two key influences on his thought come to mind: Immanuel Kant and Charles Sanders Peirce. The former introduces a metaphysical and transcendental approach to ideas, while the latter is concerned with clarity and distinction in terms of logical aspects of an idea.

15 Veblen comes closest to explaining this fact in *Absentee Ownership*, where in a footnote he gives yet another variant of the definition that "an institution is of the nature of a usage which has become axiomatic and indispensable by habituation and general acceptance."

ples interchangeably for habits of thought) and presupposing its determinations in the prevalent habits of thought. Furthermore, he interprets men's habits of thought as "i.e., their ideals and aspirations, their sense of the true, the beautiful, and the good,"[16] fairly obviously indicating a Kantian contour of his understanding of these categories and what the habits ought to encompass. The general influence of pragmatist philosophy on Veblen is today undisputed; however, a much lesser amount of emphasis and credit is given to signs of Kant's shadow in his theorizing. Particularly when one takes into account, as observed by Heidegger, that Kant is a philosopher of the axiom "*par excellence*."[17] Therefore, we follow the thesis that this is also a crucial step for Veblen; the presupposition of (axiomatic?) philosophical categories in his mode of presentation enables his mission to develop "a genetic inquiry into institutions that will address itself to the growth of habits and conventions."[18] Cantor for instance, similarly as Veblen, also relied on Darwin, in search of a "genetic" or, in his words, "organic explanation of nature,"[19] resting precisely on a theory of manifolds or sets that would supersede a mechanical interpretation of nature. The *transmundane character* of habits of thought can be observed in the following passages, emphasizing that they are "a matter of tradition out of the past, a legacy of habits of thought accumulated through the experience of past generations [. . .] in which the instinctive ends of life are worked out under any given cultural situation is somewhat closely conditioned by these elements of habit, which so fall into shape as an accepted scheme of life."[20] If we succumb to the conception of *the habits of thought*, to be understood as a category of *idea or eidos*, what then becomes of a "determinate law" that "re-makes" an indifferent manifold of elements into a consistent multiplicity to count-as-one? Its function is to demarcate the invariable protocol(s) of "formal" operations or processes that elicit the shaping of a determinate institutional fabric, composed of many count-as-ones, those which historically form specific habits of thought. Veblen put it perfectly

See Thorstein Veblen, *Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise in Recent Times: The Case of America* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1923), 101n1.

16 Veblen, *Place of Science,* 438.

17 See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning the Thing: On Kant's Doctrine of the Transcendental Principles*, trans. James D. Reid and Benjamin D. Crowe (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 128.

18 Thorstein Veblen, *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts*, new ed. (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1918), 2.

19 Cantor, "Theory of Manifolds," 76.

20 Veblen, *Instinct of Workmanship*, 7.

straightforward: *instincts designate the modes and possible structures for the formation of habits of thought*. The proceeding sections will investigate the general possibility of transcribing, or "formalizing," instincts as building principles of habits of thought into a minimal axiomatic system capable of deriving an institutional framework in a similar fashion as that in mathematics and with Badiou in philosophy. Why choose mathematical axioms? Veblen himself provides a possible answer when he discusses and distinguishes pure mathematics from applied mathematics and statistics in economics:[21]

> Mathematics is peculiarly independent of cultural circumstances, since it deals analytically with mankind's native gifts of logic, not with the ephemeral traits acquired by habituation.[22]

Axioms entail a mode of axiomatic thinking of undefined terms, of yet-to-become multiplicities, an un-teleological thinking of progress. Sticking to the "basic" imposition of set theory, as proposed by its initiator—Georg Cantor—and committing to a more literal reading of the developed axioms of set theory, let us now see how we can use axioms to formalize instincts and create a potentially infinite range of situations.

Deleuze and Zermelo-Fraenkel as Expositors of Veblen

First, we hold that axioms prescribe "formal" operations and rules according to which different ideas, i.e. habits of thought, can be composed, or put differently, are made to be(come), to exist. The axioms of a formal system, in our case the axioms of an institutional framework, are those that posit the minimal rules necessary for sustaining such a system. Observing Veblen's theory of instincts, one can extract from it both the aim and the subjective driving force of human action. Naturally, his interpretation of instincts is a product of his time (the last decade of the nineteenth century stemming from the works of the "University of Chicago Darwinists"—early John Dewey, Conway L. Morgan, and Jacques Loeb—and others such as Harvard's William James and Duke's William Mcdougall)—

[21] See James Wible, "Why Economics Is an Evolutionary, Mathematical Science: How Could Veblen's View of Economics Have Been So Different Than Peirce's?," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 43, no. 3 (September 2021): 350–77, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837220000450.

[22] Veblen, *Place of Science*, 52n3.

the time of rising anthropologico-psychological interpretations of instincts, but also the first definitions in the psychoanalytical approach of Sigmund Freud—divided between biological, self-preservational, and libidinal instincts (or distinguishing between instincts and drives). Veblen starts off with *tropismatic* action, which is an animal-like simple reflexive action towards basic life-supporting and necessary self-preservation needs; he then proceeds to *quasi-tropismatic*, *half-tropismatic*, or *physiological reactions*, which are in a sense also self-preservational, e.g. anger, promptings of sexual intercourse (without pleasure), and mimic teleological action, but are actually with "no consciousness of purpose," and lastly formulates *instincts* for intelligible action and conscious pursuit of an objective end, a libidinal-ego-drive attaining satisfaction. For Veblen, but also for associationist or evolutionary psychology and early Freudian psychoanalysis, the former of these instincts are observed in both animals and humans, while the latter are exclusive to humans. At the time of Veblen's writing, the different strands in psychology had not yet compiled a consistent theory of instincts, leaving him to develop his understanding of actions and instincts in his own evolutionary analytical framework. How the instincts and institutions eventually disjunctively overlap was later succinctly captured by Gilles Deleuze in his readings of David Hume (and, apparently, by also becoming an implicit interpreter of Veblen):

> The institution is a system of means, according to Hume, but these means are oblique and indirect; they do not satisfy the drive without also constraining it at the same time. [. . .] The difference between instinct and institution is this: an institution exists when the means by which a drive is satisfied are not determined by the drive itself or by specific characteristics.[23]

As we can see, for Deleuze, there is a disconnect between instincts/drives and institutions—to overcome this gap, the notion of tendency (i.e. habit of thought) is invoked—where

> the subject institutes an original world between its tendencies and the external milieu, developing artificial means of satisfaction. There is no doubt that tenden-

[23] Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 47.

> cies find satisfaction in the institution: sexuality finds it in marriage, and avarice in property.[24]

Consequently, this positing of a triadic structure invokes habits of thought to attain the form of (culturally or socially constructed) needs as opposed to pure instinctual behaviour:

> But it is clear that such institutions are secondary: they already presuppose institutionalized behaviors, recalling a derived utility that is properly social. In the end, this utility locates the principle from which it is derived in the relation of tendencies to the social. The institution is always given as an organized system of means. The institution sends us back to a social activity that is constitutive of models of which we are not conscious, and which are not explained either by tendencies or by utility, since human utility presupposes tendencies in the first place. [. . .] Every institution imposes a series of models on our bodies, even in its involuntary structures, and offers our intelligence a sort of knowledge, a possibility of foresight as project. We come to the following conclusion: humans have no instincts, they build institutions.[25]

Deleuze[26] very clearly observes that institutions do not derive directly from instincts. They are rather second, they "presuppose institutionalized behaviours" following utility (Hume), rationality (Popper), or some other principle of satisfying tendencies (habits of thought). However, as he points out, these tendencies do not necessarily explain why this or that particular institution has taken place at all. So, while instincts are the main building blocks—we chose to define them as *axioms*—in forming the habits of thought (Hume's reflection of the drive in the imagination),[27] there is a different function of determining what actually exists in a given (socially, culturally, historically, means-of-production) instituted world.

Veblen made very similar observations about instincts and he understood them as a means of shaping the proclivities, tendencies, and doings of human ani-

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[24] Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands: And Other Texts, 1953–1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 19.

[25] Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, 19–21.

[26] For more detailed insight into Deleuze's investigation on instincts and institutions, see Gilles Deleuze, *Instincts et institutions: Textes choisis* (Paris: Hachette, 1953).

[27] See Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, 48.

mals. They were meant to prescribe the general boundaries and rules for the formation of habits of thought, finally rendering possible intelligible comprehension of humanity's pursuit of objective ends. If we were to abstract from instincts all of their inherent hereditary and cultural heritage, we could have established them as primitive relations and functions, connecting various elements of human endeavour, e.g. of their propensities to self-preserve, work, or procreate, their bonding together (individually, racially, etc.) or grouping according to particular traits or capabilities, or making possible a transcodification of an acquired body of knowledge.

What Deleuze extracted in his reading of Hume—drive (instinct)/reflective drive/institution is what we have independently highlighted in Veblen**'s** axis instincts/habits of thought/institutions. Where does such a formalization find its contemporary model? Most strikingly, in the most universal and abstract discipline—mathematics. If Veblen was after a minimal set of instincts that would be the driving force behind the habits of thought and an institutional framework, in mathematics a similarly crucial problem occurred in Cantor's development of set theory. It was the problem of finding the most appropriate (and minimal, i.e. grounded on the primitive relation of belonging Î) axiomatic system that would outline and sustain the architecture for the abstract concept of the *set* in a first-order logic. The resolution of "Russell's Paradox," i.e. the prohibition of the existence of a set of all sets posed by Bertrand Russell in 1903, took a couple of decades (1904–1920s) to finally evolve. It involved a massive amount of reconceptualization, involving names from Gottlieb Frege to Ernst Zermelo, Kurt Gödel, and other prominent mathematicians and logicians, to finally propose a formal axiomatic system for manipulating presented multiplicities figuring as sets. These sets were to be notions without any predicates—collections predicated solely on memberships and organized under curly brackets { } instead of "mere" fusions of parts into wholes. The distinction between the two will come to be highly significant. Whereas fusions can fuse together any type of object in any kind of way, the collections are conceived more restrictively as determinate *containers*, embodying specific members (or also have no members, an impossibility with fusions). Eventually, the axiomatic system[28] of Ernst

[28] For a complete introduction to the foundations of set theory, see Abraham A. Fraenkel, Yehoshua Bar-Hillel, and Azriel Levy, *Foundations of Set Theory*, 2nd rev. ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001).

Zermelo and Abraham Fraenkel assumed the role of the most universal system for dealing with sets and became the meta-theoretical framework for mathematics. Considering the limited space available, we will proceed only with the zeroth axiom that corresponds to the formal inscription of the respective ZF axiom and turn to Alain Badiou's philosophical interpretation of "*mathematics is ontology*."

The following paragraphs therefore give a formal presentation of the most elementary axiom in a ZF system, i.e. the Axiom of the Empty Set, which can be related to the corresponding instinct and interpreted in line with Veblen's formulations. But just before we begin our examination, let us first consider this lengthy and crucial passage from *The Instinct of Workmanship*. We find here Veblen endorsing a *logical* grounding[29] of instincts vis-à-vis the habits of thought, especially the instinct of workmanship, the one we will take as the ontological constituent of presented situations:

> It may be called to mind that the body of knowledge (facts) turned to account in workmanship, the facts made use of in devising technological processes and appliances, are of the nature of habits of thought. [. . .] These habits of thought, elements of knowledge, items of information, accepted facts, principles of reality, in part represent the mechanical behaviour of objects, the brute nature of brute matter, and in part they stand for qualities, aptitudes and proclivities imputed to external objects and their behaviour and so infused into the facts and the generalisations based on them. The sense of workmanship has much to do with this imputation of traits to the phenomena of observation, perhaps more than any other of the proclivities native to man. The traits so imputed to the facts are in the main such as will be consonant with the sense of workmanship and will lend themselves to a concatenation in its terms. But this infusion of traits into the facts of observation, whether it takes effect at the instance of the sense of workmanship, or conceivably on impulse not to be identified with this instinct, is a *logical process* and is carried out by an intelligence whose logical processes have in all cases been profoundly biassed by habituation. So that the habits of life of the individual, and therefore of the community made up of such individuals, will pervasively and unremittingly bend this work of imputation with the set of their own current,

[29] Veblen is here actually inferring his own version of Kant's *transcendental schema*.

> and will accordingly involve incoming elements of knowledge in a putative system of relations consistent with these habits of life.[30]

Two Materialisms: Instinct of Workmanship ⇔ Axiom of the Empty Set

We introduce the Axiom of the Empty Set. Although the axioms of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory usually begin with the Axiom of Extensionality, we start off with the Axiom of the Empty Set because of its equivalence to the *Instinct of Workmanship* that makes it the most fundamental axiom concerned for the present inquiry. First, a formal definition of the empty set: *There exists a set with no members*. Formally defined with symbolic language: $(\exists x)\ [\sim(\exists y)\ (y \in x)]$, or conversely $(\exists x)\ (\forall y)\ (y \notin x)$. A closer examination reveals we deployed the concepts of existence, set, nullity, and membership; all operators used together in a unified manner. The above comparison of fusions and collections is perhaps helpful here: fusions are only parts of a whole, they always take existence ($\exists$) for granted, consequently there is no definition of set or a belonging relation—they are assembled according to a contingent rule and there can be a manifold of valid combinations. On the other hand, collections do not just aggregate parts into one, but instead use "containers" or simply "sacks" or "clubs" that are usually established on memberships and might just as well have no members. In the latter case, we speak of an *empty set* and assign it the mark ∅. Having laid down the formal definition, we are now in a position to further introduce the philosophical stakes of the empty set. We follow Badiou here, who names it, with a long recourse to various philosophical handlings of the notion, *the void*. The void is the proper name of an empty set, indicated by empty curly brackets { } and marked by the symbol ∅. The proposition is the following: "In set-theory, the void, the empty set, is the primitive name of being."[31] On the other hand, the empty set designates *the* multiple (being) from which all the others result in a sequential application of the succeeding axioms, i.e. *ideas* (εἶδος), or in our case, *habits of thought*. We have already presupposed in the formal definition a mode of existence, but an existence of what? Indeed, the empty set is an indifferent multiple—a multiple of nothing. It is presented in a situation as unpresented and its only mission in the presented situation is to count. However,

30 Veblen, *Instinct of Workmanship*, 176–77; italics added.

31 Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004), 57.

empty as such, it is (de)void of any content, it is an unpresentable-existent—what is presented is only the presentation itself, a proper name of being—the void. Only that this multiple, the void, is unlike any other, for it embodies the indifference to any other on a single predicate: it is the existence of nothing. *Omnipresent*, and always subtracted from presentation, i.e. from being counted into the situation, it sutures being to every presented multiplicity. So, the existence of a set with no elements is a negation of the relation of belonging, retroactively positing then also the negation of existence, i.e. of anything differentiable, presentable, or rather, a subtraction of being from the presentable. What is left is a "sutured" trace of being's proper name for the empty set—the void. Moving now to our definition of institutions, we have posited above: *Different collections of multiplicities can also count as one—they are made consistent*; it is precisely this *can* that is the operation based on the appending of the void, for it is an operation of the unity of indifferent multiplicities with the void, enabling them to consist in a situation, that is, to be counted-as-one after they are presented in a situation. Therefore, the void is also the initial "presented" multiplicity. It is without any imputed difference or concept, therefore it has to be of nothing in order to initiate the indifferent operation of forming-into-one.

In the introduction we set ourselves the task of reconstructing a materialist grounding of Veblen's oeuvre while relying on Badiou. In the remaining paragraphs we articulate a historical unfolding and our proposed "archaeological" interrogation of the respective projects. We start from the concept of *nothingness*, which has a long history in Western philosophy. It was Anaximander who first sought to empirically investigate the source and core element of all that exists to be immeasurable in space and boundless in time—the apeiron (ἄπειρον). He was after some indeterminate and primordial substance (void or voidless) that would permeate all sensible things, thus enabling particular determinations for the being-there of things. It seemed feasible that one might consider a formless substance or the void as an *ur*-thing. One outcome of classical reasoning was introduced by Parmenides and Aristotle, both of whom thoroughly questioned the existence of the void. The void would rather encompass non-existence and consequently be a non-being (Parmenides's Oneness), or rather, one would have to understand space as being without a medium or surrounding matter. A being cannot move in place with no substance-content, e.g. in a vacuum (Aristotle)—the void as such is non-being and inexistent. However, there is a school of thought that went on to show that matter qua matter can be conceived

exactly through the presupposition of the void. It comes down to the pre-Socratic atomists and with them Leucippus and Democritus, the former having been educated in the Eleatic tradition (Being is One and indivisible, non-being is not) and trying ever after to oppose it, while the latter was his pupil, who vastly expanded the atomistic insights of his master, inscribing his name into the annals of philosophy in the process. Leucippus held that no substantial thing can ever be elementary, moreover, everything is deemed to be composed of particles floating in an empty space. These particles were to be named atoms, such elements that constitute the natural world as indivisible particles—these atoms do fall in straight lines and into a void space. As atoms, they are by definition unchangeable and indecomposable. It comes down to their (colliding) motion in (an empty) space that confers the matter for a natural world. The crucial step for the constitution of the world is the colliding motion of atoms. The atomists held the starkest opposition between atoms and the void, although the crucial aspect evolved around the motion of atoms that was provoked by the void. In this sense, it becomes a causal relation of the void running on its effects, atoms, i.e. the trajectories of their movement. When the trajectory is curved, or swerved (Lucretius, and later Epicurus), we end up with the concept of a *clinamen*, a trajectory-deviating atom, inducing a collision of atoms and producing a multiple-particle thing. Atomism was indeed the first philosophical tradition to assign a significant role to the void—the first materialist undertaking in the unity of being and void. Having proposed being as divisible (split atoms), the void had become an essential difference compared to atom-composed beings, establishing a medium in which some atoms can deviate (*clinamen*), introducing thingness to the world. It implied that non-being is at the very centre of being. The void comes to envelope different Ones (composed of multiple atoms), so that it belongs and not-belongs to them at the same time.

If we move closer to the present day, progressing through the accumulated thoughts on the void introduced by figures such as Plutarch, Spinoza, Descartes, and Pascal to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century idealism, we again come to see an atomist mode of thought in the work of Hegel, and later also Marx. For Hegel's philosophy, the atomist positing of a split-unity between being and void represented in the concept of the atom represented an idea on how thought ideally proceeds in the mediation of being. The One (being) has the void as a counter-position (non-being), only insofar as being internalizes its opposite, the void,

in its own *split* essence, thus becoming a thing-in-itself.[32] Marx's philosophical and materialist underpinnings also have their origins precisely in the Greek atomist school. Marx himself wrote his doctoral dissertation at the University of Jena on the very topic: *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*. He endorses the atomism of indivisible principles and elements of either body or void, opting for Epicurus's "autonomist, idealist and potentiality" approach to atoms, being able to freely move in the void against the "empiricist and dogmatic necessarian" stance of Democritus, who believed them to fall into the void in straight lines, accidentally colliding along the way. The Epicurean freedom (giving also a moral sense: happiness or ataraxy) of moving atoms can be understood in Marx as a model of a free abstract self-consciousness liberated from its unhappy maladies. What Marx finds in Epicurus, and sees as lacking in Democritus, is the fact that, to the latter, atoms represent only material substrates falling into the void, while the former saw declination (i.e. swerving) in atoms perturbed by the void. He attributed the concept of *apeiron* to both atoms and the void, introducing the principle of the infiniteness of an all-encompassing *substance*. Marx comes to relate a particular definition to his understanding of the contradiction between existence and essence, matter and form, inherent in the atom itself (recall Hegel), out of which the dialectics of alienation and appearance unfolds.[33] The method acquired becomes well known later and is applied by the young Marx in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in his elaboration of the concept of *estranged labour*. It is man as species-being [*Gattungswesen*] that realizes his own estrangement, the objectification of his labour in order to sustain his subsistence and activity.

We shall not link Marx's concept of the human species-being directly in conjunction with Veblen's instinct of workmanship, but will however maintain that we can ascribe the *universality* of labour, as a generic determination of the human species, to both. Rather, we will propose a unifying moment of defining workmanship as a generic activity of the inconsistent human species, sublating it in a mediated form of consistent "agents seeking to accomplish some concrete, objective, impersonal end"; *mutatis mutandis* with labour as a generic name for

[32] See Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, ed. and trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133–35.

[33] See Karl Marx, "Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," trans. Dirk J. Struik and Sally R. Struik, in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975–2004), 1:61–62.

man's essence, or void as a proper name of being, or the void as the proper place of an atom's universe. The instinct of workmanship thereby pertains to each and every human being, this also precisely being the reason why it is always subtracted from immediate presentation. We never talk about workmanship or labour "in general," rather we speak of some determinate laborious endeavour or some particular human activity with a means to an end. However, observed from the other side, what makes or counts the tasks man eventually accomplishes as presented is the workmanship instinct, which always remains in the background, foreclosed. It is a hidden remainder, prohibiting the existence of the Whole, i.e. a closed-in totality; instead, it opens a gap, making it non-All as an unfolding infinite sequence of progressing change. Workmanship as a void is sutured on every elemental presentation of human agency; it verifies the deciding step from inconsistent human-intelligible pre-thought to a consistency of habit of thought. In Veblen, we can abstract to several distinct comprehensions of the instinct of workmanship, of which we highlight two: (i) this instinct is differentiated from other instincts, as it is an "auxiliary to all the rest, to be concerned with the ways and means of life rather than with any one given ulterior end,"[34] but it simultaneously also evinces (ii) a conduct of practical expediency, efficiency, creative work, and the technological mastery of facts—"Much of the functional content of the instinct of workmanship is a proclivity for taking pains."[35] What does it mean to be an auxiliary to all the rest? Is this actually not a minimal condition, or put differently, the least bound, on which the habits of the human animal rest? One should approach it precisely from the opposite side—an auxiliary is universally presented (as the void is to every atom) in every formation of the habits of thought. As such, it leads to "more" ulterior ends, i.e. to the formation of higher-end habits of thought. To the second, if we call on the "proclivity for taking pains," do we not invoke here precisely the Freudian *death drive*, the pleasure in pain principle, an invoked empty space in the human animal's being in which workmanship can deploy itself to begin an (ac)count of its own actions?

Conclusion

Our reading of Veblen follows suit by paraphrasing Deleuze that there would be no institutions if it were not for habits of thought. But habits of thought have,

34 Veblen, *Instinct of Workmanship*, 31.

35 Veblen, 33.

on the other hand, a specific set of rules of inference and, as with every set of rules, there has to be an initial proposition, as we always have a zeroth axiom, the one most coextensive with all other axioms. Set theory made this out of the Axiom of the Empty Set, just as Veblen made grounds for his theory of instincts on the instinct of workmanship. The empty set *qua* void is by definition a contentless entity, it is without a referential concept, for if it had any determinate content it would immediately count-as-one and consequently be differentiated in a structure—it would be made primordially consistent and we would end up in an impasse, as we find in (formal) languages. The instinct of workmanship is similar; taken as a pure abstract notion, it has no consistency—there is no human action without a concrete aim, an objective end; we know not of *abstract* human action—therefore it will be an always-already vanishing term for every institution. It goes as a corollary to the fact that the instinct of workmanship is *universally* present, that it negates any determinate differentiation, as opposed to all other presented terms.

By way of concluding the article, we hope that our ulterior motive has unveiled itself by now: *a philosophical interpretation of Veblen's materialism*—of instincts forming the habits of thought reflected in institutions as forms of appearance. Veblen himself quite clearly expressed his materialist stance, in particular with respect to Marx's own materialism, inscribing his name firmly in the philosophical tradition of materialist thinkers.[36] We have suggested that Veblen's variant can be traced back to his theory of instincts, as well as to his later writings on technological determinism. With the latter, in a sense, he even hardens the materialist conception, thus handing over the task of a future elaboration of a materialist groundwork capable of sustaining different elements of his theoretical body—from cumulative causation and unteleological processes to the instinctual behaviour of the human species—in a contemporary dispositive of tackling (in) completenesses and (in)consistencies. We therefore propose, following the initial materialism of the void of the Ancient Greeks, to postulate his primordial instinct of workmanship as *the* being of the human species. Following Badiou, it is the void as the only self-referential, self-belonging object, the proper naming of the void and henceforth the counting-as-one multiplicity, that has the potentiality to induce the motion of matter; and whilst doing so, it simultaneously engenders a topological space procuring matter to contingently spill itself over it. In Veblen's

[36] See Veblen, *Place of Science*, 415–17.

case, it is the instinct of workmanship that sets his materialism in motion, constructing the hierarchical world of institutions in literally the same fashion as the empty set institutes the entire cumulative hierarchy of sets—the Universe V.

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The Economy of Nature as the Logic of Government: On the Birth of Political Bioeconomy[1]

Keywords
liberal governmentality, political economy, liberalism, naturalism, Foucault, Darwin

Abstract
The aim of this paper is to show that Foucault's genealogy of liberal governmentality necessitates reconsideration in light of the history of biology and its societal implications. In his lectures at the Collège de France in the late 1970s, Foucault argued that the natural growth of the market is what ultimately verifies or falsifies the excellence of liberal governmentality. Liberal governmentality recognizes the intimate correlation between the physical and social dimensions in order to adapt its political action to the natural processes of the market. It follows that liberal governmentality rests upon a certain kind of naturalism and the knowledge that defines this form of naturalism is political economy, which explicates both the foundations and the limits of governmental action in the name of the nature of the market. Foucault thus accords significant importance to the concept of nature in liberal governmentality. However, his genealogy is confined to an inquiry into the naturalism of classical political economy, without considering the economicism of the emerging biological sciences. To expand upon Foucault's genealogy, the present paper focuses on the influence of political economy in the development of the theory of evolution by natural selection. The locution "economy of nature" is introduced to denote the *discursive formation* that brings together the naturalism of classical political economy and the economism of early evolutionary biology. This study contends that this construct played a critical role in shaping liberal governmentality.

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Ekonomija narave kot logika vladanja: o rojstvu politične bioekonomije

Ključne besede
liberalna vladnost, politična ekonomija, liberalizem, naturalizem, Foucault, Darwin

Povzetek
Cilj pričujočega članka je pokazati, da je treba Foucaultovo genealogijo liberalne vladnosti ponovno preučiti v luči zgodovine biologije in njenih družbenih konsekvenc. V svojih predavanjih na Collège de France konec sedemdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja je Foucault trdil, da je naravna rast trga tista, ki nazadnje verificira ali ovrže odličnost liberalne vladnosti. Liberalna vladnost se zaveda intimne soodvisnosti med fizično in družbeno razsežnostjo, da bi svoje politično delovanje prilagodila naravnim procesom trga. Iz tega sledi, da liberalna vladnost temelji na določeni vrsti naturalizma, vednost, ki opredeljuje to obliko naturalizma, pa je politična ekonomija, ki v imenu narave trga pojasnjuje tako temelje kot meje vladnega delovanja. Foucault tako konceptu narave v liberalni vladnosti pripiše velik pomen. Vendar je njegova genealogija omejena na raziskavo naturalizma klasične politične ekonomije, ne da bi upoštevala ekonomizem porajajočih se bioloških znanosti. Da bi razširili Foucaultovo genealogijo, se pričujoči članek osredotoča na vpliv politične ekonomije na razvoj teorije evolucije z naravnim izborom. Vpeljemo izraz »ekonomija narave«, da bi označili *diskurzivno formacijo*, ki združuje naturalizem klasične politične ekonomije in ekonomizem zgodnje evolucijske biologije. Pričujoča raziskava namreč trdi, da je imel ta konstrukt ključno vlogo pri oblikovanju liberalne vladnosti.

