

**FASCIST DI-VISIONS OF ENJOYMENT AND THE PERVERSE  
REMAINDER: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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## Abstract

Under the shade of escalating violence and fundamentalism, our epoch's diffused aura of liberalism supposedly tolerates difference, by exorcising the evil phantasms of totalitarianism, in favour of a liberal and humane post-modern order. Consequently, behind contemporary versions of evil, one demonises modern 'fascists', 'totalitarian threats', and 'Hitlers'. As if not obscure enough, fascist evil has been equivocally linked with perversion. Considering this link a tenebrous enigma, my thesis suggests that psychoanalysis can successfully elucidate its problematic and feeble basis, by re-appraising previous narratives from a number of different discourses that inscribe the liaison between fascism and perversion in their representational stage. In a first approach, the present study dissects texts as heterogeneous, as film, social theory, political philosophy, and psychoanalysis. This is to show that, despite the divergent speculative angle that each discourse espouses, perversion is a common exegetic thread, intertextually sewing their narratives. The objective of my criticism that goes through psychoanalysis, without, however, exempting it from this criticism, is to reveal that both fascism and perversion implicate the non-symbolisable kernel in politics, which becomes the source of their mystification. My thesis argues that the fascist does not take the same discursive position, as the pervert does, regarding this symbolic gap. The first is interested in domination, drawn from the superiority of his ideology's master signifier, whereas the latter is interested in excavating the emptiness of any master signifier and in constantly provoking prefabricated knowledge, similarly to the hysteric. Apart from the level of discourse, on the ethical level, I disengage the view that sees Sade and the Nazi officer, as emblematic figures of a Kantian ethical gesture. Considering the imaginary hypostasis of their ethical performance, I argue that personal interests, fantasies and desires, determine the austerity of their ethical duty. Yet, the fantasies of Sade and Nazism are incongruent, insomuch as they are organised by antithetical ideals. Finally, I develop a new rhetoric, de-pathologised and de-ideologised, regarding the structure of the so-called pervert, introducing new vocabularies and directions for psychoanalytic research that further distance the pervert, or whom I call the *extra*-ordinary subject, from fascist politics and, instead, expose his diachronic "fascist" isolation from the social

edifice. This reveals the fruitful alternatives that can stem from a 'return to Freud *cum* Lacan,' which supports a flexible on-going reformulation of psychoanalytic knowledge.

# **Contents**

## **Prologue, 1**

- a) *Methodology: Psychoanalytic Criticism and the Text(s) in Question*, 8
- b) *Mad, Cad, Sade: The Historical Profile of the Pervert*, 15
- c) *Thesis Synopsis*, 18

## **PART I: Fascism and Perversion**

### **Introduction: The Perverse Refractions of Fascism – A Retrospective, 30**

#### **1. 1930s-1940s: The Frankfurt School and the Freudian Left, 33**

##### 1.1 Critical Theory against Fascism, 33.

###### 1.1.1 *The Dialectic of Western Rationality*, 34

###### 1.1.2 *The Perverse Decay of Reason*, 37

###### 1.1.3 *The Perspicacity of the Dialectic and its Blocks*, 39

##### 1.2 The Irrational Mass, 42

##### 1.3 The (Un)Orgastic Character, 50

##### 1.4 Freudo-Marxist Limitations, 52

#### **2. 1940s–1970s: The Authoritarian and Evil Profile of Fascism, 61**

##### 2.1 The Fascist Brunt against Oedipus, 61

##### 2.2 The Perversion of Authority, 68

##### 2.3 The Evil of the Nazi Bureaucrat, 73

##### 2.4 Cinematic Images of Fascism: Sensuality and Oedipalisation, 75

#### **3. 1970s – 1980s: Neo-Freudian Perspectives, 86**

##### 3.1 The Chaos of the Creator, 86

##### 3.2 The Odium of the Feminine Abyss, 93

#### **4. 1990s: The Surfeit of Fascist *Jouissance*, 100**

##### 4.1 The Lacanian Perspective, 100

###### 4.1.1 *The Eradication of Oedipal Ethics*, 101

###### 4.1.2 *Fascism's Disavowal of the Real*, 111

#### **Part I: Conclusion, 124**

### **PART II: Discourse**

#### **Introduction: The Domination of the Fascist and the Sadean Master, 127**

#### **5. Power and Mastery through the Lacanian Prism, 131**

##### 5.1 The Conflux of Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Discourse Analysis, 131

##### 5.2 The Discursive Framework of Power, 136

##### 5.3 The Circuit of Power, 140

###### 5.3.1 *The Role of Fantasy in Power*, 145

#### **6. The Lacanian Discourse, 157**

##### 6.1 The Four Discourses, 157

##### 6.2 The Position of the Fascist and the Pervert in Discourse, 161

#### **7. Three Masters, Three Systems of Domination, 169**

##### 7.1 Discursive Systems of Power, 169

###### 7.1.1 *The Oedipal System*, 171

###### 7.1.2 *The Totalitarian System*, 173

###### 7.1.3 *The Sadean System*, 179

#### **Part II: Conclusion, 184**

## **PART III: Ethics**

**Introduction: Imagine the Law: Domination and the Ethics of Desire, 186**

### **8. Sade with Kant and Eichmann, 189**

8.1 The Kant in Sade, 189

8.2 (Pseudo) Ethics of Domination, 194

8.2.1 *The Sadean Imaginary Ethics*, 196

8.2.2 *Eichmann's Perverse Ethics*, 204

### **9. Ethics and Guilt, 213**

9.1 The Dilemma of Guilt, 213

9.2 Enjoy Guilt!, 220

### **10. From Imaginary to Democratic Ethics, 228**

10.1 Violent Utopianism, 228

10.2 The Punitive Ideal, 232

10.3 The Violence of Particularism, 236

10.4 The Totalising Imaginary Dystopia, 241

**Part III: Conclusion, 253**

## **PART IV: Politics**

**Introduction: Politics and the Embodiment of *Jouissance*, 256**

### **11. Beyond the Fascist Utopia, 260**

11.1 The Dark Veil of Fascism, 260

11.1.1 *From Perversion to Subversion and Back*, 263

11.2 Tarnished Utopias, 268

11.2.1 *The Extra-Ordinary Against Political Aporia*, 275

11.3 The Gaze of the Holocaust, 280

## **12. Extra-Ordinary Anxiety, 288**

12.1 The Perverse Object of Anxiety, 288

12.2 The Analytic Point of Ignorance, 295

12.3 The Truth of Anxiety, 300

## **13. Negating Disavowal, 303**

13.1 Disavowing the Pervert, 303

13.2 The Immoral Agent of Ideological Power, 310

## **Part IV: Conclusion, 318**

**Thesis Conclusion:** *Love the Object of Your Anxiety*, 320

**Bibliography, 330**

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## Prologue

A recent event has brought to our mind the cliché that suggests our world is full of contradictions. In May 2005, the ideal of a unified Europe underwent a cavernous crack, following the rejection of the European constitution by the French referendum. Many believed it was a decisive blow that clipped the wings of the European union, only a year after celebrating its expansion. However, the rejection of the constitution was nothing more than another illustration of the ellipsis in the political stage. The chimera of Europe as a united body contradicts the fact that each fundamental country member zealously advocates its autonomy and its distinctive identity.

This contradiction reiterates the impossibility of surpassing differences relating to nationality, religion, culture, ideology and so on that obviously operate not only at the heart of European politics but in socio-political relations in general. To that effect, the constitution, rooted in contradiction, was *de facto* doomed to failure, as a deceptive attempt to reconcile these differences. Precisely, the contradiction that foments the sanctimonious field of politics and the need to actively contravene the somniferous aura of our epoch, so that a critical cogito is promoted, stirred up the desire for conducting the present study.

My endeavour to dive into the contradictory nature of politics spawned this psychoanalytic study that critically explores the intricacies of desire in the political arena and the impossibility of the latter to quench the former. The impossible in politics refers to a condition that exceeds the symbolic boundaries of social order, carving the latter and inscribing a space beyond it. This space is neither positive nor negative *per se*. What is essential is that impossibility, the unoccupied place that 'lies beyond', can constitute a catalytic hinge for radical action in politics. Nevertheless, an imaginary expectation about a tangible and total acquisition of this impossible essence, as a fantasmatic counteraction to any genuine act that transforms social relations, may turn this unfeasible condition into a dark shade for politics. These ideas are grounded in Jacques Lacan's theory and its implementation by contemporary critical thinkers, such as Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, Sean Homer, Joan Copjec, Yannis Stavrakakis and more who ingeniously interweave Lacan with the critique of ideology or with cultural and political analysis.

The ontological paradigm that I espouse for scrutinising the impossible and its failure to be grasped within a certain discursive frame, is historical fascism, with the primary focus being on German and Italian fascism. These two versions of fascism led to regimes associated with the worst atrocities ever to have occurred in history, the excessive character of which impairs any attempt to provide a complete account of the fascist phenomenon. The fascist atrocities of the Second World War were decisive for the current denouncement of utopian thought in politics.

In our epoch, where utopian models are undergoing a severe crisis, it is important to assess the possibility for utopia to fuel any transformative social change, before we stigmatise and repudiate utopian politics. For Jameson, the ideological needs to be identified with the utopian, in accordance with Bloch's 'Utopian impulse' as the ideal of hope.<sup>1</sup> Bloch's aim was to restore the notion of utopia as an abandoned Marxist category and a catalyst for opening the future. Yet he does not prompt utopia uncritically, but rather makes an important distinction between anticipatory and compensatory utopia. The latter concerns an abstract idealism, an infecund fantasy that brings no transformations in the future. Its motivational dynamism for change is rather feeble. On its antipode, anticipatory or 'concrete' utopia does not rest on fantasy, but determination to proceed in radical changes which open the future as a real possibility. It breeds hope, whereas compensation breeds desire.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, Marxism must accord with an anticipatory utopian project that moves from an abstract critique of current reality towards action that impels dynamism and renders the future possible. This is in line with Žižek's recent adumbration of the authentic utopian gesture:

In a proper revolutionary breakthrough, the utopian future is neither fully realized in the present nor simply evoked as a distant promise that justifies present violence – it is rather as if, in a unique suspension of temporality, in the short circuit between present and future, we are – as if by Grace – for a brief time allowed to act as if the utopian future (is not yet fully here), but already at hand, just there to be grabbed.<sup>3</sup>

Yet Homer draws the heuristic limitation of the idea of anticipatory utopia, inasmuch as it "rests on the definition of Utopia as a function rather than a matter of a particular form or

content.”<sup>4</sup> This is problematic considering that, in effect, the anticipatory utopia can be differentiated from compensatory utopia with regard to their content solely. Taking racism as an example, Homer demonstrates that for Jameson it constitutes a compensatory projection, whereas for racists themselves it is anticipatory.

But why the utopia of fascism and first of all, *what is fascism?* The question regarding fascism’s ideological foundation still troubles political theorists. Some years ago, when I prepared the seed of the present work, I came across a meticulous account by a contemporary scholar in fascist studies. As recently as 1998, Roger Griffin highlighted the lack of a singular definition of fascism in political science, only to agree with the rest of the authors on the perplexed picture of the matter. Griffin gives the following description of the fascist phenomenon:

*Fascism is a genus of modern, revolutionary, “mass” politics which, while extremely heterogeneous in its social support and in the specific ideology promoted by its many permutations, draws its internal cohesion and driving force from a core myth that a period of perceived national decline and decadence is giving way to one of rebirth and renewal in a post-liberal new order.*<sup>5</sup>

Although condensed and precise, this definition does not reach the bone. It rather assembles the different phenomenological characteristics of fascism: revolutionary and nationalist aspirations, alongside mythical components, related to the rise of a vigorous post-liberal society.<sup>6</sup> With the utopian profile of fascism still mystifying its ideological status, a psychoanalytic approach to the question – not so much antithetical, as complementary to other approaches – was the pedestal for developing the present research. Griffin correctly draws the ‘core myth’ that comprises the positive content of fascism and solidifies its ideological identity, but he never explains how this vision could breed the horrific fascist barbarities. Psychoanalysis, by inserting the notion of fantasy, has proffered enlightening insights, regarding the function of the ‘mythical’ aspects of fascist ideology.

In the chapters of the present work, the reader will be able to discern the substantial and fertile role of psychoanalysis in understanding socio-political phenomena. Rather than a masterful application of the psychoanalytic doctrine to political analysis, the underlying

principle of my study is the reciprocal relation between the two. My *telos* is neither a commentary on previous political narratives nor a fabrication of an alternative profile of fascist ideology. It is beyond the scope of this study to provide an answer to the enigma of fascism.

Psychoanalysis has been selected as the only appropriate methodological tool for unearthing the contradiction endemic of the fascist discourse (e.g. the blissful labourer of a post-liberal reborn society) and the discourses on fascism as an indication of an unfathomable lacuna in these symbolic speculations. This elusive element of fascism has been misinterpreted and misconceived, through insufficient discursive schemata, such as the projection of the phenomenon on a perverse frame. Being at the epicentre of my critical focus, I perceive this concatenation between fascism and perversion, as the projection of an ellipsis in the dianoetic contemplation of the fascist phenomenon, rather than an elucidatory reflection upon the latter. The 'perverse' side of fascism may reflect nothing but the part of it that eludes representation, the part that, up to today, retains the fascist mystery.

According to a general aphorism, after a plethora of discussions and analyses, all there was to be said about fascism has already been said and therefore, the topic has grown to be irrelevant to contemporary politics. The present study discards this aphoristic demand to put an end to the fathoming of fascism. In a world of increasing violence, racism, alienation, terrorism and fundamentalism, the analogy with the 20<sup>th</sup> century ferocious antagonisms and crises that culminated in the ultimate catastrophe of the Second World War, is far from trivial.<sup>7</sup>

A glance at Europe today makes it apparent that the fascist discourse has not faded. Notwithstanding their populist spirit, Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, Jorg Haider in Austria, Umberto Bossi in Italy, Pia Kjaersgaard in Denmark and Vladimir Zirinowski in Russia are some of the leading names that belong to far-right parties and, as recently as 2003, obtained considerable percentages in national elections.<sup>8</sup> Along with these parliamentary parties, a number of illegally operating political and paramilitary groups foster a neo-fascist bloc that sustains the imaginary narcissistic core of nationalism in ideological discourse. In the rise of the new millennium and the post-modern society, supposedly more liberal and multicultural than the past, these phenomena circumscribe a

present *cul-de-sac*. Considering its relevance to contemporary human affairs, interwar fascism constitutes an essential field of continuous scrutiny, which tries to unveil the cloaks of the violent doctrine of *Will-to-Power*, behind existing forms of power.

As far as the historical atrocities are concerned, fascism had an indelible impact on post-war ethics. Even today, sixty years after the end of the war, ethical debates revolve around controversial views that see the atrocities as the horrific heritage of fascist politics, incarnating absolute evil, or as the revelation of the 'dark side' of human civilisation. The nefarious crimes related with Nazism or with Mussolini's final period (1943 - 1945), exposed the void in representation. All retrospective accounts, which have produced heterogeneous narratives regarding this void, have simply failed to fill it. The tragedy of the Holocaust resists any attempt to be discursively enfolded with knowledge, precisely because the Nazi crimes carve a space outside discourse that marks the impossibility to represent all. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we have to give up the impossible task of symbolising the non-symbolisable. In *Commitment*, Adorno articulates the impossible demand addressed to artistic expression to represent what escapes its representation.<sup>9</sup> In a paradoxical manner, he recites his statement about the inability of lyric poetry to capture the Holocaust, only to emphasise, a few lines later, the need to create a narrative for the latter through representation:

I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric; it expresses in negative form the impulse which inspires committed literature [...] The abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting; Pascal's theological saying, *On ne doit pas dormir*, must be secularized. Yet this suffering, what Hegel called consciousness of adversity, also demands the continued existence of art while it prohibits it; it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it.<sup>10</sup>

The paradox that resides in art demands the eschewal of cynicism through the inclusive acknowledgement and anamnesis of the 'real suffering' the Holocaust suggests. Lyric poetry may not effectively represent the Holocaust, yet Adorno does not opt for silence. Instead, he underpins the significance of creative representation of inconceivable suffering as the only valid expression of commitment. Its horrific atrocity opened another

dimension for art that surpasses the antithesis between political and apolitical art. Emblematic of this dimension are the works of Kafka and Beckett, which do not thwart the barbaric element of artistic representation, but they apply it in order to reveal the horrific aspects of reality.<sup>11</sup>

The limits and the possibilities of representation require thoroughgoing reflection. What is very meaningless must become the basis for producing some meaning, through representational means. Adorno's dual thesis was neglected by post-modern revisionists in the 1980s, such as Lyotard or the historian David Irving. As Homer notes, Lyotard emphasised the conception of the Holocaust as the deadlock upon which rational discourse stumbles, unable to move beyond it.<sup>12</sup> But representation must always be the attempt to narrativise this beyond:

The suffering of the Holocaust is at once on a scale that cannot be represented but at the same time it must be, and this is the paradox of the Holocaust as an historical event.<sup>13</sup>

[...] From a Jamesonian perspective, we are still left with the problem that the Holocaust is not a narrative and remains fundamentally unrepresentable, but at the same time we only have access to it through narrative representation.<sup>14</sup>

We must follow the representation of impossibility as an ethical imperative that increases our awareness of the limits of human experience. The fundamental task of representation is to represent a real totality that remains interminably ungraspable.<sup>15</sup> Signifiers, such as totalitarianism, denoting the violent encroachment and confiscation of personal freedoms and human rights, were launched in order to describe regimes such as Nazism and Stalinism.<sup>16</sup> However, aligned with other theorists, such as Žižek, Badiou attacks the notion of 'totalitarianism' as a common categorisation of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes that does not assist our understanding of Nazi atrocities. *A contrario* it is ineffective as far as our thinking is concerned, especially when Evil is taken into consideration. Badiou suggests, "We must accept the irreducibility of the [Nazi] extermination (just as we must accept the irreducibility of the Stalinist Party-state)."<sup>17</sup>

Without proceeding to a critique of the term 'totalitarianism' at this point of the study, I just wish to draw its failure to symbolically grasp the magnitude of the destruction caused by fascism and its erroneous equation of the Nazi phenomenon with Stalinism. The

‘indivisible remainder’ of this failure is mystified through perverse designations.<sup>18</sup> What came to my awareness was that numerous explications of the phenomenon touch upon the glossary of the perversions, whereas Sade, as the archetypical figure of the perverse universe, appears to be the precursor of fascist ideology and its ethics of cruelty. Thus, the argumentative web of the discourses on fascism comes upon a certain snag, as fascism *qua* perversion engraves a *terra incognita* of theoretical, moral, religious and legal contradiction and paradoxes.

My intention is to reveal the inadequacies of such nexus, in terms of both clarifying the conundrum of fascism and disentangling the notion of perversion from its marginal frame. Perversion functions as the ‘scum’ of discourse, that is to say it becomes the main reference for any failing point in discourse that eradicates the knowledge produced within its boundaries and thereby exposes its limits. Put in more concrete terms, this study poses one main research question: *What is it about the fascist discourse that cultivates the creation of perverse narratives, within a range of discourses that attempt to explain fascism?*

Does the fascist follow Sade’s trail, wishing to eradicate differences in politics, or is it a conservative ‘perverse’ tactic that only tackles the epiphenomenon, unable to submerge into fascism’s deeper dynamics? If fascism were congruous with the Sadean fantasy, then perverse sexuality would be their common ground. This is the point drawn by the narratives I present and discuss in the opening part, unrolling the first string of the coil for guiding the reader through the present work. The second string is my methodological use of psychoanalysis, as a critical tool, which, rather than hermeneutically providing definitive answers to the difficult questions posed, exposes the thorny realisation that there will never be a definitive answer to the enigma of fascism and perversion is just the moralistic veiling of this inadequacy.

The endurance of factors, such as anxiety, ambiguity, doubt and ambivalence, is the distillation of the psychoanalytic experience that perturbs the definitiveness of totalising terms and types of knowledge. So, if one anticipates this study to treat fascism as a clinical case study, s/he will be let down, since the psychograph of fascism is not only jettisoned, but is also antithetical to the objectives of the present research. On the

contrary, the aim is to divulge the insufficiency of analysing fascism, as a psychopathological entity.

The main argument that I put forward is that the category of perversion, due to its particular status in the symbolic continuum (i.e. its inscription in the symbolic order and, at the same time, its 'ex-scription', its diastole due to excessive enjoyment that goes beyond the symbolic register), becomes a source of misidentification with extreme socio-political phenomena. In contemplating these phenomena and perversions, always something escapes symbolisation and this 'something' cannot be grasped by knowledge. The term 'perverse' appears as a signifier for any parasitic condition that escapes firm symbolic meaning.

Historical fascism has been the habitual example of an ideological phenomenon associated with various perverse designations. Having its basis precisely on this ambiguous and paradoxical relation to social order (complying and radically going against it), this link is ahistorical and precarious for both the explanation of extreme phenomena, such as fascism, and the category of perversion, which is translated to the gangland that requires control, monitoring and isolation from the social edifice.

Thus, I confront this misconceiving equation, which, in its effort to reduce the ambiguity of fascism, actually further mystifies it, together with the notion of perversion. I see this as an ideological response to ambiguity itself and the so-called pervert's idiosyncratic toleration of the latter. The ultimate goal of this ideological strategy is the 'fascist' vilification and marginalisation of the pervert.

#### ***a) Methodology: Psychoanalytic Criticism and the Text(s) in Question***

The exploration of the main research question requires a suitable method of criticism. In this respect, my methodological tools are derived from the Lacanian psychoanalytic corpus, as it allows a critical elaboration of the unconscious economy that regulates discourse and the production of messages that have a formative and transfigurative role for social or cultural phenomena.