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In this paper, my objective is to demonstrate that the genealogy of liberal governmentality delineated by Foucault necessitates reinterpretation in light of the history of biology and its societal implications. One of the central themes that Foucault addresses in his lectures at the Collège de France in the late 1970s pertains to the relationship between liberal rationality and nature. According to Foucault, the natural growth of the market is what ultimately verifies or falsifies the excellence of liberal governmentality. If liberal governmentality justifies its authority through its knowledge of the natural processes of the market,

then it rests upon a certain kind of "naturalism."[2] The knowledge that defines this form of naturalism is political economy, which explicates both the foundations and the limits of governmental action in the name of the natural functioning of the market. Foucault thus accords significant importance to the concept of nature in liberal governmentality, going so far as to suggest that "what we see appearing in the middle of the eighteenth century really is a naturalism much more than a liberalism."[3] Nevertheless, he thinks it is appropriate to "employ the word liberalism inasmuch as freedom really is at the heart of this practice or of the problems it confronts."[4]

It is noteworthy that, despite the significance Foucault places on the issue of nature, his genealogy is confined to an inquiry into the naturalism specific to classical political economy, without considering the economism of the emerging biological sciences. A similar genealogical approach appears to characterize the secondary literature on governmentality. The introduction of the theme of liberal government into Foucault's later works has provided a fertile field of inquiry, yet its relation to the history of biology has received little attention.[5] In the present study, I shall propose that Foucault's genealogy of liberal government necessitates reconsideration in light of the history of biology and its societal implications. Specifically, I will concentrate on the theory of evolution by natural selection, which played a pivotal role in the establishment of biology as a scientific discipline.

Extensive research has been conducted on the relationship between Darwin's theory and political economy. Already Marx expressed to Engels his astonishment at Darwin's depiction of nature as a marketplace driven by competition and a division of labour. However, it would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that the theory of evolution by natural selection can be reduced to a polit-

2 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

3 Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 62.

4 Foucault, 62.

5 On the question of Darwinism in Foucault's genealogy, see Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 161–63; Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 115–18.

ical bioeconomy. This was not even Marx's intention, as he acknowledged the fundamental value of Darwin's discovery for a materialistic conception of human beings. Advocating for the importance of this emerging scientific worldview—in which the Darwinian revolution plays a central role—does not, however, eliminate the possibility of exploring the connections that this worldview maintains with the socioeconomic ideas of the time.

The structure of this article is as follows. After a concise examination of Foucault's genealogy of liberal governmentality, I will draw upon existing literature on the history of scientific ideas to demonstrate the influence of economic concepts on Darwin's theory. This inquiry will primarily focus on the connection between Darwin and two key figures in the history of economics, namely Thomas Malthus and Adam Smith, elucidating how Darwin incorporated two fundamental economic concepts of his era into his theory. Specifically, Smith's division of labour, which constitutes the basis of his theory of divergence, and Malthus's population theory, which functions as the impetus for natural selection. Finally, I will focus on the societal implications of the theory of evolution by natural selection, devoting particular attention to laissez-faire Darwinism.

In light of this analysis, I will make a case for the reciprocal influence between the naturalism of classical political economy and the economism of early evolutionary biology. I shall use the term 'economy of nature' to refer to the discursive formation that gathers political economy and biology together, and will contend that it is indispensable in shaping liberal governmentality. Because this type of government acknowledges the close connection between nature and society, laissez-faire Darwinism and its effects on society are essential to understanding its origins and developments.

"Governmental Naturalism"

The aim of this section is to explicate Foucault's usage of the term "governmental naturalism" (*naturalisme gouvernemental*).[6] In his lectures at the Collège de France in the late 1970s, Foucault employs this expression within his genealogy of liberal government, specifically in the course focused on the emergence of biopolitics.

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6 The term appears several times in Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

Foucault's investigation of liberal government begins with the historical rupture between the modes of government of the medieval European empires and the model of *raison d'état* that emerged during early modernity. While the former had as their ultimate reference point a theological order, the latter referred to a secularized logic of the prosperity and security of states. This new logic of government is articulated on two distinct planes: the external, which concerns the relations between states, and the internal. On the external front, states tend to place a limit on the exercise of their power in order to ensure mutual coexistence and independence. A characteristic feature of this strategy is the subordination of the army to diplomacy. On the internal front, the logic of government is not equally constrained but enjoys almost unlimited power. In fact, while the capillarity of internal state power encounters legal limits, such as recourse to natural law or the reciprocity of the social contract, according to Foucault, these limits remain superficial and do not deeply affect the prerogatives of sovereign power.[7]

Continuing this brief analysis of the focal moments in the genealogy outlined by Foucault, it is important to recall that the eighteenth century witnessed a fundamental shift in the internal logic of government. The distinguishing feature of this paradigm shift is crucial to comprehending the significance of the concept of "governmental naturalism." The knowledge that underpinned this transformation was political economy, whose origins can be traced back to the Physiocrats. Unlike law, political economy did not develop outside the *raison d'état*, but rather in response to its objectives and with the aim of affirming them as effectively as possible. While law addresses power by posing questions of origin and legitimacy, political economy formulates a question of efficiency, developing what now appears to be the very "nature" of the art of government. The turn that occurred during the eighteenth century can be summarized by a maxim that Foucault cites repeatedly: *laissez-faire, passer, et aller*.[8] According to Foucault, this slogan, popularized by the Physiocrats but dating back to Boisguilbert and Gournay, means acting so that nature goes its way and follows its own course according to the laws, principles, and processes of nature itself. Hence, political economy asserts the necessary self-limitation of governmental practice

7 Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 1–27. See also Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 285–310.

8 See, for instance, Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 48; Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 20.

and in order to define such a limit the concept of nature becomes indispensable, because to the question "What basically must a government do?," political economy's answer is: "It must give way to everything due to natural mechanisms in both behavior and production."[9]

As Catucci explains in his reading of Foucault, a cornerstone of the genealogy leading to the definition of the natural spontaneity of the economic dimension is the discussion that emerged in the eighteenth century concerning the definition of the "natural price" of grain.[10] Foucault employs this example to demonstrate how the market is considered to be the site where a truth is produced, which is determined by the law of supply and demand. It is the market that dictates to the government the rule of truth, and political economy indicates both where to search for it and how to administer it.[11] The government thus has increasingly less need to intervene with authoritarian prescriptions: its task consists in recognizing the truth and not obstructing it. The effects of political economy on the reason of state depend precisely on the fact of having introduced into the practice of government a regime of truth that has as its site of production the natural spontaneity of the market.

Always according to Catucci, Foucault "situates the emergence of liberalism during this historical period and interprets it as an attempt to further rationalize the development of the market-based governmental regime."[12] Foucault claims that liberalism should be understood as a specific form of political reasoning that directs, manages, and imposes constraints on the apparatus of governmentality.[13] As a rational discourse that emerged from within the practice of government itself, the liberalism of the eighteenth century is grounded in two key ideas: the naturalness of market mechanisms and the importance of particular types of

9 Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 67.

10 Stefano Catucci, *Introduzione a Foucault*, (Bari: Laterza, 2010), 129. On the question of liberalism in Foucault, see also Graham Burchell, "Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self," *Economy and Society* 22, no. 3 (1993), 267–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/03085149300000018; Jean-Yves Grenier and André Orléan, "Michel Foucault: The Political Economy and Liberalism," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 62, no. 5 (2007): 1155–82; Thomas Lemke, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality: A Critique of Political Reason*, trans. Erik Butler (London: Verso, 2019).

11 Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 27–47.

12 Catucci, *Introduzione a Foucault*, 129.

13 Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 20.

freedoms. It is this latter idea that led Foucault to label this form of governmentality liberalism. The freedom espoused by liberalism is not a generic form of freedom; rather, it involves specific kinds of freedom that must be fostered and maintained to sustain the "naturalness" of market mechanisms:

> The freedom that the physiocrats and Adam Smith talk about is much more the spontaneity, the internal and intrinsic mechanics of economic processes than a juridical freedom of the individual recognized as such. [. . .] In actual fact, it is something like a governmental naturalism which emerges in the middle of the eighteenth century. And yet I think we can speak of liberalism. [. . .] I think we can employ the word liberalism inasmuch as freedom really is at the heart of this practice or of the problems it confronts.[14]

While liberal governments may employ legal and rational terminology such as rights, justice, and legitimacy, Foucault contends that the effectiveness of governmental practices is determined not by the consent of the legal subject but by the flourishing of the market. Hence, as per Foucault's perspective, the market determines that good government is no longer simply government that functions according to justice.[15] Foucault's interpretation of liberalism may appear quite unconventional due to his rejection of the normative problem of liberal justice as a central theoretical concern. Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham have challenged Foucault's approach to the question of modern law by arguing that his interpretation of liberal governance "expels" law from the locus of power.[16] Foucault views law as a remnant of the pre-modern political horizon that has become instrumentally subordinated to modern discipline and governmentality with the decline of sovereign authority. However, other scholars, such as Jacopo Martire, have employed Foucault's toolbox to offer an alternative interpretation of modern law as "a *sui generis* apparatus"[17] that establishes rules of formation concerning both the knowledge of the political truth of the subject and the production of said political truth. In contrast to the view that marginalizes its role in modernity, law can thus be understood, within a Foucauldian framework, as an

14 Foucault, 61–62.

15 Foucault, 32.

16 Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham, *Foucault and Law: Towards a Sociology of Law as Governance* (London: Pluto Press, 1994).

17 Jacopo Martire, *A Foucauldian Interpretation of Modern Law: From Sovereignty to Normalization and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 24.

apparatus of subjectivation that creates a complex dynamic of interaction with governmentality. A proper analysis of this question goes beyond the scope of the present article. For this reason, I limit myself to employing Foucault's interpretation of liberal governmentality as a heuristic for a specific historical inquiry into the relationship between economics and biology.

Economy and Nature

Foucault demonstrates that, in the context of liberal governmentality, nature is viewed as a permanent counterpart to governmental practices. At the same time, to understand how naturalism impacted government practices, it does not seem sufficient to examine the conception of nature fostered by political economy. It is also crucial to investigate the influence of the economy on nineteen-century biological sciences. Therefore, I intend to deepen the analysis of "governmental naturalism," exploring the interplay between political economy and the emerging biological sciences. Borrowing a popular phrase from the eighteen and nineteen centuries, I will refer to the process of the mutual naturalization of economics and the economization of nature as the "economy of nature".

Foucault is not the only one who argues that political economy has natural roots. Scholars such as Margaret Schabas have claimed that the conceptual foundations of classical economics were grounded in physical nature and make "a very strong case for the natural context of economic theory from the early eighteenth century through the mid-nineteenth."[18] More specifically, historian of economics, such as Schabas, have insisted that, prior to the mid-eighteenth century, economic scholars perceived the concepts discussed in their theories as belonging to the same realm of study as that of natural philosophers. For instance, "for Quesnay, wealth was a physical entity, grain for our nourishment [. . .]. For Smith, the best policy was to dismantle human designs and allow the 'natural progress of opulence.'"[19] The economic realm was, in short, considered to be part of the natural one.

[18] Margaret Schabas, *The Natural Origins of Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), ix.

[19] Schabas, 3.

It is against this cultural background that the locution "economy of nature" should be interpreted. This expression gained popularity at the outset of the eighteenth century and subsequently engendered a multitude of variations. A plethora of works with similar titles were published in the mid-eighteenth century. Notably, François Quesnay released his well-known *Essai phisique sur l'oeconomie animale* in 1736, while Linnaeus presided over the dissertation *Oeconomia Naturae* in 1749. This phrase would also likely be recognizable to readers of Darwin, as he extensively utilized the notion throughout his texts. In 1833, Darwin resorted for the first time to this phrase,[20] and he repeatedly utilized it in his various works, such as *The Voyage of the Beagle*[21] and *Ornithological Notes*.[22] Both the term itself and its variant "natural economy" continued to be prominently featured in the *Origin* itself.[23]

Darwin's intellectual formation was marked by the influence of earlier naturalists, such as Linnaeus. The concept of economy of nature, which Darwin later developed, can be traced back in part to this historical background. However, it is worth noting that Linnaeus's theory, although influential, is limited by its preclassical character, which manifests in a portrayal of a static economy marked by elements of competition and implicit exchange ratios, but with few of the mechanisms later associated with classical political economy. In contrast, Darwin's theoretical framework, while sharing some of Linnaeus's insights, exhibits greater affinity with classical political economy.[24] The similarities between Darwin's theory and political economy did not go unnoticed. For instance, in 1862, Marx corresponded with Engels and expressed his amusement at Darwin's ideas:

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20 Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Zoology Notes and Specimen Lists from H. M. S. Beagle*, ed. Richard Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 138.

21 Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 232, 523.

22 Charles Darwin, "Darwin's Ornithological Notes," ed. Nora Barlow, *Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History)* 2, no. 7 (1963): 220, 239.

23 Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection: Or, the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, ed. J. W. Burrow (London: Penguin, 1985), 50, 61, 64, 79, 81, 120, 130, 146, 232, 237, 303, 305, 308, 315, 346.

24 See also Schabas, *Natural Origins of Economics*.

> It is remarkable how Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, inventions, and the Malthusian "struggle for existence."[25]

According to Marx's interpretation, Darwin's worldview was deeply influenced by the implicit model of nineteenth-century English market society, and he applied the concepts of laissez-faire political economy and Malthusianism to his view of nature and human populations.

This reading of Marx's relation to Darwin was partially uncertain for many years, due to the widely held belief that Marx had intended to dedicate a volume or translation of *Capital* to Darwin, but was refused. Only in the mid-1970s did two researchers, Lewis Feuer and Margaret Fay, independently arrive at the same conclusion that the conventional account of the intended dedication was incorrect. They showed that the received view was a result of a longstanding misapprehension of the pertinent correspondence.[26] However, Marx's reading of Darwin is not one-dimensional. In fact, he also recognized the fundamental significance of Darwin's theory. In 1860, precisely one year prior to the aforementioned excerpt, Marx corresponded with Engels, expressing his recognition of its importance. In fact, Marx clearly admired and agreed with Darwin having provided a scientific explanation of the material origin of living beings in the course of natural history. The possibility of elaborating this naturalistic worldview was possible only against the background of a new theory of the evolution of organisms, which became the cornerstone of a new natural science: biology.

[25] Karl Marx, "Marx to Engels in Manchester, June 18, 1862," in *Marx, Engels: Selected Correspondence*, ed. S. W. Ryazanskaya, trans. I. Lasker (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 120.

[26] In 1931, the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow published a letter attributed to Darwin which had been uncovered among the papers of Karl Marx in the archives of the German Social Democratic Party in Berlin. Given the absence of the original letter to which Darwin was responding, it was deduced that Marx was the unnamed correspondent mentioned in Darwin's letter. Moreover, a hypothesis was advanced regarding the nature of the book that Marx had intended to dedicate to Darwin, speculating that it might have been a volume or a translation of *Capital*. See Joel Barnes, "Revisiting the 'Darwin–Marx correspondence': Multiple Discovery and the Rhetoric of Priority," *History of the Human Sciences* 35, no. 2 (April 2022): 29–54, https://doi.org/10.1177/09526951211019226.

Going back to the cultural milieu in which the Darwinian theory emerged, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term "biology" was coined by several thinkers independently. In 1766, Michael Christoph Hanov defined the study of organic beings as *biologia* in the third volume of his *Philosophia Naturalis*. However, there is no "historical evidence that Hanov's use of the term 'biology' is the source of a tradition nor that it had any influence on later uses of the term."[27] In 1799, the English physician Thomas Beddoes used the term *biology* in his *Contributions to Physical and Medical Knowledge*. The German physiologist Karl Friedrich Burdach also resorted to the term in a footnote in his *Propedeutik zum Studium der gesammten Heilkunde* in 1800. "Two years later it again appeared, apparently independently, and was given ample publicity in treatises"[28] by the German naturalist Gottfried Treviranus and the French zoologist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck. Although Darwin was not the originator of the term *biology*, his theory of natural selection solidified this scientific field as a distinct area of study. The fundamental value of the theory was acknowledged by many scientists of the time. Upon being presented with a preliminary copy of the first edition of the *Origin* , botanist Hewitt C. Watson corresponded with the author, deeming him "the greatest revolutionist in natural history of this century, if not of all centuries."[29] While acknowledging Watson's use of hyperbole and flattery, it is noteworthy that the revolutionary value of Darwin's theory was immediately recognized and continues to be so. As the prominent American geneticist and evolutionary biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky stated, "Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution," and it is clear that he meant Darwinian evolution.[30]

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[27] Peter McLaughlin, "Naming Biology," *Journal of the History of Biology* 35, no. 1 (March 2002): 3, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014535811678.

[28] William Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth Century: Problems of Form, Function, and Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1.

[29] In Sandra Herbert, "The Darwinian Revolution Revisited," *Journal of the History of Biology* 38, no. 1 (March 2005): 51, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10739-004-6509-y.

[30] In this popular article, Dobzhansky writes that "the unity of life is no less remarkable than its diversity. [. . .] Seen in the light of evolution, biology is, perhaps, intellectually the most satisfying and inspiring science. Without that light it becomes a pile of sundry facts—some of them interesting or curious but making no meaningful picture as a whole. [. . .] It is remarkable that more than a century ago Darwin was able to discern so much evolution without having available to him the key facts discovered since." See Theodosius Dobzhansky, "Nothing in Biology Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution," *The American Biology Teacher* 35, no. 3 (1973): 127, 129, https://doi.org/10.2307/4444260.

While the field of biology has established itself as a distinct discipline within the natural sciences, the expression "economy of nature" fell out of favour within a century of its prevalent use. In fact, "in the entire print run of the journal *Nature* (beginning in 1869), while the economy of nature is mentioned in 0.7% of articles in 1874, its usage falls off linearly over the next five decades, and after around 1930, it appears to be mentioned only in historical contexts."[31] In my investigation, the term "economy of nature" is not synonymous with the historical meaning of the term itself, but rather defines a critical field of inquiry into the modern relationship between economics and biology. The emphasis on Darwin and Darwinism is motivated by their pivotal role in the development of biological science. Although the term *economy of nature* has been progressively disregarded, the robust connection between biology and economics has persisted, as has been extensively documented by historians of science.

Since the late 1960s, there has been a notable approach to the history of evolutionary biology that has emphasized the interrelationships between ideas and their socio-economic context, as seen in the works of John Greene and Robert Young.[32] Adrian Desmond and James Moore's renowned biography of Darwin also follows a similar approach by criticizing the tendency of historians to isolate ideas from their cultural context.[33] This approach has sparked various historiographical debates about the theory of evolution and most scholars now acknowledge the impact of political economists on Darwin's ideas. Of course, it would be overly simplistic to attribute a direct cause-and-effect relationship between Darwin's study of political economy and his formulation of the theory of evolution by natural selection. The process of weaving together the multiple threads that ultimately led to his theory was intricate and multifaceted. These considerations, however, do not preclude a critical inquiry into the socio-economic roots of his theory.

31 Charles H. Pence and Daniel G. Swaim, "The Economy of Nature: The Structure of Evolution in Linnaeus, Darwin, and the Modern Synthesis," *European Journal for Philosophy of Science* 8 (2018): 435–54, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13194-017-0194-0.

32 John C. Greene, "Darwin as a Social Evolutionist," *Journal of the History of Biology* 10, no. 1 (March 1977): 1–27, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00126092; Robert M. Young, "Malthus and the Evolutionists: The Common Context of Biological and Social Theory," *Past and Present* 43, no. 1 (May 1969): 109–41, https://doi.org/10.1093/past/43.1.109.

33 Adrian Desmond and James R. Moore, *Darwin* (London: Penguin, 1992).

Darwin, Malthus, and Smith

In this section, I will draw upon existing literature on the history of scientific ideas to demonstrate the integration of crucial political economic concepts into Darwinian theory. My investigation will primarily concentrate on the links between Darwin and two prominent economists: Thomas Malthus and Adam Smith.

In October 1838, Darwin became acquainted with Thomas Malthus and his renowned work on population. During this period in England, the themes outlined in Malthus's essay were intricately intertwined with one of the prevalent socio-economic concerns of the time, namely the issue of poverty. In the early nineteenth century, Malthus became a vocal opponent of the Old Poor Law and advocated for its complete elimination. His extensive analysis of this matter is predominantly present in his *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, with special attention paid to the versions published in 1803 and beyond, which considerably expanded the original 1798 edition.[34] Malthus devoted several chapters exclusively to the Poor Law in this work and presented ideas that significantly influenced the viewpoints of his contemporaries.[35] Based on his population theory, Malthus reached the conclusion that practically any kind of government intervention would be incapable of permanently alleviating the state of impoverished individuals. This is because any actions that improve the living standards of the poor would inevitably lead to a surge in their number, which would quickly surpass the available food resources, thus exacerbating their misery even further.[36]

For Darwin, Malthusian thought represented a fundamental aspect of the development of his theory. However, over twenty years passed between his reading of

34 Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. G. Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

35 Mitchell Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty. Towards a Genealogy of Liberal Governance* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

36 James Huzel, "Malthus, the Poor Law, and Population in Early Nineteenth-Century England," *The Economic History Review* 22, no. 3 (December 1969): 430–52, https://doi.org/10.2307/2594120; Nicholas Xenos, *Scarcity and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Dean, *Constitution of Poverty*.

An Essay on the Principle of Population and the publication of the *Origin*. Thanks to his autobiography, we know Darwin's immediate reaction to that reading and the significant redefinition of the interpretative framework that ensued, which he presents as a sort of intuition:

> In October 1838, that is, fifteen months after I had begun my systematic enquiry, I happened to read for amusement 'Malthus on Population', and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of new species. Here, then, I had at last got a theory by which to work.[37]

An essential concept in Malthus's population theory is the competition for scarce resources. He postulated that the means of subsistence increase at an arithmetic rate (1, 2, 3, 4, . . .) while population grows at a geometric rate (1, 2, 4, 8, . . .) which results in a much more rapid increase. It follows that, regardless of how quickly the means of production and subsistence may expand, human population grows at an even more rapid rate. Consequently, without measures taken to regulate its growth, it is inevitable that the resources required for the survival of the population will eventually become scarce. Prior to his encounter with Malthus's work, Darwin held the belief that living organisms produced just enough offspring to maintain population equilibrium. However, he later came to the realization that animal populations, much like human societies, tended to breed excessively, leading to a struggle for survival and the emergence of winners and losers. Darwin applied Malthus's reasoning to the natural realm, arguing that populations of wild animals reproduce beyond their means of subsistence, resulting in a struggle among organisms for the acquisition of resources. The stronger and better-adapted varieties survive and procreate, expanding at the expense of all others and gradually modifying the entire species. In the *Origin of Species*, Darwin himself provides the following interpretation of Malthus's theory:

[37] Charles Darwin, *Autobiographies*, ed. Michael Neve and Sharon Messenger (London: Penguin, 2002), 128.

> This is the doctrine of Malthus, applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms. As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form.[38]

In order to demonstrate the significance of the struggle for existence in his theory of natural selection, Darwin devises various images that portray "nature" as a marketplace. One of the most well-known images is that of the "hundred thousand wedges," which first appears in a passage on Malthus:

> One may say there is a force like a hundred thousand wedges trying force [into] every kind of adapted structure into the gaps [of] in the œconomy of Nature, or rather forming gaps by thrusting out weaker ones. The final cause of all this wedgings, must be to sort out proper structure and adapt it to change. To do that, for form, which Malthus shows, is the final effect, (by means however of volition) of this populousness, on the energy of Man.[39]

The economy of nature is subject to minimal changes of various kinds, such as an increase in the components of a population in a geometric progression, a decrease in individuals susceptible to harsh weather conditions, an increase in certain predators, and so on, which may compromise a delicate balance. The metaphor of "wedges" effectively portrays a saturated system in which every new variety, organism, and species competes to thrive in the environment by exploiting resources and increasing in number. According to Darwin, all the "wedging" caused by population pressure would filter out all but the fittest organisms. The allusion to the "hundred thousand wedges" is also present in the first edition of the *Origin* but was omitted in subsequent editions.[40] Although the

[38] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 7.

[39] Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836–1844: Geology, Transmutation of Species, Metaphysical Inquiries*, ed. Paul H. Barrett et al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 375–76; brackets in original.

[40] Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 119.

metaphor has been discarded, the analysis of the natural world through the lens of Malthusianism will demonstrate its importance in Darwin's "view of life":

> Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed laws of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.[41]

However, the view of the economy of nature outlined in this passage began to take shape only when Darwin incorporated into his theory of evolution concepts with an economic character that seem to hark back to the thinking of Adam Smith. As Stephen J. Gould explains in his monumental work *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*:

> If Darwin required Malthus to grasp the central role of continuous and severe struggle for existence, then he needed the related school of Scottish economists—the *laissez-faire* theorists, centered on Adam Smith and the *Wealth of Nations* (first published in the auspicious revolutionary year of 1776)—to formulate the even more fundamental principle of natural selection itself.[42]

In general, the comparison between Adam Smith and Darwin is grounded in the observation that the latter explained the diversification of species as a result of a division of labour akin to Smith's concept of the division of labour in economic processes, positing that natural selection favours the survival of varieties that exhibit greater differentiation from the original form. However, historians have not reached a consensus regarding the extent to which Darwin derived his ideas from Smith. This is due to the fact that Darwin did not explicitly acknowledge Smith's contribution to his explanation of divergence, instead suggesting that his own concept was comparable to the "physiological division of labour" expounded by the French zoologist Milne-Edwards. Contrary to Darwin, Milne-Edwards attrib-

41 Darwin, 459–60.

42 Stephen J. Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 122.

uted the development of his theory on the division of physiological labour to the works of political economists. In fact, he wrote that "the principle followed by nature in the perfectibility of organisms is the same as the one so well developed by modern economists, and in this works as in the products of industry one sees the immense advantages that result from the division of labour."[43]

Among those who assert the influence of Smith on Darwin's conception of nature are the authors of a significant biography dedicated to the English naturalist. According to Adrian Desmond and James R. Moore, Darwin's concept of divergence should be related to what he observed both in the natural context and in the socioeconomic context of London at the time. In fact, "Darwin was a heavy investor in industry. His Wedgwood cousins were among the pioneers of factory organization" (Desmond and Moore 1992, 420). The production lines of Wedgwood porcelain industries were designed through a rigorous division of labour and this "mechanisation of the labour force, and its effect on output, was totally familiar to Darwin" (1992, 420). In the house library where he resided for over 40 years, there was an abundance of texts on economics, the production system, and manufacturing activity. In light of these and other biographical elements, Desmond and Moore conclude that: "Just as his Malthusian insight had come from population theory, so his mechanism for creating diversity looked like a blueprint for industrial progress" (1992, 420). After all, in the Victorian context, the division of labour was commonly associated with specialization and rapid production in a society that relied heavily on steam-powered technology to the point that, as Desmond and Moore remind their readers, it became "the catch-phrase of the age; Prince Albert called it the engine of civilization, thundering through every aspect 'of science, industry and art."[44] This mechanization of labour thus held the potential for economic prosperity and growth, with the industrial metaphor extending even to the natural world:

> just as a crowded metropolis like London could accommodate all manner of skilled trades, each working next to one another, yet without any direct compe-

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43 Henri Milne-Edwards, *Histoire naturelle des crustacées comprenant l'anatomie, la phisiologie, et la classification de ces animaux*, vol. 1 (Paris: Librarie Encyclopedique de Roret, 1834), 6, quoted and translated in Sylvan S. Schweber, "Darwin and the Political Economists: Divergence of Character," *Journal of the History of Biology* 13, no. 2 (September 1980): 254, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00125744.