Lacanian discourse assesses “psychological and social effects of particular texts and discourses.”<sup>19</sup> It reflects the power of signification as the force that determines intersubjective relations, which gives the opportunity to study, not only the individual psychological phenomenon, but also its collective parameters. Furthermore, there is probably no other type of discourse, apart from the psychoanalytic, to have produced a more illuminating and comprehensive theory on perversion, both in its sexual and non-sexual aspects. This is because psychoanalysis approaches subjectivity, in a highly systematic and explicatory fashion.

Today, only the psychoanalytic pathway, in the basis of its scrutiny, addresses and ‘undresses’ the subject from her *objective* conception, revealing her split, lacking status, namely the subject of the unconscious. As Stavrakakis notes, “the object of psychoanalysis is not the individual it is not man, but it is what he is lacking.”<sup>20</sup> Subjective experience means more than what occupies the predominant empirical research and scientificity. Unconscious desires, anxiety, shame, guilt, fantasmatic constructs, tension and more compose the complex mosaic of subjectivity. All are interrelated and interposed multifariously in the subject’s life.

The emphasis of my critique is put on discourse *per se*. I must note here the meanings under which the notion of discourse appears in my analysis. In the first part, where the link between fascism and perversion is explored within various discourses, the term discourse refers to the systematic discussion of the topic, in line with a certain theoretical framework. In other words, discourse refers to the body of knowledge that articulated a link between fascism and perversion.<sup>21</sup> For the following parts, the term discourse is used in its main Lacanian conception, referring to the intersubjective bond established and maintained by language.<sup>22</sup>

Without promoting the Lacanian discourse as the *only* truthful approach of social relations, far from it, my aim is to accentuate its advantage as a critical analytical tool, which enables the researcher to bring forth some of the *real* processes behind representation, beyond the knowledge produced in discourse. This is its main difference from sociological or economic discourses which eulogise the *objective* rather than *subjective* factor in their explanations. This is because objectivity points towards an external and complete Other who holds the answer for everything. The baseline of this

work refuses to see the Other as a non-lacking entity that provides us with the knowledge that would embank the vacuum of our existence. The fascist threat does not come from 'outside'.<sup>23</sup> If we thwart the pernicious for our social organism forces that stem from 'inside', an ideological justification of violence, as a response to an external enemy, will continue to be the case in politics.

Yet one must not forget that the Lacanian discourse can only supplement other accounts rather than providing an alternative sufficient and autonomous exegesis of the fascist phenomenon. Psychoanalysis neglects the materialist factors that contributed to the rise and continuation of the fascist ideological discourse from the beginning of the last century until today. So, it is pharisaic to draw the inadequacies of sociological accounts in grasping the essence of the fascist phenomenon, without acknowledging a similar scantiness of psychoanalysis in its ability to historicize a socio-political phenomenon and incorporate the complexity of economic factors in the rise of fascism and its different 'faces'. This would serve the fantasy of psychoanalysis comprising a closed and thus masterful discourse.

The problem is that psychoanalysis often encrypts the risk of reducing subjective experience into 'objective' interpretations.<sup>24</sup> The problem of psychological reductionism undermines any study that implements the findings of the psychoanalytic clinic to dissect social phenomena, inasmuch as the field of the social ('objective') can be reduced to the individual ('subjective'). Stavrakakis points out that the analysis of socio-political conditions must avoid any type of psychologisation, that is, the use of internal, dispositional attributions for explaining them.<sup>25</sup> This reductionist practice lacks even explanatory power, considering that any event or behaviour is a combination of internal and external factors, and psychoanalysis must provide the golden thread that links the two (perhaps, *extimacy*, to make an early use of a Lacanian neologism, better describes the continuity between 'internal' and 'external'). More accurately, the focal point must be the bond that ties the individual to his/her social context. The essence of analysis relies on the bond formed between the analysand and the analyst.<sup>26</sup>

Rather than 'applying' Lacan's ideas to socio-political dialogues, it is more appropriate to speak about an inter-lacing between Lacan's theoretical ideas about subjectivity and the study of political phenomena.<sup>27</sup> Considering that Lacan's theory of the divided

subject indicates various symbolic and imaginary attempts of the latter to cover her division within her social milieu, it is possible for psychoanalysis to link its theoretical suggestions with socio-political analysis.<sup>28</sup> This does not suggest the emergence of a meta-discourse through the synthesis of these two fields. My approach treats itself as a text, equivalent and placed on the same stratum as the texts in question. This is a basic component for a productive theory. Nevertheless, the critical exposition of messages, propositions and vocabularies produced by the texts in question raises the nagging question of whether my critique is articulated from the vantage point of a meta-discourse. Stavrakakis attests:

Insofar as every analysis presupposes the elucidation of a particular problem or field by reference to an element which is usually external to it, and thus articulates a certain meta-discourse [...] every analysis becomes, to a certain extent, reductionist. Even the most 'objective' (casual) reading of a text, the most simple analysis of an issue, is contaminated by a certain reductionism.<sup>29</sup>

In this way, it is impossible for any analysis of discourse to escape from reductionism completely and the articulation of a meta-discourse. Nonetheless, this does not open the possibility for the enunciation of "a closed successful reduction, a closed successful meta-language," as Stavrakakis notes.<sup>30</sup> Lacan points towards the realisation of the impossibility of a meta-language, by trying ineffectively to operate in its very impossible meta-linguistic field ('a meta-linguistic negation of meta-language'). In this regard, my text does not claim to eliminate the reductionist parameters of analysing discourse, precisely because this would entail and maintain reductionism. In line with Stavrakakis, the question is to avoid absolutist reductionism and not reductionism itself.

I resort to Lacanian psychoanalysis for the purposes of a criticism (or a failed meta-discourse) that allows psychoanalysis to analyse its analyses. A psychoanalytic criticism of psychoanalysis augments theoretical ideas and practices, rather than disabling them. Especially considering the lack of extensive research on perversion, reflected in its problematic and convoluted status as a category, the revision and re-articulation of theories, describing the perverse condition, are much needed. Even when I discuss narratives from the psychoanalytic discourse, the aim is to reveal the plenitude of

resourcefulness that inheres to the texts produced by Freud and Lacan. One can return to these texts again and again, without losing their originality and their fertile hypostasis.<sup>31</sup> Less than a field of masterful interpretations, the texts by Freud and Lacan excavate guiding channels, through which the rationale of this theoretical approach flows. Yet there are practical implications, inasmuch as the need to reappraise vocabularies and attitudes towards what eludes knowledge is addressed. Only then psychoanalysis is not reduced in itself to a model of institutionalised knowledge and intellectual mastery.

Stanley Fish cauterises psychoanalytic mastery, by delivering a methodical deconstruction of the Wolf-man, Freud's famous case study.<sup>32</sup> For Fish, what is at stake is Freud's persuasive and authoritarian position as an analyst. He points to the rhetorical mastery Freud exercises upon Wolf-man's narrative and the anal enjoyment he derives from it. By withholding information and failing to provide a historical account of the case, on the one hand, and by articulating self-serving interpretations, on the other, rather it is Freud's own anal desires that surface in his masterful rhetoric, revealing his will to dominate and persuade.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, Derrida produced an effective and prismatic critique of Lacan with regard to his reading of Poe's text "The Purloined Letter."<sup>34</sup> Lacan treats the literary text in analogy with the symbolic structuring of the unconscious, taking the role of the analyst who uncovers the truth of the text. Thus, Lacan appears as the connoisseur of truth, the master who gives an absolute meaning to Poe's text, falling into the decoy of logocentrism. Lacan reduces the letter to the indivisible phallus which is "idealized and located in the voice," in the spoken word.<sup>35</sup> Countering Lacan, for Derrida, the letter may not arrive at its destination; the truth cannot be traced, as it is always in the process of ever changing and subject to the divisibility of meaning.

Considering these criticisms, the risk of succumbing to masterful Lacanianism is not entirely eradicated in my study. However, my approach articulates no postulations nor provides any leading lights, regarding the Truth of psychoanalysis. The main effort here is to detach Truth from established psychoanalytic clichés and expose it as 'unknowable', i.e. the irreconcilability between Truth and closed knowledge and consensus. My analytic pathway tries to expose contradiction (within any discourse), following the belief that its surfacing reveals the incompleteness of Truth. In this regard, I try to maintain a distance

from the current reality of growing psychoanalytic research that aims to reveal the truth behind cultural, social and political phenomena and ultimately, the Truth for psychoanalysis itself. That would lead to a *cul-de-sac* for psychoanalysis and an apostasy from its basic principle about Truth being always incomplete. Thus, the present study leaves aside its scope the revelation of Truth and points out more the misapprehension of its unrepresentability.

Psychoanalytic mastery appears to corroborate one main paradox of the Lacanian discourse. If Lacan fabricated a text deliberately subversive of “classical” authority of discourse, then his own discourse is conveyed as classical.<sup>36</sup> Lacan weaves a discourse which delineates a real space beyond symbolisation and its acknowledgement suggests that the closure of our symbolisations is impossible. This closure is nothing but a fantasy that the main goal of psychoanalysis is to traverse it. The fluidity and the diversity of meanings inherent to Lacan’s discourse evince this. As Stavrakakis says, “the Lacanian system is perhaps the closest we can get to a discourse opening itself up to what exceeds its limits.”<sup>37</sup> This suggests that Lacan’s most original argument about the real becomes the hindering element of his discourse.

What is more, the researcher who engages with the Lacanian theoretical corpus has to confront its fluid and often cryptic character. Notwithstanding the thorny debate surrounding this issue, it is the acceptance of the “irreducible ambiguity and indeterminacy” of Lacan’s discourse that renders a research project fruitful.<sup>38</sup> In my view, it is part of the responsibility that the researcher needs to assume for his/her desire to operate within the field of Lacanian discourse. My analysis maintains the difficulty and intricate character of Lacan, because this is another reflection of something that resists representation, namely it lets some of Lacan’s real come forth.<sup>39</sup> The aim of my reading is not to fabricate a representation of this real, in search of the ‘real’ Lacan, but to reveal its provocative yet constitutive character that disturbs symbolic and imaginary absolutism and certainty, as Stavrakakis notes.<sup>40</sup> It is more accurate to say that my aim is less to reveal the misrepresentation of the real and more to expose its troublesome operation within representations, through the discussion of contradictions, oscillations and inconsistencies.

Within this discursive context, my text attempts to elucidate this impossibility for closure, while is itself prepared to be exposed to the self-hindrance of what goes beyond its limits. My methodological implementation of the Lacanian discourse sets forth an exploration and approximation of the *x*-factor, operating beyond various discourses on fascism and the fascist discourse itself. Eluding representation, this unknown factor constantly returns and disturbs symbolisation in its attempt to represent all.

Consequently, a fissure emerges that adumbrates the real dimension of discourse, residing in the heart of our reality. This fissure is embodied by a surplus, namely the *object a*, a quintessential Lacanian concept which inscribes lack and excess in discourse. Despite the ungraspable character of the *object a*, Lacanian psychoanalysis can function as a compass that guides us in the multitude of the apparitions of the object. Thus, it is feasible to fathom the fissure in discourse, without turning it into reducible observable knowledge. What comes forth, at the end of this effort, is the iridescence of the unrepresentable non-symbolised lacuna in the socio-political kaleidoscope.

Inscribing new theoretical horizons, where the researcher has to bear the uncertainty of what the future will bring, is a more fertile and fascinating process than producing interpretations that affirm previous scholarly schemas. A substantial endeavour of my study, in terms of methodology, is to crystallise the verve of psychoanalytic theory that precludes the risk of becoming a self-referential closed system of knowledge, by guiding the researcher to a creative anamorphosis of existing concepts, in the light of new theorisations about human affairs and intra-psychic processes. At least, this is a realisation that came after my personal catechesis and increased awareness of the transfigurations of the models and the lexicon of 'applied psychoanalysis', with the term 'applied' itself enough to fire up numerous debates.

Psychoanalysis must not be a process that searches for narcissistic confirmation, regarding the superiority of its theories. As clinical psychoanalysis is not panacea for the subject's mental suffering, 'applied' psychoanalysis does not represent a dogmatic body of knowledge. Otherwise, the risk of instrumentalisation of psychoanalytic knowledge and its exclusion from social and human sciences, as many historicists and proponents of scientific objective research claim to have achieved, gain ground. In a world that dramatically changes every day, psychoanalysts must take precautions from becoming

graphic caricatures, caustically commenting on everything and armoured with the robust explanatory valence of psychoanalytic theory.

### ***b) Mad, Cad, Sade: The Historical Profile of the Pervert***

What does it mean to be on the perverse side? Before I commonly allude to perversion and its alleged fascist liaison in my analysis, an overview of the convoluted status of the notion of perversion and the variety of meanings it can acquire in different narratives, is required. Despite its frequent use in discourse, perversion is far from a straightforward term to define. It is not possible to single out a definition that diachronically describes the practices, behaviours, and personality, with which the concept of perversion has been linked, through the years. In his leading work, *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault shed essential light on this problem, by observing and exposing the subordination of perverse sexuality's semantics to discourse.<sup>41</sup> The prevalent discourse of each era, contingent upon the mechanisms of power, is what determines the connotations that perversion as designation holds. For some, it is a distinct psychopathological category, whereas for others, it is the product of culture and current politics. In any case, the obscurity of the notion of perversion is at stake. I will briefly explore some of the statements, regarding perversion, that have dominated discourse historically, noting that this is far from a complete account.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault scrutinises the determining role of discourses in the conception, expression, and regulation of sexuality and the notion of perversion. Until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were three main codes that regulated sexual practices: the canonical law, the Christian pastoral law and the civil law.<sup>42</sup> Sexuality followed a coded practice, as any other behaviour did, in the course of interpersonal interaction. The fundamental basis of the code was morality. In this tone, perversion was regarded as the immoral degenerate posture of the subject, regarding sexuality. The switch from a moral to a medical definition of perversion occurred in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since that time, perversion has belonged to the field of clinical research and practice, following the psychiatric indoctrination that emerged, as a firm body of knowledge. The core of the

medicalisation of perversion involves the sexual instinct, inasmuch as perverse sexuality refers to the pathology of the instinct, as something that constitutes a 'functional disease' of the latter.

The first to have produced the most systematic work on perversion, as an object of clinical discourse, was Krafft-Ebing, who is accounted for the introduction of the typical perverse terminology, still in use by psychiatric manuals. Krafft-Ebing promoted a paradoxical equation between diverse modes of perversion. Under the same classification, homosexuality, sadism, masochism, voyeurism, fetishism and so on were seen as the degenerating result of a common functional disease of the sexual instinct.<sup>43</sup> Of course, the picture is much different today, in terms of both moral values and psychiatric diagnostic categories.<sup>44</sup> This reveals the solid link between normative behaviour and medical discourse. Diagnosis, prognosis and treatment of perversion have evolved around the normative expression of sexual instinct, which is also considered the natural function, i.e. heterosexual coitus. All deviant sexual behaviours are thus linked to the category of perversion as disorders of the natural function of the instinct.<sup>45</sup>

An allusion to Freud's contribution in the study of the perversions cannot omit his seminal work *Three Essays on the Theory on Sexuality*.<sup>46</sup> The first essay of the book is an analysis of *sexual aberrations*, something that probably startles the reader who does not expect a paper on sexuality, especially at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to address the issue of perversion in its opening pages. However, this is not unfounded, considering Freud's intention to emphasise the theory of infantile sexuality that he develops in the subsequent essays. Rather than the pathology of perversion, Freud accentuates the role of the latter in the child's normal psychosexual development.

Perversion used to be seen as a digression from instincts upon which moral and social behaviour is contingent.<sup>47</sup> In this respect, a crime of particular ferocity was classified as a perverse behaviour. Freud, who does not consider perversion as deviation of the instinct, links it solely to sexuality, which is *polymorphous* and *infantile*. Polymorphous sexuality refers to the amalgamation of the component instincts with the range of the erogenous zones, before genital organisation takes over.<sup>48</sup> The integration of the erogenous zones to the primacy of the genitals is the norm that Freud adopts in order to define the complex nature of the perversions. Two notions, specifically the sexual *object* and the sexual *aim*,



provide the baseline for what deviates from the norm. The sexual object describes the person at whom sexual attraction centres and the sexual aim refers to the act itself, through which the sexual instinct finds its expression. In their normative conception, these two terms mark out the attraction towards members of the opposite sex and the genital coitus.

Nevertheless, at the same time, Freud is critical of the norm. He argues that perverse sexuality in adulthood does not suggest deviation from adult normative sexual patterns, but the *persistence* of a sexual component, or regression to a previous stage of psychosexual development, in which libido has been fixated.<sup>49</sup> Deviations of the sexual object, (previously regarded as “inversion”), cannot be seen as either innate or acquired, because for Freud, bisexuality lies in the basis of psychosexual development, which explains inversion. So, it is true that Freud relies on a norm, but this is determined by neither social nor moral criteria. If we are to accept perversion as clinical entity with particular symptoms, the definition of its pathology must not reside in its negative status, as a socially reproachful practice. Even if perverse practices were seen in socially favourable forms, they would still be perverse, inasmuch as they rely on pre-genital organisation. Freud puts across this tenet in the *Three Essays*, where he famously stated that perversion is the reverse of neurosis.<sup>50</sup> Repression, which makes the neurotic express his instinct through the symptom, is absent in the pervert who remains outside the Oedipus conflict, by implementing mechanisms, such as disavowal, which Freud elaborates in his later paper on fetishism.<sup>51</sup>

From a Lacanian perspective, perversion receives a different conceptualisation. Lacan does not take the view of perversion as the negative of neurosis, due to the absence of repression. The pervert is defined by the position he takes in relation to the drive, which is not homologous with the instinct.<sup>52</sup> Neurosis and perversion are both *structures* equally determined by the Oedipal problematic. But perversion is a structure formed in an inverse way from that of neurosis, since the pervert is not tormented by the enduring question of the neurotic about what the Other wants from him. The pervert is certain about what the Other desires. By turning himself into the instrument of the Other’s enjoyment, the pervert renounces his subjective status and takes the place of the object of the *Will-to-Jouissance*.<sup>53</sup> The *Will-to-Jouir* is not his property, but it rather belongs to the Other. This

structural perception allows perversion to be disengaged from social normative definitions and even Freud's norm of heterosexual genital coitus. In addition, it extricates perversion from its exclusive pertinence to sexual practices. A perverse structure does not necessarily suggest an acting out of perverse sexual behaviours.

Lacan's definition of perversion concerns the structure of fantasy *per se*, which is the inverse of neurosis. The inversion of fantasy appears first in 'Kant with Sade'.<sup>54</sup> Lacan's matheme that reflects the fantasmatic relation (i.e. desire) of the subject to the *object a* ( $\$ \diamond a$ ) is inverted, which means the subject is identified with the object ( $a \diamond \$$ ). Since 'Kant with Sade', and despite the fact that there is no explicit reference to perversion, Lacan's matheme of the reverse fantasy has been typically associated with the structure of perversion. Given that the reverse form of the matheme describes the Sadean fantasy, one has to ask whether Sadean fantasy functions as the prototype for sadism, which is casually applied to fascism. Sadism in fantasy does not necessarily mean sadism in action. The crimes of Sade's writings bear little resemblance to both the deeds he actually committed and the reasons for his punishment.<sup>55</sup> So, is the structure of the Sadean fantasy the criterion for identifying all other perversions?

In the present study, my main critique of the use of perverse designations in the psychoanalytic discourse evolves around one question: Is it possible for psychoanalysis to approximate non-sexual phenomena (such as power and ideology) and still refer to designations derived from the clinic? Furthermore, to what extent are narratives that link the phenomenon of fascism to perversion influenced by morality? Is there any benefit in the comprehension of political movements when one 'perversifies' ideology and any advance in the conception of the perversions, when they become 'ideologised'?

### ***c) Thesis Synopsis***

The quadripartite structure of this study is centred on the 'misfortunes of the Sadean pervert', whose spirit seems to haunt variegated narratives about fascism. The first two parts explore and expose the discursive representation of fascism, infiltrated by a polymorphous perverse aura, in order to reveal, that on the level of discourse, the pervert

occupies a different position from that of the fascist. Furthermore, Sade's discursive system forms a closed circuit, incongruent with the discursive system of 'totalitarianism', to which historical phenomena of fascism belong. The second part reappraises the homonymy of Kantian ethics with Sadean anti-morality, as the prognosticative ethical exemplar, materialised by the fascist atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the final part, I adumbrate the predicament of contemporary politics, which (mis)use the notion of perversion, in order to keep at bay any destabilising factor that breaks their normative portcullis. Hence, I articulate an alternative view of the 'perverse parameter' in society.

The first part embarks on a detailed illustration and juxtaposition of narratives that comprise my 'textual data'. The latter were gathered from various discourses (i.e. a discussion of the topic, following a certain school of thought), such as social theory, political philosophy, psychology, cinema and psychoanalysis. From the reproduction of the stereotypical image of the fascist *qua* sadist, whose lash bestows him with power, to more complex and sophisticated philosophical, socio-political and psychoanalytic readings of perversion's linkage to fascism, the objective is to furnish the evidence about this 'perversology' around fascism, dissecting the multitude of its narrativisations and demonstrating its problematic aspects. The selection of the texts was grounded in their enduring impact on social theory and representation and they are recounted in a chronological order.

The first major study to have introduced the idea of fascism's perverse pedestal was Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that acerbically exposes the irrational basis of capitalist domination that breeds fascism, by perverting natural instinct, as Sade's figure comes to exemplify. Sade, as the proto-bourgeois exponent, who perverted and instrumentalised enlightenment reason for his own personal depraved interests, seems to be also the proto-fascist figure for the two authors. Furthermore, in his essay 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', Adorno draws on the regressive massification that sustained the perverse structure of fascist regimes. The narratives of the Frankfurt School, resonant of the critical spirit of the thought of modernity, produced a compelling polemic against fascism, while their ideas evoked the revolutionary fortitude of social movements of the previous century. As late as the students' demonstrations and revolts of the 1960s and 1970s, the Frankfurt School

thinkers have long been a source of inspiration for radical political action. Nevertheless, I confront some mystifying aspects of the Frankfurt School and the Freudian Left, as well as the intricacies of their exegeses of fascism.

The reason for including texts from the psychoanalytic discourse has dual justification. First, it is difficult to disregard the major impact of psychoanalytic discourse on a wide range of intellectual disciplines, including social theory, psychopathology and cultural production, or its formative role in the shifting perceptions of subjective experience and conscience. So, if psychoanalytic argumentation embroiders narratives produced by differential discourses, it is important to see the way psychoanalytic discourse fathoms the relation of fascism to perversion, especially as the basis of the present work is itself psychoanalytic. Second, the belief that psychoanalysis cannot benefit from previous works of the same framework, without re-evaluating the application of its concepts, is what guides the rationale of my critique. A critical psychoanalytic work has to re-examine and restore the suggestions of psychoanalysis in order to advance its theory and establish a constructive podium in contemporary critique.

The chronological presentation of psychoanalytic narratives, from the 1940s to today, reflects the hermeneutical trajectories that psychoanalysis has followed, after Freud. An early example of the application of psychoanalytic insights to fascist politics is a text by Ernest Jones which draws on orthodox Freudian hermeneutical patterns. In the course of my presentation, I also consider other psychoanalytic works, from Neo-Freudians, such as Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, to contemporary readings by Juliet Flower MacCannell and Slavoj Žižek, repercussive of the Lacanian cogito. My critique of Jones's text focuses on his interpretation of the Nazi phenomenon as part of a general symptomatology, engendered by a re-activation of elliptical Oedipal dynamics. Specifically, homosexual trends characterise the psychic structure of Nazi aficionados and those who remained lethargic in the face of the fascist threat. The fear of Hitler, as a sadistic paternal imago, causes this re-enactment of perverse psychic elements. By prioritising the importance of a complete Oedipus complex, Jones explains fascism, and consequently the associated perverse traits, as the failure of the patriarchal structures of society.

In the early 1950s, expanding the ramification of the Freudo-Marxist perspective, the well-known socio-psychological study on the *Authoritarian Personality* intended to

provide objective measures of the repressed perverse features of the potential fascist. Considering the numerous unresolved biases of the study, eventually it only reproduced the stereotypical conception of perversion as linked to criminological and pathological parameters of social relations. Since the 1950s, the work of Hannah Arendt has also been increasingly inspirational, forming a *sine qua non* today for any study on ideologico-political conditions captioned under the term 'totalitarian'. From a philosophical scope, Arendt addresses ethical issues related to fascism. Before the introduction of the notion of the 'banality of evil', Arendt's proclivity to associate Nazism with perverse labelling is traced in her work. More importantly, her discursive arguments stirred up the ethical debate regarding the affinity between the thought of Kant and Sade, which I develop in the third part of the study.

Given the impact of psychoanalytic and Marxist views in the post-1945 years, it is not surprising to discern their impact on other discursive contexts, related to culture and artistic creativity. In the 1960s and 1970s, cinema had become a powerful discursive medium, with an immediate impact on a cultural level.<sup>56</sup> The narratives of three influential films are recounted, inasmuch as they fabricate a relation between fascist politics and perverse sexuality. These films are: Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (1969), Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1973) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975). These three emblematic delegates of Italian cinema not only had inestimable impact on international cinema, in terms of aesthetical style and technique, but also produced caustic and provoking narratives about contemporary politics, which were far more daring than Hollywood productions. For this reason, even nowadays their works are essential references for scholarly analyses of the representation of fascism.<sup>57</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, a new force in Freudian psychoanalysis produced original theorisations on perversion, which were again applied to fascist politics. Chasseguet-Smirgel is a renowned Neo-Freudian who points out the creative aspects of pre-oedipal idealisations that characterise perversion. Without disengaging herself from the conservatism of orthodox Freudians, Chasseguet-Smirgel over-emphasises patriarchal hegemony and reduces any attack against the paternal ringside to a perverse effort of establishing a Sadean chaotic universe, alluding to Hitler and Nazism as embodiments of the latter. Within this pre-Oedipal theorising framework, Klaus Theweleit adds the

abolition of the maternal image, along with the paternal image, to the explanation of the solidarity of the Nazi military forces, without demonstrating adequately how these decomposing perverse rudiments can consolidate an organic military body, like the fascist *Freikorps*.

The work of Juliet Flower MacCannell and Slavoj Žižek represents the recent psychoanalytic discussion about fascism and perversion in the last fifteen years. Their predilection to ground the plenitude of their arguments in ideas, derived from the equivocal psychoanalytic theorisation of perversion, is contended (e.g. the explanatory role of disavowal in Žižek). I must note my solidarity with these two authors' endeavour to unearth the dynamics of fascism via a Lacanian pathway and their emphasis on psychoanalysis as an essential plinth for a prospective political praxis. My critique is aimed instead at the frequent and immune scholastic application of knotty ideas related to perversion that averts this political prospect of psychoanalysis. Above all, my analysis identifies a common ground between leftist radical narratives and conservative narratives, whether produced within the psychoanalytic discourse or not, that takes perversion as the dark crypt where social and political misfortunes of the human condition lie in ambush.

The second part contains an original psychoanalytic criticism of the statement that discursively relates fascism to perversion. The logic of Lacan's theorisation of the discourse of the unconscious enables us to scrutinise this statement beyond its discursive limits. Only psychoanalysis, as an intellectual tool, can elucidate this transcendental of any ideological dimension. In this vein, I discuss the limits that the pervert and the fascist appear to surpass, arguing that each one fits a separate discourse, as contoured by Lacan. Thus, I defy the idea of their deviation from existing discourses that shape social bonds. Nonetheless, fascism cannot be taken into the same discursive canvas as perversion. The first is in agreement with the discourse of the master, whereas the latter appears to be commensurate with the structure of the discourse of the hysteric, bearing in mind that Lacan did not develop a schema of a distinct perverse discourse.

At least one factor renders fascism and perversion incompatible representational schemata. This is domination, which characterises the discursive position of the fascist. As the master, who embodies a signifier of absolute value (the Aryan ideal) in the dominant position in discourse, the fascist forces an inferior other, a slave (the non-

Aryan), to work for his *jouissance*. This discursive circuit, which I associate with power, produces a fantasy of domination. As for the perverse subject, it is possible to incorporate him into the discourse of the hysteric, challenging the crossing boundaries between neurosis and perversion. Given their dissimilar positions, the fascist and the pervert follow different discursive attitudes, in the formation of their social bonds. The pervert is dominated by the Other, inasmuch as he serves the Other's *jouissance*, whereas the master seeks to dominate the Other. Each discourse produces a certain fantasy of a complete Other, forming a closed circuit of power. In the case of the master's discourse, we have a fantasy of domination, as the fulcrum that determines the relation between the terms of the discourse.

The fantasmatic position of the Sadean characters, which I consider to be different from the perverse position, is part of a closed system of masterful domination that can be juxtaposed with two more systems: an 'Oedipal' and a 'totalitarian' system, both inscribed in the master's discourse. The Oedipal system is dominated by the law's repression of the real, which marks its presence through the perverse fantasies of any 'ordinary' subject. Through versatile images that entrap the gaze and fantasmatic apparitions in the subject's life, the Oedipal system gives vent to the imaginary Real, in the Žižekian sense. A dilation of repression shifts the relation to the real. An 'over-repression' *via* 'over-identification' with the law establishes an oppressive totalitarian system that modifies the circuit of *jouissance* in its relation to the law. The law becomes the route for the symbolic Real to emerge. It is noted that the 'totalitarian' system is conceived as an extension of the 'Oedipal' system and not as something that operates outside the boundaries of the latter. The Sadean system, taking *The 120 Days of Sodom* as its epitome, is based on neither repression nor oppression. It is a self-subversive system of the real Real, worshipped by Sadean characters as the absolute devouring and diluvian experience for the subject to enjoy, which is something impossible.

The third part of the study contains a scrutiny of the ethical debate regarding the historical atrocities of fascism. Conceived as the legacy of Sade and, furthermore, as a horrific ontological example of the fulfilment of the Kantian ethics, the fascist atrocities raise vertiginous ethical questions. Does the Holocaust emblematises the paradoxical affinity between the thought of Kant and Sade? Horkheimer and Adorno were the first to

elaborate the question of whether Kantian ethics is in harmony with Sadean cruelty, followed by Lacan's similar allusion to Sade as the truth of Kant. But if the reverse is also true, Kant being the truth of Sade, the subject who adheres to the supremacy of the ethical duty is also a Sadean pervert. I confront this problematic equation by illuminating the flaws of the *Kant-with-Sade* thesis.

Behind the aspirations of Sade, as well as of the fascist, lies an omnipotent narcissistic fantasmatic position. From this position, both imagine a rigid law, which is not lacking and thereby founds their system of domination and plasters every gap. Both Sade and fascism formed systems incongruous with Kantian ethics. Without claiming that they had a common ethical pedestal, the two systems are characterised by masterful domination that prioritises an ideal linked to personal interests (fantasies). Therefore, this ideal cannot acquire a universal status. The fascist does not reveal the perverse truth of the Kantian law, but a common malformation of Kant's maxim that we find in every system of domination, where an ultimate fantasy, reflective of egotistic interests, arbitrarily takes the status of a universal law.

Furthermore, in this ethical discussion, I scrutinise the role of guilt, by exploring its relation to the symbolic, the real and the imaginary. My argument is that an ethical action first requires the acceptance of symbolic guilt. This does not occur in the case of Sade or fascism, where the dominance of the imaginary methodises a suspension of guilt, by patronising a complete and absolute law that could satiate desire. As long as guilt is on the side of the servant, the master's reliability remains intact and his signifier appears to be capable of accomplishing this imaginary goal. This does not constitute an ethical attitude for the fascist, who excludes symbolic guilt, as incompatible with the supremacy of the ideal that he serves.

The last part deals with an enduring problem in psychoanalysis that cleaves to the nebulous notion of perversion and the related glossary. Regardless of its spinose character, perversion is seen as a field of fixed and definite propositions. Consequently, one finds assertive, yet bewildering applications of these propositions in the analysis of fascism or other political phenomena. For this reason, the update of the psychoanalytic philology of perversion is an exigency. This means that novel theorisations, regarding the clinical, ethical and political status of the subject, described under the nominal category



of perversion, are required. The casual use of this category in the interpretation of socio-political phenomena adds more obscurity to the terms involved, without considering perversion on new ground. Sado-masochism, fetishism, repressed homosexual tendencies or terms like disavowal, have become rigid explanatory schemes for the flourishing of last century's fascism.

Despite the discrepancy between fascism and perversion regarding discourse and ethics, as discussed in the second and third chapters of the study, the intoxication of fascism with perverse traits facilitates the segregating practices of an authoritarian norm against the subject who receives the label 'pervert'. Seen as the subject who raises anxiety in the agents of the institutional dome of society, precisely by denouncing subjectivity and identifying with the object, the so-called pervert receives an empty label, so that the very emptiness of the discursive accounts of perversion, the failure of attaching any fixed meaning to the notion, is disguised. Given that it serves ideological purposes, I challenge this 'fascist' segregating practice, by engraving a new trail that abandons the perverse designation. Specifically, I incorporate into my rhetoric a de-pathologised, de-ideologised and de-moralised term for referring to the so-called pervert. I prefer to call him the *extra-ordinary* (subject), as the one who is caught up between lack and excess, there where the *object a*, the object of anxiety, emerges and marks the *extra-ordinary* position, which is conformist and provocative, at the same time.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Sean Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 95-96.

<sup>2</sup> See Ruth Levitas, "Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia," in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, ed. by Jamie Owen Daniel, Tom Moylan (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 65-79 (p. 67).

<sup>3</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "From Revolutionary to Catastrophic Utopia," in *Thinking Utopia: Steps into Other Worlds*, ed. by Thomas W. Rieger, Jörn Rüsen, Michael Fehr (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), pp. 247-262 (p.247).

<sup>4</sup> Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> See Roger Griffin, *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold, 1998), p. 14 (italics in the original).

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<sup>6</sup> As I will not be providing the reader with another explanation of the fascist phenomenon and considering the plethora of relevant theoretical and historical works, ideological debates around the nature of fascism were deliberately left aside (there are only few allusions to those debates where they assist the comprehension and the context of my analysis).

<sup>7</sup> For example, the decline of the great empires, as a consequence of the formation of new national states in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, resulted to a crisis of national identities. This resembles today's situation, where the question of identity is raised once again, as contemporary societies need to reform themselves in the face of multiculturalism, the atrophy of ideological discourse and the gradual fading of the distinction between the Western and the Eastern world (in favour of Western liberalism).

<sup>8</sup> Indicatively, 'The People's Party' of Christof Blocher in Switzerland won 26,6% of the votes in the 1999 elections and maintained its strength in subsequent elections, despite its Far Right profile and the fact that Blocher has denied the Holocaust. Moreover, the Flemish Bloc in Belgium, an anti-immigrant racist and separatist party, won 33% of the votes in the 2000 elections in Anvers, despite its proscription as illegal.

<sup>9</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment" (1962) in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1990 [1978]), pp. 300-318. Adorno confronts the idea of 'engaged literature' that Sartre and Brecht conveyed through the politicised nuance of their artistic creations, while he supports Kafka and Beckett's 'autonomous art'. For Adorno, art must avoid any representation that suggests political catechesis and instead express a true relation to suffering.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>11</sup> See Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 39-40.

<sup>12</sup> As Homer puts it: "Lyotard prioritized one side of Adorno's paradox, its unrepresentability, at the expense of the other, that is, the absolute need for serious artists to try and represent the Holocaust truthfully." See Sean Homer, "Narratives of History, Narratives of Time," in *On Jameson: From Postmodernism to Globalization*, ed. by Caren Irr and Ian Buchanan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 71-91 (p. 79).

<sup>13</sup> Homer, "Narratives of History, Narratives of Time," p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 38. I must note here that this view is far from mere paradoxology and does not endorse the succumbing to finitude. *A contrario*, it calls for a constant challenge of finitude and symbolic boundaries.

<sup>16</sup> See Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* for a historical mapping of the concept (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967 [1951])

<sup>17</sup> See Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> A term associated with Slavoj Žižek's work. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> See Mark Bracher, "Introduction," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. by Mark Bracher, Marshall W. Alcorn, Jr., Ronald J. Corthell and Françoise Massardier-Kennedy (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), pp. 1-16.

<sup>20</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, "Laclau with Lacan: Comments on the Relation between Discourse Theory and Lacanian Psychoanalysis," in *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume III: Society, Politics, Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 314-337 (p. 316).

<sup>21</sup> This is the common social conception of the term. Furthermore, discourse implies a relationship between the creator of a text and its recipient, based on a series of statements that reflect the discursive flow of a certain thought or else forms of knowledge [See Stefan Tischer, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak and Eva Vetter, *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* (London: Thousand Oaks, 2000), p. 25]. In the present study, the statement produced by texts drawn from film, social theory, political philosophy and psychoanalysis will be critically reconsidered (I must note here that theoretical works and films are seen as products of various discourses, that is bodies of knowledge expressed through a text). The research criterion for incorporating the specific texts was their *macro-structure*, that is the underlying theme that fabricates their statement (here the statement produced within a dianoetic frame that links fascism to perversion in its sexual or non-sexual conception). Put in more rigorous methodological terms, the external conditions of the text that determine its meaning (rather than its internal properties, e.g. coherence, cohesion) are taken into scrutiny, but not simply at the level of representation. Psychoanalysis, as a method,

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enables us to evaluate more than what operates within the symbolic discourse, this is to say, more than the analysis of conventional meanings attached to the sign (the object of semiotics). The failure of the sign to signify what exceeds the boundaries of signification and yet influences the production of the message, without being possible for knowledge to grasp it, is a process that only the psychoanalytic method can illuminate. The level of my analysis encompasses the following facets of the text: *intentionality*, *acceptability*, *situationality* (the discourse that effects its construction) and *intertextuality* (the relation with texts taken from other discursive frames, e.g. paralleling film narratives with the argument of texts taken from the sociological or the psychoanalytic discourse). The complete textual passage is the unit of analysis employed. [Robert de Beaugrande's and Wolfgang Dressler defined these criteria in *Einführung in die Textlinguistik*, (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1981). Here I am referring to them, as they are reproduced in Stefan Tischer, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak and Eva Vetter, *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* (London: Thousand Oaks, 2000), pp. 22-23].

<sup>22</sup> For an extensive elaboration of my analytical use of the notion of discourse, see the second part of the present study.

<sup>23</sup> Two recent examples are Slobodan Milošević and Saddam Hussein who are typically portrayed as modern personifications of Hitler.

<sup>24</sup> I believe the field of neuro-psychoanalytic research, which has become a popular discipline so rapidly, epitomises this tendency to objectify the subject's experience. For instance, a neuro-psychoanalytic project would explore the synaptic activity that suggests disavowal and if its occurrence was higher among fascist subjects, that would suggest empirical evidence for their perverse structure. Such a psychoanalytic perspective would prioritise neurophysiological processes rather than economic and historical conditions as the determinants of a certain ideological position. Nonetheless, it is not biological verification that psychoanalytic research is lacking, but a way to historicise socio-political phenomena. The challenge for psychoanalysis lies in the latter, rather than the former.

<sup>25</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4. Stavrakakis also refers to Ernesto Laclau's *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time* (London: Verso, 1990) in relation to the congruence of psychoanalysis with socio-political analysis.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141, endnote 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> To use a Sadean metaphor, they maintain their beauty, regardless of all the academic tribulations they are subjected to.

<sup>32</sup> See Stanley Fish, "Withholding the Missing Portion: Psychoanalysis and Rhetoric," in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 525-554.

<sup>33</sup> Fish recites the words of the Wolf-man regarding Freud: "This man is a Jewish swindler, he wants to use me from behind and shit on my head." For Fish, the Wolf-man was right. *Ibid.*, p. 526.

<sup>34</sup> See Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth," trans. by Alan Bass, in *The Purloined Letter: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, ed. by John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (London: The John Hopkins Press, 1988), pp. 173-212.

<sup>35</sup> See Barbara Johnson, "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida," in *The Purloined Letter: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, ed. by John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (London: The John Hopkins Press, 1988), pp. 213-251 (p. 225).

<sup>36</sup> This criticism addressed by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy is extensively discussed by Stavrakakis, in the third chapter of *Lacan and the Political*, pp. 90-94.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1979).

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

<sup>43</sup> See Arnold Davidson, "Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality," *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Autumn, 1987): 16-48.

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<sup>44</sup> The most quoted example is homosexuality. After protracted protests and struggles by gay movements, it is rare to include homosexuality in the perversions.

<sup>45</sup> Davidson, "Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality."

<sup>46</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 7, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 135-243.

<sup>47</sup> See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1988 [1973]), p. 307.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," p. 80.

<sup>51</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" (1927), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 21, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 152-157.

<sup>52</sup> Freud was the first to replace the notion of the sexual instinct with that of the sexual drive. As early as in 1905, Freud does not conceptualise the sexual instinct as a singular and consistent instinct, but as consisted of separate components; perversion is what exemplifies this. See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," An essential difference between instinct and drive is that the latter has no zero degree of satisfaction, whereas the former meets its goal by direct expression. See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.139.

<sup>53</sup> See Jacques Lacan, "Kant with Sade," trans. by James B. Swenson Jr, *October* 51 (Winter, 1989): 55-104.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ironically, Sade's blasphemous provocation of religion was what led him to prison, rather than his libertinage.

<sup>56</sup> The growing academic research in film and television studies reflects this.

<sup>57</sup> For example, when I first began to work on this project, Kriss Ravetto published her book that analyses the aestheticisation of fascism in cinema. The three films I selected are among the works she discusses. See *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

## **PART I**

### **Fascism and Perversion**

## **Introduction:**

### **The Perverse Refractions of Fascism: A Retrospective**

Last century's fascism and predominantly Nazi Germany demarcate a crepuscular territory in modern history. Despite the copious readings, debates and interpretations in the field of social and political theory, the memory scars of fascism have not yet healed and many questions persist regarding its nature, motivation and impact on history. The first part of the present study aims to shed some vibrant light on the diversity and lack of consensus in explanatory narratives about fascism. By critically exploring the discursive frameworks of these narratives, what becomes clear, despite any exegetic discrepancies, is that a common thread interweaves them.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, at the centre of their discursive stage, one finds a casual linking of fascism to conditions typically described by the notion of perversion and its multifarious synecdoches, concerning stereotypes, terminology and practices associated with the pervert. As a recurrent intertextual motif, this link seeps a noticeable body of cultural, philosophical and psychoanalytic works.

So, how close is fascism to the notion of perversion? On this issue, the compelling analyses of fascism produced in the early 1940s by two leading exponents of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, are discussed first.<sup>2</sup> In their work, we find early traces of the link between fascism and perversion, which appears to be a manifestation of the reified and dominative structures of society that endorse the objectification of the other. Wilhelm Reich was also one of the first to relate fascism to perversion in his anti-fascist critique, which dates back to 1933, but was not published in English until 1946. In the 1940s, psychoanalytic research also steadily expanded its scope, relating clinical material to socio-political conditions. We find a representative example of this direction in Ernest Jones' attempt to explain the rise and spread of fascism, by means of perverse mechanisms.

In the early 1950s, the Frankfurt School axioms had an impact on the nascent, at the time, field of socio-psychological research in North America. Their influence is conspicuous in the configuration of the famous *Authoritarian Personality* theory, the product of collaboration between different researchers. Despite regular allusions to Adorno's name as

the author of this work, this neglects his peripheral role in the development of the theory. Another eminent figure who meticulously dissected fascism and totalitarianism as modern phenomena is Hannah Arendt. Early suggestions in her work in the 1950s give a perverse nuance to fascism, repercussive of the extremity of its atrocities, but Arendt later revised her ideas, after attending Eichmann's trial in 1961.