44 Adrian Desmond and James R. Moore, *Darwin* (London: Penguin, 1992), 420, 421.

> tition, so species escaped the pressure by finding unoccupied niches in Nature's marketplace.[45]

In the *Origin*, Darwin explicates that organisms engage in a competitive struggle to survive and reproduce. This "universal struggle for existence" leads to the emergence of a natural "division of labour," as different organisms excel at exploiting diverse resources. The constant tendency to diverge is a "profitable" one, as the more diverse organisms become the better equipped they are to take advantage of the various niches available in nature's "economy," which in turn allows them to thrive and increase in numbers.[46] On the contrary, the competition is most severe between allied forms, which "fill nearly the same place in the economy of nature."[47] Darwin's perspective on competition in nature appears to be heavily imbued with economicist language, and the echoes of Smith seem equally unmistakable. The comparison between economic competition, driving traders to explore new markets, and the "struggle for existence," among organisms opening new ecological niches, appears evident. Competition engenders a division of labour in the economy, which is mirrored in the biological realm, as a relatively small collection of biological species can gradually transform into a remarkable variety of specialists.

Moreover, according to Smith, individuals solely pursue their self-interest and exhibit no concern for the common good but, in doing so, each individual is "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention,"[48] namely the maximization of the entire economy's productive capacity. Therefore, the action of Smith's invisible hand gives rise to a higher harmony resulting from a seemingly contrary process, i.e. the individual's pursuit of personal success. Stephen J. Gould has noticed the striking similarity between this process and Darwin's natural selection to the point of arguing that Darwin's theory is "the economy of Adam Smith transferred to nature."[49] In fact, as individual competition without restrictions generates the optimal social order in Smith's

45 Desmond and Moore, 420.

46 Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 158.

47 Darwin, 127.

48 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 593.

49 Stephen J. Gould, *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 12.

world, likewise, the struggle among organisms leads to prosperity and harmony in nature. In both the natural and social realms, this constitutes the "general economy of any land."[50] While it is imperative to recognize that the intricacy and legacy of Darwinian theory cannot and should not be reduced to an economic interpretation, it appears plausible to argue that the laissez-faire economy within Smith's industrial world can be connected with the laissez-faire economy of Darwin's natural world.

Laissez-faire and Political Bioeconomy

In the preceding section we saw that Darwin incorporates in his theory two core economic concepts of his epoch: the division of labour and Malthusian population theory. Such considerations have led renowned historians of science to assert that "Darwinism *is* social."[51] This assertion does not necessarily imply that Darwin himself was a social Darwinist who sought to apply his naturalistic perspective to human society. Moreover, definitions of social Darwinism are multifaceted, and a comprehensive analysis of them lies beyond the scope of this contribution.[52]

Despite the multiplicity of definitions, a work by the American historian Richard Hofstadter from 1955 remains a seminal text on this topic in many respects. *Social Darwinism in American Thought* not only highlights the pervasiveness of social Darwinism in American culture, but also demonstrates that the laissez-faire doctrine underpins this scientific-cultural tradition. The book portrays the extensive impact of Darwin's theory on American social thought and the significant debate among intellectuals over the implications of evolutionary theory for social thought and political action. According to Hofstadter, social Darwinism exerted its greatest influence in the United States because

50 Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 158.

51 Robert M. Young, "Darwinism *Is* Social," in *The Darwinian Heritage*, ed. David Kohn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 609–38.

52 Cf. Robert Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860–1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction between Biological and Social Theory* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980); Richard Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism in Germany, 1859–1895," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54, no. 3 (July 1993): 469–88, https://doi.org/10.2307/2710024.

> with its rapid expansion, its exploitative methods, its desperate competition, and its peremptory rejection of failure, *post-bellum* America was like a vast human caricature of the Darwinian struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest.[53]

In such a cultural milieu, proponents of social Darwinism, such as Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, utilized the concept of the struggle for existence to justify both the negative and positive aspects of modern industrial society under laissez-faire principles. The ideological function of this form of social Darwinism was effectively fulfilled during the buoyant and expansive decades of the 1870s and 1880s, enabling the middle class to maintain its confidence in the potential for success in the struggle of life. Following the scholarship of Hofstadter, it is possible to characterize social Darwinism as a philosophical framework that seeks to rationalize or endorse the struggle for existence as an indispensable and innate phenomenon that contributes to biological and social progress. While confining our scope to this definition, it remains a controversy surrounding the origins of social Darwinism, with different scholars tending to credit Spencer with its inception rather than Darwin.[54]

There is no doubt that Spencer, not Darwin, coined the phrase "survival of the fittest." Spencer introduced the term in an essay in 1852, approximately seven years before Darwin's theory of evolution was published. Shortly after Darwin published the *Origin*, Spencer sent him a copy of his essay "A Theory of Population, Deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility," because, as he explained to a correspondent in February 1860, he wanted to show Darwin the extent to which his argument aligns with the one utilized in the conclusion of that essay.[55] Should we then speak of "social Spencerism"?[56] Yet, the evolutionary mechanism that Spencer had in mind when describing the evolution of life was Lamarckian and his idea of progress was rooted in this Lamarckian view of nature.[57] Given the

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53 Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 44.

54 See Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth*.

55 See David Duncan, *The Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

56 John N. Burry, "Social Spencerism?," *Nature* 313, no. 28 (February 1985): 732, https://doi.org/10.1038/313732c0.

57 Richard Weikart, "Was Darwin or Spencer the Father of Laissez-Faire Social Darwinism?," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 71, no. 1 (July 2009): 20–28, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2007.06.011.

diversity of biological theories that promote the struggle for existence, it may be more appropriate to speak of laissez-faire biologism. In fact, long before he read Darwin, Spencer embraced the position that laissez-faire was necessary to ensure biological progress, and this perspective is linked to the themes that Spencer had already developed in his first work, published in 1851, *Social Statics,* and which was an attempt to infuse laissez-faire economics into biology. Whether it is more appropriate to speak of laissez-faire biologism or not, there is no doubt that various (and problematic) interpretations of Darwin's theory have played an important role in naturalizing a laissez-faire vision of society.

Despite the remaining issues under debate, it seems reasonable to establish that there was a significant intermingling between economics and biology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that the emerging bioeconomy resulting from this reciprocal influence had a significant impact on the Western society of the time. Moreover, it is equally evident that Darwinian theory, along with its more or less faithful interpretations, played a central role in the definition of bioeconomy. In light of these considerations, it is surprising that critical studies on biopolitics have almost completely ignored the questions of bioeconomy and laissez-faire Darwinism; especially when we consider that Foucault started "studying liberalism as the general framework of biopolitics."[58] Following this genealogical line of inquiry, classical liberal governmentality can then be defined as a form of government based on the economy of nature and according to which market principles are part of the natural order. While Marx considered physiocrats to be the "true fathers of modern political economy [. . .] within the bourgeois horizon,"[59] scholars have argued that Foucault regarded them as the true progenitors of governmentality within a liberal framework.[60] Marx also recognized the economicist dimension of biological theory, at least a certain interpretation of it, which should not be reduced to Darwin's revolutionary idea. In the wake of this idea, I believe it is time to reconstruct Foucault's genealogy of liberalism in light of the history of biology and its societal implications. Indeed,

58 Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 383.

59 Karl Marx, "Economic Manuscript of 1861–63: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Third Chapter," trans. Ben Fowkes and Emile Burns, in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (London: Lawrance and Wishart, 1975–2004), 30:352.

60 I take this analogy from Ceyhun Gürkan, "The Critique of Classical Political Economy in Foucault's Analytics of Power and Government," *FLSF (Felsefe ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi)* 22 (Autumn 2016): 99–118.

only in this way will it be possible to grasp the naturalism grounding liberal governmentality and understand what I term the birth of political bioeconomy.

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From Communist Ideology to the Idea of Communism: Transformations in Žižek's Notion of Communism[1]

Keywords
Žižek, communism, Idea, Kant, Hegel

Abstract
This article approaches a potential tension in the work of Slavoj Žižek between his critique of communist ideology and his endorsement of the communist idea. The aim is to show how this endorsement, in effect, emerged out of Žižek's sustained engagement with communist ideology. The article captures this transformation by focusing on his understanding of the notion of the idea and the ways in which ideology can be transgressed. The conclusion drawn is that in moving from a Kantian to a Hegelian notion of the idea, Žižek also leaves behind his initial Beckettian Leninism in favor of an understanding of revolution that no longer depends on the heroic act of a subject, but on the immanent logic of the communist idea.

Od komunistične ideologije k ideji komunizma: transformacije Žižkovega pojma komunizma

Ključne besede
Žižek, komunizem, Ideja, Kant, Hegel

Povzetek
Članek obravnava potencialno napetost v delu Slavoja Žižka med njegovo kritiko komunistične ideologije in njegovim zavzemanjem za komunistično idejo. Cilj je pokazati, kako je ta podpora dejansko nastala iz Žižkovega nenehnega ukvarjanja s komunistič-

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no ideologijo. Članek to preobrazbo zajame tako, da se osredotoči na Žižkovo razumevanje pojma ideje in na načine, na katere je mogoče ideologijo preseči. Sklepna ugotovitev je, da Žižek s prehodom od kantovskega k heglovskemu pojmu ideje zapusti tudi svoj začetni beckettovski leninizem v korist razumevanja revolucije, ki ni več odvisno od herojskega dejanja subjekta, temveč od imanentne logike same komunistične ideje.

∞

At the heart of communism today lies what might appear to be an oxymoron, something that we could call the post-communist communist, an attempt to present a critique of historically existing communism while still remaining a communist. The question confronting communism is, in other words, if one can separate the proper from the improper actualization of the idea, making it possible to subscribe to the communist idea that initiated revolutions while nevertheless dismissing (at least parts of) its tragic consequences. Today, this position is often deemed impossible, forcing many to draw the conclusion that the idea of communism is dead. Within the work of Slavoj Žižek, this tension could be located in the opposition between his analysis of communist ideology and his attempt to think the emancipatory potential of the communist idea. Therefore, when treating Žižek's work on communism, many have chosen to completely disregard one of these aspects, either claiming that his endorsement of communism is just another example of his performative provocations, or that he, behind a veil of feigned criticism, is merely promoting a return to totalitarianism.[2]

Among scholars who have taken the post-communist communism of Žižek seriously, many have claimed that he has been furthering a notion of revolutionary

[2] Cf. Yannis Stavrakakis, "On Acts, Pure and Impure," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 4, no. 2 (2010), http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/301/301; Reinhard Heil, *Zur Aktualität von Slavoj Žižek: Einleitung in sein Werk* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 62; Thomas Brockelman, *Žižek and Heidegger: The Question Concerning Techno-Capitalism* (London: Continuum, 2008), 71–74; Dominik Finkelde, *Slavoj Žižek zwischen Lacan und Hegel: Politische Philosophie—Metapsychologie—Ethik* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2009); Matthew Sharpe, *Slavoj Žižek: A Little Piece of the Real* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 195; Ola Sigurdson, *Theology and Marxism in Eagleton and Žižek: A Conspiracy of Hope* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 11.

communism throughout his entire work in English.[3] However, this article will try to show how the idea of communism emerged and evolved in and through his many attempts to understand the horrific failures of twentieth-century communist ideology. This aim of not only distinguishing between the analysis of communist ideology and the development of an idea of communism, but also to show how the latter emerged through sustained engagement with the former, will also serve as a point of separation from those who only read Žižek's notion of communism as another word for critical philosophy or *Ideologiekritik*.[4] To achieve this, the present article will focus on Žižek's understanding of the idea, how it relates to politics and ethics, as well as how this notion has transformed through his sustained engagement with the ideology and the philosophy of communism.

Communism, Ethics, and Kant

In what is perhaps his first most sustained engagements with communism in English, found in the 2001 book *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*,[5] Žižek offers a depiction of the multiple layers and functions of this belief system: from the ideology of the official party line, via the everyday approach to the world that characterizes both the average citizen and the dissident, to the perspective of Western Marxists who, while remaining communists, wanted to avoid defending Soviet communism. At this point in his work, Žižek almost exclusively uses the term communism to denote what we might call "actually existing communism," as he attempts to explain its ideological system. Already in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek had highlighted the importance of empty rituals as the glue holding together the Stalinist community,[6] a point which he now, just over a dec-

3 Cf. Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012), 9; Fabio Vighi, *On Žižek's Dialectics: Surplus, Subtraction, Sublimation* (London: Continuum, 2012), 21.

4 Cf. Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 117; Robert Ruehl, "Žižek's Communist Theology: A Revolutionary Challenge to America's Capitalist God," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011), http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/295/295; Cindy Zeiher, "And What of the Left? Žižek's Refusal of the Current Leftist Parable," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 10, no. 2 (2016), http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/955/958.

5 Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2011).

6 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 162–63.

ade later, expanded upon in order to show how these ideological practices were enacted not only by the party apparatchiks and the nomenklatura, but also by the average Soviet citizen. Against the then prevalent idea that in particular the West had reached the pinnacle of the post-ideological age, Žižek here developed a concept of ideology in which even cynical acceptance (the supposedly non-ideological position *par excellence*) includes a certain form of ideological belief. Žižek's more specific points concerning communist ideology, which toward the final days of the Soviet Union also showed clear cynical tendencies, urges us to avoid describing the cynical stance as a way for ordinary people to adopt an ironic (non-believer's) distance to official dogma. Instead, this stance of disinterested cynicism was not only demanded from above by ideology itself, but it was even necessary for the survival of the system. Since cynicism was imposed on the citizen, Žižek concludes that the ironic rebel, maintaining a dissident mindset while simultaneously adhering to the official party line, never posed any threat to sustained communist rule. Instead, the real peril could be found in the honest believer with a true commitment to the communist cause. As noted, this cynical belief structure is not specific to late communist ideology. Rather, Žižek has continuously shown how this subjective position can be found everywhere today. Taken in this sense, cynicism allows for an ideological subject to be quite aware of the impossibilities and instabilities plaguing the utopian vision of society purported by the ruling ideology, all the while continuing to reproduce the very same ideology in and through action. Thus, Žižek's analysis of communist ideology in the late Soviet Union and Yugoslavia undermines the hope of locating a disruptive *kynicism* in the people's rejection of official dogma. Rather, this rejection is already included in its functioning as an ideology.

Since we should not ascribe any disruptive potentiality to this supposedly disillusioned stance, the cynicism of late communist ideology can no longer be read as a reaction to the "ruthless, self-obliterating dedication to the Communist cause" supposedly defining Stalinist terror and repression.[7] Instead, Žižek writes, "the problem with the Stalinist Communists was that they were *not* 'pure' enough, and got caught up in the *perverse* economy of duty: 'I know this is heavy and can be painful, but what can I do? This is my duty . . .'"[8] The reference to duty, which Žižek goes on to develop in its Kantian context, becomes a key component to un-

7 Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, 111.

8 Žižek, 111.

derstanding his analysis of communist ideology. As we will see, it also explains why the label communism is deceptive when discussing Žižek's understanding of revolutionary politics during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Žižek's reading of a Kantian notion of duty, which relies heavily on Alenka Zupančič's understanding of an "ethics of the real," places the horrors of twentieth-century communism in an ethical context.[9] This does not, however, mean that ideology becomes an ethical concept. At least not if we by this assume that it offers some way of distinguishing between good and evil (placing ideology on the latter side). Instead, the Kantian ethics developed by Zupančič should be read as an injunction to act "in conformity with duty and strictly for the sake of duty."[10] By urging us to act in accordance with our duty, Kant, in this reading, offers an attempt to escape the issues that plague any ethics intended to separate good from evil, since such a distinction either requires a universal ground in something like God or Nature, or it risks getting stuck in the minutiae of practical life when trying to work out what is good for whom, in what situation, etc. The important caveat here is that we cannot motivate our dutiful acts by referencing anything but duty itself, which is where Žižek's analysis of communism comes in. The issue, as he points out regarding Stalin's terrors, was not that its perpetrators believed too much in the cause, that they in every single situation followed their duty to the end, convinced that they were doing the right thing. Rather, the issue is, as is illustrated in the quote above, that they referred to their duty as a painful injunction forcing them to carry out atrocities despite their personal moral objections. Although there is an obvious kind of perversity in the hypocritical reference to duty, what remains for us to show is how this understanding of Kantian ethics underlies Žižek's entire analysis of communist ideology in much of his work during the 1990s and early 2000s.

At first, it may seem counterintuitive that not only a sincere believer in any ideological credo, but also a subject appearing to be cynically detached, retains a reference to duty. But if we read Žižek's depiction of what we might call cynical and Stalinist communism as two versions of the same ethical failure, it might help to shed some light on this notion of duty. But before that, let us try to work

9 Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan* (London: Verso, 2011).

10 Zupančič, 53.

out the details of how a Kantian ethic of the act provides the framework for the analysis. Regarding the ethical act, Zupančič writes:

> "Act so that the maxim of your will can always hold at the same time as the principle giving universal law"—what is the paradox implicit in this formulation of the categorial imperative? The paradox is that, despite its "categorical" character, it somehow leaves everything wide open. For how am I to decide if (the maxim of) my action can hold as a principle providing a universal law, if I do not accept the presupposition that I am originally guided by some notion of the good (i.e., some notion of what is universally acceptable)? In other words, there is no a priori criterion of universality. [. . .] *Anything can be transformed into a universal claim; nothing is* a priori *excluded from ethics*.[11]

The truly ethical act is therefore not one in which the subject acts in accordance with a previously given notion of the good, but rather one in which the entire world of this subject is risked in order to follow a sense of duty. This act is one wherein all the existing coordinates of the subject's life are eradicated and, potentially, laid out anew. Only when following a sense of duty beyond the limits of one's subjective world is it possible to act in accordance with duty alone, meaning that the ethical act can be accomplished without the disturbance of subjective perversions. An initial distinction must here be made between the ethical act and its ideological counterpart; the latter aimed at retaining perversions belonging to a specific world rather than acting to eradicate this foundation. It is, however, not just the failure to perform this destructive act that brings together the false suffering of the ruthlessly efficient Stalinist bureaucrat and the cynical citizens not taking official decrees seriously. Instead, it is the very attempt to establish a distance between themselves and the act that constitutes their ethical failure (leaving them stuck in ideology). In other words: they do know very well what they are doing, but they nevertheless do it. While following official decrees, the cynical subject knows very well that the big Other is non-existent and shot through with inconsistencies. But in practice, this subject still acts as if the big Other is omnipotent. This is precisely what makes the cynical approach into a truly modern ideological configuration. Zupančič illustrates this by pointing to the role of knowledge in the act as the line separating classical heroic ethics and modern cynicism. What a classical hero, exemplified

[11] Zupančič, 92–93.

by Oedipus in Zupančič's analysis, shares with a modern cynic is the position in which the subject identifies itself with the symptom. Both Oedipus and the cynic reduce themselves to the object as it appears in the eyes of the big Other. They perform all the tasks required by the big Other, turning into "the pure instrument of the big Other's will."[12] However, for the cynic, this relationship is tainted by a certain perversity dependent on the awareness of the big Other's impotence. Oedipus, on the other hand, is turned into the instrument of the big Other's will against his own explicit attempt to avoid it. Nevertheless, it is first when he acknowledges his role, and gauges out his eyes rather than committing suicide, that Oedipus becomes a true classical hero. Hence, the cynic and the hero structurally occupy the same position, but in choosing blindness over suicide, Oedipus sends a message to the big Other that he refuses to pay the price of the debt that he was ascribed already from the outset. Only by renouncing his expected position as a tragic hero (which would entail killing himself after learning of the atrocities he had committed in his blindness) does Oedipus turn himself into a classical hero, a reminder of the structural need for blindness that allows the system to sustain itself.[13]

When observing the cynic, we can identify a similar attempt at reducing subjectivity to an object. Just as was the case with Oedipus, when realizing the inescapable nature of ideology, the cynic chooses to accept the role of the big Other's object of desire rather than trying to escape this fate. This structural position also characterizes the sentimental Stalinist bureaucrat as he is cursing his lot of having to carry out the atrocities that duty demands of him. However, unlike Oedipus, who in his act of blinding himself becomes a "true tragic hero," there is no ethical heroism to be found in these modern-day equivalents. Neither the cynic nor the pathetic bureaucrat can achieve such a status since heroism can no longer be achieved simply by becoming aware of the structural necessity of one's guilt (the fact that our own activity is the prerequisite for the fulfilment of the big Other's prophecy). The difference here, as Zupančič shows, is thus not dependent on the subject, but the status of the big Other. With the rift opened up by modernity, all the big Other's inconsistencies became an object of public knowledge. The big Other's impotence was openly admitted. Turning oneself into the object of this big Other, which for Oedipus was a scandalous act (secur-

12 Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, 112.

13 Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*, 175–99.

ing his role as a tragic hero battling against his position in a given world), can, therefore, no longer constitute an act of transgression (even though the cynic often experiences his or her ironies as affronts to the big Other). If we already from the outset are aware that the big Other's inconsistencies require the subject's action in order to function, the inconsistencies exploited by the ironic distance in the end amounts to nothing. In a modern ethics, the subject instead "finds herself in a situation where she has to take the decision to act in spite of this knowledge, and to commit the very act that this knowledge makes 'impossible.'"[14]

To return to Žižek's analysis of communist ideology, he identifies, even in its dissident voices, a failure to act in accordance with duty. In a comment on the work of Soviet composer Shostakovich, Žižek points out how his symphonies allegedly allowed for two readings: one which remained in accordance with the official ideology and one which ironically mocked it, potentially transgressing the given order. Žižek's claim is that the second reading cannot have been exclusively accessible to other dissidents, meaning that a distinction could not be made between those stuck in ideology (reading his symphonies as lauding Soviet communism) and the non-believers, who, through their distance, could enjoy the ironies and inconsistencies of the ruling ideology. Instead, a more probable scenario is that both readings could be enjoyed by one and the same person. Žižek continues:

> So it is Shostakovich's very inner distance towards the "official" Socialist reading of his symphonies that makes him a prototypical Soviet composer—this distance is constitutive of ideology, while authors who fully (over)identified with the official ideology, like Alexandr Medvedkin, the Soviet filmmaker portrayed in Chris Marker's documentary *The Last Bolshevik*, run into trouble. Every Party functionary, right up to Stalin himself, was in a way a "closet dissident," talking privately about themes prohibited in public.[15]

Hence, the issue with the dual message in Shostakovich's symphonies is how this split allows for his personal desires to return, tainting his duty to resist what he saw as a despicable regime. Regardless of if he exploited this duality as a way to protect himself from persecution, or if the ironic theme was just a way for him

14 Zupančič, 256.

15 Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, 125.

to enjoy an imagined intellectual superiority, it provided him with a reason to follow a sense of duty not grounded in duty itself but rather in self-preservation or intellectual vanity. Thus, Shostakovich could make use of the officially admitted inconsistencies of the big Other without sacrificing his symbolic identity, since his very existence did not point out anything in this big Other that everyone was not already enjoying. This issue is also why Žižek, in the quote above, highlights film director Alexandr Medvedkin as a much more troublesome figure for the ruling elite: his point here is that Medvedkin's overidentification with the communist cause offered a much larger threat to official dogma since he, through overidentification, threatened to destroy the system from within. Here, we find a form of "traversing the fantasy," wherein an act of genuine belief becomes capable of initiating a move from desire to drive, from a perverted duty to a duty for duty's sake. In other words, it opens up "the possibility of undermining the hold a fantasy exerts over us through the very overidentification with it, i.e., by way of embracing simultaneously, within the same space, the multitude of inconsistent fantasmatic elements."[16] But is it, following Žižek, enough to simply believe in ideology too much to open up a space for traversing it? To understand this, it can be helpful to counterpose the notion of ideology with that of the idea.

The Kantian Idea and Traversing the Fantasy

If an ideology exists to account for the subject's failure to adhere to the ethical act, this act itself must be understood in relation to the idea. More specifically, we should here employ a term which, although rarely used by Žižek, is central to Zupančič's reading of Kant's ethics, namely the "transcendental idea." She writes: "The transcendental idea articulates the relationship between the understanding and reason. As we have already said, it is the way the understanding sees itself by reason. It is interesting to observe that Kant always conceives transcendental ideas through the image of the 'standpoint of an observer.'"[17]

The transcendental idea is that which makes ethics possible by bringing together the understanding's work of creating concepts on the basis of objects of experience and reason's creation of ideas separate from any direct ties to these

16 Slavoj Žižek, *Disparities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 364.

17 Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*, 73.

objects.[18] Without this connection, we will only end up with either a myriad of concepts relating to experience (lacking reason's ability to unify them into a greater whole), or empty ideas bereft of any connection to the real world (thus making the ethical act impossible). Therefore, the transcendental idea must offer "a *concept* that embodies a *unity* that seems *as if* it really exists in the world of what is (being)."[19] Here, two Lacanian concepts of great importance seem to collapse into each other: the Master Signifier and the quilting point. On the one hand, the transcendental idea seems to represent that which retroactively quilts the entire field of concepts belonging to understanding, that which "stops the otherwise indefinite sliding of signification"[20] by unifying that which initially appeared in the form of pure multiplicity and difference. But on the other, if we are to avoid the risk of getting caught in a traditional Marxist understanding of ideology as that which simply hides the truth of material relations behind a veil of ideas, the transcendental idea must also function as a Master Signifier, that which "not only induces but determines castration,"[21] i.e., the signifier responsible for initiating the work of the understanding. This is why, as Zupančič puts it, we must conceive of the transcendental idea as "the *way* the *understanding sees itself being seen by reason*,"[22] meaning that we are not dealing with two different levels, i.e., understanding (dealing with things) and free thought in the form of reason (dealing only with itself), but an immanent split or parallax in the perspective which, at the same time, makes a world possible while also making the final unity of this world impossible. This is what both Žižek and Zupančič are aiming at with the claim that the ethical act is set out to "traverse the fantasy." Since the fantasy of the subject is that which holds together the world, making sure this subject never comes too close to the fundamental lack at its center, it is, simultaneously, this lack that an idea must cover up. The difference between ideology and the ethical act comes down to how this act relates to the transcendental idea. In an analysis of Stalin and Lenin, Žižek illustrates this by taking up the old Marxist question regarding the necessity of a bourgeois revo-

18 Zupančič, 65.

19 Zupančič, 69.

20 Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 681.