In the light of such theoretical works that emerged during or soon after the end of the Second World War, different discursive means contoured the nexus between fascism and perversion. A fine example is European cinema, which became distinctively political in the 1960s and 1970s. Fascism became a central theme of many films, often represented through images of perverse acts. Suffice it to recall the filmic texts of three eminent directors, namely Pier Paolo Pasolini, Luchino Visconti and Liliana Cavani, for a clearer illustration of the inscription of fascism into perverse aesthetics.<sup>3</sup>

Moving towards the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, a prominent delegate of Neo-Freudianism, re-introduced the notion of perversion in politics, exploring the relation of Sade to Nazism. Adopting a similar Neo-Freudian scope, Klaus Theweleit weaves psychoanalytic theorisation with cultural analysis, dissecting the fantasies of the fascist militia, perverse in their core. More recently, contemporary thinkers, Slavoj Žižek and Juliet Flower MacCannell, are assessed on the basis of their psychoanalytic suggestions, which seem to further underpin the idea of fascism's perverse undercurrent.

The argumentation of each narrative is related to the discursive framework of its production, that is the school of thought it trails. The main objective here is not to discover any truth of pathology behind fascism or Nazism as historical events or to assess the degree to which each discourse has succeeded in providing sufficient and reflective exegeses about the fascist phenomenon. The emphasis is put on the explanatory role of the category of perversion, as far as the fascist phenomenon is concerned. I will proceed to an appraisal of the validity of the discursive suggestions presented, focusing on contradictions and insufficient elaboration.

Centred on perverse themes, texts and filmic images fabricated a view of fascism which has grown to be rather stereotypical. Without any detectable trace of such a stereotype before the Second World War, this was brought into play as fascism culminated in

unparalleled atrocious evil, merging with its Nazi dimension and less with its Italian version.<sup>4</sup> The perverse designation somehow seemed to fit with the extremity of this evil. As a result, 'deviant' sexuality has become a frequent point of reference, when the constitutive elements of fascism are fathomed.

The validity of this stereotype and its precarious impact on the social representation of a rather complicated ideological construct, like fascism, is questionable. The majority of these narratives apply psychoanalytic ideas to their arguments, in order to explore the unconscious economy behind fascist ideology. Thus, psychoanalysis played a formative role in shaping an exegesis, by bringing sexuality to the ideologico-political terrain. But can psychoanalysis contribute to astute comprehension of socio-political conditions without being reduced to a machine of institutionalised knowledge and vertiginous theoretical *doxa*? With regard to this question, I will explore the elucidatory outcome of psychoanalytic interpretation in the clarification of labyrinthine ideas that dominate theory and research on perversion. If there is an implicit or explicit link between perversion and fascism sketched by psychoanalytic discourse, the question is whether it advances the theory and the knowledge on perversion.

These questions bind the knot that each part of the present study aims to critically expose. The axis of my analysis, rather than throwing a stone of contempt against earlier discourses on fascism, tries to re-inscribe the points in each narrative that envelop the interlacing of fascism with perversion as a message. At the risk of an anodyne reflexive equation between the last two terms, this message requires further elaboration if we want to gain a flexible and polygonal psychoanalytic understanding of socio-political phenomena.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In the first part of the study, the term 'discourse' refers to the body of knowledge that articulates the link between fascism and perversion.

<sup>2</sup> I follow a chronological order for presenting and discussing each text, based on the first English publication.

<sup>3</sup> I am referring to three of their films, respectively: *Salò or The 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), *The Damned/ La Caduta Degli Dei* (1969) and *The Night Porter* (1973).

<sup>4</sup> The focus is German and Italian fascism; these were the first two types of fascism to have seized power and they had an indelible impact on history.



## **1. 1930s-1940s: The Frankfurt School and the Freudian Left**

### **1.1 Critical Theory against Fascism**

Since its foundation, in 1923, the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research has produced one of the most influential discourses on modernity, while its work has become synonymous with the movement of Critical Theory. Better known as the Frankfurt School and without forming a unified body of congruent theoretical ideas, the movement dissected, under its analytic and kaleidoscopic spectrum, state capitalism into the components that transformed it into the prevailing model of socio-economic relations in Western society. Concerned with the escalating pervasiveness of despotism in the West, the School's Critical Theorists aimed to develop a contemporary theoretical encapsulation of the shifting configurations of capitalism, inquiring into the rise of fascism, as an interrelated trend. In the 1930s, as the spreading of fascism cast a shadow over Europe, the particular socio-political conditions in Germany occupied the centre of the Frankfurt School's analytical focus.

Critical Theory, as a methodological strategy, involved critical reappraisal of traditional philosophical theories and values, as well as adoption of radical dialectics that amalgamated philosophy with social sciences, in the service of nurturing a critical cogito as a guide to action. Another essential bastion for the ratiocination of the precepts of Critical Theory was the interlacing of Freud's psychoanalytic speculation with Marxian dialectics. This innovative speculative frame, commonly referred to as Freudo-Marxism, drastically transcended pure socio-economic explanations, encompassing psychoanalytic discoveries and inscribing the multifarious role of the unconscious in politics.

This prismatic dialectical methodology aimed to unveil the contradictions that percolate modern society, evincing the thread that sutures together the individual with her social, economic and cultural context. Capitalism weaves its hegemony through the exploitation of human needs and the oppression of the individual by established social relations, mediated by commodification, reification, mass culture and consumerism. A critical exposition of the contradictions and problematic aspects of the individual's social milieu can foster the prospect of a viable social metamorphosis.

Among the most distinguished delegates of the Frankfurt School is Theodor Adorno, who applied Critical Theory in a seminal and innovative way, confronting capitalist domination and its fascist parameter. The polemic of fascism is a recurrent theme in his work or, as Espen Hammer puts it, “the experience of fascism is the great political trauma to which Adorno always keeps returning.”<sup>1</sup> In 1944, Adorno co-authored with Max Horkheimer the pivotal study, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.<sup>2</sup> Written between the years 1941-1944, the work emblematises the new directions in social theory engraved by the two authors, departing from immanent critique<sup>3</sup> and moving towards a more philosophical approach. This also marked a departure from the earlier radical interdisciplinary approach which relied more on empirical research.<sup>4</sup> Apart from these methodological innovations, one finds the seeds of what would later become a common leitmotif: the exposition of the perverse roots of authoritarianism and fascism.

### 1.1.1 *The Dialectic of Western Rationality*

Horkheimer and Adorno related modernity to the capitalist *status quo* of Western society, which, far from reaching its collapse, grew more vigorous by decomposing revolutionary consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Taking this into consideration, the authors of the *Dialectic* did not emphasise directly radical politics and economic factors that encumber class struggle from its socialist objective. They rather prioritised a philosophical critique of the culture industry and the Enlightenment project, the mythological properties of which legitimised the domination of nature by the bourgeoisie and the barbarous effects it had on humanity. With scientific thought having succumbed to various dominative forces of the West (capitalism, fascism) and the East (Stalinism), Horkheimer and Adorno viewed critical philosophy as the ultimate bastion for countering mechanisms of control and domination.

Adorno was particularly critical of a predominant quantitative conception of scientific reason and objectivity.<sup>6</sup> Instead of inaugurating social change, the positivistic paradigm and technological advances impeded this prospect, serving domination. Positivist scientific reason protracts existing socio-economic relations, becoming an instrument of capitalist power. As long as scientific and technological developments benefit capitalist relations of

production, reason is perverted to an atavistic ideological force, authenticating administered societies and rationalisation.<sup>7</sup> Hence, science becomes the aftermath of a hegemonic type of rationality, contagious to all aspects of human civilisation and nature. Under the effect of such an ideological manipulation of reason, the subject is deprived of autonomy and the self-determination of her subjectivity.

Far from being a liberating force then, Western rationality opens the way to fascist mytho-logical irrationality. Horkheimer and Adorno evoke an extensive pandect of “historical events, from the epic dawn of mankind to the present, all of which display a reversibility between enlightenment (liberation from the powers of necessity) to myth (the perpetuation of the *Immergleiche*).”<sup>8</sup> Without avoiding the putrefying effect of existing dominative systems, philosophical reason turned, from being the backbone of social critique, to becoming part of the reified and instrumental structures of modern society it was meant to fight against. Thus, for Horkheimer and Adorno, philosophical reason needed to reinstate its critical aptitude and form a distinctive research paradigm.

Pulling the strings of socio-economic relations, the bourgeoisie instrumentalised reason so that it served its utilitarian purposes and turned the Enlightenment project into a medium of control. The thrust of reason’s purity and authenticity deteriorated, recanting its status as an emancipatory and life-affirming force, reformatory of the predominant socio-economic relations. As a result, the cathartic and critical power of reason reversed into an irrational force, which oppressed the expression of natural instincts and gave rise to destructive and totalitarian dominative forms.<sup>9</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno discern the peril of instrumental reason that resides in rationalization, stating, “The totalitarian order gives full rein to calculation and abides by science as such. Its canon is its own brutal efficiency.”<sup>10</sup> Under the epaulet of the primacy of Enlightenment reason, liberalism amplified and extended oppressive practices, which made the hope for liberation languish and ultimately bred fascist domination.

[...] After the short intermezzo of liberalism, in which the bourgeois kept one another in check, domination appears as archaic terror in a fascistically rationalised form.<sup>11</sup>

As the culmination of the irrational forces operating in Western civilisation, fascism reflects its tendency towards self-destruction; it constitutes an annihilating force *par excellence* and a violent blow against the civilised world.<sup>12</sup> Contributing to this deleterious operation, the bourgeoisie mistreated the Enlightenment's messages of civilisation's return to nature; consequently, such distorted messages forged the mythical façade of fascism. The idea of administering an untamed nature inserts reason as a rigid calculative medium and presents nature as an adversary for human beings. But, in reality, this hostility is indicative of rationalism's own fading to mythology. The myth of a hostile Nature, against which the subject has to defend herself is a form of alienation and control.<sup>13</sup> It endorses the idea that man can control the natural world, while, in effect, it is an illusionary idea that only amplifies human suffering.

This mythology fosters modern reified configurations and, consequently, ensconces neoteric types of confinement, such as fascism, which wove its mythology around the vision of recuperating the bonds with Mother Nature. Rather than forming the equipage for controlling the physical world, reason enforced a despotic and gruesome control over individuals. The Nazi atrocities and their rationalisation were the apotheosis of the perverted application of Enlightenment reason. The destructive Nazi project of founding a global new order, by materialising the ideal of returning to the physicality of the natural world, dramatically vitiated the progressive conception of reason.<sup>14</sup> However, as Horkheimer argues, this restoration of natural bonds was very different from its idealistic philosophical capture, being the sheer product of exploitation and oppression of natural desires rather than the liberation and demystification of the latter:

In modern fascism, rationality has reached a point at which it is no longer satisfied with simply repressing nature; rationality now exploits nature by incorporating into its own system the rebellious potentialities of nature. The Nazis manipulated the suppressed desires of the German people.<sup>15</sup> [...] The revolt of natural man – in the sense of the backward strata of the population- against the growth of rationality has actually furthered the formalization of reason, and has served to fetter rather than to free nature. In this light, we might describe fascism as a satanic synthesis of reason and nature-that very opposite of that reconciliation of the two poles that philosophy has always dreamt of.<sup>16</sup>

The return to the natural expression of the instinct, as ideologised by fascist paganist ideas, served an arbitrary and utilitarian twist of rational reason, which oppresses rather than liberates. Inevitably, sexuality, as an essential dimension of the instinct, was also distorted by this ideologisation. The pseudo-revolutionary façade of fascism exploited popular slogans of the people revolting against suppression and misused radical messages, in favour of the same malign bourgeois power it pledged to subvert. Thus, suppression was perpetuated.

### ***1.1.2 The Perverse Decay of Reason***

The ossification of the authenticity of critical reason is not translated to a perversion of reason solely, but also to an actual perversion of the natural instinct, with sexuality being an essential part of it. The natural expression of the instinct is impaired, once the subject is deprived of the critical capacities of her reason. In place of the natural instinct, a perverted and artificial expression of the latter occurs, alienating the subject and sanctioning her self-destructive domination.

The alienating forces of the capitalist deployments of mechanistic and technological expansion operate on the unconscious (or the ‘alienated psychic substance’, as Žižek notes)<sup>17</sup> and take over a feeble ego. This alienated and perverted ego reflects the subject’s eidolon of her thwarted desires, disguised by a violent veil. Violence is a perverse expression of the sexual instinct. Rather than its pre-requisite, perversion is more the consequence of the authoritarianism of capitalist institutional structures that suppress nature and sexuality.

Fascism is the extension of this suppression.<sup>18</sup> Instead of forming an individual pathology, perversion indicates the inhumane instrumentalist roots of capitalist industrialism. Fascism constitutes the annexe of the irrational and self-destructive bourgeois culture.<sup>19</sup> The authority of the bourgeoisie certainly does not wither, as it is concealed by the vicious and barbaric profile of fascism.<sup>20</sup> A rationalised scheme of brutality maintains bourgeois control and deviously presents liberalism as liberation.

This type of vicious liberation is congruous with Sade's model of sexual cruelty. More than an enumeration of perverse sexual practices and behaviours, the writings of Sade are exemplary of a broader constellation of manipulative socio-economic relations. The economic exploitation of the individual for the benefit of the capital consummates Sadean morality. Sade's philosophy of exploitative debauchery is upheld by a pseudo-rational pedestal for the blatant and callous exercise of sexual catachresis, consonant with the dominative rationalisation of capitalism and fascist brutality. To illustrate the Sadean parallel with the Enlightenment thought Horkheimer and Adorno write in an excursus in the *Dialectic*:

[...] The work of the Marquis de Sade, like that of Nietzsche, constitutes the intransigent critique of practical reason, in contradistinction to which Kant's critique itself seems a revocation of his own thought. It makes the scientific the destructive principle. [...] The primeval behaviors which civilization had made taboo had led a subterranean existence, having been transformed into destructive tendencies under the stigma of bestiality. Juliette practices them not as natural, but as tabooed activities. [...] Juliette embodies (in psychological terms) neither unsublimated nor regressive libido, but intellectual pleasure in regression – *amor intellectualis diaboli*, the pleasure of attacking civilization with its own weapons. She favours system and consequence. She is a proficient manipulator of the organ of rational thought.<sup>21</sup>

The liberal (per)version of Enlightenment rationalism treats nature and, concomitantly, man, as objects subjugated to the domination of a Kantian universal formalism. Sade's ideas embrace this formal functional rationality by reversing Kant's model, graphically exposing the catastrophic and exploitative effects of its appropriation by the bourgeoisie.<sup>22</sup> Sadean relations and Nazism inflicted a cruel exploitation over the other, reducing him/her to an object. In Sade's writings, the degradation of the victim, suppressed and abused by the destructive domination of the sadist, and the catalogue of horrific executions form a paradigmatic frame for the mortification of the other (e.g. Jew) in fascism. In this regard, the crimes of fascism are associated with Sadean 'sexual pathology'.

The fascists derived enjoyment from killing, affirmative of their ruling power.<sup>23</sup> This raises the question whether mastery is able to have a perverse undercurrent, inasmuch as

a Sadean image crystallises authoritarianism and embodies the *Will-to-Power*. Joan Copjec alludes to Horkheimer and Adorno's view of perversion and sadism in particular:

Sadism [...] expresses a will to dominate the other by instrumentalizing him, by treating him as a mere object to be exploited and tortured. [...] By inflicting pain the sadist does indeed aim, as Horkheimer and Adorno maintain, to produce in the other a certain objectification, an excess of corporeality, a suffering or sheer passivity of the body that would no longer be summonable to purposive action.<sup>24</sup>

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the aim of the sadist is to turn the other into a sight of passive suffering. But Copjec notes that it is exactly the opposite spectacle that turns the sadist on: the other's choice to stop transcending the pain s/he has been subjected to and instead surrender him/herself to this pain.<sup>25</sup> If Sade personifies the fascist *Will-to-Power*, this implies an objectification of the other as the victim or the slave. Nevertheless, from a Lacanian prism, the slave is not the object; s/he is rather the one who stages the object, the spectacle (or the voice) usurped and enjoyed by the master.<sup>26</sup> But does mastery and domination have anything to do with the perversions? Fascist atrocities could effortlessly yet bewilderingly be characterised as demonical products of a sadistic inclination, while perversion could sexualise the field of the political, implying that equality and freedom of expression go through the normalisation of taboo sexual practices that feed the perverse tendencies of the oppressed individual.

### **1.1.3 *The Perspicacity of the Dialectic and its Blocks***

It is difficult to discern the main goal of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The discontinuous structure of the text and the dense intricate argumentation make it hard for the reader to draw a definite conclusion about the objective of the work or the presence of core theory.<sup>27</sup> Yet it is possible to discern a central task in the *Dialectic*: to unveil the destructive foundation of Western civilisation, as far as the individual and his/her rational cogito are concerned. But if fascism was really the apogee of this alienating and calamitous turn of liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s, as Horkheimer and Adorno seem to

believe, does not such a view make later capitalism and phenomena of domination appear as states devoid of the disastrous propel of fascism? Today, Slavoj Žižek underscores the potential of contemporary permissive liberalism for culminating in a dystopian culture that is deleterious for rationality.<sup>28</sup> Although the *Dialectic* does not tackle permissiveness, Adorno, in his later work, as well as other Frankfurt School thinkers, noted these surreptitious dominative forces operating in permissive societies. Marcuse implemented terms, such as ‘repressive tolerance’ and ‘repressive desublimation’ in order to discuss the ways contemporary capitalism would allow some desublimated instinctual expression, but only through consumerist routes that reinforce the repressive structures of its power.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, a *cul-de-sac* barricades the analytical pathway of the *Dialectic*. It ingenuously accentuates mechanisms, such as instrumentalisation and domination over nature, that perverted reason and the natural expression of the instinct, yet the origins of the problem that turned the Enlightenment project into a despotic instead of a liberating development remains unscathed. There is no sufficient explanation as to what the faulty provisos that rendered reason a bourgeois oppressive agent were. What happened and what turned the Enlightenment into a brake pedal for the progress of rationalism? By highlighting singular factors, such as instrumentalisation and suppression, as the problematic areas of Western society, the critique of the *Dialectic* ended up in a reductive scope.

As Whitebook notes, this reflects an interpretative monism, displayed by the Frankfurt School, inasmuch as it overvalued, at hyperbolic rates, a singular core process at a time, in the dissection of modernity’s dynamics. Any one process, such as “rationalization, commodification, technification, reification, instrumentalization, or power,” is considered as the unconditional fulcrum of the modern world.<sup>30</sup> This leaves aside all other original democratic developments, as derivatives of these central processes.

According to another criticism by Hammer, Horkheimer and Adorno’s endorsement of a categorical repudiation of Enlightenment ideals, such as “progress, freedom, emancipation and technology,” makes their overall argument appear politically conservative.<sup>31</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno seem to disown any of the conspicuous achievements of scientific and technocratic reason in Western society. Yet, their



aphoristic tone is understood, if one considers their critique as an ultimate alerting action against the escalating fascist despotism of the time. Even today, it is an exigent task for Critical Theory to surmount this impediment, by updating socio-political theory and critique, in the face of capitalism's current reform as a global prospect for opulence.

Another question that remains ambiguous is whether the relentless critique of Enlightenment reason calls for a reconstructed invigoration or an entire repudiation of the latter. To that effect, one can say that the *Dialectic* prognosticates post-modernist motifs, such as the renunciation of reason as the tool of power apparatuses and the departure of Neo-Marxism from its traditional socio-economic context which it critically rehashed.

However, this does not place Horkheimer and Adorno's work outside the spirit of modernity. The principal belief of modernity about the primacy of rational reason is still the propulsion of their critique. Critical reason is a vital force against any oppressive system. Whether it was fascism or Stalinism, Critical Theory deplored any totalising form of authority. It may be that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* fabricates an acerbic critique of the Enlightenment project and its self-destructive quality, but Horkheimer and Adorno also note:

We are wholly convinced – and therein lies our *petitio principii* – that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought [...] If consideration of the destructive aspect of progress is left to its enemies, blindly pragmatized thought loses its transcending quality and its relation to truth.<sup>32</sup>

This means, the two authors did not abdicate Enlightenment in its essence, this is the priority given to reason, but they called for an enlightening reason that could cease consternation and bewilderment and inaugurate a liberating social transformation. A historical reappraisal of reason is an urgent attempt to draw attention to its instrumentalisation, as the main barrier for the realisation of the revolutionary vision. Radical changes, *a propos* of socio-economic structures, are condemned to collapse, as long as Enlightenment reason fails to bring its gifts and capitalism severely infringes its principles. Therefore, the reconstruction of reason is needed in order to restore its critical dynamism.

The help Adorno draws from psychoanalysis in order to brace philosophical reasoning, meticulously isolates simplifying applications of psychoanalysis in the service of Marxist ideological purposes. In this sense, his Freudo-Marxist approach is different to those adopted by Marcuse, Fromm or Reich, who directly link up the Freudian doctrine with revolutionary and liberating ideas. Thus, when Horkheimer and Adorno implement the psychoanalytic notion of repression for describing a socio-political model of repression, this is not drawn from ‘clinical Freudianism’, as Fredric Jameson notes, but from the Freudian corpus that reflects on society (works such as *Civilization and Its Discontents* or, as we will see next, elsewhere Adorno has recourse to Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*).<sup>33</sup> This keeps at bay the reductionism of the social to the individual, what is represented by Freud’s case studies, yet it presupposes that Freud’s socio-cultural approach is not reductionist in itself, which is something contentious.

## 1.2 The Irrational Mass

The Marxian ideal guided the Frankfurt School’s prioritisation of rationality. Yet Adorno did not fail to see the potential for authoritarianism inherent to any progressive movement which loses its rational consistency by clinging to the psychology of the masses in its effort to gain political power.<sup>34</sup> Ideologies and philosophies in modern society echo as destructive forces, inasmuch as their main source of energy is the emotional part of human character that confiscates the purity of reason.

Thus, for Adorno, the exploitation of the emotional needs of the masses, related to irrational components such as primitive fears and wishes, was accountable for the affirmative reception of fascism and its detrimental consequences. The implication of emotion for politics has catastrophic consequences, as far as it allows the manipulation of needs in a strategy that disguises irrational ideologies under an appealing and non-reproachable veil.

In “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” Adorno has recourse to Freud and works such as *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*,<sup>35</sup> in order to

denote the artificial character and the perilous consequences of fascist propaganda and demagoguery. Epitomising his previous work on fascism, during the 1940s, Adorno's essay directly draws upon psychoanalysis and the psychology of the masses in developing an exegesis of the fascist phenomenon. His interest is in deciphering the mechanisms behind identification of the individual with fascist power and his/her subjugation to it.<sup>36</sup> The eradication of individuality and its transformation into a mass enact the *modus operandi* of fascist propaganda.

For the fascist demagogue, who has to win the support of millions of people for aims largely incompatible with their own rational self-interest, can do so only by artificially creating the *bond* Freud is looking for. If the demagogues' approach is at all realistic – and their popular success leaves no doubt that it is – it might be hypothesized that the bond in question is the very same the demagogue tries to produce synthetically; in fact, that it is the unifying principle behind his various devices.<sup>37</sup>

Freud traces out a libidinal process in order to explicate the massification of individuals. The abolition of their very individuality results from a libidinal bond that develops among them. Namely, an authority figure, such as a leader, becomes a source of identification for each individual. His/her ego ideal is partially or totally identified with the leader, giving rise to a collective mass formation. The crucial point that Freud draws and Adorno discerns in his theorisation is that the psychology of the masses is not a repercussion of an archaic brutal instinct, but more indicative of a primitive attitude of otherwise ordinary and rational individuals who are incorporated into a mass, as Homer points out.<sup>38</sup> In line with this process, the fascist leader functions as an idealised figure for the individual who regresses to an archaic state, preceding to the development of his/her ego ideal. The whole process is secured by the imposition of a rigid and artificial hierarchy. For Adorno, fascist hierarchies serve sadomasochistic purposes, which means it is not a purely libidinal force that maintains their solidity, but there is also a destructive component.

The fascists, down to the last small-time demagogue, continuously emphasize ritualistic ceremonies and hierarchical differentiations. The less hierarchy within the set-up of a highly rationalized and quantified industrial society is warranted, the more artificial hierarchies with no objective *raison d'être* are built up and rigidly imposed by fascists for

purely psycho-technical reasons. It may be added, however, that this is not the only libidinous source involved. Thus hierarchical structures are in complete keeping with the wishes of the sadomasochistic character.<sup>39</sup>

As Homer notes, Adorno expands Freud's logic to the circumscription of a "new type of character structure, the rise of the narcissistic subject."<sup>40</sup> The emergent fascist character combines authoritarianism with his libido, in such a manner that unconsciously reactivates the archaic wish to identify with the authority of the primordial father. Fascism cultivates this narcissistic identification, endorsed by a despotic narcissistic leader (Hitler) reminiscent of the primordial father. The image of the leader is idealised, activating a mere narcissistic process that stirs up the individual's fascination and love for the ideal leader.

Nevertheless, inasmuch as it follows a narcissistic scenario, love is not reciprocated, but rather encircles a certain image, the authority figure. The individual obeys him, but also wants to *be* him. Infused by ambivalence, as Homer points out, this narcissistic process sustains fascist leadership.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, positive libidinal energy is invested in the identification with the leader and, on the other, negative energy forges the solidarity of the group, in the form of a common "hatred for the other."<sup>42</sup>

Adorno may sketch out a perverse nuance of fascism, yet he unequivocally states that the cause of fascism should not be attributed to 'psychological dispositions'.<sup>43</sup> It is more how these dispositions are manipulated and exploited by fascism. Propaganda serves precisely this purpose. It operates on an artificial regression of the groups rather than the immediate expression of instincts.<sup>44</sup> Such a regression solidifies the domination of the oppressor exactly because it diverts narcissism from the ego of the individual and substitutes it for a libidinal identification with the oppressor. Therefore, domination builds its power by exploiting the psychology of the masses and being aware of the indolence and manageability of groups brought together by archaic pre-oedipal ties. Lacking authentic personal emotional verve, the fascist mass fabricates a synthetic dramaturgy around the figure of the leader and acts its identification with him.<sup>45</sup> It is not an actual identification with the leader, but more a thespian partaking in his performance, which allows the mass to express its zeal. This cultivates a state of 'phoniness', which destroys the ego's critical reasoning. It is an artificial dramaturgic act that entails an

element of violence. The innuendo of the counterfeit underpinning of their 'group psychology' is what renders fascist mobs so barbarous and callous.<sup>46</sup>

But can we attribute this effect only to the regressive slide of individuals and their exploitation by the fascist leader? The level of Nazi catastrophe and the disparate fascist regimes that prevailed in European countries, during the previous century, draw a picture related to a constellation of factors. A strict psychoanalytic interpretation based on a regressive misidentification with an authority figure fails to capture this complexity. Freud cannot be exempt from this criticism, considering the emphasis he places in regression in *Group Psychology*, without efficiently expounding the parameters of an otherwise common mechanism.

The omission of any reference to the notion of the death drive that Freud had already introduced in 1920 (in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) is striking and bewildering, especially when the operation of the masses is what is at stake. According to Hammer, this limitation renders *Group Psychology* a "theoretically unsatisfactory" text, which can be efficiently comprehended, only when other works such as "On Narcissism", *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and "Mourning and Melancholia" are taken into account.<sup>47</sup> Without the theoretical suggestions about narcissistic identification, it remains unclear whether Freud's view of mass regression has to do with a pre-object cathexis primordial identification or identification emerging from the libidinal object-choice, in a narcissistic regressive manner.<sup>48</sup> Adorno does not discern these problematic aspects of Freud's writing, nor does he expand on the logic of *Group Psychology*, by contemplating the implications of the death drive for his analysis of mass regression in fascism (especially when one considers that Freud recognised the validity of the notion of the death drive).<sup>49</sup>

Apart from this, Adorno makes no use of Freud's metapsychological concepts and thus seems to repeat Freud's reductionism of the social to the individual, since for Freud the former is a reflection of the latter.<sup>50</sup> This is indicative of a rather 'mechanical' interpretation of Freud, as Sean Homer characteristically notes, aligned with Anthony Elliot; such an interpretation strictly follows Freud's early biological suggestions, namely his id-psychology, that restrains the critical thrust of Adorno's effort.<sup>51</sup> Homer criticises Adorno, as well as Marcuse, for a 'partial and one-sided' consideration of psychoanalysis.<sup>52</sup> He critically refers to Adorno's emphasis on the mechanism of

identification and the psychological manipulation of the masses, as strategies implemented by fascism.

Moreover, Homer canvasses Adorno's argument about the fascist leader occupying the place of the omnipotent father of the primal horde. Apart from his punitive side, the father is also the one who regulated his sons' pleasure and access to enjoyment.<sup>53</sup> Considering the fantasmatic relations that weave the act of identification with the father, in Adorno's text there is little consideration about fantasy, the ambivalence it breeds and how they come to form the armoury of fascist manipulation, especially when they go beyond any rational frame.<sup>54</sup> It limits, if not contradicts, Adorno's philosophical postulations about self-reflection that must characterise theory.

Perhaps, Adorno's 'mechanical' reading of Freud is understood, when his essay is placed in a frame wider than a plain acerbic critique of fascist domination. What is also at stake is the ego-psychology's post-Freudian revisionism that Adorno criticised for renouncing Freud's biological determinism and emphasising the mediation of socio-cultural factors.<sup>55</sup> Adorno resorts to 'id-psychology' that focuses on the eternal conflictive dynamics between the biological status of the individual, namely the predominance of the drive, and his/her social context.<sup>56</sup> Adorno resists the 'revisionist' reduction of the Freudian doctrine to conflicts that torment the ego due to socio-cultural factors, by laying emphasis on the very essence of the conflict, that is the libidinal demands of the id and their clash with the ego. The biological basis of these demands, what is considered to be 'nature', cannot be viewed separately from the historical process that shaped it.<sup>57</sup>

Adorno remained loyal to the Freudian approach in his psychoanalytic conception of social relations.<sup>58</sup> The focus was still on nature, the uncompromising character of the drive, rather than culture and the adjustment to values shared by a group. The key role of 'repression' *qua* restraint of libidinal drives leads to the emergence of a 'second nature', which founds the alienation of the subject and let external forces take over her subjectivity.

Now, one contradiction that comes forth for psychoanalysis, as Žižek notes, is the role of the repression of the drive as the basis for a despotic regulation of the subject and at the same time, repression as the pedestal for any cultural and social development.<sup>59</sup> The latter function of repression suggests a theoretical equation with the notion of

sublimation. Maintaining this contradiction, Adorno links repression and sublimation to social antagonism. For any advanced cognitive or mental ability, the drive has to be repressed, supporting social domination. What is more, domination utilises the sublimation of the libidinal drive not for any 'superior' cultural, non-sexual accomplishment, but for the preservation of its oppressive and brutal power.<sup>60</sup>

In order to describe this process, the Frankfurt School introduced the term 'repressive desublimation', which refers to a settlement between the punitive side of the superego, that is, its perverse side, and the id. Both serve the same purpose, the self-destruction of the subject and the eradication of her rationality. According to Žižek, we have a "perverse reconciliation of the Id and the Super-Ego at the expense of the Ego."<sup>61</sup> Legal social authority ostracises the mediating rationality of the Ego, by taking the form of a punitive superegoic demand, which complies with the 'illegal' destructive drives of the id. 'Repressive desublimation' does not suggest that the inversion of repression would bring a liberating effect and turn alienation to a life-affirming rational force.

There is always the threat of totalitarianism as a 'post-liberal' transformation of domination, which can enact a synergy between the id and the superego, with catastrophic consequences. The demands of the id become harmonious with the superegoic orders conspiring against the autonomy of the ego, which is led to its absolute defeat and disintegration. The rational stamina of the ego gives its place to the regressive automatism of the id impulses. Contrary to an experience of ultimate freedom, regression to the impulsiveness of the id marks the ultimate confinement to social domination. The id's demands coincide with those of the superego, which is the 'militia' of social order.

As Žižek notes, this coalition between the id and the superego instates a control apparatus, whose forces acquire a direct domination over the drive, by exercising social 'repression'.<sup>62</sup> Its manifestation in post-liberal societies is not that of a prohibitive internalised law, typical of bourgeois liberalism. Quite the reverse, social repression takes the form of a transgressive command, which eradicates self-control. 'Repressive desublimation' is an extension of capitalist authoritarianism, as this is discussed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. It exposes the underlying dynamics of an authoritarian regulation of social relations that escapes the common perception of authority as what represses the demands of the id. The manipulation of the regressive status of the masses

and their spurious imitation of the leader that Adorno describes in “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” seem to reflect this logic of ‘repressive desublimation’.

However, Žižek confronts a certain impasse in Adorno’s argument about the fascist totalitarian threat and his psychoanalytic implementation. Adorno equates the subject’s psychology with her psychoanalytic conception, disregarding the fact that ‘psychology’ is a negative term for psychoanalysis.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Adorno maintained a rather ambiguous position regarding the concept of the ego. He advocated the importance of a strong ego, as what opposes alienating forces, criticising its deterioration in late modernity.<sup>64</sup> Yet the ego, within a social context regulated by capitalist organising principles is linked to an identity imposed on the subject, marking its falsity.<sup>65</sup>

For Adorno, the integrity of the ego is crucial for the subject’s autonomous and rational functioning. The ego is the filter that affirms the life essence of the drive, while it dismantles the destructive aspects of the drive, by relying on its critical capacities. At the same time, a rational ego fights against authorities that represent an oppressive superegoic order that put a barrier to the life content of the drive. The perverse outcome of authoritarianism is therefore deterred by a strong ego. The release of individuals from the heteronomy of their unconscious would result in their psychology being vanished. Psychology for Adorno may suggest a certain “bondage of the individual,” but it is also the prerequisite “for freedom in the sense of certain self-sufficiency and autonomy.”<sup>66</sup>

Despite this contradiction, Adorno seems not to denounce the illusory autonomy of the ego, even though he punctuates the *aporia* related to the latter.<sup>67</sup> The autonomy of the subject pertains to a bourgeois ideological veiling of her alienated nature in administered societies. Under its alleged exercise of Enlightenment reason, capitalism disguises its reified structures and legitimises the pervasiveness of instrumentalised reason. Thus, alienation is concealed, by being transfigured and exalted as autonomy. It is not clear how the loss of autonomy in the individual manipulated by the fascist takes place. In spite of the fact that autonomy has been subjected to relentless ideologisation and has become a normative trite notion, Adorno strangely does not relinquish, but maintains the term. As Sean Homer notes:



While he [Adorno] persuasively criticised the notion of the individual as an autonomous ego, on the one hand, and insisted on its demise in the increasingly narcissistic world of advanced capitalism, he was then forced to defend the notion, on the other, when faced with the prospect of its total eclipse.<sup>68</sup>

Considering that the post-structuralist perception of the subject as essentially divided did not reach maturation at the time, Adorno seemed to favour “the relative individuation achieved under liberalism.”<sup>69</sup> Autonomy and freedom were two indistinguishable ideals that guided the critical efforts of the Frankfurt School (or its utopia). If a radical social transformation is feasible, this is translated to liberation *qua* autonomy.

We can suggest a parallel here with Kantian philosophy and the idea of the autonomous subject who transcends any external authority and disposes her existence in accordance with a universalised law.<sup>70</sup> This requires a constant personal effort, which means autonomy is not something given for the subject, but something she needs to accomplish. Thus, freedom is there before autonomy. The subject holds the free will to choose the consummation of her autonomous or heteronomous status. Heteronomy suggests the subject is free, but not autonomous. The reified structures of modern society thwart the subject’s attempts to realise autonomy and enforce their own ends, replacing autonomy with alienation.<sup>71</sup> The Frankfurt School’s innovative thought has elucidated the commodifying and reifying advances, ratified by capitalism, that destabilise the autonomous status of the individual’s ego.<sup>72</sup>

Post-modern critique of autonomy disengaged this notion from emancipation, since the latter became another mythical veil for concealing the *Will-to-Power* and human finitude.<sup>73</sup> Behind emancipation an absolute and omnipotent master lies in ambush. If emancipation is one side of the coin, the other side is the non-feasible task of unfastening oneself from the mortal lining of human existence. Fascism exploited this fantasy of overcoming finitude by giving a material basis to the reasons that maintained the incomplete status of existence. With fascism, these reasons appear to be controllable and modifiable. The fascist *Will-to-Power* emerged as a unifying force that cultivated the illusion of suturing the pieces of a fragmented symbolic reality (economic competition, national identity). Whereas the symbolic is the marker of finitude, fascism attempted to erase the latter by implementing images of mastery and omnipotence.<sup>74</sup>

### 1.3 The (Un)Orgastic Character

Among the works of the leftist dialectical polemic against fascism, the case of Wilhelm Reich is rather idiosyncratic, in terms of theoretical style and argumentative prowess. Nonetheless, as one of the most zealous critiques of fascism, Reich's discursive ideas deserve particular attention.<sup>75</sup> A member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, as one of Freud's disciples, and later a member of the German Communist Party, Reich emblematises the marriage of psychoanalysis and Marxism. The Freudo-Marxist model he espoused forwarded a set of ideas endowed with vigorous explanatory potential regarding socio-political issues, but also became a source of various misconceptions. Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* exemplifies both aspects of his Freudo-Marxist version.<sup>76</sup>

As an attempt to adumbrate the characterological profile of fascism, Reich's analysis draws a link between ideology and parts of the human character, that is to say, the unconscious side of character. For Reich the unconscious is conceived as a reservoir of primitive impulses or as he says "an intermediate character layer, which consists exclusively of cruel, sadistic, lascivious, rapacious, and envious impulses."<sup>77</sup> These impulses are considered as "secondary drives" that Reich associates with the Freudian unconscious, seen as the outcome of the repression of 'primary biological urges'. Liberalism, as the prevailing ideological system at the time (principally referring to the Weimar democracy), suppressed the unconscious layer by means of meticulous and strict ethical regulations operating on the conscious surface of personality; this is the superficial character layer. In other words, liberalism promoted an attitude of 'self-control', holding off the destructive impulses of the unconscious. This suppression was decisive for stirring up fascism in Germany.

On the other extreme of the spectrum, fascist ideology does not suppress this intermediate unconscious stratum. Unlike liberalism, fascism encompasses this second layer of the human character which is also the perverse side of it, inasmuch as the unconscious is the hive of all destructive and irrational impulses, turned as such by despotic sociological patriarchal structures. Perverse features synthesise the core of fascism which "transforms the masochistic character of the old patriarchal religion of

suffering into a sadistic religion.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, fascism can hardly be seen as a revolutionary movement, since a genuine revolutionary action for Reich must spring from the pure biological kernel of human existence, which is also the source of anything creatively new. This is the deepest character layer and the bastion for any authentic revolutionary innovation in the arts or sciences. However, this layer is inaccessible to both the liberal and the fascist. Reich gives the following definition of fascism:

[...] “fascism” is the basic emotional attitude of the suppressed man of our authoritarian machine civilization and its mechanistic-mystical conception of life.<sup>79</sup>

In this defining context, Reich recognises three features of fascism: First, fascism is not a singular socio-pathological phenomenon, but rather a symptom of a complex network of endemic autarchy that involves liberalism. Autarchic suppression is the social dominative structure, pathological as such, behind Western civilisation that substantiates fascism as an emotional reaction against this structure. Fascism as a perverse emotional attitude originates from the suppression of the individual, which seems to be unhesitatingly equated with repression. Reich suggests that the perverse side is present in all individuals, but it requires the ‘massification’ of people as a precondition in order to make its appearance. On this ground, once the individual is incorporated in a mass that releases the suppressed irrational and barbaric character layer, fascism is the final outcome of this loss of individuality and critical reason,

To that effect, German fascism owes its consolidation and ascendance to power to the manipulation of the psychic structures of the masses. In that spirit, Nazism initiated a policy of strict sex-economy so that it could serve its formidable imperialistic and destructive purposes. A despotic sex education of children and adolescents was greatly emphasised just to breed perverse desires. As Reich notes:

The natural sexual strivings toward the other sex, which seek gratification from childhood on, were replaced in the main by distorted and diverted homosexual and sadistic feelings, and in part also by ascetism [...] *Sadism originates from ungratified orgastic yearnings.* The façade is inscribed with such names as ‘comradeship’, ‘honor’, and ‘voluntary discipline’.<sup>80</sup>

No more aporistically than this, Reich ascribes the power of German fascism to the perversification of the psychic character of the people. The oppressive model of sex – economy was nothing but perverse training and the motive force behind the sadistic brutality of Nazism. By turning the population into perverts, Nazism managed to conduct its imperialist atrocities. Reich obviously falls into the decoy of psychological reductionism, by drawing a character type and pathology that underlie a socio-political phenomenon.<sup>81</sup> Replicating the Freudo-Marxist logic about perversion as a synecdoche of repressive practices and structures, Reich's biologist account eulogises sexual liberation as an end in itself.

To reiterate the main ideas of the narratives of the Freudian left, for Reich and the Frankfurt School perversion is a product and a medium of political power shaped by the authoritarian structures of Western capitalist society. Fascism exemplifies this negative process at best. This ignores historical dimensions (as Foucault has meticulously demonstrated) that influence sexuality and the destructive component of the (biological) instinct. For Reich, the oppression of sexuality and the displacement from its natural expression, serves the barbaric acts of fascism, whereas the Frankfurt School delegates, Horkheimer and Adorno, who abdicate Reich's naturalism and the emphasis on primitive biological instincts, desexualise perversion linking it to political purposes of obedience, conformism and leadership control, as deviations from critical reason.

#### **1.4 Freudo-Marxist Limitations**

The Frankfurt School's Marxist interpretation of the Freudian doctrine presaged the current confluence of psychoanalysis with social theory and cultural criticism.<sup>82</sup> Notwithstanding the innovative suggestions and applications of Freudo-Marxism, some versions of the latter bear various tensions.

In the early Frankfurt School, Fromm's Freudo-Marxist thought reflected a reductionism which years later would also characterise Herbert Marcuse in what was probably his most explicit Freudo-Marxist attempt: *Eros and Civilization*.<sup>83</sup> In his work,

Marcuse promotes the idea of sexual liberation from the repressive parameters of capitalist civilization. In the same line, Reich also formulated an idiosyncratic Freud-Marxist synthesis, as we saw earlier. Like Marcuse, Reich combines radicalism with psychoanalytic theories on sexuality without overcoming the impediment of reductionism in his approach. Whereas Reich drew on the clash between the cathartic 'orgastic potency' and repression, Marcuse emphasised more the incongruence between malformed sexuality, due to superfluous repression, and true sexuality.<sup>84</sup>

Reich and Marcuse's views appear to limit the utopian project to the overturning of sexual repression.<sup>85</sup> Capitalist relations endorse pro-fascist reasoning through the suppression of sexuality and the amputation of rational thinking. If suppression engenders the relentless irrational character of the unconscious, then critical reason could dissolve the irrationality and the repressed status of the latter. However, this view conditions the formation of the unconscious with a particular organisation of social reality, without taking into account the culmination of the fissure between the innate and rigorous nature of the drive (originating in biology) and social reality, which is prohibitive as such.