21 Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 89.

22 Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*, 71.

lution foregoing its communist counterpart. Although the Russian bourgeoisie of the early twentieth century was not ready for the purported first step towards communism, Lenin nonetheless decided to intervene. What Žižek describes as Lenin's "wager that *this very 'premature' intervention would radically change the 'objective' relationship*"[23] is, in other words, an attempt to act beyond the confines of a given transcendental idea. Only by confronting the non-existence of the big Other could Lenin's act change the actual "objective" situation, retroactively making something new (a communist revolution) always-already possible. Thus, the transcendental idea is not ideological in itself. It is rather a necessary prerequisite for the subject's world, but as soon as this idea is treated as given from beyond (as in the case with the conception of history's necessary progress) it turns into ideology.

It is at this point that one could claim that Žižek's development of "Lenin's wager" shows how, in his philosophy, "communism [is] a contemporary name for emancipatory, egalitarian politics."[24] But that would be to overstretch his notion of the ethical act at this point in time. Rather, in Žižek's writings from the 1990s and early 2000s, communism is mainly treated as a form of ideology, as the belief in the "necessity of history" which, with history as the given transcendental idea, acted to preserve the existing order. Although driven by the idea or perhaps the ideal of communism, Lenin's success should be located in his fidelity to duty alone, i.e., to his ethical act which made it possible to traverse the given situation. The worldview that came with the communist idea appears, in Žižek's reading, more as the source of future problems than the liberating spark: the only communist idea possible would be one steeped in communist ideology, including the notion of the "necessity of history," an idea intended to bring together and supplement objective knowledge and, simultaneously, make it both incomplete and whole. What we need to highlight here is how this issue is in no way specific to a potential communist idea, but to ideas in general as Žižek here defines them. At least the ones taking on the function of a "transcendental idea," since they offer the point through which a subject must pass in order to achieve the ethical act and are not ideas instigating this act. We can see this point in how Žižek, in what is often referred to as his theological trilogy published at the beginning of this millennium, criticizes Marx's notion of com-

[23] Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, 114.

[24] Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 9.

munism. After a discussion of Marx's understanding of the role of contradiction as the driving-force behind capitalist expansion, Žižek writes:

> Marx's fundamental mistake was to conclude, from these insights, that a new, higher social order (Communism) is possible, an order that would not only maintain but even raise to a higher degree, and effectively fully release, the potential of the self-increasing spiral of productivity which in capitalism, on account of its inherent obstacle/contradiction, is thwarted again and again by socially destructive economic crises. [. . .] So, in a way, the critics of Communism were right when they claimed that Marxian Communism is an impossible fantasy—what they did not perceive is that Marxian Communism, this notion of a society of pure unleashed productivity *outside* the frame of Capital, was a fantasy inherent to capitalism itself.[25]

Hence, it was not only on the everyday level that communist ideology offered a fantasy protecting the subject and the world that it inhabits. Even for Marx himself, communism seems to have been a transcendental idea offering a fantasmatic image of a capitalist production free of contradiction. The ethical act, on the other hand, one capable of liberating us from both communist and capitalist ideology by destroying the present world, is at this point in Žižek's work a religious act. In the appendix to *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, Žižek writes:

> The point of this book is that, at the very core of Christianity, there is another dimension. When Christ dies, what dies with him is the secret hope discernible in "Father, why hast thou forsaken me?": the hope that there is a father who has abandoned me. The "Holy Spirit" is the community deprived of its support in the big Other. The point of Christianity as the religion of atheism is [that] [. . .] it attacks the religious hard core that survives even in humanism, even up to Stalinism, with its belief in History as the "big Other" that decides on the "objective meaning" of our deeds. [. . .] The gap here is irreducible: either one drops the religious form, or one maintains the form but loses the essence. That is the ultimate

[25] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2008), 14.

> heroic gesture that awaits Christianity: in order to save its treasure, it has to sacrifice itself—like Christ, who had to die so that Christianity could emerge.[26]

In a similar vein, it is possible to see how Žižek at this point would claim that the only way to save the revolutionary legacy of Lenin is to sacrifice its communist ideology and to act in accordance with duty alone. Only then might the subject give up whatever notion of the big Other that controls the transcendental idea. This is also why Žižek, when examining communism, expends much effort on describing the failures of its historical actualization, never really touching explicitly on its potentially liberating qualities. An illustrative example of this lack can be found in the afterword to Žižek's first edited collection of texts by Lenin, published in 2002. Here he explicitly asks the question whether "it [is] still possible to imagine Communism (or another form of post-capitalist society) as a formation which liberates the de-territorializing dynamic of capitalism." But instead of an answer to this question, he begins by returning to the critique of Marx's communist fantasy as a vision of capitalism without its inherent contradiction, before moving on to a critique of the nostalgia for communist revolution found in both Cuba and Eastern Europe.[27] So how come Žižek, just a few years later, started to explicitly endorse the "communist idea"?

The Hegelian Idea of Communism

Although it has been shown to play an important role in what was to become Žižek's conceptualization of communism, the ethical act capable of traversing the fantasy cannot in itself explain his turn to the communist idea.[28] Rather, Žižek maintains his critical focus on communism as an ideology throughout the period during which he develops a new understanding of the act. It is only with the publication of *In Defense of Lost Causes* in 2008 that Žižek shows the initial signs of revising his earlier position on communism: first through the claim that the notion of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" offers the best available weapon against what he describes as the ruling logic of bio-politics,[29] and later the

[26] Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 171.

[27] Slavoj Žižek, "Lenin's Choice," afterword to *Revolution at the Gates: Selected Writings from February to October 1917*, by V. I. Lenin, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2004), 274–76.

[28] See Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2014), 166–219.

[29] Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 412–19.

same year by promising to stake out "the hard road to dialectical materialism."[30] However, the most notable difference shows itself a year later, in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, as he develops his thoughts on the "communist hypothesis" by drawing on the work of Alain Badiou. After presenting the reader with a long quote from Badiou, in which it is claimed that the only thing of interest to a philosopher is the idea, Žižek adds the following caveat:

> One should be careful not to read these lines in a Kantian way, conceiving communism as a "regulative idea," thereby resuscitating the specter of an "ethical socialism" taking equality as its *a priori* norm-axiom. One should rather maintain the precise reference to a set of actual social antagonisms which generates the need for communism—Marx's notion of communism not as an ideal, but as a movement which reacts to such antagonisms, is still fully relevant.[31]

Initially we should, once again, take a note from Alenka Zupančič by equating the regulative idea and the transcendental idea.[32] Hence, what Žižek seems to be claiming here is that communism should not be understood as a form of a quilting point capable of bringing together different actual events under a specific understanding of equality, since such an understanding would only open this idea up to a perverted sense of duty. Instead, Žižek claims that communism's actuality is derived from its capability to survive "the failures of its realization as a specter which returns again and again, in endless persistence best captured in the already-quoted words from Beckett's *Worstward Ho*: 'Try again. Fail again. Fail better.'"[33] In this Beckettian Leninism, Žižek's communist idea[34] appears to be split: it acts both as a name for a specific set of antagonisms immanent to contemporary capitalism and as a spectral promise echoing from the disastrous revolutions of the past, urging us to repeat their inevitable failure. Although a definite transformation has taken place in how Žižek, at this point, speaks about the revolutionary potential of communism, this evental idea also seems

30 Slavoj Žižek, "Enjoyment within the Limits of Reason Alone," foreword to the second edition of *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008), xi–xii.

31 Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), 87–88.

32 Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*, 64.

33 Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 125.

34 For a similar depiction, see also Slavoj Žižek, "How to Begin from the Beginning," in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), 217.

to share many similarities with Kantian spurious infinity: the communist idea is doomed to fail, but we should nevertheless try to implement it since next time we might get a little bit closer to realizing its full potential. Thus, despite his own explicit warning, the communist idea still appears to be haunted by Kant. One might, however, argue that there is a difference of psychoanalytical importance between Žižek's "beginning from the beginning" and Kant's "process of gradual approximation": while the latter remains focused on the object of desire (even though it is impossible), the former implies, as it seems, a change in perspective, offering us a process no longer focused on the impossible object, but on the process itself, i.e., on the drive as that which *fait le tour*, that which moves around and therefore tricks the object. But, as we will see, although Žižek here has explicitly introduced the notion of communism with a move "from Kant to Hegel," some necessary steps on this path remain, at least when it comes to the development of his understanding of the idea.[35]

The attempt at working through the Kantian undertones plaguing the notion of the idea as an "unfinished project" is perhaps best illustrated by a repetition of a paragraph on Kant's ethical and Mao's political failures appearing first in *In Defense of Lost Causes* and then, four years later, in *Less Than Nothing*. In the first instance, Žižek refers to Beckett's formula as he discusses Kant and Mao, pointing out how the latter's failed Cultural Revolution and the explosion of capitalist development in China during the last thirty years are "a sign that Mao retreated from drawing *all* the consequences of the Cultural Revolution."[36] Hence, on the one hand, Žižek seems to be claiming that one should avoid making compromises with the transformative idea, while, simultaneously, holding on to the notion that the failure of the idea is inevitable. In other words, if the idea cannot be compromised with, but its proper actualization remains impossible (making some form of compromise inevitable), we are forced to draw the conclusion that

[35] This is missed, for instance, by Agon Hamza, when focusing only on the Kantian aspects of Žižek's call for communism. See Agon Hamza, "A Plea for Žižekian Politics," in *Repeating Žižek*, ed. Agon Hamza (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 235–36. By taking Žižek's claims of Hegelian fidelity at face value, as does Lorenzo Chiesa, one risks overlooking how Žižek developed his notion of the idea of communism in tandem with certain adjustments in his readings of Hegel. See Lorenzo Chiesa, "Christianity or Communism? Žižek's Marxian Hegelianism and Hegelian Marxism," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 66, no. 3 (2012): 399–420.

[36] Žižek, *Lost Causes*, 210; italics added.

what we might call a noumenal antagonism always remains beyond our grasp. What remains beyond is the idea itself in its full actualization, showing us how Žižek here hinted at an understanding of the idea that retains a reference to a Kantian ethics. A further issue with this depiction of the idea as plagued by an inescapable compromise is that it erases any ultimate distinction between the communist idea and its ideology. If both Lenin's and Mao's respective revolutionary acts, in Žižek's depiction, represent the truth of the communist idea as a name for the desire to overcome a number of deadlocks inherent in capitalism, and what followed after these revolutions must be understood as the effect of their unavoidable compromise with this idea, it becomes impossible to draw a demarcating line between the ideology—which through, for instance, extreme brutality attempts to save its own system—and the idea which points beyond this system. Or rather, the idea is always turned into ideology as soon as someone attempts (and fails) to actualize it in the world. However, when repeating the paragraph in *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek drops the final reference to Beckett, instead highlighting how this "pseudo-Kantian Levinasian" understanding of "a regulative Idea which is 'forever to come,'" fails to properly express the Hegelian insight concerning the actualization of the idea before he ends the section by asking for another solution.[37]

Since then, Žižek has continuously returned to this problem in connection with the communist idea in what seems like an attempt to go beyond his Beckettian Leninism. First, in his 2016 book *Disparities*, he returns to his often-repeated critique of Marx, but this time with a crucial addition at the end:

> Is not the Idea of communism also such a lie (a false utopian notion) which enables us to see the truth about the existing capitalist system and its antagonisms? Yes, but in a very specific way. The traditional Marxist notion of communism is false in the sense that it remains immanent to the capitalist universe. Every historical situation contains its own unique utopian perspective, an immanent vision of what is wrong with it, an ideal representation of how, with some changes, the situation could be made much better. When the desire for a radical social change emerges, it is thus logical that it first endeavours to actualize this immanent utopian vision—and this endeavour is what characterizes every authentic

[37] Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 819.

> emancipatory struggle. So the critics of communism were in a way right when they claimed that the Marxian communism is an impossible fantasy; what they did not perceive is that the Marxian communism, this notion of a society of pure unleashed productivity outside the frame of capital, was a fantasy inherent to capitalism itself, the capitalist inherent transgression at its purest, a strictly ideological fantasy of maintaining the thrust to productivity generated by capitalism, while getting rid of the "obstacles" and antagonisms that were—as the sad experience of the "really existing capitalism" demonstrates—the only possible framework of the effective material existence of a society of permanent self-enhancing productivity. This, however, should not seduce us into abandoning the very idea of communism—on the contrary, this idea should be conceived in a strict Hegelian sense, as a notion which transforms itself in the course of its actualization.[38]

At this point, Žižek has completely abandoned the idea of "fail again, fail better" (and its unavoidable Kantian undertones) in favor of a notion of the idea that no longer measures its success against how well its actualization corresponds to an imagined ideal (to which it will always come up short). Instead, the utopian ideal will be transformed through the process of actualization, not because it comes up short when measured against the physical world, but because both the utopia and the actual world are caught up in their own immanent antagonisms. Here, as tensions rise within the antagonisms of the present system, a communist idea, struggling directly with the contradictory core of capitalism, might begin to unfold even though it is not explicitly presented as the idea of communism (something we, according to Žižek, saw happening during the Covid-19 pandemic).[39] However, it is only as an *après-coup*, in the aftermath of its implementation, that it becomes possible to see how the idea, from the outset, was inevitably transforming the original ideals in the process of giving birth to new antagonisms. In other words, the original utopia appears as such only after its idea has been actualized, meaning that this utopia only appears to us in the light of a failure. Understanding the idea in this way offers the only possible escape from Kantian spurious infinity, since we are no longer, already from the outset, doomed to fail. Instead, although inevitable, failure only becomes discernible after the idea has been actualized, as historical contingency retroactively is turned into necessity, revealing why failure was present already from

38 Žižek, *Disparities*, 300.

39 Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 104.

the beginning. We can also here get a glimpse of what Žižek refers to as his dialectical materialism as one "in which substantial 'matter' disappears in a network of purely formal/ideal relations,"[40] namely that it is in these cracks that material antagonisms can appear as a retroactively appearing cause. Recently, Žižek seems to claim that the Kantian remains plaguing his understanding of the communist idea arose out of an implicit analogy between the unconscious (as the place of antagonisms that underlie the individual subject) and capitalism (as the place of social antagonisms producing a revolutionary subject). While the antagonisms of the unconscious constitute the prerequisite for the subject's very possibility, implying that abolishing these antagonisms would mean eliminating human subjectivity as we know it, the antagonisms of capitalism are not what make society possible *tout court*. They just constitute the ground for our current society. That is why Žižek now, in stark contrast to his earlier position, claims that

> Communism is not an endless process of overcoming capitalism, in the same way as psychoanalysis never abolishes the Unconscious: Communism, of course, will not be a perfect state of human fulfilment, it will generate its own antagonisms, but they will be qualitatively different from capitalist antagonisms. Plus they will not mean that Communism is an endless unfinished project, a goal we will never reach: Communism will be defined by these new antagonisms in exactly the same way as capitalism is defined by its own specific antagonisms.[41]

Conclusion

We have now seen how Žižek's explicit goal of following the arduous road from Kant to Hegel has impacted his notion of the communist idea. But it is not only a notion of the idea that Žižek had to reimagine in order to move from a critique of communist ideology to an endorsement of the communist idea. In his already quoted return to the critique of Marx's notion of communism, we can also discern a reassessment of another important notion in this reading: fantasy. Instead of focusing on fantasy as that which must be traversed in order to instigate the creation of a new world, the utopian ideal (in the form of an impossible

40 Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 5.

41 Slavoj Žižek, *Hegel in a Wired Brain* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 168.

fantasy) constitutes a prerequisite for the transformation as such. Thus, the risk is no longer to remain stuck in a false fantasy, making the subject incapable of following duty to the end. Such a notion of fantasy does, to a large extent, share many of its limitations with a traditional Marxist understanding of ideology, most notably the distinction between a true and a false way to relate to the antagonisms of a given society.[42] We can thus see how Žižek's development of his Hegelian dialectical materialism shows itself in the communist idea: gone are depictions of the utopia of the idea as an impossible beyond that urges us to act. Gone, it seems, is also the importance of the liberating act itself. Instead, the revolutionary subject seems to have been demoted to a secondary position, allowing the system itself, through its effects (such as the pandemic), to create the fantasy of its own utopia (true freedom instead of the false freedom to sell one's labor). Hence, a communist idea can begin to actualize itself without the need for a heroic deed of attempting (and failing) to do the impossible. As Žižek notes apropos the pandemic, when the barbarism immanent in the system becomes too overbearing, a field for utopic communist measures previously unimaginable is opened. This, however, does not mean that while the appearance of a communist idea is necessary within capitalism (since its antagonisms will always give birth to an impossible fantasy of transgression), the actual communist revolution is its unavoidable outcome. Rather, every attempt to get rid of capitalism's antagonism can always be reintegrated into the very system that it fights against. Here, the difference between communist ideology and the communist idea once again shows itself: an ideology is the belief that a system can go on indefinitely. Regardless of whether it is Soviet communism or contemporary neo-liberalism, ideology always offers a solution which proposes to remove the disastrous effects while keeping the system intact. Against this, the idea arises directly out of the antagonisms that brought about these problems, forcing us to make a choice between business as usual (and its inevitable failure) and the struggle "over what social form will replace the liberal-capitalist New World Order."[43]

[42] Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 95.

[43] Žižek, *Pandemic!*, 127.

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Oedipus Rex and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis: A Tragedy of Desire and Otherness

Keywords
Oedipus Rex, Sophocles, Freud, Lacan, desire, mythology, Otherness

Abstract
This article develops an analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in relation to the mythological and literary-theatrical place the play holds in the history of psychoanalysis from Freud to Lacan, not to mention Foucault's counter-psychoanalytic reading. How do we see the constitutive relation between this play and the Freudian complex? Does Lacanian psychoanalysis help illuminate the play as a tragedy of desire in alienation? The paper argues for a tragedy of desire's Otherness in Sophocles' play, showing how the parental alterity is configured in the shifting dynamics of paternal and maternal signifiers. Be it in the divine oracle or the chorus, the play accentuates the field of Other to activate the tragedy of desire and chanellizes it through affects like guilt, shame and self-reproach, inscribed on the subject's body in the form of scopic and invocatory drives. The paper concludes by reflecting on the status of the unconscious as knowledge, complicating Foucault's interpretation and presenting a tragedy of the desire-to-know that produces existence without desire as an experience of suffering.

Kralj Ojdip in mitologija psihoanalize: tragedija želje in Drugosti

Ključne besede
Kralj Ojdip, Sofokles, Freud, Lacan, želja, mitologija, Drugost

Povzetek
Članek razvija analizo Sofoklovega *Kralja Ojdipa* v razmerju do mitološkega in literarno-gledališkega mesta, ki ga ta igra zaseda v zgodovini psihoanalize od Freuda do

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Lacana, če Foucaultovega protipsihoanalitičnega branja niti ne omenjamo. Kako vidimo konstitutivni odnos med to igro in freudovskim kompleksom? Ali Lacanova psihoanaliza pomaga osvetliti igro kot tragedijo želje v alienaciji? Članek zagovarja tragedijo Drugosti želje v Sofoklejevi igri in pokaže, kako se starševska drugost konfigurira v spreminjajoči se dinamiki očetovskih in materinskih označevalcev. Naj gre za božanski orakelj ali za zbor, igra poudarja polje Drugega, da bi aktivirala tragedijo želje in jo kanalizira prek afektov, kot so krivda, sram in samoočitki, ki so vpisani v telo subjekta v obliki skopičnih in invokacijskih nagonov. Članek se zaključi z razmislekom o statusu nezavednega kot vednosti, kar zaplete Foucaultovo interpretacijo in predstavi tragedijo želje po vednosti, ki proizvaja obstoj brez želje kot izkušnje trpljenja.

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This article focuses on the relation between Sophocles' Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex* and psychoanalysis, not only in terms of the possible psychoanalytic interpretations of the play but also in a constitutive sense in which the literary and the theatrical get caught up in the psychoanalytic process. As is well known, the Greek myth of Oedipus the king, who unknowingly murdered his father and shared a bed with his mother, is the figure Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalytic discourse, chose to ground the central "complex" of psychoanalysis, i.e. the Oedipus complex. It refers to a heterosexual child's desire to kill his or her same-sex parent (the father for a male child and the mother for a female child) in order to fulfil his or her sexual desire for the parent of the other sex. For Freud, the Oedipus complex marks a significant early stage of psycho-sexual development and its dissolution at a certain point marks a watershed for the human subject. The Oedipus myth is constitutive for Freudian psychoanalysis, and the play, based on this mythical account, has been a major reference point among psychoanalysts. For Jacques Lacan, myth is not a teleological origin-story but more like the *construction* of an origin in the retroactive logic of the unconscious. As he defines it, while constructing his myth of the "lamella"—the libidinal organ of loss in sexual reproduction, a myth "strives to provide a symbolic articulation for [something], rather than an image."[1] This semiotic conception of myth as a linguistic articulation (and not just an Imaginary phenome-

[1] Jacques Lacan, "Position of the Unconscious," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 718.

non) places it in a narrative structure. Oedipus is one such mythological narrative structure for psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis enters into a foundational relation with literature when Freud invokes Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex* alongside another tragedy from Renaissance England—Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—to make an interpretive point about the complex that he names after Oedipus. Lacan rightly notes this "equivalent" relation between Sophocles and Shakespeare in Freud.[2] In Freudian terms, Hamlet is in love with his mother Gertrude and when his uncle Claudius kills his father in conspiracy with her, Hamlet procrastinates in his revenge. He defers in his dilemma because Claudius has enacted his own unconscious wish of killing his father in order to have a sexual relation with his mother. In what follows, we will study literature's constitutive relation with psychoanalysis through *Oedipus Rex* and the Freudian clinical myth of the Oedipus Complex. I will show how Freud and Lacan's inroads into Sophocles' play carve out a path for the dream as an unconscious formation, incarnate the unconscious in the linguistic field of the Other, and concentrate on affects such as guilt and the position the body as a site on which the affective signifiers of the unconscious are inscribed. Cross-pollinating Lacan with Foucault on Sophocles, we will reflect on unconscious knowledge in the Other and see how *Oedipus Rex* represents the parental Others in its unfolding tragedy of desire. I will mark how the paternal and maternal functions in the play undergo a complex shift, becoming substitutable, if not unstable, in the process. The paternal and maternal signifiers circulate among multiple figures in the ever-complexifying metonymic flow of desire.

Freud's Tracing of *Oedipus Rex*: Dreams, the Unconscious, and Guilt

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud talks about the child's love for one parent and hate for another. Let us first note that he does not see this as plain and simple pathology. In fact, his clinical experience instructs that love and hate for one or the other parent is a psychic phenomenon, observed in most children, even so-called 'normal' ones. Freud makes a distinction of *scale* between "normal" children and "psychoneurotics" when he says that for some the hate might

[2] Jacques Lacan, *Desire and its Interpretation*, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), 234.

become murderous and love might turn carnal.[3] To support this theory, Freud uses the Greek legend and evokes Sophocles' play. Oedipus, the son of Laius, king of Thebes, and Jocasta, was abandoned as a child due to an oracle that the unborn child would go on to kill his father and marry his mother. The rescued child grew up to become a prince in an alien court. As he questioned his origins, an oracle hinted at the curse attached to his destiny. On a journey away from home, he met Laius and killed him in a sudden quarrel. Oedipus then went to Thebes and solved the riddle of the Sphinx. The grateful Thebans gave him Jocasta's hand. He married her, reigned long, and had two sons and two daughters with her. As a plague broke out in Thebes and the oracle was summoned again, the truth of the old guilt and the curse came out. It is around this plague situation that the play picks up the mythical narrative. The messengers bring back the oracle's response that the plague will only end if Laius's murderer is driven out from Thebes.

Almost like a detective story, the play traces this act of revelation and Freud likens this narrative of unfolding in the dramatic text with the clinical process of psychoanalysis.[4] He claims a universal value for the subjective destiny of Oedipus because, for him, there is an Oedipus in all of us. Freud suggests that the play appeals not just to an ancient Greek audience but to a more modern audience too. We can identify with its tragic protagonist through the complex of love and hate that we feel for our parental figures: "It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so."[5] Freud highlights the "tragedy of destiny" in Sophocles' play and supplements this idea of an external, objective destiny with a psychic and internal notion of subjective trajectory as destiny. This destiny is not pre-ordained but is the pathway of the unconscious mind, which often harbours instincts, desires, and emotions which contradict our conscious, intentional psyche.

Freud draws our attention to the final words of the chorus that highlight Oedipus's transformation from powerful to miserable:

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3 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 278.

4 Freud, 279.

5 Freud, 280.

> People of Thebes, my countrymen, look on Oedipus.
> He solved the famous riddle with his brilliance,
> he rose to power, a man beyond all power.
> Who could behold his greatness without envy?
> Now what a black sea of terror has overwhelmed him.
> Now as we keep our watch and wait the final day,
> count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.[6]

As the above lines suggest, we cannot take anyone's happiness for granted until the final moment of his or her life. Oedipus once was the epitome of happiness but destiny had other ideas for him. Freud thinks that this last speech of the chorus truly universalizes Oedipus's character as an embodiment of our own tragic subjective trajectories. He speculates that the content of the myth itself was derived from dreams, i.e. from a formation of the psychoanalytic unconscious. As support for this conjecture, he quotes the following dialogue from the play. This is Jocasta trying to console Oedipus about a so-called meaningless dream, dreamt by many people:

> Many a man before you,
> in his dreams, has shared his mother's bed.
> Take such things for shadows, nothing at all—[7]

Freud's point is that the text itself situates sexual desire for one's mother as the material of archetypal dreams. But, in the pre-psychoanalytic Greek world, dreams did not have any meaning as the unconscious was yet to be discovered. Such dreams were passed off as "shadows." Freud interprets the dream of having intercourse with one's mother together with the other archetypal dream of seeing one's father dead. He considers the entire play to be a response to these two generic dreams that often evoke disgust and indignation. Owing to this, the legend as well as the play include affective aspects like self-reproach, horror, and guilt.[8] Oedipus blinds himself in self-punishment when he comes to know his act. There is another reference to dreams in the play that Freud does not quote. This is Tiresias's prophetic utterance on Oedipus's predicament:

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6 Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1984), 251.

7 Sophocles, 215.

8 Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 278–79.

> That day you learn the truth about your marriage,
> the wedding-march that sang you into your halls,
> the lusty voyage home to the fatal harbor!
> And a crowd of other horrors you'd never dream
> will level you with yourself and all your children.[9]

The impending truth about Oedipus's marriage is compared with horrific dreams that are almost beyond the limit of dreaming itself. The levelling of the father with the children is the complex family scenario arising from sexual relation with the mother. Oedipus is technically a brother to his own children as they all share the same mother, Jocasta. Sophocles' Theban trilogy of plays shows that it is this curse of the Labdacus family that goes on to produce further tragedies in *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. In short, the doom falls not on Oedipus but on his entire family.

When Freud returns to Sophocles' play during his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, he underlines the "amoral" nature of the work: "It absolves men from moral responsibility, exhibits the gods as promoters of crime and shows the impotence of the moral impulses of men which struggle against crime."[10] This is the radical edge to the tragedy of Oedipus that shows how the will of the gods can be completely "immoral." As the course of the play suggests, even if the divine wish is at cross-purposes with morality, it will be realized. Freud comments that unlike Euripides, who could have nurtured this radical angle due to his lack of religious belief, for a devout believer like Sophocles, the will of the gods is sacrosanct: "The will of the gods is the highest morality even when it promotes crime."[11] Freud adds that this moral conundrum does not take away from the effect of the play as the audience reacts to the implications of the play and how it taps into their own unconscious guilt:

> Even if a man has repressed his evil impulses into the unconscious and would like to tell himself afterwards that he is not responsible for them, he is bound to be aware of this responsibility as a sense of guilt whose basis is unknown to him.[12]

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9 Sophocles, *Three Theban Plays*, 183.

10 Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 331.

11 Freud, 331.

12 Freud, 331.

Let us underline this unconscious permeation of guilt as a strong affect as we make a slow transition from Freud to Lacan vis-à-vis Oedipus.

From Freudian References to Lacanian Interpretations: The Corporeality of Guilt

If we follow Oedipus's reactions to this killing guilt, we see how it casts a shadow on his body in terms of self-punishment and horror:

> I, with my eyes,
> how could I look my father in the eyes
> when I go down to death? Or mother, so abused . . .
> I have done such things to the two of them,
> crimes too huge for hanging.
> Worse yet,
> the sight of my children, born as they were born,
> how could I long to look into their eyes?
> No, not with these eyes of mine, never.
> Not this city either, her high towers,
> the sacred glittering images of her gods—
> I am misery! I, her best son, reared
> as no other son of Thebes was ever reared,
> I've stripped myself, I gave the command myself.
> All men must cast away the great blasphemer,
> the curse now brought to light by the gods,
> the son of Laius—I, my father's son!
> Now I've exposed my guilt, horrendous guilt,
> could I train a level glance on you, my countrymen?
> Impossible! No, if I could just block off my ears,
> the springs of hearing, I would stop at nothing—
> I'd wall up my loathsome body like a prison,
> blind to the sound of life, not just the sight.
> Oblivion—what a blessing . . .
> for the mind to dwell a world away from pain.[13]

[13] Sophocles, *Three Theban Plays*, 243.

To derive some important points from this long speech of Oedipus quoted above, first and foremost, it shows the *corporeality* of his guilt. The guilt embedded in his unconscious action not only leads to self-punishment in actuality but his imagination itself is heavy with thoughts of self-harm and auto-mutilation. His self-blinding, as he says, represents his wish not to face his parents with his eyes. The psychoanalytic idea of the gaze becomes important here. Freud only acknowledged oral and anal drives, but Jacques Lacan, his French successor, added two more drives to the kitty of unconscious pulsions: gaze and voice. Oedipus's corporeality of guilt invokes both these drives: the scopic and the invocatory. Guilt has a scopic context wherein the gaze of the Other frames the human self as a subject of the unconscious. In other words, we define ourselves with the help of the way in which our significant Others visualize us. What the Other's gaze frames is the subject-body, misrecognized in the mirror image. Oedipus blinds himself as he does not want to be subject to the gaze of the parental Others. As Lacan suggests in *Seminar X*, Oedipus's horror lies in seeing his own eyes cast to the ground. For Lacan, this image grounds Oedipus's anxiety: "It is the impossible sight that threatens you, of your own eyes lying on the ground."[14] Oedipus's body is not captured by the gaze of the Other but his own gaze, separated from his body. This self-separated gaze causes horror by puncturing the body's Imaginary consistency. Oedipus eventually switches to his own role as a father—an Other to his children. He justifies self-blinding by the guilt that does not allow him to look into the eyes of his sons and daughters. Once again, the gaze's failure is marked therein.

To continue with the corporeal mapping of guilt onto psychoanalytic drives, other than the visual, we notice an emphasis on the auditory here: yet another subjective portal to the Other. Voice becomes an important object and invocation, a drive in Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is through the voice that the subject engages with the Other in the field of language. This bridge marks the Lacanian figuration of the unconscious as an intersubjective entity. It exists between the subject and the Other as a cut. Oedipus says that thanks to his guilt, he cannot face his parents, children, or countrymen. This facing the Other is not just visual but auditory as well. That is why for Lacan the unconscious as a discourse of the Other is structured like a language. Language in its function as speech is the locus of this Other. Stated differently, all our significant Others reside in language.

[14] Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 162.

We bring them into existence by talking about them within the conversational space of speech. Oedipus is evoking these others in the quoted speech. It is in this context that he mentions his desire to stop his ears. He calls his body a prison. He wants to shut out the Other from his subjective space. This is a self-inflicted exile but also the inscription of guilt on his body. It is the guilt that writes itself on his body in the form of these mutilations both in thought and action. Oedipus connects the scopic with the invocatory in his expression "blind to the sound." If the Oedipal narrative offers a mythical structure for psychoanalysis in general, the scopic and the invocatory drives incarnate another mythicality here. As Lacan agrees with Freud on this point, drives mythify the Real of the subject's desire for the lost object.[15]

To probe further into the above speech, it blurs the mind-body distinction by foregrounding guilty corporeality as the index of a mental wound. Oedipus considers his self-exiled body the only way to keep pain from invading his mind. His body thus becomes a mouthpiece for his mind. He wants to alleviate his mental suffering by shutting out his body from both "sights" and "sounds" of life, as he says it. This is the life of the Other that animates his own body and mind. If we connect this with ultimately what happens to his body at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*, it registers the reaction of guilt on the body that vanishes. Oedipus's death is nothing short of an enigma. We have no idea where he is buried, if at all. He vanishes from the surface of the earth. This dissolution of corporeality is the climax of his guilt, as it were. As Lacan highlights in *Seminar VI*, Oedipus considers his very birth to be insignificant. For him, Oedipus's quest is for an existence beyond desire but he finds this existence unsustainable: "where existence, having arrived at the extinction of his desire, ends up."[16] When desire dries up, an existence that inhabits existence and nothing else becomes an experience of pain. In formulating this, Lacan echoes the choric reflection on an existence of suffering from *Oedipus at Colonus*:

> Never to be born is the best story.
> But when one has come to the light of day
> second-best is to leave and go back
> quick as you can back where you came from.

[15] Jacques Lacan, "On Freud's 'Trieb,'" in *Écrits*, 724.
[16] Jacques Lacan, *Desire and Its Interpretation*, 91.

> For in his giddy light-headed youth
> what sharp blow isn't far from a man? What
> affliction—
> strife death dissension the ache of envy—
> isn't close by? And in the end
> his lot is to lack all power:
> despised and cast out in friendless old age[17]

The chorus in itself is an incarnation of the Other in Sophoclean tragedy as it tries to articulate the divine will that remains so difficult to understand! To come back to the Other's field, the enigmatic and inscrutable will of the gods in Sophocles' play stands for the psychoanalytic locus of the Other. It is a gigantic, inanimate mouth from which emerges the divine language of accursed prophecy. For Lacan, speech acquires its truth value by being deposited in the locus of the Other, i.e. the Symbolic discourse of language. The oracle in Delphi in *Oedipus Rex* stands for this locus. It is noteworthy that the Delphic oracle is presented consistently through the metaphor of drive, as evident in the trope of the Other's voice:

> Who is the man the voice of god denounces
> resounding out of the rocky gorge of Delphi?
> The horror too dark to tell,
> whose ruthless bloody hands have done the work?[18]

And again:

> but he cannot outrace the dread voices of Delphi
> ringing out of the heart of Earth,
> the dark wings beating around him shrieking doom
> the doom that never dies, the terror—[19]

The image of "the rocky gorge of Delphi" signals a lifeless mouth that emanates "the voice of god" resounding in horror and darkness. In the second passage quoted above, the chorus calls the oracle "the heart of Earth" that produces

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17 Sophocles, *Three Theban Plays*, 84.
18 Sophocles, 186.
19 Sophocles, 186.

"the dread voices of Delphi." These voices, emblematic of the Other's discourse, spell doom for Oedipus.

As the switching roles of mother and wife, on the one hand, and brother and father, on the other, signify throughout the play, Oedipus's act of killing his father and "sowing" his mother[20] create a Symbolic entanglement for the linguistic register of the conventional familial taxonomy. This guilt-driven contamination of the Symbolic order is manifested in numerous hesitations while expressing the scandalously overlapping status of mother and wife, on the one hand, and father and brother, on the other: "Brother and father both / to the children he embraces," "His wife and mother / of his children," "Leaving / its mother to mother living creatures / with the very son she'd borne," and again "His wife, / no wife, his mother, where can he find the mother earth / that cropped two crops at once, himself and all his children?"[21] The strong affects of shame and the guilt, lying in incest, rend the Symbolic order and the chorus remains a special witness to this stumbling function of language, unable to express the entangled character of family relations, turned upside down by Oedipus's unconscious acting out.

Oedipus Rex as a Tragedy of Desire: Substitutable Parental Functions

While Freud's major reference for Sophoclean tragedy is *Oedipus Rex*, for Lacan, the central work in the same Theban trilogy is *Antigone*. For instance, Lacan discusses *Oedipus Rex* in *Seminar VI*, primarily as a cross-reference for *Hamlet*. It is Shakespeare's play that takes centre stage in this seminar. In *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (delivered 1959–60), Lacan posits Antigone's predicament as a psychoanalytic tragedy of desire and devotes a whole year to the reading of this play. Antigone's death drive to save the honour of her accursed family and dead brother Polyneices embodies, for Lacan, the psychoanalytic ethic of desire, i.e. never to give up on one's own desire. Though there is a supplementation of *Oedipus Rex* with *Antigone* in Lacan, I will use his lens to read the latter and to see if there are threads that can work for the former play as well.

If we import Lacan's interpretive framework for *Antigone* for *Oedipus Rex*, we must begin by acknowledging the play as a tragedy of desire. This is the uncon-

[20] Sophocles, 248.

[21] Sophocles, 185, 211, 236.

scious desire of the subject, alienated by the Other. For Lacan, human desire is the desire of the Other. He shifts emphasis from the Oedipal desire *for* the Other (sexual desire for one's father or mother) to the desire *of* the Other (especially the mother's desire) controlling the subject. This explains his gravitation towards *Antigone* instead of *Oedipus Rex*. We have already spotted the Delphic oracle and the chorus as potential sites from which the discourse of the Other operates in the play. This discourse brings in the desire of the Other that alienates the subject. The will of the gods is the desire of the Other that compels Oedipus to do what he does. Oedipus's own desire is alienated by this desire of the Other. In our Lacanian reading, instead of his desire for Jocasta and the desire to kill Laius, the core of his tragedy emerges from the fact that it is not his own desire but a desire imposed on him by the desire of the gods.

In *Seminar VII*, while identifying the trait of the Sophoclean protagonist as an intermediate position between life and death, Lacan reflects on Oedipus: "Sophocles represents him as driven to bring about his own ruin through his obstinacy in wanting to solve an enigma, to know the truth."[22] To know what lies in the unconscious is Oedipus's psychoanalytic journey. On the one hand, unlike Hamlet, Oedipus does not know what he is doing, but on the other, this non-knowledge is itself part of an epistemological problematic, lying at the heart of the play. Lacan comments that although Jocasta warns him that he should not know more, Oedipus cannot stop his drive for knowledge. In Lacan's aforementioned view, Oedipus wants to know what existence would be without desire. Michel Foucault, in his lecture of 17 March 1971 at Collège de France entitled "Oedipal Knowledge," develops an inquiry into the status of the multiple knowledges at work in Sophocles' play. He argues that *Oedipus Rex* presents these knowledges in a logic of sub-divided halves that are fragmented like jigsaw pieces and only come together at the end. Though Foucault takes his examination in a historical direction of transition from oracular to judicial knowledge in ancient Greek society, his fundamental point about knowledge being the core of the play resonates with our excursus. He takes a strategic departure from the psychoanalytic unconscious as a heuristic tool for the play and observes the following:

[22] Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 272.

> It is not so much Oedipus's "ignorance" or "unconscious" that appears in the forefront of Sophocles' tragedy. It is rather the multiplicity of forms of knowledge, the diversity of the procedures which produce it, and the struggle between the powers which is played out through their confrontation.[23]

The paradox that Foucault's departure does not take into serious consideration is that the psychoanalytic unconscious is not ignorance but a form of knowledge. In a talk delivered in the same year as Foucault's, i.e. 1971 (November 4), entitled "Knowledge, Ignorance, Truth and Jouissance," Lacan clarifies that the unconscious is an "unknown knowledge" that is "well and truly articulated, that is structured like a language."[24] In this formulation of unknown knowledge, structured like a language, we hear the echo of the unconscious, structured like a language. For Lacan then, the unconscious is a form of knowledge with a linguistic structure. This is the knowledge that is aired by the Delphic oracles and yet there is no subject to know it at that point. This unconscious knowledge rests in the linguistic field of the Other without there being an Oedipus to know it at that historical moment. If the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, it cannot do without the question of the Other's knowledge. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan states: "If the unconscious has taught us anything, it is first of all that somewhere in the Other it knows (*ça sait*)."[25] He goes on further to declare:

> "What is it that knows?" Do we realize that it is the Other?—such as I posited it at the outset, as a locus in which the signifier is posited, and without which nothing indicates to us that there is a dimension of truth anywhere, a *dit-mension*, the residence of what is said, of this said (*dit*) whose knowledge posits the Other as locus. The status of knowledge implies as such that there already is knowledge, that it is in the Other [. . .].[26]

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23 Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know and Oedipal Knowledge*, ed. Daniel Defert, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 251.

24 Jacques Lacan, "Knowledge, Ignorance, Truth and Jouissance," in *Talking to Brick Walls: A Series of Presentations in the Chapel at Sainte-Anne Hospital*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 17.

25 Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge: Encore, 1972–73*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 87–88.

26 Lacan, 96.

This idea of the unconscious as a knowledge in the Other anchors the epistemological crux of *Oedipus Rex*. Be it the chorus, the Delphic oracle, or divine will, there is unconscious knowledge in the Other. The play realizes Oedipus's acquisition of this knowledge. Oedipus presents a wanting-to-know of this supposed knowledge in the Other. What this knowledge leads to is a death-like crisis. It is ironic that the desire to know the truth eventually eclipses desire and produces an existence that can only inhabit itself as an experience of pain. But this existence is not sustainable, hence Oedipus's ultimate vanishing act.

Harold Bloom states that Oedipus's "necessity of ignorance, lest the reality-principle destroy us," is "the true force of Freud's Oedipus Complex."[27] Like Antigone, there is something akin to a desire for destruction in Oedipus that pushes him onward. The tragedy of desire culminates in a movement of desire towards the death of the *being-there*. As stated above, Oedipus does not simply die but vanishes: "He dies from a true death in which he erases his own being."[28] For Lacan, "Oedipus shows us where the inner limit zone in the relationship to desire ends."[29] This zone is a point "beyond death," as *Oedipus at Colonus* demonstrates. For the Lacan of *Seminar II*, if Oedipus has a psychoanalysis, it only ends with *Oedipus at Colonus* when he fulfils the *parole* of the Other's prophecy and evaporates from the surface of the earth.[30] In Shoshana Felman's words, "he [Oedipus] *assumes the Other*—in himself, he assumes his own *relation* to the discourse of the Other."[31] Once he comes to know the truth, his race is run and he must disappear into the zone of existence without desire where pain prevails.

After he comes to know the truth in *Oedipus Rex*, we see the king repeatedly wanting to exist in the liminal zone between life and death:

27 Harold Bloom, "Introduction," in *Sophocles' Oedipus Rex*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase, 2007), 4.

28 Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 306.

29 Lacan, 306.

30 Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York, W. W. Norton, 1988), 230.

31 Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 133.

> Drive me out of the land at once, far from sight,
> where I can never hear a human voice.[32]

Once again, we see the focus on seeing and hearing here. The desire to be in the zone of true death is complementary to the desire to be hated by the gods: "What man alive more miserable than I? / More hated by the gods?" and "Surely the gods hate me so much—."[33] To conclude this thread, let me say that Oedipus presents a tragedy of desire insofar as human desire is distanced by the Other's desire and in that lies its tragic dimension.

Following the footsteps of the Other—the Oedipal duo of the mother and the father, an examination of the role of the paternal and maternal functions becomes a psychoanalytic curiosity around Sophocles' play. The paternal law prohibits incest and hence it takes an act of patricide to enable it. Let us recall the central lesson Lacan extracts from the Oedipus complex as a structure in *Seminar VI*: the Oedipus complex identifies desire with the locus of the law.[34] This point is made more resoundingly in *Seminar X*:

> The Oedipus myth means nothing but the following—at the origin, desire, as the father's desire, and the law are one and the same thing. The relationship between the law and desire is so tight that only the function of the law traces out the path of desire.[35]

The question of desire in the field of the law introduces the law of the father. Pietro Pucci argues that the father has multiple functions in *Oedipus Rex* and they are represented by the voices of the gods. For him, there are four such paternal figures:

> In *Oedipus Tyrannus* four figures of the father emerge each with its own ideal and imaginary foundations. We recognize (1) the king as a Father of his citizens, (2) Polybus as the provider of cares and affection for the son, (3) Laius as the biolog-

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32 Sophocles, *Three Theban Plays*, 245.
33 Sophocles, 206, 250.
34 Lacan, *Desire and its Interpretation*, 341.
35 Lacan, *Anxiety*, 106.

> ical father, and (4) Apollo—and Teiresias, his priest—as a divine Father insofar as he gives an irrevocable *telos* to the son.[36]

Pucci finds a logocentric aspect to each of these figures. The paternal function thus symbolizes law, authority, meaning—all properties of *logos* or knowledge. But is this *logos* stable? I would argue that there is a substitutability to the father-function in *Oedipus Rex*. To understand this, we have to go into certain modulations that this paternal signifier undergoes in the play.

The chorus is a site for observing the paternal signifier's changing trajectory. For example, it calls divine laws fatherless, declares that the "Olympian sky" is "their only father," and continues:

> Nothing mortal, no man gave them birth,
> their memory deathless, never lost in sleep:
> within them lives a mighty god, the god does not
> grow old.[37]

This passage posits a god as the father who does not have a father. In other words, he is the self-created creator—a fatherless father. Father is thus a signifier that retroactively constructs a myth of origins. It is in this sense that it acquires legal authority and power. Unlike a god as the divine father without a father, all other fathers are replaceable in the play. Father, in a Lacanian sense, becomes more of a function than a figure. The function can change figures; it can go from one figure to another. For a substantial period of time, Oedipus thinks that Polybus is his father and when the messenger brings the news from Corinth that Polybus is no more, both Jocasta and Oedipus breathe a sigh of relief to note that Polybus was not killed by Oedipus. After this, the father function moves from the figure of Polybus to that of Laius.

When the messenger tells Oedipus that Polybus was not his father, he reacts: "My father— / how can my father equal nothing? You're nothing to me!" This co-relation of the father with "nothing" by way of negation is reiterated: "Neither was he, no more your father than I am," and again "No more than I am. He

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36 Pietro Pucci, "What is a Father?," in Bloom, *Sophocles' Oedipus Rex*, 144.

37 Sophocles, *Three Theban Plays*, 209.

and I are equals."[38] To go back to Pucci's central question: What is a father? The father has a Symbolic dimension insofar as his name is a signifier that centralizes the social discourse of patriarchy. In the above quotes, the important point is that the father is defined via negation, i.e. by saying what it is not. For example, the father is nothing or the father is not what the messenger is to Oedipus. The paternal signifier is indeed about to be trashed into nothingness by Oedipus's patricidal act. The metonymic substitutability of the paternal signifier signals this impending annulment.

At another point, the chorus asks Oedipus who his father is:

> Oedipus—
> son, dear child, who bore you?
> Who of the nymphs who seem to live forever
> mated with Pan, the mountain-striding Father?[39]

Pan as the "mountain-striding father" echoes the references to the Delphic rock and its inanimate mouth that articulates the curse on Oedipus. The incest makes sure that the father and the son become replaceable signifiers:

> One and the same wide harbor served you
> son and father both
> son and father came to rest in the same bridal chamber.[40]

As Oedipus becomes the father of his own mother's children, the son shares the same woman as his father. This is another level of metonymic substitution in a chain of paternal signifiers. When Oedipus punishes himself towards the end of the play, he gives the paternal responsibility to Creon: "Oh Creon, you are the only father they have now . . ."[41] So, the paternal nomination once again shifts from Oedipus to Creon as an inhabitable function. Moreover, as mentioned above, thanks to the patricide, Oedipus the father also becomes brother to his children, thereby marking another complexity in the paternal position.

[38] Sophocles, 218.
[39] Sophocles, 224.
[40] Sophocles, 234.
[41] Sophocles, 249.

This unstable father function is a crucial psychoanalytic insight to be gained from Sophocles' drama.

There is a similar instability in the maternal function as it moves from the figure of Merope to Jocasta. The metonymy is between the mother and the wife—two signifiers that generally do not meet on a plane of substitution due to the prohibition of incest. In this case, they become radically substitutable by one another. When Oedipus takes Merope to be his mother, he is still scared about crossing the line, as fated in the prophecy: "But mother lives, so for all your reassurances / I live in fear, I must."[42] The chorus calls Mount Cithaeron Oedipus's "mountain-mother."[43] Calling the birthplace a maternal signifier further opens up the metaphorical field of language in which the mother, like the father, is a circulating signifier. At another point in the play, the mother is also likened metaphorically to the earth.[44] When the chorus wonders who Oedipus's mother could be, we have another substitutive speculation, this time, divine:

> Who was your mother? who, some bride of Apollo
> the god who loves the pastures spreading toward the sun?
> Or was it Hermes, king of the lightning ridges?
> Or Dionysus, lord of frenzy, lord of the barren peaks—
> did he seize you in his hands, dearest of all his lucky finds?—[45]

Let me mark the drift in this speech. From speculating if Oedipus has a divine mother, the chorus swiftly shifts back to the myriad of paternal signifiers here. This not only re-emphasizes my previous point about the metonymy of the father in the signifying chain of language, but also shows the patriarchal inflection of this language. The choric discourse abides by the law of the father and reduces the mother to nothing but a relational identity—"the bride of" either Apollo or Hermes or even Dionysus. This connects the metonymy of the maternal signifier with the metonymy of the patronymic function in the discourse.

42 Sophocles, 215.
43 Sophocles, 224.
44 Sophocles, 236.
45 Sophocles, 224.

When Oedipus articulates his tragic desire for self-punishment, his desire to go back to his maternal abode marks a Freudo-Lacanian signature of the death drive as the wish to return to one's mother's womb:

> As for me,
> never condemn the city of my fathers
> to house my body, not while I'm alive, no,
> let me live on the mountains, on Cithaeron,
> my favorite haunt, I have made it famous.
> Mother and father marked out that rock
> to be my everlasting tomb—buried alive.
> Let me die there, where they tried to kill me.[46]

It is interesting to note how Oedipus identifies the city with his fathers (the multiplicity of father functions, implied by the plural), while Cithaeron is first connected with the mother, and only thereafter the father. Cithaeron is a strange womb-tomb for Oedipus. That is the place where he was found. It is his birthplace and yet it is the same place where his biological father tried to kill him by abandoning him there. It is where Oedipus wants to go back to in his guilt and die. The mother's desire is operative here as the subject's wish to die and be united with the mother. Jocasta, Oedipus's biological mother, is dead by this point. The desire of the mother, controlling Oedipus's final death-wish in a patronymic discourse in which the paternal signifier is forever slipping away, is symbolic of *Oedipus Rex* as a tragedy of alienated desire.

To conclude, in this article we have seen that there exists a constitutive mythical relation between Sophoclean drama and psychoanalysis. I have navigated through Freud's use of *Oedipus Rex* to evoke the moral complexity, the dynamic of ignorance and knowledge, and the interiorization of destiny as an unconscious subjective trajectory. Building on Lacan, I have opened up the psychoanalytic dimension of reading Sophocles' play as a tragedy of desire that highlights affects of guilt, shame, and self-reproach by mapping them onto the body through invocatory and scopic drives. I have used the Lacanian lens further to draw attention to the alienation of human desire in the anchoring force of the Other's desire. I have grounded desire's alterity in the choric discourse as well as

[46] Sophocles, 246.

the Delphic oracles and demonstrated how the paternal and maternal signifiers in the play's discourse indicate instability through substitutions in the complicated metonymy of desire. Oedipus's desire to know finally produces existence without desire as an experience of suffering—and therein lies the tragedy of desire. Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* offers psychoanalysis one of its constitutive myths and, in turn, psychoanalysis allows us to read the central question of desire in tragic drama, in all its knots and impasses.

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Unspeakable: Perversion, Psychoanalysis, *Prosopopoeia*[1]

Keywords
Freud, Lacan, Miller, perversion, psychoanalysis, *prosopopoeia*

Abstract
In order to speak in the voice of "the pervert," psychoanalysis inevitably find itself performing the classic rhetorical act of *prosopopoeia* whereby an imagined, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking. To re-read Jacques-Alain Miller's classic essay "On Perversion" (1996), for example, we find that the pervert is adjudged to be "unspeakable"—in every sense of that word—and so they can only be ventriloquized by the figure of the analyst. If the analyst seeks to speak on behalf of the pervert, however, this essay argues that the perverse speech act is itself a form of *prosopopoeia* which can ventriloquize the subject position of the hysteric, the neurotic, the psychotic, and even the analyst themselves. In conclusion, the essay argues that Miller's account of the relationship between the analyst and the pervert, where each are seen to ventriloquize the other, bespeaks of a certain *prosopopophilia*—a love of *prosopopoeia*—that is the condition of being a speaking subject in the first place: I am always speaking for and as the other—even or especially when I am speaking as "myself."

Neizrekljivo: perverzija, psihoanaliza, prozopopeja

Ključne besede
Freud, Lacan, Miller, perverzija, psihoanaliza, prozopopeja

[1] This essay was first delivered as a paper at the symposium *Perversion and Its Discontents* at the Institute of Philosophy, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, in May 2023. I am very grateful to Boštjan Nedoh for the invitation to speak and to the other participants for their helpful feedback. In what follows, I have preserved the original oral format for reasons that will hopefully become obvious.

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Povzetek

Da bi psihoanaliza spregovorila z glasom »perverzneža«, se neizogibno znajde v klasičnem retoričnem dejanju prozopopeje, v katerem je namišljena, odsotna ali mrtva oseba predstavljena kot govoreča. Če na primer ponovno preberemo klasični esej Jacquesa-Alaina Millerja »O perverziji« (1996), ugotovimo, da je v njem perverznež označen za »neizrekljivega« – v vseh pomenih te besede –, zato ga lahko ventrilokvizira le lik analitika. Medtem ko si analitik prizadeva govoriti v imenu perverzneža, pa pričujoči prispevek trdi, da je perverzno govorno dejanje samo po sebi oblika prozopopeje, ki lahko ventrilokvizira pozicijo subjekta kot histerika, nevrotika, psihotika in celo samega analitika. Na koncu članek trdi, da Millerjev opis odnosa med analitikom in perverznežem, v katerem vsak od njiju ventrilokvizira drugega, kaže na določeno prozopofilijo – ljubezen do prozopopeje –, ki je pogoj za to, da smo sploh govoreči subjekt: vselej govorim za drugega in kot drugi – tudi ali predvsem takrat, ko govorim kot »jaz sam«.