Yet the Freudian unconscious, as an anarchic and primitive biological force, is elusive and thus not reducible to specific socio-economic and materialist factors. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud relates self-destruction to the unconscious and the notion of the death drive (*Thanatos*) as the natural counterpart of the sexual drive (*Eros*).<sup>86</sup> The death drive is a ubiquitous irrational force intrinsically operating and undermining the stability of the ego, regardless of its subjugation to any type of ideological power. Nonetheless, for Reich and Marcuse, the unrepresentable and unlocatable nature of the death drive is reduced to a product of capitalist domination and suppression.

Furthermore, to the extent that Freud's theory neglects the historicizing dimension and the role of socio-economy in the formation of the subject, its synthesis with Marxism does not resolve this problem. Given that Freud's theorisation on sexuality, defined in strict biological terms, is the essential bastion for Reich or Marcuse's ideas, their approach does not efficiently historicize socio-political phenomena. In the face of this limitation, Adorno was sceptical of the Freud-Marxist approach, discerning the deadlock of its endeavour to compose "a common language for historical materialism and psychoanalysis," as Žižek notes.<sup>87</sup>

In Reich and Marcuse, capitalist repression appears to transfigure the sexual drive and turn it into a destructive force. Thus, Marcuse advocated the 'resexualisation' of social relations, as the prevalence of *Eros* could limit destructive forces. But this posits the unconscious as a form which is adjustable to socio-political conditions. Had it not been for the economic antagonism of capitalism, the unconscious would have been reconciled with an autonomous ego. A rational ego harmonious with the Marxist ideal would be less alienated, rescinding destructive elements that may contaminate natural life and redeeming the purity of sexuality. If perversion is the impairment of the natural expression of sexuality, that is to say, its distortion by artificiality and external oppressive forces, the prospect of a revolutionary retraction of suppression *qua* repression fosters the illusory anticipation that perverse phenomena such as sadomasochism would fade away from society. The chart of the perversions would be futile because natural sexuality would prevail and the category of perversion itself would serve no purpose.

One must bear in mind, however, that perverse behaviour is not experienced as coercion or as the product of suppressed sexuality by the pervert's ego. The eclipse of perverse sexuality is far from being a realistic prospect in a Freudo-Marxist vision that promises the expression of biological, natural instincts, dismantling their catastrophic capitalist distortion. It is not a coincidence that Marcuse's ideas about the revolutionary prospects of polymorphic sexual emancipation were so popular among the radical student groups of the 1960s.<sup>88</sup> Yet this popularisation of Freud's theorisation was criticised even by other Freudo-Marxists such as Fromm who considered it to be misleading and inaccurate.<sup>89</sup> Another point that Homer draws in relation to the Freudo-Marxist efforts of Reich and Marcuse is their failure to provide a positive framing of desire, in contrast with Deleuze and Guattari's politics of desire. For Reich and Marcuse, desire is irrational and represents the antipode to the rationality of the social field.<sup>90</sup>

The Freudo-Marxist view of perversion as a condition arising from repression erroneously equates the latter with suppression. In this regard, repression suggests an unconscious operation that perverts sexuality and breeds pre-fascist artificial trends. Nevertheless, this disregards Freud's assertion that the development of sexual perversions is due to the persistence of archaic 'sexual components' that *fail* to undergo repression.<sup>91</sup> The failure of repression, interlocked with the persistence of infantile sexual components,

accounts for perversion. Archaic elements that characterise the psychic structure of any individual turn to become an indispensable part of his/her conscious sexual behaviour. In “Television,” Lacan denounces this Freudo-Marxist thesis, by alluding to Freud’s unequivocal assertion that repression does not stem from suppression.<sup>92</sup>

The abolition of suppression *qua* repression would not suggest a liberating and an authentically enlightening option, since the constitution of socio-symbolic relations is based precisely on repression. In Lacanian terms, the eradication of the latter inexorably erases the locus of the Other. Nevertheless, it must be noted here that Marcuse acknowledges the need of primary repression, in order for society to emerge. Rather it is the surplus repression that functions as a dominative agency that restrains individuals.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps, it is more appropriate to say that a genuine revolutionary act does not eradicate repression, but re-organises social relations, by establishing a different position to the repressed. As Žižek illustrates in his critique of ideology, there is always an unassimilable space embodied by conflicts and antagonisms that ideology represses, in order for society to constitute itself as a coherent whole.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, a genuine radical act does not dissolve repression, but it defies any fixed maintenance of the latter through oppressive means. A much-needed utopia would not eradicate repression, but lead to a different relation to the repressed, by transcending all ideological frames and eventually “traversing the fantasy,” as Žižek suggests.<sup>95</sup> The ultimate outcome would be a re-organisation of the symbolic structures of society.

The cunningness of capitalism was that it managed to re-organise itself, in the second half of the previous century, concealing its oppressive features, something that so-called existing socialism failed to do. The Frankfurt School was critical of the Soviet Union, demonstrating that suppression is not a negative privilege of Western societies, but a mere repercussion of the idiosyncrasy of any authoritarian regime, regardless of its ideological standpoint. The Stalinist system concealed suppression under the sanctimonious veil of socialist equality among members of the party. But the main question of how socialist establishments disfigured Marxism in an equally authoritarian manner remained.

As far as Stalinism is concerned, Žižek argues that critical theorists failed to efficiently tackle this nefarious segment of Soviet Marxism in their critique, because of their

disregard and avoidance of Stalinist phenomena.<sup>96</sup> Lacking a positive theory of Stalinism which would evaluate the latter as a distinct case of domination, the Frankfurt School did not explain the reasons for Marxism's failure to become pragmatized. With regard to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Žižek points out the absence of Stalinism from the critical exploration of the instrumentalisation of reason as something that attenuates the vigorousness and the concreteness of Horkheimer and Adorno's critique.<sup>97</sup> The overemphasis of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* on the rise of Nazism and anti-Semitism in the West, inevitably led to neglecting the main question of why Marxism went wrong in its Soviet manifestation. This feeds a neo-conservative idea, insinuating that there is nothing to be learned from the East.

According to Žižek, this shortcoming of Critical Theory can be attributed to limited accessibility to Stalinist phenomena compared to fascism and Nazism in the West.<sup>98</sup> So, while fascism has been profusely studied, the complexity of Soviet Marxism still remains in shadow, as well as the irrational synecdoche of its Leninist and Stalinist manifestation.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> This type of critique suggests an application of critical theory through the appraisal of societal phenomena or ideas without critical theory imposing its own criteria and values; instead, it emphasises the importance of values already present in society. According to this logic, by endorsing progressive ideals and norms existent in society, such as humanism, freedom, justice and so on, it is feasible to articulate a type of critique that alerts people to take action against oppressive structures and breed social changes that allow these ideals to flourish. This is the utopia that immanent critique promotes; nevertheless, Adorno's dialectical critique of culture or ideology is not inscribed in this frame, as it constitutes an "extremely uneasy, antinomic synthesis of immanent and transcendent critique." See Andrew Arato, "Introduction to Part II: Esthetic Theory and Cultural Criticism," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1990 [1978]), pp. 185-219 (p. 203).

The crystallisation of Adorno's own critical approach is 'negative dialectics', according to which all philosophical positions and social theories are critically contended, embarking from no 'identity-principle'. This indicates a discrepancy with the philosophical outlook of Horkheimer or Marcuse who prioritised the formulation of a positive social theory, on the ground of a Hegelian notion of 'reason' which is intrinsically related to freedom. See Tom Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School* (Chichester: Horwood, 1984), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> In the 1930s, Horkheimer supported the interdisciplinary programme which focused more on empirical research and political economy. But later, the group that stood next to Horkheimer and Adorno's



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orientation accentuated less the critique of economic relations and more the critique of the expanding utilitarian scientific and technological reason that conformed to the tenets of institutional power. Nonetheless, not everyone in the Frankfurt school agreed with the prioritisation of critical theory as the main research tool. Members, such as Neumann, Gurland and Kircheimer, yielded the Marxist critique of capitalist monopoly by looking at its formative effects on the transformation of the main state institutions: legal, political and economic. They paid far less attention to mass psychology and its implication for politics and culture. See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-50* (London: Heineman, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 41-42. Joan Alway also notes that Horkheimer and Adorno's belief was that the proletariat as a revolutionary agent had disappeared at the time, as s/he was assimilated by the administered society. See Joan Alway, *Critical Theory and Political Possibilities: Conceptions of Emancipatory Politics in the Works of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* begins with a confrontation of the strict positivist foundation of scientific and technological expansion. See Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School*, pp. 18-19. See also Max Horkheimer's essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" which criticises the objectivism of traditional philosophy and contrasts it with Critical Theory. In Max Horkheimer (ed.) *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 188-243.

<sup>7</sup> Seyla Benhabib explains the process of rationalisation: "By 'social rationalization' Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse mean the following phenomena: the apparatus of administrative and political domination extends into all spheres of social life. This extension of domination is accomplished through the ever more efficient and predictable organizational techniques developed by institutions like the factory, army, the bureaucracy, the schools and the culture industry. The efficiency and predictability of these new organizational techniques are made possible by the application of science and technology, not only to the domination of external nature, but to the control of interpersonal relations and the manipulation of internal nature as well." See Seyla Benhabib, "The Critique of Instrumental Reason," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 66-92 (p. 74).

<sup>8</sup> Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno note the peril for the cultural edifice submitting to the instrumentalisation of reason and thus domination. The chapter on "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" seems to be prescient of the homogeneity and the mercantile character of contemporary culture. Western civilisation's promotion of a morose and ephemeral culture reveals its inclination towards irrational domination and a self-destructive proclivity. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>12</sup> This suggests a destructive tendency that stems from socio-political factors (e.g. capitalist domination). In this regard, the biological character of the Freudian notion of the death drive is neglected.

<sup>13</sup> Even nowadays, many assume a hypothetical rivalry between nature and man. When natural catastrophes occur, we hear about Nature 'taking revenge' from humans or the 'wrath' of (super)natural forces being unleashed against human civilisation.

<sup>14</sup> The echelon of barbarity associated with these dominative systems impaired the objectives of immanent critique, as it was difficult to discern and restore the stamina of humanistic values operating in such systems.

<sup>15</sup> See Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1999 [1947]), p. 121

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>17</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Marcuse in the 1960s expanded this reflection on the alienating effect of capitalist structures on sexuality. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon, 1953).

<sup>19</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the control practices that liberalism irrationally imposes over the individual foster "the reified drive of the individual bourgeois;" that is "survival as affirmed by reason revealed as destructive natural power, no longer to be distinguished from self-destruction." Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 90.

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<sup>20</sup> Nicos Poulantzas gives an excellent account of this view in *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*, trans. by Judith White (London: Verso, 1979).

<sup>21</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-50*, p. 265.

<sup>23</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno argue: "The mass-murdering Fascist appeared as the pure essence of the German manufacturer, different from the criminal only in that he enjoyed power." Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 228.

<sup>24</sup> See Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), p. 223.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> An illustration of this is found in Pasolini's film *Salò* which is presented in the following chapter. Towards the end of the film, the four fascist libertines execute the victims in the courtyard of their mansion. Through binoculars, they watch the spectacle of the massacre from their window, becoming sexually aroused.

<sup>27</sup> It is hard to discern a core idea in the *Dialectic* that reveals a certain trajectory for future research. But it is possible to read the formal discontinuity of the *Dialectic* as an indication of Adorno's more general endeavour to dissect and confront identity form. See Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>28</sup> This idea appears in more than one works by Slavoj Žižek. Indicatively, see *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 391-392.

<sup>29</sup> See Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr. and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 95-137. See also Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2002 [1964]).

<sup>30</sup> See Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), p. 78.

<sup>31</sup> According to this criticism, the *Dialectic* entirely relinquishes the emancipatory vision of Marxism about subverting capitalism. See Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>32</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xiii.

<sup>33</sup> In Jameson's words: "What remains powerful in this part of their work, however, is a more global model of repression which, borrowed from psychoanalysis, provides the underpinnings for their sociological vision of the total system or "verwaltete Welt" (the bureaucratically "administered" world system) of late capitalism. The adaptation of clinical Freudianism proves awkward at best precisely because the fundamental psychoanalytic inspiration of the Frankfurt School derives, not from diagnostic texts, but rather from Civilization, with its eschatological vision of an irreversible link between development [...] and ever-increasing instinctual renunciation and misery. Henceforth, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the evocation of renunciation will function less as a psychic diagnosis than as cultural criticism; and technical terms like repression come to be used less for their own denotative value than as instruments for constructing, a contrario, a new Utopian vision of "bonheur" and instinctual gratification." See Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject" in *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume III: Society, Politics, Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 3-43 (p. 7).

<sup>34</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," (1951) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1990 [1978]), pp. 118-137, (p. 135).

<sup>35</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," (1921), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 18, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974).

<sup>36</sup> Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," 121.

<sup>38</sup> See Sean Homer, "The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy," *New Formations* no. 38 (Summer, 1999): 78-90 (p. 81).

<sup>39</sup> Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> Homer, "The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy," p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>43</sup> Something that Erich Fromm did.
- <sup>44</sup> Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," p. 135.
- <sup>45</sup> Adorno claims: "Fascism furthers this abolition [man's 'psychology'] in the opposite sense through the perpetuation of dependence instead of the realization of potential freedom, through expropriation of the unconscious by social control instead of making the subjects conscious of their unconscious." Ibid., p. 136.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 137.
- <sup>47</sup> Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, pp. 60-61.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 61.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 60.
- <sup>51</sup> Homer, "The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy," p. 78.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 79.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 82.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Some representatives of this revisionism are Erich Fromm, Alfred Adler and Karen Horney.
- <sup>56</sup> Homer, "The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy," p. 78.
- <sup>57</sup> As Žižek says, "Psychic nature is the result of a historical process which, on account of the alienated character of history, assumes the 'reified', 'naturalised' form of its opposite, of a pre-historical given state of things." Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, p. 10.
- <sup>58</sup> Something which often invokes the fidelity of Ernest Jones, although the latter stands in the conservative antipode to Adorno's ideological position.
- <sup>59</sup> According to Žižek, Adorno displays a more respectful attitude to the Freudian corpus than Freud's successors. Žižek states "Adorno uses the contradiction as a theoretical indication of truth." By leaving exposed the contradiction in Freud's theory, he lets its truthful part to emerge. See Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, p. 13.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 20.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 16.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 18.
- <sup>64</sup> Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, p. 57.
- <sup>65</sup> Responding to this impasse, Adorno promoted the idea of "the utopia of the end of compulsory identity, the reconciliation of ego and id." A utopian non-identity would emerge from the deflation of the discrepancy between primary and secondary processes. This reconciliation is artificial when social relations are not authentic in themselves. As Hammer notes, "In light of the antinomy of ego-strength and the utopianism of a reconciled ego, he [Adorno] therefore opts for the 'coldness' of the former." See Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, p. 58.
- <sup>66</sup> Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," p. 136.
- <sup>67</sup> This delineates a philosophical question which involves the equal predominance of two mutually exclusive meanings. So, regardless of whether it is feasible or not, aporia is a demand for resolution. In the third chapter of his work, Joel Whitebook has an extensive discussion on the Ego and Adorno's defence of the aporia related to autonomy. See Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*, p. 122.
- <sup>68</sup> Homer, "The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy," p. 79.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>70</sup> This indicates that Adorno, despite his austere criticism of Enlightenment reason, does not reject the latter totally. I discuss Kant's ethical philosophy more extensively in the third part of the study.
- <sup>71</sup> Labour production is presented as the end and not as the means to the accomplishment of the subject's end.
- <sup>72</sup> Homer, "The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy," p. 78.
- <sup>73</sup> This occurs as omnipotent mastery cloaks "our inescapable embeddedness in nature, language, and tradition." See Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*, p. 122.
- <sup>74</sup> In the following chapters, the *Will-to-Power* is thoroughly elaborated and related to the question of ethics.
- <sup>75</sup> That was before Reich committed himself to the bioelectrical experimentation on what he called *orgone* (orgasmic) energy.

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<sup>76</sup> See Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. by Vincent R. Carfagno, ed. by Mary Higgins and Chester M. Raphael (London: Souvenir Press, 1970 [1946]). *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* was written in 1933, but it was not published in English until 1946. This is the reason for presenting his work, after Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

<sup>77</sup> Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, p. xi.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii (italics in the original).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192 (italics in the original).

<sup>81</sup> Stavrakakis criticises Reich and some Freudo-Marxist views for reductionism. See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 141.

<sup>82</sup> Homer, "The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy," p. 78.

<sup>83</sup> See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon, 1953).

<sup>84</sup> See Jeffrey Weeks, "Dangerous Desires," in *The Body: Critical Concepts in Sociology, Volume III*, ed. by The Aberdeen Body Group: Andrew Blaikie, Mike Hepworth, Mary Holmes, Alexandra Howson, David Inglis and Sheree Sartain (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 152-174 (p. 158).

<sup>85</sup> This means that a collective utopia that moves beyond sexual behaviour remains unfulfilled, as long as the individual does not express his/her sexuality freely.

<sup>86</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 18, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 7-64 (pp. 31-32).

<sup>87</sup> Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup> In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse envisages a prospective society that relies on an ideal and liberating fusion of Marxism and Freudianism and enables individuals to practise polymorphic sexuality.

<sup>89</sup> In his work, "Infantilization and Despair Masquerading as Radicalism," posthumously published, Erich Fromm confronts Marcuse's ideas for imprudently exalting sexual perversions and misreading Freud. See Erich Fromm, "Infantilization and Despair Masquerading as Radicalism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 10 (1993): 197-206.

<sup>90</sup> See Sean Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1998), p. 77.

<sup>91</sup> Freud says in a footnote added in 1920: "Analytic investigation has already been able to show in a few cases that perversions are a residue of development towards the Oedipus complex and that after the repression of that complex the components of the sexual instinct which are strongest in the disposition of the individual concerned emerge once more." See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 7, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 135-243 p. 161.

<sup>92</sup> See Jacques Lacan, "Television," trans. by Dennis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, *October* 51 (Winter, 1989): 5-50 (p. 31).

<sup>93</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, "Dangerous Desires," p. 159.

<sup>94</sup> See Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 113. Žižek borrows the notion of the real (the Lacanian equivalent to Freud's anarchic and dislocating nature of the drive) to conceptualise this antagonistic space which is empty of any meaning. I elaborate further Žižek's ideas in the fourth chapter of this study.

<sup>95</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989). I develop this point further in the next part, where I analyse the three systems of the master.

<sup>96</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2002 [2001]), pp. 92-93.

<sup>97</sup> Yet notes that the *Dialectic* deployed a critical tactic to attack Western domination as the apex of a disastrous culture, in order to go against it. By drawing an ultimate fascist and irrational denouement as the inescapable finale of totally administered societies, the *Dialectic* endeavoured to drastically contravene it.

<sup>98</sup> This is what Žižek argues in an interview with Eric Dean Rasmussen, See *Liberation Hurts: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek*, University of Illinois at Chicago, (29 September, 2003). Available from: <<http://www.lacan.com/zizekillinois.htm>> [accessed 12 March 2006].

## 2. 1940s–1970s: The Authoritarian and Evil Profile of Fascism

### 2.1 The Fascist Brunt against Oedipus

After years of meticulous research in psychopathology, the psychoanalytic clinic solidified its theoretical edifice and opened the possibility for the application of clinical material to the interpretation of socio-historical matters. As early as the first period of the psychoanalytic school in Vienna, renowned members attempted to identify the unconscious processes behind political events and social dynamics.

Freud was the first to pave the way with works, such as *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.<sup>1</sup> Freudians, such as Ernst Kris and Theodor Reik, also developed an interest in the efficiency of psychoanalysis in approaching social-political issues.<sup>2</sup> Erich Fromm was probably the most characteristic case, who departed from the traditional psychoanalytic clinic and conjoined Frankfurt school's radical Freudo-Marxism. It is not surprising then to find narratives from the orthodox Freudian discourse that try make some (psychoanalytic) sense of the fascist phenomenon and search for its pathological elements.

The term 'psycho-politics' has been occasionally used to describe this application of psychoanalytic knowledge into political analysis, providing insights about unconscious operations. Nonetheless, the term has been also negatively associated with the psychologisation of the political terrain and this field of research was greeted with much dispute and controversy. What is often confronted is the tendency to categorise and interpret complex historico-political events, based on pre-existing clinical material or a fragmented collection and interpretation of evidence. With regard to this rationale, it takes a lapsus or a parapraxis by Hitler in order to unearth some unconscious reasons behind his deeds and thus elucidate some of the Nazi enigma.

Despite this oversimplification, one cannot repudiate the genuine intention of those works to draw an analytic vector that links the individual with his/her collective context. They may lack the passionate and radical quality of the Frankfurt School's analyses, yet it is important that traditional analysts recognised indeed the wider explanatory framework of psychoanalysis, taking the political factor as an indispensable dimension of their accounts.

The hegemonic paradigm at the epicentre of orthodox psychoanalytic narratives, interweaving their argumentation, is the Oedipal logic. So, it comes as no surprise to see the same logic dominating psychoanalytic interpretations of fascism. This is understood, when one considers that knowledge derived from the psychoanalytic clinic filters the construal of such political phenomena.

Illustrative of a wider psychoanalytic scope is Ernest Jones's epic work *Psycho-myth, Psycho-history: Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis*, a collection of papers which deal with heterogeneous non-clinical applications of psychoanalysis.<sup>3</sup> One of Freud's most loyal disciples and later president of the International Psychoanalytic Society, Jones remained faithful to the authenticity of his master throughout his life and went on to produce a remarkable body of analytic work ranging from clinical cases to art and politics. His essay "The Psychology of Quislingism" is one example of Jones's effort to move to the 'psycho-political' terrain, exploring the unconscious dynamics behind the rise of German fascism. The text demonstrates the way mainstream Freudian psychoanalysts took fascism to the couch in order to explore its unconscious complexes. On the tracks of Freudian logic, the orthodoxy of which Jones perennially embraced, "The Psychology of Quislingism" was originally a paper presented at the British Psychoanalytic Society in 1940.<sup>4</sup> It can be seen as an alerting call for action against the fascist threat that culminated at the time. Less than a direct mapping of the psychopathology of fascism, Jones's essay is more an interpretation of the underlying unconscious factors that facilitated the spread of the Nazi phenomenon.