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In this paper, I would like to tell you why I am so happy to be here today. It's not because I enjoy talking about psychoanalysis or anything like that. As a matter of fact, psychoanalysis doesn't make people like me happy at all: we really have nothing to say to the likes of you and, quite honestly, we find all your theoretical gobbledygook boring and ridiculous. To tell you the truth—which is the kind of nauseating personal "confession" I know people like you really want to hear—I am happy to be here at this symposium on perversion for one reason only: *I am a pervert*. If you psychoanalysts know anything about us perverts, after all, it is that we are happy wherever we are: we perverts just love being perverts; we feel no guilt, shame, or trauma; we experience no lack, no lost or missing object; we heroically act *on* our perversion in the real world rather than pathetically acting it out in fantasy or therapy; we exist in the now of a permanent *jouissance* rather than in the infinite regress of the chain of desire; and we ask no question to which that mythical "subject supposed to know" called the analyst is supposed to have an answer, because we already know the answer ourselves. For psychoanalysis, we perverts thus belong to that set of hopeless, incurable cases that are simply deemed unanalyzable—like psychotics or the Irish.[2] Did I mention that

[2] See Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* (2006) for the most recent iteration of Freud's (probably apocryphal) animus towards the Irish. In the film, Matt Damon's character states that

I'm Irish, too, by the way? In our incurable happiness, though, I'm sorry to say that we perverts seem to make you psychoanalysts very unhappy indeed, but please don't be sad because (like one of my illustrious predecessors) I am here to teach you how you can be more like us: *Encore un effort*, psychoanalysts, if you want to be perverts!

To speak in the voice of "the pervert" which I will be trying, more or less unconvincingly, to do in this paper, we inevitably find ourselves performing the classic rhetorical act of *prosopopoeia* (προσωποποιία, from the Greek *prosopon* [πρόσωπον, face] and *poiein* [ποιειν, to make]) whereby an imagined, absent, or dead person or inhuman thing is represented as speaking or acting. It is possible, of course, to see the entire history of psychoanalysis as a series of (more or less convincing) ventriloquisms of the master's voice whereby Lacan speaks for Freud, Žižek for Lacan, and so on, but arguably the pervert alone remains, in every sense of the word, *unspeakable*. As is well known, perverts pose a peculiar empirical problem for the psychoanalyst insofar as they rarely present themselves for analysis in the first place and so can only be spoken *for*, around and about, or on behalf of, by the (emphatically non-perverse) analyst. For psychoanalysts, though, perverts also constitute a more serious theoretical problem for the analytic process itself because their real problem is that they seem to have no problem with their problem or, even worse still, they really may not have a problem in the first place: they simply exist, Zen-like, in the silence of pure *jouissance*. If the pervert unproblematically enjoys their own symptom, which is thus not even a "symptom" anymore, this state of blissed out beatitude threatens to render the analyst figuratively and literally redundant: what nineteenth-century psychiatry notoriously diagnosed as the incurable pervert who is happy in their perversion may thus be the harbinger of that other aggressively anti-psychoanalytic figure who can be found at the other end of the Freudian century, namely, the serotonin-enhanced subject of modern psychopharmacology. In this singularly unhappy state of affairs, perversion not only "disappears on the couch," as Jacques-Alain Miller puts it in a classic essay, but also threatens to make the analytic couch *itself* disappear.[3]

"What Freud said about the Irish is, we're the only people who are impervious to psychoanalysis."

3 Jacques-Alain Miller, "On Perversion," in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jannus (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 306–20.

This paper is a set of more or less perverse speech acts, written in response to Jacques-Alain Miller's "On Perversion" (1996), on the curiously asymmetrical dialogue, or perhaps internal monologue, between the psychoanalyst and the pervert. To be sure, Miller's famous talk may be read as the classic, even symptomatic, act of perverse *prosopopoeia*, because despite or because of the pervert's acknowledged inaccessibility to analytic scrutiny, he proceeds very happily to analyze this most unanalyzable of subjects. It is apparently no problem at all that the pervert doesn't "ask to undergo analysis," Miller alleges, nor that they "cannot communicate" their knowledge of sexual enjoyment to others, nor even that they prefer the company of "a tiny, secret society of initiates"[4] to the (presumably) endless cocktail party that is the social life of a Lacanian psychoanalyst. As Tim Deans argues in an excellent essay on Lacanianism and perversity, none of this matters because the "absence of perverts in analysis allows one to say whatever s/he wishes about them."[5] For Miller, predictably enough, what he wishes to say about the pervert is that their so-called "happiness" is really just the misrecognized or disavowed symptom of a pathology which, as Freud himself had argued almost a century earlier in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), takes its pleasure from the "wrong" object: "he [the pervert] has found sexual gratification," the former concludes, "but it is not the right kind."[6] Yet, it is possible to argue that Miller's essay also manifests a certain *Unbehagen*—a *mal-être*, discontent, perhaps even another "wrong" kind of happiness—with its own happy *prosopopoeia* of perversion: "perversion throws the analyst's most intimate judgment into question," he confesses, "throwing into question the point up to which he himself has moved on the path of sexual enjoyment."[7] If the analyst ultimately fails to convincingly speak for the pervert, this paper will propose that it may not be because the latter is incurably silent, resistant, or unspeakable, but rather because (and as Miller obliquely appears

4 Miller, 306–9.

5 Tim Deans, "The Frozen Countenance of the Perversions," *Parallax* 14, no. 2 (2008): 102, https://doi.org/10.1080/13534640801990608. In Deans's own verdict upon Miller's essay, to which I am obviously indebted in what follows, "The so-called pervert's basic satisfaction, his sense of not needing psychoanalysis to make him happy, is being construed as potentially pathological. It is not only that perverts stay away from analysis because of a history of mistreatment, but also that allegedly perverse modes of enjoyment are seen as a rebuke to analytic know-how. In appearing as untroubled, the happy pervert apparently troubles the psychoanalyst" (Deans, 101).

6 Miller, "On Perversion," 309.

7 Miller, 308.

to suggest here) the pervert speaks for *them*: what I wish to hypothesize here is that perversity is itself a kind of *prosopopoeia*, which is uncannily able to ventriloquize the voice of analysis itself, and which (like all acts of ventriloquism) carries with it the existential risk of irony, parody, mechanical repetition, redundancy, and even death for its victim. In the remarkable conclusion to Miller's essay, where the subject supposed to know finds themselves asking the question of their own enjoyment and the subject who is supposed to have a question finds that they already know the answer, the pervert thus disappears from the analysand's couch only to reappear in the analyst's chair speaking, as it were, *ex cathedra* (literally, "from the chair"). Who or what, then, speaks in the voice of the pervert?

"How very interesting"

In the same way as Michel Foucault's history of madness, the psychoanalytic history of perversion seems to be the history of a silence.[8] It has already been noted by Deans, for instance, that Freud's case histories contain "clinical testimony from several hysterics (Dora, Anna O., Emmy von N., etc.), from two obsessional neurotics (Rat Man, Wolf Man), from one phobic (Little Hans), and indirectly from a distinguished psychotic (Schreber)," but the pervert, alone, never speaks in their own voice.[9] At one level, of course, the early Freud's ambition is precisely to explode the nineteenth-century sexological theory (descending from Krafft-Ebing, Moll et al.) that there is a generic psychosexual personality type called the "pervert": everyone and everything is perverse.[10] Yet, despite or because of perversity's unspeakable universality, everything still proceeds in his early work as if there really were an individuated subject of perversion, typically diagnosed as an "invert" or homosexual, whose determined pathological symptoms can be made to speak for them. To briefly rehearse his essay on "The Sexual Aberrations," which is the first of his classic *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud famously argues that sexual perversions are either "(*a*) actions of *extending*, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union; or (*b*) actions of *lingering* over the in-

8 Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961).

9 Deans, "Frozen Countenance," 99.

10 In Miller's gloss upon the early Freud, perversity is the norm of the drive: "Perversion is natural, that is, primary. Perversion is more primal than the norm, that norm being secondary or even cultural." Miller, "On Perversion," 313.

termediate relations to the sexual object normally rapidly traversed on the path towards the final sexual aim."[11] While Freud's definition of perversity is notoriously broad enough to encompass such apparently "normal" sexual practices as gazing, kissing, or foreplay, which all derogate from the territory of strict genital copulation for the purposes of reproduction, he then goes on to identify a qualitative threshold beyond which the "normally" perverse becomes positively pathological: what defines perversion as a pathological symptom is a certain spatial or temporal *fixity* [*der Fixierung*] that leads it to not merely supplement but to wholly substitute itself for the normalized sexual activity of heterosexual intercourse.[12] In their pathological "stuckness" upon their enjoyment which leads them to say "no" to any supposedly normal sexual object or aim, the pervert allegedly begins to speak their own symptom for the first time.

To make the pervert "speak" in and as themselves for the first time in history, however, Freud must ironically become the original unhappy or discontented perverse *ventriloquist*. It has already been observed by Arnold Davidson, amongst others, that his allegedly universal theory of perversion ironically ends up reproducing, albeit without the residual moralism, the discredited psychosexual subject positions of many of his sexological predecessors.[13] As "The Sexual Aberrations" makes abundantly clear, Freud's pervert remains more or less synonymous with historically overdetermined figures like the "invert" or homosexual and this gesture will persist into Lacanianism as well: the homosexual is taken to speak for "perversity in general." However, we can already begin to glimpse the ventriloquist's own lips moving when Freud himself acknowledges that, in the majority of cases, we can only "discern the pathological character in perversions not in the content [*Inhalt*] of the new sexual aim, but in its relation [*Verhältnis*] to the normal."[14] For Freud, at least according to the strict letter of his text if not perhaps its normalizing spirit, the pervert thus appears to occupy a kind of libidinal empty place which subtracts itself from any determined psychosexual subject position or object choice into a pure and empty relationality: what they enjoy is explicitly not some positive sexual "content," e.g., ho-

11 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition*, ed. Philippe van Haute and Herman Westerink, trans. Ulrike Kistner (London: Verso, 2016), 13.

12 Freud, 22.

13 See, for example, Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

14 Freud, *Three Essays*, 22.

mosexuality et al., but what we might call the negative, virtual, or potential set of "relations" between drives, attachments, and objects. If the pervert only exists in the interstices between libidinal subject positions, which is to say as the possible extension, variation, supplementation, or substitution of every single position in the sexual field by every other, then they can occupy no (normal or perverse) position of their "own": they are, constitutively, what is out of place. In the very historical moment when they are first called upon to speak in their own voice, Freud's pervert reveals themselves as a kind of libidinal Bartleby: they would prefer not to be analyzed.

In Freud's once obscure but now somewhat notorious late case study "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920), a case which should, according to his own clinical criteria, be almost a textbook study in perversion, what we might call the perverse analysand's empirical and theoretical *undiagnosability*, as opposed to any positive symptomatic behavior, revealingly becomes the non-symptomatic symptom of their perversity.[15] To recall Freud's own diagnostic process of more or less total elimination in this case study, the young woman who is its subject is (uniquely amongst such studies) neither named nor given a pseudonym but remains entirely anonymous; she is said to be "not in any way ill [. . .] nor did she complain of her condition"; she is judged to be both "brazen" and "deceitful" in her exhibition of her homosexuality; she is said to have no desire to undergo analysis voluntarily and barely engages with the analytic process; she has, according to him, "never been neurotic, and came to the analysis without even one hysterical symptom," indeed, by the end, it is not clear whether she is even homosexual and, of course, the word "pervert" never appears anywhere in his text.[16] It is thus hardly surprising that feminist and queer readers of this essay object that Freud reduces the young woman to a kind of ventriloquist's dummy or mouthpiece for his own heteronormative speculations about the alleged "causes" of her homosexuality.[17] As we have already begun to see in the case of "The Sexual Aberrations," though, we arguably find the pervert

[15] See also Deans's discussion of the same essay in "Frozen Countenance," 99–100.

[16] Sigmund Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman (1920)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 18:146–72.

[17] See, for example, the essays collected in Ronnie C. Lesser and Erica Schoenberg, eds., *That Obscure Subject of Desire: Freud's Female Homosexual Revisited* (Philadelphia: Routledge, 1999).

in the unhappy gaps or lacunae —the discontents—which haunt Freud's own relentless will to normalization. For Freud, what comes to define the subject position of the pervert in this text is precisely an oscillation between other more determined subject positions, speech acts, or language games and, in particular, between the positions of the hysterical and obsessional neurotic and their own defining enunciations of lying by telling the truth and telling the truth by lying. If the pervert is thus characterized by a kind of undiagnosability, Freud's account of the young woman's curious engagement, or rather lack of engagement with the analytic process itself, perhaps helps us to glimpse why this might be: "Once when I expounded to her a specially important part of the theory, one touching her nearly," he recalls, "she replied in an inimitable tone, 'How very interesting,' as though she were a *grande dame* being taken over a museum and glancing through her lorgnon at objects to which she was completely indifferent."[18] In Freud's own normalizing interpretation, the young woman's merely academic interest in the process of analysis is nothing more than a classic act of resistance, which he describes as a kind of analytic equivalent to the "Russian tactics" in warfare of retreating or withdrawing to a position that proves unconquerable,[19] but it is at least possible to wonder whether her real position is ironically closer to the classic German military tactic of attacking what Carl von Clausewitz calls the enemy's *Schwerpunkt* or "center of gravity":[20] what arguably disarms Freud here is that this young woman—who exhibits an analyst's theoretical or conceptual mastery of the analytic process but signally lacks any sense that she personally is the analysand—is actually speaking in the voice of the *analyst*.

"I always lie"

In the opening pages of his paper "On Perversion" (1996), which was originally delivered as a talk to the Paris-New York Psychoanalytic Workshop, Jacques-Alain Miller briefly laments that the pervert simply never presents themselves

18 Freud, "Psychogenesis," 163.

19 See Mary Jacobus, "Russian Tactics: Freud's 'Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,'" *GLQ* 2, nos. 1 and 2 (1995): 65–79, https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2-1_and_2-65, for an account of the "Russian" metaphor in Freud. In the *Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality*, Freud revealingly associates this form of resistance with obsessional neurosis rather than perversion.

20 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

for analysis ("We might conclude that perverts are unanalyzable, but the fact is they simply don't come asking to undergo analysis")[21] before immediately proceeding to speak, nevertheless, of a figure we will term the "perverse analysand." It is revealing that the Lacanian theory of perversion has even less of a basis in empirical observation than its Freudian predecessor: Lacan's own classic example of a real, live "perverse analysand" is the distinguished, but sadly no longer empirical, figure of the Marquis de Sade.[22] As Miller himself observes, the psychoanalyst's hunt for the elusive figure of the pervert inevitably seems to lead away from "reality" and into the field of literature. "No other clinical structure involves as many literary references as perversion,"[23] but this insight never leads to sustained reflection on why the space in which people, by definition, can only ever speak on behalf of the other should also be the privileged place of the pervert. To explain why perverts do not come to analysis in the first place, Miller speculates that they are something close to the opposite of, say, neurotics, who present themselves in order "to seek out the lost object": the pervert, on the contrary, believes that "they have found it [the object]" and so "can expect nothing from analysis."[24] For Miller, every analysand needs "a certain void or deficit in the place of sexual enjoyment" to want to undergo analysis in the first place, but the pervert instead experiences something close to *a void of a void* of enjoyment that he calls the "inertia" of *jouissance*: "The pervert has the answer," he writes, "an immutable, constant share that is always ready to use it is *at hand*, an *at hand* enjoyment."[25] If the pervert feels that they do not need analysis because they are already happy, which is to say they desire nothing because enjoyment is always easily within reach, Miller goes on to contend that they, nonetheless, suffer from a lack of satisfaction with "satisfaction" itself. In the analytic process, Miller confidently predicts, the allegedly happy pervert would surely discover that their "right" object of pleasure was the wrong object all along or, better still, that every object is somehow wrong and so, like every other unhappy analysand, they really do have a question to which the analyst may be supposed to have an answer: "The pervert has found the object, that is his problem; he is certain about his ways of obtaining sexual gratification, but that is not why he comes to analysis," he declares, "Perhaps he feels it is not what it ought to be;

21 Miller, "On Perversion," 309.
22 See Deans, "Frozen Countenance," 101–2.
23 Miller, "On Perversion," 312.
24 Miller, 309.
25 Miller, 310.

he has found sexual gratification but it is not the right kind. Either you don't find it, or if you do, it is not the right kind."[26]

To speak of this paradoxical (indeed almost oxymoronic) figure of the "perverse analysand," whose very lack of any reason to undergo analysis becomes the very reason *why* they need it, what Miller really seems to be talking about is not a "real" empirical subject so much as a hypothetical indeed even fictional placeholder in his own thought experiment: "He do the pervert," to misquote Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, "in different voices." It is inevitable that we analysts must end up speaking for perverts, he argues, because even on the vanishingly rare occasions that a real live perverse analysand presents themselves at our clinics they remain curiously absent: "either perversion disappears on the couch, or the patient disappears from the couch."[27] According to Miller's account of his own clinical practice, his perverse analysands are inevitably homosexuals once again who have courageously broken out of the diminishing circle of pure enjoyment to begin the process of seeking the truth of their desire: "We are," he ventriloquizes his perverse clientele, "among the most honest, the most truth-seeking, the most self-searching patients."[28] However, the truth Miller's perverse analysand has come to tell, paradoxically, is that all perverts are pathological liars. If perverts are empirically unanalyzable, then anyone who comes to analysis and claims to be a pervert is, almost by definition, not a "real" pervert but something else: a neurotic, a psychotic, perhaps even (to recall Freud's encounter with the young woman again) a kind of wannabe analyst who thinks they know better than the subject supposed to know and is engaging in a rash or precipitate act of self-diagnosis. For Miller, in what could almost be a verbatim quotation from Freud's case study of the brazen but deceitful young homosexual woman, any analysand who openly diagnoses themselves as a pervert is thus automatically suspicious: "You mustn't take at face value the subject's announcement that he is a homosexual," he warns, "One man may believe he is a homosexual because he slept with a boy once when he was fourteen, and another may believe he is not a homosexual even though he sleeps with two or three different boys a week."[29] In Judith Feher-Gurewich's verdict, which takes

[26] Miller, 309.
[27] Miller, 309.
[28] Miller, 307.
[29] Miller, 308.

Miller's professional skepticism about the self-diagnosis of the perverse analysand to its logical conclusion, the only "true" pervert, if indeed they exist, is the analysand who *lies* about being a pervert: "I have not yet encountered the rare specimen who would admit to being a pervert."[30]

In their pathological commitment to telling the truth that they are lying or lying that they are telling the truth, the perverse analysand thus becomes a kind of Lacanian equivalent to Aristotle's notorious Cretan liar: "I am a pervert," they tell their analyst, "and all perverts are liars." To say a statement like "I am a liar," as Lacan famously reminds us in Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), we do not necessarily fall into the classic logical contradiction described by the Greek philosopher because there is always a structural gap or interval between what he calls the "enunciating subject," who speaks a statement in the first place, and the "subject of enunciation," who is spoken of or about in the statement itself: I can thus still speak the truth that "I am a liar" without fear of self-contradiction even or especially if the "I" that I happen to be speaking about in the statement is said to be "a liar." It is the particular task of the analyst, Lacan argues, to retroactively construct the enunciating subject, who may well be telling the truth of their desire, from the subject of enunciation, who may equally be a pathological liar, by an act of ventriloquism which sends back the enunciation to the enunciator albeit in an inverted form: "He says to him—*in this* I am deceiving you, *what you are sending as a message is what* I *express to you, and in doing so you are telling the truth*."[31] As Slavoj Žižek elaborates, the liar's paradox typically expresses itself in two ways in analysis: a hysterical neurotic will, for example, be revealed as a subject who lies about their desire by telling the truth ("I really didn't kill him, officer, but, between you and me, he is my worst enemy and I've been wishing him dead for years!"), whereas an obsessional neurotic will be revealed as a subject who speaks the truth of their desire in the form of a lie ("I hereby declare this meeting closed, sorry, I meant to say open!").[32] For Miller, though, what is remarkable about the

[30] Judith Feher-Gurewich, "A Lacanian Approach to the Logic of Perversion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 191. See also Deans, "Frozen Countenance," 102–3.

[31] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 139–40.

[32] Slavoj Žižek, "Desire: Drive=Truth: Knowledge," *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*, no. 1 (1997): 147–52.

perverts he treats in his own clinic (who say "I am homosexual" even though they had one isolated same-sex experience in their youth or, alternatively, say "I am heterosexual" despite having same-sex encounters every week) is that they seem to shuttle or oscillate undecidably between the polarities of the hysterical and obsessive neurotic (between lying to tell the truth and telling the truth to lie) so that it becomes impossible to determine what, if anything, their original or "true" subject position may be*: they are neither telling the truth nor lying*. If the analyst seeks to ventriloquize the pervert's statement to reveal the truth of their desire to give them back their "own" voice by speaking back to them, they are ventriloquizing what is *itself* an originary act of self-ventriloquism or *prosopopoeia*: the pervert never speaks in their own voice but, so to speak, in place, or on behalf, of the pervert. In Mladen Dolar's arresting phrase, which is itself a ventriloquism of Plutarch, the floating or subjectless speech act called the pervert is "a voice and nothing more [*vox et praeterea nihil*]."[33]

"Is that to say that the analyst is a pervert?"

In *taking the place of the subject who takes the place of* the pervert, which I would argue is, more or less, the ambiguous position occupied by Freud's young homosexual woman as well as Miller's own homosexual men, the pervert once again begins to encroach upon or occupy the subject position of the analyst themselves: they both claim to speak, more or less knowledgeably and authoritatively, *on behalf of* the pervert. To explore this obscure structural affinity between the pervert and the psychoanalyst, which persists in spite or perhaps because of their mutual contempt, to its end, I want to conclude by returning to Miller's fascinating and speculative conclusion to his essay "On Perversion" where he openly, if briefly, hypothesizes about the possibility of what we might call a "perverse analyst": "Let us conclude on this point," he tells his audience, "if the true pervert makes himself be object *a*, we can very simply deduce from Lacan's formula why it is incompatible with analysis. The analyst, in the analytic operation, makes himself be object *a*. Is that to say that the analyst is a pervert? Certainly not."[34] It is at this point, unhappily, that we must begin to ventriloquize the ventriloquist themselves because Miller himself is forced to stop speaking due to a lack of time. As he is obviously recalling here, though, the Lacanian

33 Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006).

34 Miller, "On Perversion," 318.

pervert is famously characterized by the operation of "disavowal [*Verleugnung*]" (and in particular the disavowal of castration by the father), which allegedly leads them not to pursue their own enjoyment, but rather to become the object or instrument of the other's (and in the first instance the mother's) *jouissance*.[35] Yet, in the process of analysis, as Dominik Hoens also observes, this is precisely the stance or position that the analyst themselves must take vis-à-vis the pervert: they must make themselves, via the process of transference, the perverse analysand's, and arguably every analysand's, object *a*.[36] If the Lacanian pervert remains in some sense genuinely unanalyzable, however, Miller's remarkable conclusion here is thus that it may not be because of the old Freudian saw that they are far more aggressively resistant to analysis than the hysterical or obsessional neurotic—what could be *more* analyzable, after all, than a classic strategy of resistance?—but because, as I have proposed throughout this essay, they are, in a certain sense, singularly *open* to, indeed already *in*, analysis: the pervert, lacking any determined clinical position of their own from which to speak, usurps the classic subject position of the analyst themselves as the one who speaks *for* the pervert. In their most audacious act of self-*prosopopoeia*, then, the pervert is unanalyzable because they are *already* speaking from the structural position of the analyst: they make themselves the instrument of the very subject who is supposed to be the instrument of them.

To bring "On Perversion" to a close, Miller thus finally begins to speak about the pervert as a species of analyst, but this makes it all the more curious that he appears to disavow, and I use this term advisedly, the counter-factual hypothesis that the analyst themselves may be a "pervert." It is sometimes argued that the curious Lacanian fixation upon the homosexual as the privileged form of the pervert is a manifestation of the very symptom they seek to diagnose in their perverse analysands, namely, disavowal: "*I know very well that human sexuality is perverse*," Deans parodies the Lacanian analyst, "*but all the same only some*

[35] See Jacques Lacan, *La relation d'objet, 1956–1957* (Paris: Seuil, 1994); Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2016); Jacques Lacan, "Kant with Sade," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 623–44, amongst the many discussions of structural perversion in his work.

[36] Dominik Hoens, "Towards a New Perversion: Psychoanalysis," in *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 88–103.

subjects may be classified as perverts."[37] Accordingly, it is tempting to diagnose Miller's simultaneous denial and admission, which is to say disavowal, of the possibility that the analyst themselves may be perverse as a symptom of their *own* perversity: "The analyst [. . .] makes himself be object *a*," he concedes, but adds "Is that to say that the analyst is a pervert? Certainly not." Yet, I don't want to go down the somewhat banal and predictable route of triumphantly diagnosing the psychoanalyst as a pervert here—which would risk confirming the essential rectitude of the diagnostic category of perversion in the first place, as if it really did exist "out there" in some proper place—but to describe what we may call the theatre of originary *prosopopoeia*, of a necessary placelessness which can only be ventriloquized by the other, in which pervert and analyst alike are compelled to perform. For Miller, presumably, any analyst who makes themselves an object *a* would still not be a real pervert because, as we saw earlier, they are only speaking back or ventriloquizing the pervert's enunciation for them so as to reveal, in inverted form, what the latter is really saying: they are, so to speak, speaking the truth of the pervert's own speech act. If Miller thus appears to be speaking as an analyst amongst analysts when he speaks about the act of ventriloquizing the pervert, however, I cannot help but be struck by the fact that, strictly speaking, what he is really doing here is *ventriloquizing the analyst*: he is speaking the truth of the analyst's own, apparently now untrue or lying, statement or enunciation ("The analyst [. . .] makes himself be object *a*,") back to the analyst in a further inversion of the latter's own inversion of the pervert's statement ("*Is that to say* that the analyst is a pervert? Certainly not."[38] Who exactly, then, is speaking for whom in this curious libidinal echo chamber, the pervert, the analyst, the pervert or analyst's super-ego, or perhaps just the "it speaks" (*la ça parle*) of *prosopopoeia* itself?[39] In ventriloquizing the analyst ventriloquizing the pervert ventriloquizing the analyst, Miller's essay arguably symptomizes what we might call the structural *prosopopophilia*, which is to say the (perverse) love of *prosopopoeia* itself that is, in Lacanianism, the condition of being a speaking subject in the first place: I am always speaking for and as the other even or especially when I am speaking as "myself."

37 Tim Deans, "Frozen Countenance," 107.

38 Miller, "On Perversion," 318; italics added.

39 For a classic study of *prosopopoeia*, see Paul de Man, "Autobiography as Defacement," *MLN* 94, no. 5 (December 1979): 919–30, https://doi.org/10.2307/2906560.