Jones believes that every emancipatory revolt in history is followed by a conservative and rigid system to which individuals respond with increased servitude. In this vein, after a period of emancipation brought by the rapid industrialisation of society and the progress of scientific knowledge in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, ultimately authoritarian political establishments took over. The liberating and emancipatory forces of scientific reason resulted in an unbearable burden of responsibility that elicited primitive infantile mechanisms. The individual tries to discard this responsibility by adhering to an omnipotent authoritarian figure. This figure can provide him/her with security and protection; that is to say, the leader of dictatorial systems more than any other system of political organisation feels obliged to meet the omnipotent role with which people bestow him.

For Jones, this explains the megalomaniac character of those authoritarian leaders. In this respect, Hitler as a powerful figure is nothing but a product of the German people's belief in omnipotence and the demand of its fulfilment by their leader, who expunges responsibility from the group. Jones finds recourse to the logic of the defence mechanisms as the main theoretical tool for constructing his arguments. He interprets the rise of fascism as the result of introjective and projective mechanisms that protect individuals against anxiety and guilt.<sup>5</sup> In search for the good leader, German people introjected the figure of Hitler. They incorporated him, as a kind of psychic cannibalism. On the other hand, projection, commonly encountered in paranoia, involved the expulsion of evil from Germans and its projection to Jews only to return in the form of delusions of persecution: the evil Jew who prioritises his personal wealth at the cost of Germany's prosperity.

Apart from the omnipotence of the leader, Nazism's successful rise to power was also the result of the phenomenon of 'Quislingism', named after Vidkun Quisling, a Norwegian politician. Initially an honorary Commander of the Order of the British Empire and a minister of the Norwegian government, Quisling resigned in order to set up a fascist party and collaborate with the Nazis. Synonymous, thus, with treachery, Jones uses the term 'Quislingism' to denote a pro-fascist attitude and generally to give a name to a general condition of cooperating with the enemy. Oedipal unresolved issues sustain this treacherous attitude. Specifically, Hitler was perceived as an irresistible and formidable paternal imago that made people lethargic and docile. This is because a "formidable paternal figure" functions as a terrain of internalisations and projection of drives.<sup>6</sup> The pressing historical circumstances may justify the absolute and categorical style of Jones's discursive arguments, yet what becomes obvious is his unconditional belief in psychoanalysis's explanatory power by generalising its empirical evidence.<sup>7</sup>

Jones writes:

Coming now to the psycho-analytical problem concerned, I may assume that every analyst has had ample evidence of the identification of the enemy in question with certain aspects of the formidable Father imago. The torture dreams about Hitler, and the still more revealing ones of friendly intimacy with him, are apt to occur in contexts that render this interpretation inevitable.<sup>8</sup>

With the main axis of his argument evolving around Oedipal matters and relying on material derived from his clinical practice, such as dream analysis, Jones identifies two homosexual positions: a passive, linked to the dreams of torture by Hitler, and an active, expressed through dreams of affiliation with the latter. In an attempt to convert the evil father to a good one, other countries denied and repressed their aggressivity towards Hitler, taking a position of inertia. This explains the passivity in which other countries were caught up.

The analytical point is that primary aggressive wanting was so repressed as to be inconceivable, though its existence was after all implied in the idea of the Father demanding back the penis of which he had been robbed.<sup>9</sup>

Jones sees this lethargic state of Quislingism as indicative of a homosexual position. While political leaders of neutral countries which did not take any action against Hitler nor barricaded his ascension to power, maintained a passive and masochistic homosexual position, leaders who allied themselves with the Führer, followed an active homosexual pattern. For them, Hitler as a paternal imago was irresistible and called for identification. Galvanised by an active homosexual desire, the allies succumbed to the seduction of this imago, identifying themselves with Hitler.<sup>10</sup> Here, Jones resorts to the mysterious unconscious fascination the image induces, as far as the paternal imago involves feelings and behaviours related to the image of the Father.

Nevertheless, the reasoning for adumbrating a paternal role of Hitler, homologous to that of Freud's primordial father, is absent from Jones elaboration.<sup>11</sup> It seems that leadership is equated with the paternal imago, an idea that reiterates Freud's view, but it does not explain why Hitler eclipsed other leaders' imagoes. Jones simply argues that this is due to Father/Hitler's sadism (identified here with sexual potency) that forms a projective rostrum for impulses belonging to the people or other leaders. It is an attitude of fear towards a sadistic father, which becomes both "sexualised and moralised."<sup>12</sup> The outcome of this fear is submission or conformity with the forces of the enemy. Identification with the dictator proffers a safety net from disorganising revolutionary factors, such as Bolshevism that constituted an external threat for the stability of Nazi Germany.



For Jones, a submissive attitude corresponds to a passive homosexual position, displayed by countries such as Denmark and Norway, whereas fascist leaders like Mussolini who allied with Hitler took an active homosexual position. The *sexualisation* and *moralisation* of their fear and guilt determined this passivity. The degrading Treaty of Versailles, equivalent to castration, isolated from Germany geographical areas, previously under its rule, and burdened the Germans with the exclusive responsibility of the First World War felonies. Treachery constituted a perverse pathway to overcome the guilt caused by the previous isolation of Germany.

Treachery, by allying oneself with the conquering enemy, would seem to be an attempt to sadistically overcome the incest taboo by raping the Mother instead of loving her.<sup>13</sup>

I would suggest that the people who are most subject to the wiles of Nazi propaganda are those who have neither securely established their own manhood and independence of the Father nor have been able to combine the instincts of sexuality and love in their attitude towards the Mother or other women. This is the psychological position of the homosexual.<sup>14</sup>

Concerned less with Hitler, who anyway seems to have completed his identification with the father, and more with other leaders, Jones places on the perverse side the aficionados who supported Nazism either inside or outside the German borders. Anyone who remained docile or actively cooperated with Nazism, assisted the enemy due to unresolved Oedipal conflicts, leading to perversion. Only the acceptance of castration would build an independent secure manhood that would enable the individual to love his mother or other women. It seems that followers of Nazism, tried to secure their manhood through a homosexual route, becoming dependent and submitting to the will of a despotic figure, namely Hitler. Regarded in terms of a negative obedience, homosexuality appears to be the pedestal for the fascist threat.

The inability to take any action against Hitler, as a dreadful father, constitutes the main symptom of Quislings who is thereby the archetype for the general inability and inertia towards the Nazi threat. As a replica of his clinical 'liturgy', Jones interpreted the formation of this symptom as the result of either closing the blinds to the aggressiveness of the Father or by approving it. The common denominator of these two positions is the

refusal to fight the enemy. And this is because the enemy becomes *irresistible*. Despite submission and conventionalism being common attitudes in any political system, Jones translates these attitudes to homosexuality, as far as German fascism is concerned.<sup>15</sup>

Jones oedipalises an ideologico-political occurrence and explains the rise of fascism as the product of a series of misidentifications. But far from adopting the Marxian logic, Jones does not attribute authoritarianism to the dominant socio-political structuring of Western society, but to the reactivation of early Oedipal dynamics and the ominous digression from the identification with the normative superego, namely the patriarchal law. Inevitably, any digression from the Oedipal pathway leads to an open space of recourse to designations from the glossary of perversion.

It is not difficult to detect the inadequacies and the risk of oversimplification that the orthodox Freudian approach harbours, inasmuch as it fails to draw a clear distinction between the collective character of socio-political phenomena and the symptoms of the analysand. It could only be myopic to reduce all leaders who collaborated with Hitler to homosexuals. Were they unable to resist and recognise the ferocious character of the escalating National Socialism, just because of their unconscious homosexuality? Apart from this, paradoxically, Hitler committed his identification with the Father, so he is exempt from these Oedipal unresolved difficulties. Nonetheless, his sadistic standing also insinuates a problematic Oedipal identification.

The problem is that fascism had already begun to show its impending protagonistic role in politics, shortly after the end of First World War, before Hitler became the dominant fascist figure in the mid 1930s. In fact, Mussolini preceded Hitler in being the first to establish a despotic fascist regime. Hitler became inspired by the rise of Italian fascism and had high regard for Mussolini as a leader (that is to say, a paternal figure in Jones's terms), although in the late 1930s the roles were reversed and growing rivalry damaged the relations between the two leaders.

Furthermore, on a methodological level, Jones's ample references to projection encumber the profundity of his argument. The risk of the undifferentiated use of this particular mechanism was something that Freud himself pointed out, when he adumbrated the role of projection in paranoia:

In the first place, projection does not play the same part in all forms of paranoia; and, in the second place, it makes its appearance not only in paranoia but under other psychological conditions, as well, and in fact it has a regular share assigned to it in our attitude towards the external world. [...] Having thus been made aware that more general psychological problems are involved in the question of the nature of projection, let us make up our minds to postpone the investigation of it [...] <sup>16</sup>

An exaggeration of the explanatory power of projection tarnishes the thrust of psychoanalytic arguments instead of rectifying them, since projection is pertinent to an epiphenomenal process that does not broach its underlying essence, namely fantasy. The projection of an imaginary construct, i.e. an image, is important for analysis, when the concomitant identification with this image is informative of the way the desire of the projector is implicated.

The image of the formidable father has more to say to about its seductive aspects seeped by desire and fantasy and less about the negative consequences of the failure of Oedipal identification. As follows, Jones does not attempt to dissect the structural fantasmatic aspects and the utopian character of fascist ideology that leaders exploited and their people became fascinated with. There is no elucidation of the supposed homosexual fantasies that maintain the attitude of the allies or the fantasies that fascism promoted. One can presume that this replicates and superimposes over the psychoanalytic process a cliché fantasy about fascism's latent perverse structure.

Jones' narrative is not the only traditional psychoanalytic narrative that weaves the fabric of the Nazi phenomenon around problematic individual intrapsychic processes, as elucidated by the clinical applications of psychoanalysis. Another distinguished psychoanalyst, working in the field of 'psycho-politics', Money-Kyrle also linked Nazism to psychopathology, taking a Kleinian perspective.<sup>17</sup> If Jones' interpretation vacillates between paranoia and perversion, Money-Kyrle emphasises more paranoid mechanisms, analysing Nazism as a case of moral pathology. For him, moral behaviour is defined by "the fear of a sense of guilt."<sup>18</sup> Guilt as the basis of morality is expressed through a persecutory and a depressive form. Nazism was a pathological disturbance of this morality, cultivating a personality type that escapes guilt. Money-Kyrle discerns this type in Hitler. Being both manic and paranoid, Hitler established an immoral regime of "political

paranoia.” Thus, in line with Jones and Money-Kyrle’s accounts, archaic and pre-oedipal processes form the psychotic or the perverse psychograph of Nazism.

But a hardcore hermeneuticism seems to lead these early psycho-political narratives, which abates rather than augments the vigour of their argumentation. Psychoanalysis is implemented as a rigid rational tool of interpretation of a particular, yet complex, political condition. Rather than a methodical analytic effort, Jones’s paper is an isolated and ineffective response to a historical moment of instability for the international political equilibrium. Fascism’s vision of a global new order is unhesitatingly reduced to the Oedipal model of interpretation.

Less than a ‘scientific’ elucidation of an absurd phenomenon that tries to abolish the normative and rational political basis of liberal democracy, the psychoanalytic scrutiny of fascism requires more a thorough analysis of the structural components that sustained its ideological resonance, instead of focusing on its pathology. This must draw attention to the lack of rational meaning from the basis of all ideological formations that occupy the locus of political power.

## **2.2 The Perversion of Authority**

The scathing opposition to fascism, as drawn by the Frankfurt School in the previous decades, was encapsulated in the collaborative socio-psychological work on the *Authoritarian Personality*, in 1950.<sup>19</sup> The fulcrum of this systematic effort was the assembly of a more concrete tool by which the rationale of Critical Theory could find its empirical and verifiable ratification. The project was funded by the American Jewish Committee and was included as one of the five volumes in the *Studies in Prejudice* series, published in 1949-1950. The Director of Scientific research was Horkheimer.

In standard social psychology texts, Adorno is portrayed as the architect of the *Authoritarian Personality*, even though his role in the whole project was only subsidiary, involving a qualitative analysis of the data collected. This regular misapprehension neglects Adorno’s antithesis and relentless critique of the positivistic zealotry, which became prevalent in Western scientific community. In the introduction of *The Positivist*

*Dispute in German Sociology*, Adorno demarcates Critical Theory's dialectical approach to society as a totality from positivist sociological approaches, which rely on empirical verification:

The concept of societal totality is not ontologized, and cannot be made into a primary thing-in-itself. Positivists who ascribe this to dialectical theory [...] simply misunderstand it. [...] Positivism internalises the constraints exercised upon thought by a totally socialized society in order that thought shall function in society. It internalises these constraints so that they become an intellectual outlook. Positivism is the puritanism of knowledge. What puritanism achieves in the moral sphere is, under positivism, sublimated to the norms of knowledge. From the outset, knowledge denies what it seeks, since this is denied by the desideratum of socially useful labour. Knowledge then projects the taboo which it has imposed upon itself onto its goal, and proscribes what it cannot attain. The process which otherwise might be unbearable to for the subject – namely, the integration of thought into what confronts it and must be penetrated by it – is integrated into the subject by positivism and made into his own affair.<sup>20</sup>

Adorno confronts the 'truth' of scientific objectivity and methods.<sup>21</sup> What is more, fascism's appropriation of scientific reason and technological expansion propelled Adorno's reproach of the preponderance of positivism in epistemology and scientific practice in the West.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps, one can understand the involvement of Adorno in the project, considering his unbroken interest in anti-Semitism and its implications for socio-politics. For him, ideology and prejudice were commensurable notions. Thus, the *Authoritarian Personality* scale's aim to evaluate the underlying authoritarianism of the typical pro-fascist individual reflected this link between ideology and prejudice.

Yet the scale serves as a further manifestation of the 'perversification' of the fascist phenomenon. Based on rather misleading measures of 'pre-fascist' characters, the scale and its underlying theory had a major impact on the configuration of a stereotypical view of the fascist as a pervert. Intended to measure the levels of authoritarianism in the subject, the *Authoritarian Personality* scale relied greatly on Erich Fromm's analysis of the authoritarian type of character in the collective work, *Studien über Autorität und Familie*.<sup>23</sup> Along the lines of this analysis, the 'authoritarian personality type' is characterised by irrationalism, reflected in sexuality in the form of sado-masochistic behaviours. According

to Fromm, the sadistic tendencies of the subject have their origins in the aggression towards a despotic father. After the displacement of aggression, the subject continues to obey authority taking up a masochistic attitude. This personality type generally describes the conservative individual, predisposed to extreme right ideology.

Notwithstanding the influence of this early study of the Frankfurt Institute of Research, the work on the *Authoritarian Personality* by the 'expatriated' Institute in the US departed from the guiding principles of Critical Theory.<sup>24</sup> As an extensive empirical work, it is based on objective measuring of numerous dimensions which are thought to circumscribe the authoritarian subject. The collaborators developed an inventory with a number of categories, which attempt to identify and classify despotic beliefs, emotions and behaviours.

In the *Fascism (F) scale* of the inventory, thirty-eight items measure the tendencies of the "potentially fascistic individual."<sup>25</sup> Associated with anti-democratic trends, these tendencies are seen to predispose the subject to propagandistic messages of fascist ideology. Apart from the rational left versus irrational right, there are two sub-categories, clearly linked to the perversion of the sexual instinct: *Authoritarian Submission* and *Authoritarian Aggression*. The first alludes to masochistic tendencies, whereas the second encompasses the sadistic component of authoritarianism.<sup>26</sup> The scores for these sub-categories, supplemented by measures on *Sex, Power* and "*Toughness, Destructiveness* and *Cynicism*, join the dots of the profile of the potential fascist. Authoritarianism suggests the camouflage of a sadistic attitude under a socially acceptable form.

Nonetheless, what is the validity of a research hypothesis that relates fascist authoritarianism to an unconscious perverse character, namely a subject unaware of her perverse wishes,<sup>27</sup> when the assumption drawn is based on desexualised forms of aggression only and discursive authoritarian contexts? We have the portrait of a sadist who takes up desexualised violence, due to repressed sexuality. In that context, political attitudes<sup>28</sup> of obedience to a violent authority and conformity are products of the transformation of unfulfilled sexual wishes. Displaying the traits of conformity and conventionalism, the authoritarian individual would not address criticism raised by the decisions of a recognised authority, but on the contrary, s/he would censure and apply punitive practices to those who transgress the values promoted by authority.

As the emotional life which this person regards as proper and a part of himself is likely to be very limited, so the impulses, especially sexual and aggressive ones, which remain unconscious and ego-alien are likely to be strong and turbulent.<sup>29</sup>

Despotism and conventionalism as political conditions correspond to certain personality traits that suppress sexuality, perverting it into an ego-alienating unconscious force; so the authoritarian individual does not differ from the perverse individual. As Whitebook notes, “the authoritarian personality, with its masochistic submission to the superego, is itself a form of character perversion.”<sup>30</sup> But this does not mean that the authoritarian subject is engaged in flagrant perverse acts, affirmative of his personality traits. This is because two mechanisms contrive to disguise the perverse nature of the fascist: one is displacement and the other is projection. The variable of ‘projectivity’ provides the degree to which projection as a mechanism operates in the authoritarian personality.<sup>31</sup> The scale statements touch on issues subtly related to underlying sexuality, but they also include some explicit references to sexuality, such as the variable in the *Fascism scale*, which focuses on unconscious -or ‘ego-alien’- sexuality.<sup>32</sup>

A strong inclination to punish violators of sex mores (homosexuals, sex offenders) may be an expression of a general punitive attitude based on identification with ingroup authorities, but it also suggests that the subject’s own sexual desires are suppressed and in danger of getting out of hand.<sup>33</sup>

The *Authoritarian Personality* scale, as a loose empirical crystallisation of the Freud-Marxist scope, fails to sufficiently adumbrate the profile of the totalitarian master, so long as the latter does not designate a subject of any distinctive and identifiable image. However, the scale suggests that the fascist is dominated by an image of authority. The signifiers of its statements seem to reflect stereotypical fantasies held about the potential fascist who can be traced behind a given authoritarian image.

Therefore, the certainty that the scale quantifies the resemblance of an ordinary individual to a pre-fixed authoritarian image is purely fantasmatic. The rising socio-psychological discipline of the time attempted to utter the point of fixation of the fascist

aficionado's fantasy, by reducing it to something measurable and thus controllable, which is another fantasy. In this respect, *The Authoritarian Personality*, as an early study on subjective prejudice, itself is subject to prejudice and stereotyping, which both involve the prevalence of fixed imaginary constructs.<sup>34</sup>

As far as the authoritarian personality resonates the characterological pieces of Hitler's Nazi despotism, one recalls a Žižekian remark which cauterises the obsession of many Hitler biographers with discovering evidence for perverse sexual behaviour, "as if Hitler's alleged sexual perversion will provide the 'hidden variable', the intimate missing link, the fantasmatic support that would account for his public personality."<sup>35</sup> Likewise, we can say that the categories of the fascist scale related to the underlying perverse structure of the authoritarian subject seem to support this obsession with the 'hidden' perverse variable of fascism. My view is that the scale aims to provide objective and indubitable empirical evidence for fascist perversity, without effectively accomplishing this goal and isolating its biases. Instead it composes a crafty mosaic of elements, amongst them perverse trends, commonly associated with the (mis)representation of historical fascism.

Inasmuch as 'authoritarianism' is a designation of power, the *Authoritarian Personality* scale cannot only be criticised for a flat objectification of the potential fascist, but also for the construction of a tool that serves ideological purposes, under the cloak of scientific reason. This is far from meeting the objectives of Critical Theory that implements a philosophical prism, critical of the dominant socio-economic edifice. For the *Authoritarian Personality* scale, individual responses to pre-fixed statements about prejudice and despotism provide sufficient evidence that enables the Western scientific community to identify an image that itself constructed and contrasted to that of the liberal anti-fascist subject.

Thus, the creators of the scale endorse a radical image only in opposition to an authoritarian image.<sup>36</sup> I see this as an admission of the inability to approach the lacuna carved by fascism (the immensity of its atrocities) and the fantasy that sustained its actions; instead, the scale crams this lacuna with the fantasy of the perverse authoritarian personality as the antipode to the 'healthy' liberal personality.



### 2.3 The Evil of the Nazi Bureaucrat

Was Nazism the ultimate incarnation of evil? Since the end of the Second World War and the chronicling of the Holocaust atrocities, an ongoing ethical speculation on the historical examples of totalitarian regimes still tries to map out the conditions that enabled humans to turn against their own fellow being on such an echelon of catastrophe and misanthropy. The degree of Nazi barbarity troubles the preponderance of anthropocentric ethics which aims at the absolute good for all humans. Furthermore, the inability to understand how Nazism trivialised the supreme value of the moral law and carried out this evil became the pedestal for extensive philosophical discussion.

There may be a more subtle relation between evil and moral law. Hanna Arendt researched this relation, producing an essential narrative on the ethical implications of totalitarianism, dissecting with acumen the Nazi phenomenon. With her ethical suggestions formative for arguments that associate fascist evil with perversion and with Arendt herself producing textual links between Nazi crimes and perverse terminology, an allusion to her work and its ramifications are indispensable.