In conclusion, though, I want to go back to what I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted: I'm here to make you happy. It's really my vocation in life, making people happy, and so I won't take "no" for an answer. After all, you and I have so much in common: we are both experts in our respective fields, we both prefer the company of our little group of initiates to the ridiculous moralism of "normal" society and, let's be honest, we both get our kicks in the same way: putting masks or faces on, role-playing games, fetishes and all that kinky stuff. To tell you the truth, though, what makes me happiest of all is making *you* happy, so please don't be shy about saying what it is you really want from me: I can be a psychotic, a hysteric, or a neurotic and I'm even willing to be the instrument of your *jouissance*—your very own *objet a*—if you want me to talk dirty to you. If you don't want to say anything at all, though, please don't feel embarrassed: I feel like we're getting to know each other so well now that I can already guess what you are going to say and, frankly, I think I can say it better myself anyway. In any case, please just lie back on the couch, make yourself comfortable, and take a deep breath—I promise this won't hurt a bit. So . . . are you happy now?

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The Drive of Capital: Freudo-Marxism's Dialectical Materialism

Keywords
Luria, Vygotsky, Reich, Fenichel, Marcuse, Freud, Lacan, Marxism, psychoanalysis, drive

Abstract
Especially during the brief post-revolutionary period before the rise of Stalinism, certain thinkers in the Soviet milieu offered some attention-worthy reflections regarding Freud's body of work. In particular, Luria and Vygotsky put forward thoughtful Marxism-informed assessments of the metapsychology and methodology of psychoanalysis. And strong cross-resonances are audible between these Soviet thinkers' reflections and the early stages of Western Marxism's rapprochement with Freud, starting in texts by Reich and Fenichel and continuing with the Frankfurt School, of whose members Marcuse arguably furnishes the most sophisticated and sustained engagement with analysis. In this essay, I argue that Luria, Vygotsky, Reich, Fenichel, and Marcuse share in common a fundamentally correct insight according to which the theory of drive (*Trieb*) is a load-bearing pillar for any psychoanalytic Marxism. Moreover, not only is the Freudian metapsychological concept of drive applicable to and productive of Marxism and its form(s) of materialism—echoing Lacan's claim that Marx invented the symptom, I contend, here and elsewhere, that Marx's mature critique of political economy already anticipates the later analytic idea of *Trieb*. In fact, I would go so far as to credit Marx with (also) being the inventor of the analytic drive (albeit *avant la lettre*).

Gon kapitala: dialektični materializem freudo-marksizma

Ključne besede
Luria, Vigotski, Reich, Fenichel, Marcuse, Freud, Lacan, marksizem, psihoanaliza, gon

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Povzetek

Predvsem v kratkem porevolucijskem obdobju pred vzponom stalinizma so nekateri misleci v sovjetskem okolju ponudili nekaj pozornosti vrednih razmislekov o Freudovem delu. Zlasti Lurija in Vigotski sta podala premišljene, z marksizmom podprte ocene metapsihologije in metodologije psihoanalize. Med razmišljanji teh sovjetskih mislecev in zgodnjimi fazami približevanja zahodnega marksizma Freudu, začenši z besedili Reicha in Fenichela ter Frankfurtsko šolo, med katere člani Marcuse podaja verjetno najbolj izpopolnjen in trajnosten angažma do analize, je slišati močno navzkrižno sozvočje. V tem eseju trdim, da je Luriji, Vigotskemu, Reichu, Fenichelu in Marcuseju skupno temeljno pravilno spoznanje, po katerem je teorija gona (*Trieb*) nosilni steber vsakega psihoanalitičnega marksizma. Še več, ne le da je freudovski metapsihološki koncept nagona uporaben in produktiven za marksizem in njegove oblike materializma – v skladu z Lacanovo trditvijo, da je Marx izumil simptom, tu in drugod trdim, da Marxova zrela kritika politične ekonomije že anticipira kasnejšo analitično idejo *Trieb*. Pravzaprav bi šel tako daleč, da bi Marxu pripisal, da je (tudi) izumitelj analitičnega gona (čeprav *avant la lettre*).

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Certain thinkers in the Soviet milieu, during the brief post-revolutionary period between 1917 and the rise of Stalinism, offer some still-attention-worthy reflections regarding Sigmund Freud's body of work. In particular, Alexander Luria and Lev Vygotsky put forward thoughtful Marxism-informed assessments of the metapsychology and methodology of psychoanalysis. And strong cross-resonances are audible between these Soviet thinkers' reflections and the early stages of Western Marxism's rapprochement with Freud, starting in texts by Wilhelm Reich and Otto Fenichel and continuing with the Frankfurt School,[1] of whose members Herbert Marcuse arguably furnishes the most sophisticated and sustained engagement with analysis (incidentally, Reich claims that Freud's criticisms of communism in *Civilization and Its Discontents* were responses to his [Reich's] Marxism).[2]

1 Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 86.

2 Paul A. Robinson, *The Freudian Left: Wilhelm Reich, Geza Roheim, Herbert Marcuse* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 31–32, 36–37; Russell Jacoby, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Political Freudians* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 80.

Martin A. Miller, at one point in his 1998 study *Freud and the Bolsheviks: Psychoanalysis in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union*, pivots from doing history to engaging in theory. He interjects into his historical narrative an argument according to which all efforts to marry Marxism and psychoanalysis, including those attempted in the Russian and Soviet settings, are doomed to inevitable failure. In Miller's assessment, Freudianism's purported focus on clinically treating individual psycho-sexual pathologies, allegedly ineliminable by any socio-political changes, renders it fundamentally incompatible with Marxist and Bolshevik positions.[3]

Luria and Vygotsky themselves furnish powerful counter-arguments against Miller's sort of assessment. In a co-authored introduction to the 1925 Russian translation of Freud's 1920 *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, they write optimistically of how "a new and original trend in psychoanalysis is beginning to form in Russia," one that "attempts to synthesize Freudian psychology and Marxism [. . .] in the spirit of dialectical materialism."[4] What might have resulted from this 1920s Russian analytic trend if it had not been snuffed out by the effects of Stalinism in the immediately following years? I now will turn to the details of Luria's and Vygotsky's Marxist reflections on Freudian psychoanalysis, with particular attention to be devoted to the former's extended 1925 essay "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology."

Luria begins his thorough 1925 Marxist examination of psychoanalysis by asserting the trans-disciplinary validity of dialectical materialism.[5] By "dialectical materialism," he clearly has in mind the Friedrich Engels of *Anti-Dühring*, *Dialectics of Nature*, and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*. More precisely, Luria, in line with and appealing to this Engels, characterizes dialectical materialism as a "materialist monism" of an always-in-process inextricable intertwining of all things, an ever-fluctuating

3 Martin A. Miller, *Freud and the Bolsheviks: Psychoanalysis in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 96–97.

4 Lev Vygotsky and Alexander Luria, "Introduction to the Russian Translation of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*," in *The Vygotsky Reader*, ed. René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner, trans. René van de Veer and Theresa Prout (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 11.

5 Alexander Luria, "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology," *Soviet Psychology* 16, no. 2 (1977): 8, http://doi.org/10.2753/RPO1061-040516027.

organic whole of cross-resonating parts.[6] Vygotsky likewise associates dialectical materialism with an emphasis on "development" as change, process, transformation, etc.[7] This development also is said by him to exhibit: irregular staccato rhythms; unevenness between its various unfolding levels; complex reciprocal interconnections between its constituents; and revolutionary abruptness as well as evolutionary gradualness.[8]

Whether knowingly or not, Louis Althusser later echoes Luria. In particular, Althusser repeatedly subsumes psychoanalysis under the overarching intellectual authority of historical and/or dialectical materialism. He asserts that "*no theory of psychoanalysis can be produced without basing it in historical materialism*."[9] Additionally, Althusser anticipates historical materialism, in conjunction with advances in biology, playing a key role in making possible future "discoveries that will one day allow the elaboration of the scientific theory of the unconscious."[10] He also avows that "Freud, exactly, like Marx, offers us the example of a *materialist and dialectical* thought."[11] Hence, Freudian psychoanalysis would be ready-made for absorption into the enveloping framework of Marxist materialism.

Althusser's most emphatic and elaborate version of the gesture of situating psychoanalysis within the wider jurisdiction of historical/dialectical materialism is laid out in his 1966 "Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses." Therein, Althusser rather uncontroversially defines psychoanalysis as a theory of the unconscious. But, more controversially, he then maintains that psychoanalysis de-

6 Luria, 8–10, 13; Adrian Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism, Volume Two: A Weak Nature Alone* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 73–136.

7 Lev Vygotsky, "Problems of Method," in *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 64–65.

8 Vygotsky, 73

9 Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan," in *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, ed. Oliver Corpet and François Matheron, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 32.

10 Louis Althusser, "The Discovery of Dr. Freud," in Corpet and Matheron, *Writings on Psychoanalysis*, 103; Johnston, *Future Materialism, Volume Two*, 137–53.

11 Althusser, "Discovery of Dr. Freud," 107.

fined thusly is a "regional theory" in need of a "general theory," with the latter as a ground establishing the scientificity of the former.[12]

Bringing Jacques Lacan into the picture along with Freud, Althusser, in 1966, sketches a hierarchy of theories. Within this hierarchy, the regional theory of psychoanalysis is subsumed under the general theory of the signifier (as per Lacanianism). Then, the general theory of the signifier is, in turn, itself subsumed under the even more general theory of historical materialism.[13]

Thereby, historical materialism once again is put forward by Althusser as grounding the Freudian field.[14] One of the justifications for all this in "Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses" is Althusser's contention that the analytic unconscious is, in part, a "subject-effect" of ideologies, with their discourses and practices, turning individuals into (heteronomous) subjects (*qua* subjected) via interpellations.[15] Hence, for this Althusser, historical materialism's critical analyses of ideologies, appropriately informed by a structuralism-inspired general-semiological account of signifiers, would offer access to the preconditions and underpinnings of the unconscious and, with it, of psychoanalysis as the "science of the unconscious."

Well before Althusser, and without Althusser's reliance on structuralism, Lacan, etc., Luria already could be said, like the French Marxist, to also situate psychoanalysis as a regional theory within the general theory of Marxist materialism. Luria insists that the psy- disciplines, including psychoanalysis, need dialectical materialism in order to be truly scientific[16] (Reich similarly insists that psychoanalysis can supplement, but not replace, "sociology" *qua* the explanatory jurisdiction of Marxist materialism).[17] Such scientificity would involve synthesizing elements from both biology and historical materialism.[18]

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12 Louis Althusser, "Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses," in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, ed. François Matheron, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2003), 38–41, 43.

13 Althusser, "Three Notes," 63–67.

14 Althusser, 67.

15 Althusser, 53–63, 71–73.

16 Luria, "Monistic Psychology," 14.

17 Wilhelm Reich, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Socialist Reproduction, 1972), 14–15, 43.

18 Luria, "Monistic Psychology," 10.

For Luria, the anchoring of a regional theory of the psyche to the general theory of dialectical materialism should be especially easy to achieve in the case of psychoanalysis. Why? According to him, this would be because Marxism and psychoanalysis could be described as meeting each other halfway.[19] On the one hand, Luria, like others after him including Althusser, portrays psychoanalysis as implicitly sharing the sensibilities and core commitments of dialectical materialism, including the latter's materialist monism and organicist holism.[20] On the other hand, Luria emphasizes that Marxist materialism, as vehemently anti-reductive despite its indebtedness to the eighteenth-century French materialists and Feuerbach, acknowledges the relative autonomy of individual personalities and correspondingly refuses to dissolve without remainder singular psyches into anonymous material bases.[21] As Russell Jacoby notes, Reich similarly adheres to the insistence of Karl Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach on a materialism retaining rather than dissolving subjectivities.[22]

Vygotsky also underscores that dialectical materialism likewise refuses to dissolve the human into the animal.[23] Relatedly, Vygotsky, appealing to Engels, contrasts reductive naturalistic with anti-reductive dialectical approaches to the detriment of the former.[24] For him as for Luria, the dialectical materialism to which psychoanalysis can and should be joined is anything but atomistic, mechanical, etc.

Despite the ancient Greek etymology of "psyche" tethering it to what the word "soul" connotes, Luria is adamant that the Freudian psyche is no soul in any idealist sense whatsoever. For him, analysis is not an idealism. As such, its psyche is not an immaterial mind independent of everything bodily.[25]

So, if the Freudian psychical apparatus is not disembodied as per anti-materialist idealisms and/or Cartesian-style ontological dualisms, how does Luria con-

19 Luria, 35.

20 Luria, 14–15, 19–20, 22, 24, 34, 37.

21 Luria, 15–17, 36–37, 39–40.

22 Reich, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*, 18–19; Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Conformist Psychology from Adler to Laing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 90.

23 Vygotsky, "Problems of Method," 60.

24 Vygotsky, 60–61.

25 Luria, "Monistic Psychology," 18.

ceive of the soma-psyche relationship in analytic metapsychology? At one moment in "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology," he suggests that unconscious dynamics are "on a level with other processes in the organism from which they are functionally, but not fundamentally, distinct."[26] He immediately specifies that this more subtle difference amounts to psyche being soma insofar as the latter is socially mediated, namely, suffused with and reshaped by "social stimuli" registered thanks to the body's "complex system of receptors and effectors" attuned to surrounding social environments.[27]

Luria, for whatever reason(s), does not invoke Freud's *Hilflosigkeit* in connection with this asserted receptivity. However, the young human organism's underlying inclination to be profoundly affected in its motivations, emotions, and cognitions by the "social stimuli" it registers is symptomatic of the biological fact of its prolonged prematurational helplessness. From a Marxist standpoint sympathetic to psychoanalysis, this *Hilflosigkeit* arguably plays a crucial role in establishing a crossroads between, on the one hand, both nature and society as understood by dialectical materialism and, on the other hand, the analytic psychical apparatus. This renders Luria's omission apropos helplessness somewhat strange.

That said, Luria's above-noted notion of a functional-but-not-fundamental distinction between soma and psyche appears to entail, as it does for Vygotsky too,[28] that the psychical is a modification of the somatic resulting from social mediation (albeit with the origins of social mediation itself left unspecified). Yet, Luria promptly proceeds to muddy these waters somewhat. He quickly shifts from characterizing psychoanalysis as a materialism in which the mental is a modification of the physical to depicting analysis as implicitly a Spinozistic dual-aspect monism in which the soma-psyche distinction arises out of an underlying, undifferentiated "energy"[29] (both Antonio Damasio and Mark Solms embrace Spinozistic dual-aspect monism as the most fitting philosophical framework for

[26] Luria, 19.

[27] Luria, 19.

[28] Lev Vygotsky, "The Problem of the Cultural Development of the Child," in Van der Veer and Valsiner, *The Vygotsky Reader*, 59.

[29] Luria, "Monistic Psychology," 20.

neuro-psychoanalysis,[30] with Solms also being a great admirer of Luria).[31] Even if these two renditions of Freudianism by Luria both qualify as monisms, they are two very different forms of monism arguably incompatible with each other.

The bio-materialism Luria attributes to Freud with ample justification has no need for (nay, would repudiate) Spinozism's metaphysical posit of a God-like *natura naturans* as the productive power underlying the physical universe as the congealed materiality of *natura naturata*. Freud's science-shaped materialist sensibilities are such that, in relation to the Spinozistic distinction between the constituting activity of *natura naturans* and the constituted entities of *natura naturata*, he would insist on accounting for human mindedness strictly on the basis of *natura naturata* alone (first and foremost as the biology of the organisms belonging to the species *homo sapiens*), without recourse to anything beyond, behind, or beneath nature as the physical universe. Instead of Baruch Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*, there is simply Freud's lone *natura*. As regards the hypothetical *natura naturans* (or Luria's hypothetical "energy"), Freud would protest *Hypotheses non fingo*. Despite both Luria's avowed fidelity to Marxist materialism as well as Soviet interest in Spinoza as a forerunner of Marx via Marx's debts to G. W. F. Hegel, I would suggest that the same would hold for Marx as for Freud here.[32]

Luria considers the psychoanalytic concept of drive (*Trieb*) to be the basis and epitome of Freud's monism. Although Luria construes drives as endogenous stimuli—this is at least true of the drive source (*Quelle*) and its attendant pressure (*Drang*) as a "demand for work"—he also recognizes that exogenous stim-

30 Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (New York: Harcourt, 2003), 12, 133, 209; Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World: An Introduction to the Neuroscience of Subjective Experience* (New York: Other Press, 2002), 56–57.

31 Karen Kaplan-Solms and Mark Solms, *Clinical Studies in Neuro-Psychoanalysis: Introduction to a Depth Neuropsychology* (London: Karnac, 2002), 26–43.

32 A. M. Deborin, "Spinoza's World-View," in *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy*, ed. and trans. George L. Kline (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 90–91, 102, 108–13; I. K. Luppol, "The Historical Significance of Spinoza's Philosophy," in Kline, *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy*, 175; Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 23–49; Johnston, *Future Materialism, Volume Two*, 73–136.

uli shape drives too (particularly at the level of the drive's object [*Objekt*]).[33] Speaking of "the psychoanalytic system," Luria states:

> Its concept of drive is rigorously monistic, as is its view of the individual in general. Indeed, a drive is not a psychological phenomenon in the strict sense, since it includes the effects of somatic and nervous stimuli and of the endocrine system and its chemistry, and often has no clear-cut psychological cast at all. We should be more inclined to consider drive a concept at the 'borderline between the mental and the somatic.' The dualism of the old psychology is thus completely discarded. Whether or not the particular person is or can be conscious of drive is entirely of secondary importance, depending on a number of minor details in the development of drive. Moreover, all the hypotheses about the relationship between soul and body, their psychophysical parallelism or interaction (so necessary to the old psychology), are also left by the wayside. Psychoanalysis has shifted the problem to an entirely new plane—a monistic approach to the mind.[34]

A couple of pages later in "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology," he embellishes further on this line of reflection—"for psychoanalysis, drives are not a purely psychological concept, but have a much broader sense, lying at 'the borderline between the mental and the somatic,' and are more of a biological nature."[35] He continues:

> Thus, psychoanalysis attaches special importance to the dependence of mental functions on organic stimuli. It makes mind an integral part of the organism's system; it can hence no longer be studied in isolation. This is what sets psychoanalysis apart from the old scholastic psychology, which attempted to depict the mind as something with no connection at all with the overall life of the organism and studied the brain quite apart from any influence other organs of the body might have on it (e.g., the endocrine glands) and the general dynamics of the organism as a whole. Indeed, the outstanding merit of psychoanalysis has been that it situates the mind within a general system of inter-relations of organs, views the brain

33 Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 7:147–48; Sigmund Freud, "Papers on Metapsychology [1915]," in *Standard Edition*, 14:118, 120–23.

34 Luria, "Monistic Psychology," 22.

35 Luria, 24.

> and its activity not in isolation, but on a level with the other organs of the body, and attempts to give psychology a solid biological foundation and to effect a decisive break with the metaphysical approach to the study of the mind. I should not be wide of the mark if I said that in doing this, psychoanalysis took an important step toward creating a system of monistic psychology.[36]

Luria, through his focus on the metapsychological concept of drive, appears to move towards conflating monism with holism. This holism, regardless of Luria's own views, would not require endorsement of any sort of reductionism or epiphenomenalism, including the epiphenomenalist implications of Spinozistic monism.

As just seen, Luria accepts the distinction between soma and psyche relied upon by Freud's drive theory as well as his metapsychology in general. By contrast, a reductive materialism or naturalism would seek to collapse psyche into soma. And, a dual-aspect monism would treat this distinction as merely apparent in relation to an undifferentiated underlying ontological substrate (paradigmatically, Spinoza's substance as the hidden ground of the attributes of thinking and extension). If and when Luria has such reductionism or Spinozism in mind when speaking of "monism" in connection with Freudian psychoanalysis, he is wrong to attribute such monism to Freud. But, when he attributes holistic tendencies to Freud's drive theory, including complex entanglements of soma (as material body) and psyche (as more-than-material mind), he is amply justified in doing so.

When discussing Freudian drives in "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology," Luria indeed highlights the holistic sensibilities informing Freud's metapsychological conception of *Triebe*. In so doing, Luria enriches the holism of Freudian drive theory and the entire analytic metapsychology for which this theory is so central. Freud himself gestures at the holistic entanglement of soma and psyche, with drives as hybrid constructs sandwiching together somatic and psychical components. Luria's remarks indicate that, in addition to this, there are, as regards various phenomena of interest to psychoanalysis (especially an analysis aligned with dialectical materialism), further holistic distributions: across multiple components within the internally differentiated cen-

[36] Luria, 24–25.

tral nervous system; between the highly complex brain and the rest of the body with its numerous anatomical and physiological aspects; amongst the various functions and dimensions of mental/psychical life; as well as in interactions between the intra-somatic, the intra-psychical, and both the extra-somatic and the extra-psychical natural and social circumstances surrounding the minded and embodied individual.[37]

Seen from Luria's Marxist and scientific perspectives, Freudian analysis, in its holism, is nothing if not anti-localizationist about the phenomena with which it concerns itself. Freud already warned against attempts at anatomical localizations of such metapsychological models as his topographies of the psychical apparatus.[38] Likewise, Solms, avowedly taking inspiration from both Freud and Luria, vehemently distances his version of neuro-psychoanalysis from any localizationist agenda.[39]

Like Luria in particular, Solms stresses the sprawling extent of the neuroanatomical distribution of most mental functions in human psychical life. Freud can be read as leaving open the possibility of future neuroanatomical localizations of aspects of psychoanalytic metapsychological models based on the assumption that the limits of (then-)present neuroscientific knowledge permit continuing to entertain the viability of this possibility. However, Luria and Solms both argue that the neurosciences already know enough to rule out the legitimacy of anatomical localizations as forming the key links between psychoanalysis and neurobiology. Scientific knowledge (rather than ignorance) of neuroanatomy, with its insights into the high degree of the anatomical distribution of mental functions across the regions and sub-regions of the central nervous system, already rules out reliance on localizations as the load-bearing bridges connecting analysis's psyche with science's brain.

37 Luria, 24–25, 28–29, 39–40.

38 Freud, "Papers on Metapsychology," 174–75; Sigmund Freud, "A Short Account of Psycho-Analysis (1924 [1923])," in *Standard Edition*, 19:191; Sigmund Freud, "An Autobiographical Study (1925 [1924])," in *Standard Edition*, 20:32; Sigmund Freud, "Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays (1939 [1934–38])," in *Standard Edition*, 23:97, 144–45.

39 Kaplan-Solms and Solms, *Clinical Studies in Neuro-Psychoanalysis*, 17–25, 43, 54–55, 60, 250–51, 260, 276.

Yet, despite Luria's just-mentioned anti-localizationism, Luria and Vygotsky, in their co-authored introduction to the Russian translation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, echo Freud's hopes for eventual natural scientific vindications of psychoanalytic hypotheses[40] (as does Luria in "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology").[41] These co-authors and collaborators signal their approval of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*'s science-inspired (and Empedoclean) speculations having it that the conflict between Eros and the *Todestrieb* operative within the human psyche is itself just one expression amongst countless others of a natural strife between forces of unification and destruction writ large across the entire cosmos from top to bottom.[42] Whatever Luria's distributionist reservations about neuroanatomical localizations, he nonetheless does not hesitate to side with Freud's more biologistic moments and argues that psychoanalysis globally grounds the psychical in the somatic, the human subject in the human organism.[43] For the Luria of "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology," Freudian drive theory, with the role played therein by anatomical drive-sources, anchors the libidinal economy, and, with it, the psyche as a whole, in the biological body.[44] Luria's stance combines a denial of discrete neuroanatomical localizations with an affirmation of global organic localization (i.e., the rooting of the entire psyche in soma).

Luria's "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology" and the "Introduction to the Russian translation of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*" co-authored by Luria and Vygotsky both date from the same year (1925). Yet, there is a strange tension between these two texts' assessments of Freud and the soma-psyche relationship in psychoanalysis. "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology," after lauding Freud's labors for moving psychology towards being founded upon a "materialist monism" compatible with dialectical materialism,[45] inserts the following critical remark as this essay's penultimate paragraph:

40 Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)," in *Standard Edition*, 18:174–75; Vygotsky and Luria, "Introduction," 13.

41 Luria, "Monistic Psychology," 27.

42 Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," 40–53; Vygotsky and Luria, "Introduction," 14.

43 Luria, "Monistic Psychology," 27–29.

44 Luria, 30–34.

45 Luria, 34–35.

> If the system of psychoanalysis is to measure up better to the requirements of dialectical materialism, however, it must develop fully the dynamic dialectic of mental life and take a third step toward a holistic approach to the organism: it must now integrate the organism into a system of social influences.[46]

An endnote specifies that this integration would be tantamount to a psychoanalytic "advance from mechanical materialism to dialectical materialism."[47] Luria therefore appears to conclude that Freud's corpus does not amply acknowledge "social influences" in its account of human mindedness. In *Thought and Language*, Vygotsky similarly indicts Freud for putting forward "the untenable conception of a pleasure principle preceding a reality principle"[48] (an indictment contested by Reich).[49]

Yet, this faulting of Freudian analysis for neglecting the interactions between the somatic-psychical organism and its surrounding social milieus should be contrasted with the concluding paragraphs of Luria and Vygotsky's preface to the Russian edition of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (contemporaneous with Luria's "Psychoanalysis as a System of Monistic Psychology"). Therein, Luria and Vygotsky observe:

> If the biological conservative tendency to preserve the inorganic equilibrium is concealed in the deeper layers of psychical life, how can humanity's development from lower to higher forms be explained? Where are we to look for the root of the stormy progression of the historical process? Freud provides us with a highly interesting and deeply materialistic answer, i.e., if in the deep recesses of the human psyche there still remain conservative tendencies of primordial biology and if, in the final analysis, even Eros is consigned to it, then the only forces which make it possible for us to escape from this state of biological conservatism and which may propel us toward progress and activity, are external forces, in our terms, the external conditions of the material environment in which the individual exists. It is they that represent the true basis of progress, it is they that create the real personality and make it adapt and work out new forms of psychic life; fi-

46 Luria, 35.

47 Luria, 45.

48 Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, ed. and trans. Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962), 21.

49 Reich, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*, 25, 27, 38–39.

> nally they are the ones that suppress and transfer the vestiges of the old conservative biology. In this respect Freud's psychology is thoroughly sociological and it is up to other materialistic psychologists who find themselves in better circumstances than Freud to reveal and validate the subject of the materialistic foundations of this theory.[50]

They continue:

> So, according to Freud, the history of the human psyche embodies two tendencies, the conservative-biological and the progressive-sociological. It is from these factors that the whole *dialectic of the organism* is composed and they are responsible for the distinctive 'spiral' development of a human being. This book represents a step forwards and not backwards along the path to the construction of a whole, monistic system, and after having read this book a dialectician cannot fail to perceive its enormous potential for a monistic understanding of the world.[51]

Soon after this, Luria and Vygotsky conclude their introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (i.e., "this book" in the preceding quotation) thusly:

> Bourgeois science is giving birth to materialism: such labour is often difficult and prolonged, but we only have to find where in its bowels materialistic buds are showing, to find them, to rescue them and to make good use of them.[52]

By contrast with Luria on his own in 1925, Luria with Vygotsky in the same year grants that Freud puts forward a "*dialectic of the organism*" in which society (as Freud's *Kultur* [civilization]) significantly configures the reality principle embedded in and modulating the psychical apparatus with its driving pleasure principle. Luria and Vygotsky together acknowledge that the Freudian psyche is shot through with and sculpted by the sorts of social mediators of concern to Marxist materialism. Hence, worries about Freud as not socially minded appear to be put to rest in this co-authored introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, with Freudian psychoanalysis, according to the latter text, being "thoroughly sociological." I would claim that this putting to rest is fair and appropriate—and

50 Vygotsky and Luria, "Introduction," 16.
51 Vygotsky and Luria, 16–17.
52 Vygotsky and Luria, 17.

this unlike Luria's and Vygotsky's solo indictments of Freud for allegedly ignoring social factors.[53]

Reich, in his 1929 article "Psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union" written shortly after a visit by him to Russia, rightly rebuts Bolshevik condemnations of Freudian psychoanalysis for insufficient sensitivity to social forces[54] (strangely, in an essay on Reich, Bertell Ollman repeats these same criticisms of Freud rejected by Reich himself).[55] Marcuse likewise problematizes efforts to lump Freud together with bourgeois individualists.[56] In the introduction to *Eros and Civilization*, he insists that "Freud's theory is in its very substance 'sociological,' and [. . .] no new cultural or sociological orientation is needed to reveal this substance."[57] Marcuse soon proceeds to assert that "Freud's individual psychology is in its very essence social psychology."[58] Jacoby, citing Theodor Adorno,[59] lends his support to Reich's and Marcuse's defense of Freud as himself already a thoroughly social thinker, with the Freudian psychical creature as a *zoon politikon*.[60]

Luria on his own concludes that Freud himself, as a materialist, has yet to take the step from a mechanistic neglect of social mediation to a dialectical inclusion of such mediation in "the distinctive 'spiral' development of a human being." But, in his joint statements with Vygotsky apropos 1920's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he drastically tempers, if not abandons altogether, this critical conclusion. The judgment shifts from Freud being a non-dialectical mechanical materialist to him being, even if only despite himself, a spontaneous dialectical materialist. According to this latter verdict (one echoed outside the Soviet

53 Reich, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*, 30, 41–42; Otto Fenichel, "Psychoanalysis as the Nucleus of a Future Dialectical-Materialist Psychology," ed. Suzette H. Annin and Hanna Fenichel, trans. Olga Barsis, *American Imago* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1967): 297–98.

54 Wilhelm Reich, "Psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union," in *Sex-Pol: Essays, 1929–1934*, ed. Lee Baxandall, trans. Anna Bostock, Tom DuBose, and Lee Baxandall (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 82.

55 Bertell Ollman, "The Marxism of Wilhelm Reich: The Social Function of Sexual Repression," in *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism since Lenin*, ed. Dick Howard and Karl E. Klare (New York: Basic Books, 1972), 219–20.

56 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 55–58; Robinson, *Freudian Left*, 197.

57 Marcuse, 5.

58 Marcuse, 16.

59 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Continuum, 1973), 351.

60 Jacoby, *Social Amnesia*, 79.

Union by Reich and Fenichel),[61] all that is needed for Marxism to embrace psychoanalysis is the performance with respect to Freud's *oeuvre* of the classical Marxian-Engelsian operation of extracting (or "rescuing") the "rational kernel" (i.e., "materialistic buds") from the "mystical shell" (i.e., "bourgeois science"). Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* again suggests the need for such a rescue operation of extraction with respect to Freud[62] (incidentally, Lacan expresses great admiration for Vygotsky and his *Thought and Language* especially).[63]

The "*dialectic of the organism*" with its "distinctive 'spiral' development of a human being" referred to by Luria and Vygotsky in their joint presentation (and echoed by Vygotsky in another piece)[64] of Freud arguably alludes to Engels, especially Engels's 1876 essay "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man" (contained in *Dialectics of Nature*).[65] Vygotsky elsewhere invokes this Engels, along with the Hegel and Marx channeled by Engels. In particular, Vygotsky appeals to Hegel's, Marx's, and Engels's observations about the making and using of tools in the *praxes* of social laboring as responsible for the peculiar dialectics of human nature and history.[66] Luria begins an essay of his entitled "The problem of the cultural behaviour of the child" by highlighting tools along the exact same lines as Vygotsky.[67] Luria and Vygotsky's joint attribution to Freud of a dialectical conception of the human being render him particularly proximate to the Marxist materialism they uphold.

Starting with Reich in the 1930s, the Soviets' more positive evaluations of Freudian psychoanalysis are echoed in some of the earliest Western efforts to

61 Reich, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*, 15–16, 55; Fenichel, "Dialectical-Materialist Psychology," 301; Robinson, *Freudian Left*, 19, 43–45.

62 Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, 10.

63 Jacques Lacan, "Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XII: Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse, 1964–1965" (unpublished typescript, December 9, 1964), PDF document; Jacques Lacan, "Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIII: L'objet de la psychanalyse, 1965–1966" (unpublished typescript, April 20, 1966), PDF document.

64 Vygotsky, "Cultural Development of the Child," 63–64.

65 Friedrich Engels, "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man," in *Dialectics of Nature*, trans. and ed. Clemens Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 279–96.

66 Lev Vygotsky, "Internalization of Higher Psychological Functions," in Cole et al., *Mind in Society*, 54; Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, 48–49.

67 Luria, "The Problem of the Cultural Behaviour of the Child," in Van der Veer and Valsiner, *The Vygotsky Reader*, 46.

wed Marx and Freud. Below, I will address what arguably are the two most sophisticated initial attempts in the non-Soviet European context to marry psychoanalysis and Marxist materialism: Reich's 1929/1934 *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis* (which Paul Robinson describes as "the most tightly argued piece he ever wrote")[68] and Fenichel's 1934 "Psychoanalysis as the Nucleus of a Future Dialectical-Materialist Psychology." In my subsequent treatment of Reich and Fenichel, the cross-resonances with Luria and Vygotsky as summarized above will be audible. In the meantime, I want to address the perhaps best-known classic articulation of Freudo-Marxism, namely, Marcuse's 1955 *Eros and Civilization*.

Whereas such Western Marxist works as Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* and the Frankfurt School's collaborative effort *The Authoritarian Personality* arguably mishandle psychoanalysis in the heat of the urgent anti-fascist struggle, Marcuse's 1955 manifesto on Freudo-Marxism is much more faithful to and careful with Freudian theory. In what follows, I will not reconstruct the contents of *Eros and Civilization* in their entirety. Instead, I will selectively underscore certain manners in which Marcuse contributes to the issues presently under discussion through his handling of Freud *vis-à-vis* Marxism in *Eros and Civilization*.

Marcuse rejects the Luria-type Soviet charge against Freudian psychoanalysis of failing to pay attention to the socio-historical dimensions of human existence. However, he develops a different line of criticism with regard to Freud, one foreshadowed by Reich.[69] Specifically, Marcuse, as a historical materialist, warns against Freud's wholesale equation (most notably and famously in *Civilization and Its Discontents*) of any and every "civilization" (i.e., all human societies in all times and places) with the inevitable imposition of neurosis-inducing repression *als Verdrängung*.[70]

Freud's "reality principle," especially in the context of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, is in no small part a reflection of specifically social, as distinct from natural, external reality. It can and does dictate certain intra-psychical repres-

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68 Robinson, *Freudian Left*, 41.

69 Reich, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*, 24–25; Robinson, *Freudian Left*, 33.

70 Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents (1930 [1929])," in *Standard Edition*, 21:86–92, 94–97, 129; Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 4–5, 17.

sions. However, *Eros and Civilization*, drawing on Marxist sensibilities, maintains that the Freudian reality principle, as reflective of the externalities of different societies, must be historicized in ways Freud fails to carry out—with this nevertheless being imperative insofar as societies consist of historically variable structures and dynamics.[71] Relatedly, and latching onto things Freud says in connection with "Ananke" (the ancient Greek personification of unavoidable necessity and compulsion),[72] Marcuse accuses Freud of falsely eternalizing socially created and historically transient material scarcity as dictating discontent-inducing "instinctual renunciation."[73]

Another Marxist line of criticism Marcuse brings to bear on Freud in *Eros and Civilization* has to do with the distinction between work and play. Marx, in connection with his long-running concern with the alienated status of labor under capitalism, observes that the very notion of an antithesis between labor and leisure is symptomatic of capitalistic alienation. That is to say, only when labor is alienated does it appear as the necessity of dull, unrewarding drudgery as opposed to leisure as the freedom of enjoyable, gratifying recreation.[74] A socialist or communist supersession of capitalism presumably would de-alienate labor, thereby transforming work (back) into play (or, in a hybrid Schillerian-Freudian manner, overcoming the antagonism between drive and necessity).[75]

Marcuse accuses Freud of uncritically taking for granted the bourgeois ideological eternalization/naturalization of capitalism's work-play zero-sum dichotomy symptomatic of the specifically capitalist alienation of labor[76] (and this in addition to perhaps not foreseeing the economic and ideological colonization of the "happiness" of workers' "free time" by capitalism and its forms of repressive desublimation).[77] This accusation forms part of the larger argument in *Eros and Civilization* about Freud's insufficiently historical account of external social re-

71 Marcuse, 34–37, 40, 44–45, 87–88.

72 Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," 101, 139.

73 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 134.

74 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)," in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Penguin, 1992), 327–31; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1973), 470, 611.

75 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 213–14, 223–24.

76 Marcuse, 47, 154.

77 Marcuse, 46–48, 157, 245.

ality. In other words, the instinctual renunciations demanded by the social side of the Freudian reality principle are, by Marcuse's Marxist lights, the gratuitous impositions of socially alienating labor conditions, not the unavoidable consequences of naturally dictated work to which the entirety of humanity is hopelessly condemned forever.

Implicitly linked to the immediately preceding by the tie between labor and time (including subjects' experiences of lived temporality) as conceptualized in Marxism, *Eros and Civilization* also discusses time at the intersection of historical materialism and psychoanalysis. In this vein, Marcuse states:

> The fatal enemy of lasting gratification is *time*, the inner finiteness, the brevity of all conditions. The idea of integral human liberation therefore necessarily contains the vision of the struggle against time.[78]

Later, in the final chapter of *Eros and Civilization*, he expands on this thusly:

> 'Joy wants eternity.' Timelessness is the ideal of pleasure. Time has no power over the id, the original domain of the pleasure principle. But the ego, through which alone pleasure becomes real, is in its entirety subject to time. The mere anticipation of the inevitable end, present in every instant, introduces a repressive element into all libidinal relations and renders pleasure itself painful. This primary frustration in the instinctual structure of man becomes the inexhaustible source of all other frustrations—and of their social effectiveness. Man learns that 'it cannot last anyway,' that every pleasure is short, that for all finite things the hour of their birth is the hour of their death—that it couldn't be otherwise. He is resigned before society forces him to practice resignation methodically. The flux of time is society's most natural ally in maintaining law and order, conformity, and the institutions that relegate freedom to a perpetual utopia; the flux of time helps men to forget what was and what can be: it makes them oblivious to the better past and the better future.[79]

The second half of the second of these two block quotations makes it clear that Marcuse considers the psychoanalytic account of temporality to play into the

78 Marcuse, 191.

79 Marcuse, 231.

hands of capitalism's undue burdens of "surplus repression"[80] and ideological rationalizations (via eternalization/naturalization) of these burdens. He here sides with Marxism against Freudianism.

For both Marx and Marcuse following him, a future realization of something along the lines of a communist "realm of freedom" would be inseparably bound up with changes in how people spend the time of their lives on a day-to-day basis. More precisely, the end of the reign of capital ends its logic of M-C-M′ , in which surplus-value is the overriding socially efficacious telos. With the termination of this logic also would come the elimination of the socio-economic compulsion to condemn the vast bulk of humanity to the tedious lost time of ever more surplus labor (as ever more gratuitous thanks to the material abundance made possible by capitalism's enhancements of social productive power). In other words, with the post-capitalist reduction of labor time to that necessary for the satisfactory production and reproduction of the laborers—this is distinct from the surplus labor time "necessary" for producing surplus-value appropriated by the minority formed by non-laboring capitalists—the day-by-day balance of laboring persons' lifetimes between the necessity of work and the freedom of play would tilt substantially in the direction of the latter.[81]

Additionally, given Marcuse's Heidegger-acquired phenomenological sensibilities, combined with his appreciation for the young (*circa* 1844) Marx's vivid descriptions of the laborer's lived experience of "alienation,"[82] the later Marcuse of *Eros and Civilization* probably assumes that a subjective change at the level of phenomenal temporality will be induced as a consequence of an objective transformation at the level of socially structured time. Put differently, Marcuse likely believes (and believes that Marx too assumes) that, once the external objectivity of the collective organization of individuals' daily scheduled rhythms and routines are radically reconfigured, a dramatic mutation will ensue in the inter-

80 Marcuse, 35–37, 40, 44–45, 87–88.

81 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume Three*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Penguin, 1981), 958–59; Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 152–53, 194–95.

82 Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 322–34; Herbert Marcuse, "New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism," in *Heideggerian Marxism*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 89–93, 96–97, 104–7; Herbert Marcuse, "On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics," in Wolin and Abromeit, *Heideggerian Marxism*, 139, 149.

nal subjectivity of persons' awarenesses of the ebbs and flows of past, present, and future. This Marcusian belief perhaps is knowingly reinforced by the early Georg Lukács's more phenomenological musings about the experience of time under the influence of capitalist reification.[83] Similarly, in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse, in line with his Freudo-Marxism, makes a connection between time and sex, hypothesizing that increased amounts of regular leisure will result in people liberating themselves through resexualizing their bodies in "polymorphously perverse" fashions, as instances of non-repressive desublimation[84] (with Göran Therborn noting that "unlike Reich, sexual liberation in the genital sense is not the psycho-analytical aim of Frankfurt theory so much as the investment of all human activity with libidinal energy").[85]

Yet, much of what Marcuse has to say about time in *Eros and Civilization* arguably hints, contrary to Marcuse's own intentions, that he might not be so justified in favoring Marxism over Freudianism on this particular issue. Marcuse indeed is correct that psychoanalytic accounts of temporality, starting with those advanced by Freud himself, propose an antagonism between time and pleasure. Marcuse's previously quoted remarks about temporality also indicate that he sees psychoanalytic metapsychology as situating time on the side of external (and natural rather than social) reality and the ego's registration of this external reality in the form of the intrapsychical reality principle regulating the pleasure principle. The supposed inner depths of the id, in line with Freud's repeated depictions of it and the unconscious as "timeless" (*Zeitlos*), are manifestly contrasted by Marcuse with the time-sensitive ego sensitized by the brute given fact of the transience of all things. I now will succinctly contest Marcuse's reading of temporality in Freudian analysis. In so doing, I will additionally challenge how *Eros and Civilization* in particular interfaces psychoanalysis with Marxism.

My 2005 book *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* amounts, in its entirety, to a sustained rebuttal of Marcuse's manner of handling

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83 Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 89–90.

84 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 201; Robinson, *Freudian Left*, 207–8.

85 Göran Therborn, "The Frankfurt School," in *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*, ed. New Left Review (London: Verso, 1977), 100.

psychoanalytic temporality in *Eros and Civilization*.[86] *Time Driven*, relying heavily on Lacan as well as Freud, proposes that the unconscious is timeless only in the sense of not conforming to the iron rule of the chronological time so prominent at the level of conscious experience. Relatedly, I maintain that other forms of temporality different from linear chronology can and should be recognized as informing the configurations and operations of unconscious dimensions of psychical life—and this even by Freud's own lights, in addition to Lacan's suggestions to the same effect.[87]

Furthermore, insofar as the id is the seat of the drives, *Time Driven* temporalizes the id in analyzing all drives (*Triebe*) as split, in their inherent metapsychological make-up, between two discrepant, conflicting temporal dimensions. The source (*Quelle*) and pressure (*Drang*) of drive are caught up in the cyclical, recurring temporality of what I designate as the psychoanalytic drive's "axis of iteration." By contrast, the aim (*Ziel*) and object (*Objekt*) of drive are situated within a temporal dimension I call the drive's "axis of alteration." This second dimension consists of complex interactions between projective (from past, through present, to future) and retroactive (from present to past) movements of/in time. While the somatic axis of iteration involves (attempted) repetition, with its stubbornly relentless seeking after the eternal return of an unaltered past, the psychical axis of alteration involves (repetition-thwarting) difference, with its perpetual retranscriptions and modifications of its mutable, shifting ideational contents, both phenomenal and structural.[88]

These just-summarized features of *Time Driven* raise several objections to the Marcuse of *Eros and Civilization*. First of all, they indicate that Marcuse is wrong to restrict the place of time in psychoanalytic metapsychology to external natural reality and the ego's inscription of this externality within its secondary-process reality principle. Marcuse's mistake is to treat both the unconscious and the

[86] Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), xxxiv, 154–55, 244–45, 253–55; Adrian Johnston, "A Blast from the Future: Freud, Lacan, Marcuse, and Snapping the Threads of the Past," in *Umbr(a): Utopia*, ed. Ryan Anthony Hatch (Buffalo: Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Culture, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2008), 67–84.

[87] Johnston, *Time Driven*, xxix–xxx, 5–57, 218–19, 315–16.

[88] Johnston, xxvii–xxxviii, 218–332, 343–47.

id, with their primary-process pleasure principle, as internal psychical depths untouched by time/temporality.

Moreover, with the temporalization of the drives (along the lines argued in *Time Driven*) going hand-in-hand with a temporalization of the unconscious and the id, I make a detailed metapsychological case for the insurmountability of the psychoanalytic time-pleasure antagonism as described by Marcuse in the above quotations from *Eros and Civilization*. The "splitting of the drive" of *Time Driven*'s sub-title refers to each and every *Trieb* being internally divided along the fault line between its axis of iteration (source and pressure) and its axis of alteration (aim and object). These two axes are permanently and by their very natures out of synch and at odds with each other. This inner antagonism between incompatible temporal axes renders all drives inherently unable to attain the satisfactions they nonetheless, and in vain, demand.

Therefore, *pace* the Marcuse of *Eros and Civilization*, time's interference with pleasure is not just an issue of an exogenous factor affecting the secondary processes of the ego. Temporality's thwarting of gratification and enjoyment is also a matter of an endogenous arrangement bound up with and inseparable from the primary processes of the unconscious- and id-level libidinal economy in and of itself at the level of this economy's own components (i.e., drives) and their inner workings. In terms of Marcuse's above-quoted playing off of Marxism against Freudianism apropos the topic of temporality, my preceding summary of *Time Driven* and its upshots for *Eros and Civilization* indicates that psychoanalytic insights into the antagonism between time and pleasure are even weightier and harder to offset with appeals to socio-historical variables than Marcuse realizes.

Even if a socialism and/or communism arrives in which socially necessary labor time is substantially reduced for all persons, this will not usher them into a libidinal paradise in which dissatisfactions disappear with the lifting of capitalism's needlessly excessive surplus repressions.[89] If and when such liberated persons get to, for instance, experience the non-repressive desublimation of resexualizing their polymorphously perverse bodies, they will discover that certain stains of discontent, displeasure, malaise, pain, suffering, and unease appear to be well-nigh indelible—including (and especially) within the field of

[89] Robinson, *Freudian Left*, 202–3.

their very sexualities. Although the lived experience of temporalities may well change, perhaps even quite significantly, on the other side of the rule of capital's clocks, time will not cease and will not cease to function as an ineliminable impediment to the machinations of the drives. To assume otherwise is utopian in a bad sense that ought to be rejected by Marxism itself in line with its sober-minded rejections of other unrealistic utopias.

Nevertheless, psychoanalysis does not, and should not, commit the error of making the perfect into the enemy of the good. Both Freud and Lacan rightly avoid doing this with respect to Marxism. Freud, in his critical reflections on the Bolsheviks in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, acknowledges that Marxist-type economic redistributions would be a real boon for humanity, an instance of major historical progress to be welcomed and applauded. He merely appends to this a reasonable cautionary note to the effect that revolutionaries should not project onto such sweeping material redistributions overly inflated "idealistic" (*idealistiches*) hopes for a total transubstantiation of "human nature" (*menschlichen Natur*) from top to bottom.[90] Alas, Marcuse seems to indulge in precisely such utopian projections. Maybe the better stance here, compromising between the authors of *Civilization and Its Discontents* and *Eros and Civilization*, would be to say: Do not count on revolutionary economic, political, and social transformations replacing a bad old human nature with a good new one; but, if such a replacement unexpectedly does happen, one will be free to be pleasantly surprised.

Lacan, like Freud, warns that radical leftists would be wise to manage their revolutionary expectations, to rein in their paradisal anticipations. Without doing so, such political actors, if and when they pass to the revolutionary act and find themselves on the other side of it, are in grave peril of succumbing to brutally crushing disappointment. In Lacan's own terms, the unavoidable discrepancy between the "*jouissance* expected" versus the "*jouissance* obtained," a discrepancy insurmountable even via any Marxist revolution, risks provoking a devastating "subjective destitution" ravaging at least those revolutionary subjects

[90] Sigmund Freud, "Das Unbehagen in der Kultur," in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Anna Freud et al. (London: Imago, 1940–52), 14:504; Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," 143.

who were unable or unwilling to see this discrepancy coming while in the grip of their fevered pre-revolutionary utopian dreams.[91]

The inevitable dashing of these dreams threatens to make the dreamers and those they oversold on their dreams into embittered reactionaries undoing whatever real revolutionary gains are made either from within (a leftist Thermidor) or from without (a right-wing counter-revolution). From this Lacanian vantage point, pre-revolutionary fantasies driving revolutionaries to undertake their revolution are some of the greatest dangers to actual post-revolutionary progress if and when it comes to pass—and this despite these fantasies' roles in helping to catalyze revolutionary activity. As Lacan observes in his 1965 text "Science and Truth" regarding such risky but indispensable supports (or "dangerous supplements") to radical political projects, "an economic science inspired by *Capital* does not necessarily lead to its utilization as a revolutionary power, and history seems to require help from something other than a predictive dialectic."[92] This "something other," at least in the case of revolutionaries' pre-revolutionary fantasies of the *jouissance* expected on the other side of the revolutionary *passage à l'acte*, both assists in making revolution more likely (however slightly) while simultaneously also jeopardizing the revolution's post-revolutionary longer-term survival if and when the revolution indeed comes to pass.

In the absence of a pre-revolutionary psychoanalytic working-through of revolution as a fantasy in the strict analytic sense—the "*rêve*" in "*rêve-olution*," like all dreams for an analyst, must be interpreted—any revolution that might in fact arrive one fine day cannot but end up appearing—even (and especially) to the revolutionaries themselves—to be the proverbial "God that failed." The worry is that such revolutionaries would themselves respond to the shortcomings of their first-imagined-but-now-arrived savior with a version of making the perfect into the enemy of the good. They thereby would fail to value and preserve the post-revolutionary *jouissance* obtained (as tangible economic, political, and/or social gains) because it does not measure up to the pre-revolutionary *jouissance* expected (i.e., aspirations for such things as the transubstantiation of

91 Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge: Encore 1972–1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 111–12; Johnston, *Time Driven*, xxiv, xxxiv–xxxv, 239–41, 243, 248, 250, 282–83, 285–87, 297–98, 318, 324–25, 327, 329–30, 336–37, 339.

92 Jacques Lacan, "Science and Truth," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 738.

human nature and the complete elimination of discontent and suffering). Any revolution inspired specifically by Marcuse-type hopes—this also would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the mirage of the "New Man" deceptively upheld as a reality by Really Existing Socialism, including in the sort of Soviet propaganda surrounding the likes of Luria and Vygotsky—would face such dangerous disillusionment. Down the path of disappointment, regression to the pre-revolutionary past, or worse, beckons.[93]

I now leave behind this line of psychoanalytic criticism of Marcuse's brand of Freudo-Marxism in bringing this intervention into the more sophisticated and thoughtful Marxist assessments of psychoanalysis to a close. In these concluding moments, I wish to place a spotlight on certain shared commitments common to Luria, Vygotsky, Reich, Fenichel, and Marcuse as Marxists engaging critically yet charitably with the Freudian field. The three analytically-inclined Western Marxists dealt with here (i.e., Reich, Fenichel, and Marcuse) all assert that Freud's version of the soma-psyche distinction (most prominently on display at the level of his metapsychological drive theory) is a microcosmic, intra-subjective reflection of the dialectical logic of the macrocosmic, inter/trans-subjective infrastructure-superstructure distinction (as proposed by historical materialism's account of social history).[94] According to this parallel, Freudian soma mirrors Marxian infrastructure and Freudian psyche mirrors Marxian superstructure.

However, Reich, Fenichel, and Marcuse subscribe to a version of historical materialism in which the superstructural can and does reciprocally react back on the infrastructural base upon which it rests and from which it arises. That is to say, for Reich, Fenichel, and Marcuse alike, there is a dialectical interaction between infrastructure and superstructure. Theirs is thus a dialectical historical materialism (as opposed to an economistically reductive and mechanical one). Hence, in drawing a parallel with Freud's soma-psyche couple, they urge a sympathetic

93 Jacques Lacan, "Radiophonie," in *Autres écrits*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 424; Jacques Lacan, "Television," in *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 32–33, 46.

94 Reich, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*, 20–21, 56; Fenichel, "Dialectical-Materialist Psychology," 294–96, 311; Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 132–33.

Marxist construal of Freud as a spontaneous dialectical materialist of sorts (as do Luria and Vygotsky too in places I reference above).

In a related vein, Luria, Vygotsky, Reich, Fenichel, and Marcuse all agree on the central role of psychoanalytic drive theory in a synthesis of psychoanalysis and dialectical/historical materialism.[95] They interpret the interplay of somatic and psychical dimensions and components within each and every analytic *Trieb* as permitting the attribution to Freudian metapsychology of a materialist dialectics bringing Freud-the-psychoanalyst into proximity with Marx-the-historical-materialist. For them, Freud's *Trieb* is the pineal gland between psychoanalysis and Marxism.

However, Marx and Freud can be brought together along these lines coming from the other direction too, namely, through reinterpreting pivotal portions of Marx's corpus so as to close the gap with Freud's *oeuvre*. Specifically, and as I will go on to show, rereading Marx with the benefit of psychoanalytic hindsight reveals the presence in Marx's writings of an already highly sophisticated conceptualization of *Triebe* strikingly foreshadowing the Freudian account of drives. Maybe Marx ought to be credited not only with inventing the psychoanalytic concept of the symptom *avant la lettre*, as Lacan proposes,[96] but also with inventing the analytic idea of the drive prior to Freud.

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95 Luria, "Monistic Psychology," 22, 24–25; Vygotsky and Luria, "Introduction," 14; Reich, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*, 20–21; Fenichel, "Dialectical-Materialist Psychology," 295–96, 302, 306; Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 11–12, 21, 31.

96 Jacques Lacan, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, 1971* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 164.

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