Without herself being exempted from conceptualising Nazi atrocities through perverse denominations in previous works, Arendt seems to favour perverse vignettes, when she refers to German fascism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

Torture, to be sure, is an essential feature of the whole totalitarian police and judiciary apparatus; it is used every day to make people talk [...] To this rationally conducted torture another, irrational, sadistic type was added in the first Nazi concentration camps and the cellars of Gestapo. Carried on the most part by the SA, it pursued no aims and was not systematic, but dependent on the initiative of largely abnormal elements.<sup>37</sup>

Arendt demarcates a rational from an irrational type of torture performed by the SA and the SS, the two most forceful fascist parties in Germany, in the 1930s. Unless used for extracting information, the fascist ordeals were products of a pathological structure and linked to sadistic irrational character components. Given this irrational basis of fascism that epitomises its perverse 'abnormality', one can discern the influence of the Frankfurt School thought in Arendt's reading.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt is concerned with the totalitarian phenomenon, focused on Nazism and Stalinism. She considers Nazism to be an ideological condition where critical thinking as the foundation of good disintegrates, favouring a mass community that unleashes evil.<sup>38</sup> Arendt uses terms, such as “bestiality” or “beasts in human form,” in her description of fascist acts, supporting the idea of a perverse pathology of the *SA* and the *SS*.<sup>39</sup> In a footnote, Arendt quotes a report of the operations in the concentration camps that characteristically states that the *SA* practised all forms of sadistic perversion. Only when the Nazi took over did this type of sadism become a typical fascist policy.<sup>40</sup>

Decisive for the abandonment of this acerbic critique of Nazi evil through perverse designations was Arendt’s interview with Eichmann, during his trial in Jerusalem in 1961. The image of the administrator of the ‘Final Solution’ was much different from the widespread perception of Nazi officers, seen as cruel and sadistic animals. Eichmann famously claimed that the Kantian ethical doctrine constituted his moral masonry throughout his life. Therefore, the extermination of the Jews was not his personal responsibility, insofar as he followed superior orders that required him to perform his duty. This assertion raised thorny ethical debates as to whether any individual has the potential to do harm only by austere clinging to an ethical duty. Questions embracing the human condition and its relation to the moral law were radically re-examined.

It is this dutiful stand of Eichmann that led Arendt to the introduction of a rather controversial notion, that of the ‘banality of evil’. Under a ‘banal’ cloak, evil is presented as bureaucratic and trivial, rather than extreme and radical. Evil, in its banal form, is perceived more as the annihilation of the subject’s capacity for critical thinking. According to her report, the Nazi officer seemed to lack critical thinking and spontaneity.<sup>41</sup> After the trial of Eichmann, Arendt further scrutinised the relation between the emaciation of critical reason with evil by developing her theory on the ‘banality of evil’. Under a banal bureaucratic guise, evil is *depthless*, which means it lacks sophistication or any critical elaboration. It is a product of blind obedience to one’s duty. This banality frames Eichmann and explains the apathetic execution of the ‘Final Solution’. Arendt writes:

[...] such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all

the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man – that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem.<sup>42</sup>

This shallowness of critical thinking is an essential feature of banality and turns out to be the basic pre-requisite for unleashing evil. In his claims, Eichmann, alongside other Nazi officers, had recourse to the performance of a duty solely for the sake of it without reappraising its ethical status. If this was a deliberate Kantian position indeed, Nazi bureaucrats are exempt from the liability of their crimes. The banality of evil is a transfiguration of evil once incorporated into a monolithic bureaucratic mechanism, similar to official totalitarian apparatuses. The Nazi bureaucracy of the ‘Final Solution’ was the most horrific revelation of this form of evil.

After the observation of the superficiality by which evil appears, Arendt departs from the thesis of ‘radical’ evil, which is present in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. ‘Radical’ evil can never exist, Arendt notes. Evil is banal and spreads like a fungus, while thought is unable to intrude the thin surface of floating evil. The search for depth in evil is fruitless; only good can be seen as radical, as having depth.

In the present study, the banality of evil will not be set on a critical analysis in terms of ethical and philosophical validity. What concerns us here is to explore whether this shift from the radical perception of evil in fascism to its banal form has actually influenced and abandoned the perverse designations pertinent to the fascist atrocities. Rather than this being the case, together with the banality of evil, the figure of the Nazi fascist came to epitomise the banality of perversion. We will return to this point later, in the part of the study that canvasses the relation between Kantian ethics and Sade.

## **2.4 Cinematic Images of Fascism: Sensuality and Oedipalisation**

The interpretative thrust of Freudianism and Marxism had an increasing influence over manifold discursive contexts, especially in the years following from the early 1960s to the middle 1970s. As a characteristic example, the cinematic edifice at the time

encompassed a psychoanalytic and Marxist critique in a number of films that drew on fascist politics.<sup>43</sup>

Belonging to a generation of endowed filmmakers, Luchino Visconti, Lilliana Cavani and Pier Paolo Pasolini created three filmic texts which divulge an intention to explore and expose the parallel lines between fascism and perverse sexuality. This parallel is inscribed in the central themes of films, such as *The Damned* (1969), *The Night Porter* (1973) and *Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), which can have an auxiliary and illustrative role for the purposes of the present study and the theoretical ideas presented so far.<sup>44</sup> More than being the crux of these films' distinctiveness, the perverse portrayal of fascism also incited virulent controversy around these films, lasting until nowadays.

When in 1969 Luchino Visconti's epic film *The Damned* was released, it received criticism for capturing the Nazi vision through deviant forms of sexual behaviour. Yet the director claimed that his intention was to present a segment of fascism indicative of its degenerative basis.<sup>45</sup> Visconti's film attempts to adumbrate the Nazi debasement of the sexual instinct, through the portrait of Martin, an heir of a colossal steel industry and a troubled paedophile who ultimately turns into a pitiless Nazi officer. Martin's perverse character forms a contentious analogy with the ideal Nazi. The viewer is first introduced to Martin disguised as Marlene Dietrich in *Blue Angel* performing the song 'falling in love again' at his grandfather's birthday celebration. When his show is interrupted by the breaking news of the Reichstag fire, Martin/Marlene gets noticeably irritated, showing more concern about his drag show than Germany's faltering democracy.

In another notable sequence, the film presents the young members of the *S.A.*, the populist fascist party, indulging in transvestite camp performances, followed by an implicit homosexual orgy. This is terminated with their assassination by the Nazis, in the 'Night of the long knives'. Imbued with homoerotic aestheticism, the depiction of the young fascists' drag feast has the nuance of a naïve and puerile playful activity. The *S.S.* fascists erase this perverse decadence of the *S.A.* with their massacre. Yet, Martin's transvestite, paedophile and infantile character betrays precisely the same perverse basis for Nazism.

Before joining the Nazi party, Martin's character appears to be saturated with uncertainty, hesitation and gloom. While tormented by his paedophilic desire and lack of

confidence, Martin rapes a young girl. From an ambivalent and timid paedophile, he turns into a determined, dour and callous Nazi officer, going as far as to rape his mother. Under the palpable impact of Freudian theories, the emphasis on the infantilism of the *S.A.* and Martin implies a perverse deferment of the Oedipal conflict which seems to explain their allure by fascism. Visconti portrayed a fascist icon, whose perverse structure seems to be a prerequisite for his transformation to an inhuman agent.

A second film that resorts to the psychosexual complexities of the Nazi is Lilliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*. Released in 1973, it became one of the most notorious films of the decade, yet influential for a number of 1970s cult films, which presented Nazi fascists engaging in various perverse acts.<sup>46</sup> As with *The Damned*, Cavani's film attracted polemical reviews, because of its main thematic axis which revolves around a relationship, typically perceived as sadomasochistic, between Max, a former *SS* officer, and Lucia, a survivor of the concentration camp. Max works as a night porter in a lush hotel, where former Nazi officers meet, plotting ways to retrieve and destroy evidence of their wartime activities. Lucia, who arrives at the hotel with her husband, is the only living witness who can testify against Max. Soon after they meet, the two characters return to their faithful and passionate sadomasochistic bond, which seems to have been developed in the concentration camp.

This is where most of the film's controversy is centred. During Lucia's incarceration, Max, as the Nazi officer, appears to sexually exploit his female victim. The memory of exploitation in the concentration camp is given in faded colour and grim lighting, contrasted with its elevation to the rejuvenating motive force that fuels the colourful and passionate perverse rapport between Max and Lucia. Nonetheless, Lucia's compliance was most probably the reason for her survival. Furthermore, the formation of their extraordinary love affair, if it is love indeed, increases the esotericism of their relationship and raises questions over her exploitation.

Many parts of the film remain deliberately equivocal. It is impossible to trace where it all began and ends. The setting of the hotel has no past or future, only present. This is an apt metaphorical context for the a-temporality of both Max and Lucia's relationship. Cavani does not disclose anything more about the identity of the characters, apart from their common past, so it is difficult to figure out who exploits whom, whether it is power or

perversion that ties their irresistible bond. To add more controversy, the main idea of the film came from the real experiences of a female survivor of the Holocaust, who recounted her coercion to comply with the sadistic wishes of one of her captors in an interview with Cavani.

Through this intricate narrative, Cavani raises some radical and provocative questions. Can fascism become the net that supports a sensual, yet a sexually deviant experience? Was it possible for a strong love relationship to flourish in the concentration camp, concealing ideological contrasts and power relations– the ‘Aryan’ and the ‘vulgar Jew’? The concentration camp, the most horrific aspect of Nazi exploitation, functions as a stage for sensationalism and sexual exchange, which put together an ‘erotic custody’, that is, the mutual invincible attraction between Max and Lucia as a bizarre operation of desire. Is it exercise of power or just a perverse desire, in the form of a ‘contractual’ and permanent sadomasochistic bonding? It may be love that holds together the two characters as an imaginary veiling of the exploitation of fascist power, but it is not clear how this love grows. In any case, the perverse eroticisation of fascism is the imprint of this enigmatic relationship and Cavani presents perversion as a synecdoche of the Nazi exercise of power. *The Night Porter* seems to support the idea that fascist power is organised around a perverse structure.

In 1974, a year after *The Night Porter* came out, Pier Paolo Pasolini completed the making of *Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom*, which even today appears in the lists of most scandalous and controversial films of all time. The film was finally released in 1975, shortly after Pasolini’s brutal death, which added to the notoriety of what became his last film. The representational space of *Salò* amalgamates sexual politics with philosophical and ideological critique, as Pasolini narrativises the boundaries between perversion and fascism, in the same line as the creators of the *The Damned* and *The Night Porter*.<sup>47</sup> The film exhibits the tortures nineteen young men and women undergo by four fascist leaders, who abducted and held them in a luxuriant mansion. Through painful and breathtaking images, the film portrays intolerable and crude Sadean scenarios as the *modus operandi* of fascist power.

At first glance, the film seems to be an illustration of the fantasies which Sade unfolds in the pages of his novel, the *120 days of Sodom*. Nevertheless, by adding another dimension

to this literary tribute to libertinage, Pasolini implements Sade's novel as a metaphor for Mussolini's fierce exercise of power in the years between 1943-1945, while his fascist regime in *Salò* was sinking. The Sadean model is stripped from its fantasmatic context, equated with an irrational fascist law of debauchery and a medium of both sexual and political oppression. Without a cause and effect relationship between the two, fascism is seen as indistinguishable from sadism.

Pasolini goes beyond the aesthetic leitmotifs used in previous representations of the perverse fascist. He eradicates sensationalism and transforms sensuality to a stern and punitive fascist law which rules the bodies of the victims. The romanticism of Cavani and the operatic melodrama of Visconti are thwarted as Pasolini creates a highly denaturalised and austere representation of fascism, denoted by a static and monotonous use of the camera and a symmetrical *mise-en-scène*. This combination of ideological commentary, shocking images, innovative and idiosyncratic film structure is what gave *Salò* the status of one of the most litigious and anti-conventional works of international cinema.

The narratives of *Salò*, *The Night Porter* and *The Damned* draw a radical fascist profile which stitches brutality with deviant sexual behaviours. Nonetheless, the question is whether this heterogeneous 'perversification' of fascist politics reflects something more valid than a stereotypical and a mystifying representation.<sup>48</sup> Such filmic representations of fascism confront two main problems. First, a bewildering sexualisation of the fascist phenomenon is inscribed in their centre. Considering the frequency with which this sexualisation appears, it is obvious that rather than criticising it, cinema endorses a normative sexual expression that associates any deviation and uncommon sexual practices to the violent, anti-social and felonious profile of fascism.

Second, the underlying perversity of these filmic characters conveys a troubled psychological disposition. The aetiological schemes for this disposition are often germane to a psychoanalytic theorisation about intra-psychic Oedipal conflicts and structural dysfunctions that result in perversion. Indicative of this point is the sequence from *The Damned*, where Martin, once a fierce Nazi, rapes his mother. Ernest Jones' postulations about the Nazi proponent could be the paradigmatic frame for Visconti's scenario. Martin, as an ambivalent and apprehensive paedophile, is evidently outside the realm of secure manhood, but, as soon as he joins the Nazi party, he is transformed into a determined and

brutal officer. The rape of his mother is the ultimate evidence of Martin's perverse determination derived from belonging to the Nazi party and reveals his inability to successfully integrate sexuality with the love for his mother. Nazism for Visconti, as in Jones's narrative, becomes the pedestal for a perverse solution to the Oedipal complex that veils castration.

Such a portrayal does not simply adumbrate the pathology of fascism. It suggests a pathological distortion of sexuality that fascism comes to embody. Pathology of the sexual drive becomes the bastion for criminal activities. Ravetto criticises Oedipalised visualisations of fascism, similar to those constructed by *The Damned*.<sup>49</sup> This is because she views psychoanalysis as what categorically equates desire with perversion and reflects on the impact that fascist representation, imprinted by perverse erotica, has on the imaginary level of the cultural mind.

For Ravetto, the sexualisation of fascist politics undermines the radicalism of other critical works, like Pasolini's, since they imply the necessity of a repressive arrangement of socio-political relations. Given the polymorphism of the perversions and the constitutive repression of this polymorphism in social relations, psychoanalysis confronts a paradox: fascism is attributed to rigid repressive strategies and at the same time envisaged through images of perverse sexuality. This is a contradiction found in the theoretical arguments of the Frankfurt school against the repressive structure of the Western world, which were a major influence for neodecadent cinema.<sup>50</sup> However, the root of this contradiction lies in the problematic status of the notion of repression in psychoanalysis.

Oedipalised aesthetics embroiders one of the most powerful sequences of *The Night Porter*: while Max recounts a dream about Lucia, we see her semi-naked, in Nazi uniform, dancing voluptuously in a decadent cabaret with male soldiers, until she abruptly confronts in horror Max's decapitated head (a scene that a common psychoanalytic view would link to castration). Filled with superb sensationalism, the scene elevates the Nazi attire to a fetish. Exercise of power and sexuality collapse, producing a fetishistic fantasmatic image: a modern 'Salome', dried out of all stereotypical feminine features, yet being as seductive and irresistible as the Nazi officer. The victim is identified with the Nazi, through an image of androgynous sexuality. The dream reveals the strange, undifferentiated and fatal fascination that Max derives from both Lucia and Nazism. This eroticisation of Nazi



aesthetics implicates the viewer in a peculiar *ideologico-erotic* spectacle. Fascist politics are sexualised, in spite of the strong anti-erotic stamp of fascism's historical occurrence or Nazism's ideological programme.

Without vetoing their anti-fascist intentions or artistic aptness, *Salò*, *The Damned* and *The Night Porter* cultivate a misleading perception of the fascist either as an ostensibly innocent camp Nazi figure or as the Nazi 'Satan', engaging in dark sadistic rituals. This may be due to the ideological perspective Visconti, Cavani and Pasolini adopt. Despite the divergent angles of their commentary, they compose filmic representations that reveal a common Marxian standpoint. They all make perspicuous references to the role of the bourgeoisie in the rise and invigoration of fascism in the political terrain, during the pre- and post-war years. Visconti and Cavani cauterise bourgeois values, by framing the perverse-fascist characters of their films in patrician settings and by injecting an operatic aura in the actors' performances. The interlacing of bourgeoisie and fascism is depicted in several parts of *Salò* in a lucid, acerbic and categorical manner. The four fascist libertines belong to the higher socio-economic backgrounds. Their identity dwells in obscurity; we know only the titles of their nobility: The Duke, the Bishop, the Magistrate and the President. Formal suits, typical politeness, (mis)quotations of philosophers and artists, piano melodies create a diffused bourgeois atmosphere.

*Salò* betrays proximity between Pasolini and the Freudo-Marxian scope. It could play the role of a graphic synopsis of ideas by Horkheimer and Adorno, so long as the figures of the four bourgeois fascists encroach the victims' right for self-determination and autonomy, by usurping their bodies and regulating their sexuality. They violate scientific and critical reason, instrumentalising it for the purposes of their own enjoyment. In their philosophical discussions, Nietzsche and Baudelaire are unwittingly and uncritically misquoted and taken out of context, similar to Nazism's mistreatment of the theoretical ideas of major philosophers. Natural laws undergo mythological disfiguration by fascism. By turning reason into irrationality and pure absurdness, a praxis of a 'death of thousand times' is feasible.<sup>51</sup> Reason becomes a myth that hypostatizes fascist crimes.

Stylistically, the rigorous symmetry of the film's image further reinforces the denaturalisation and instrumentalisation of reason. This geometrical balance is maintained by means of the three circles that structure the film and the motionless and discoloured use

of the camera. The bourgeois perversion of reason sets the theoretical prism of *Salò's* aesthetics that takes this perversion to the letter. Pasolini conveys a rather personal and radical view of fascism, addressing it to sadism directly:

In sadism and in power politics human beings become objects. That similarity is my ideological basis of the film [...] Marx defines power as the force that merchandises the human being. The exploitation of one man by another is a sadistic relationship.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast with Pasolini's *Trilogia della Vita* that eulogises the glory of corporeal pleasures, *Salò* is a composite, scathing and bleak critique of fascist exploitation.<sup>53</sup> Pasolini believed that fascism never abandoned the political stage in Italy and exploitation was sustained through the operation of neo-fascist groups and the predominance of neo-capitalism. The nexus of fascism with perversion in *Salò* does not serve as a simple metaphor anymore, but as a literal equation between the two terms.

Nevertheless, this literal synthesis of fascist exploitation qua perversion operates at the expense of its Sadean component. The fantasy of a sexual and sadistic debauchery for its own sake is the lining of Sade's writings, whereas in the filmic transposition of *Salò*, debauchery is predominantly an ideological action. Even though sexual acts and coercion are involved, these are divorced from any sexual gratification. They are behaviours as shallow and misanthropic as any other human interaction in an industrialised capitalist context. A sexual and violent economy counterfeits the political and financial economy of the State. However, the chasm between the two economies remains in the film. Perverse epithets regarding sexuality serve ideological purposes. But sexuality, in the sense of sexual difference, inhabits a non-ideological territory, which is nevertheless essential for political speculation and action. I elaborate this point further in the final chapter of this study.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921) and "Civilization and its Discontents" (1930 [1929]), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 18 and Vol. 21, respectively, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 69-143.

<sup>2</sup> See Theodor Reik, *The Compulsion to Confess: On the Psychoanalysis of Crime and Punishment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959 [1927]).

<sup>3</sup> See Ernest Jones, *Psycho-myth, Psycho-history: Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis*, Volume II (New York: Hillstone, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> "The Psychology of Quislingism" later appeared in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 22 (1941): 1-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>7</sup> This is evident in the way Jones articulates his argument: "From my own psycho-analytical data I have come to the conclusion..." Jones, *Psycho-myth, Psycho-history: Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis*, Vol. II, p. 280.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo" (1912-13), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 13, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 1-161.

<sup>12</sup> Jones, *Psycho-myth, Psycho-history: Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis*, Vol. II, p. 281.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> This shallow link between a characterological trait, such as submission to an autarchic paternal figure, and deviant forms of (unconscious) sexuality appears as a distinct category in the *Authoritarian Personality* scale some years later. In psychoanalysis, there is still debate on whether homosexuality belongs to the category of perversion or not. In pure structural terms, homosexuality suggests an incomplete resolution of the Oedipus complex that qualifies it as perversion.

<sup>16</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia" (1911), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 12, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 9-82 (p. 66).

<sup>17</sup> See Money-Kyrle, Roger Erle, *Psychoanalysis and Politics: A Contribution to the Psychology of Politics and Morals* (London: Duckworth, 1951).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> See Theodor W Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Else, Levinson, Daniel J., and Sanford, R. Neritt, *The Authoritarian Personality* (London: Harper, 1950).

<sup>20</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, "Introduction," in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, ed. by Theodor W. Adorno, Hans Albert, Ralf Dahrendorf, Jürgen Habermas, Harald Pilot and Karl R. Popper, trans. by Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976 [1969]), pp. 1-67 (pp. 55-56).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Nazi rationalisation, see Tilla Siegel, "Whatever Was the Attitude of German Workers? Reflections on Recent Interpretations," in *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts*, ed. by Richard Bessel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 61-77.

<sup>23</sup> See Horkheimer, M., (ed.), *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1936). The work comprises a collaboration between Horkheimer, Fromm and Marcuse, each contributing with an essay.

<sup>24</sup> Taking into consideration the strict positivistic character of this research project and its focus on phenomena of prejudice, the *Authoritarian Personality* fits better with the objectives of socio-psychological research, than Critical Theory.

<sup>25</sup> Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

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<sup>27</sup> This is something that reiterates Reich's ideas. See Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. by Vincent R. Carfagno, ed. by Mary Higgins and Chester M. Raphael (London: Souvenir Press, 1970 [1946]).

<sup>28</sup> I must note here that 'attitude' is not the same as 'action'. A political subject may be active or inactive. Above all, she employs an attitude which can be either positive or negative.

<sup>29</sup> Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, p. 161.

<sup>30</sup> See Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), p. 78.

<sup>31</sup> The fascist ethos, as reflected by projective mechanisms, is measured by indicating agreement with the following statement: "The sexual orgies of the old Greeks and Romans are nursery school stuff compared to some of the goings-on in this country, even in circles where people might least expect it." A highly authoritarian person would show strong agreement with this statement, projecting sexual wishes which are considered to be inappropriate.

<sup>32</sup> Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>34</sup> More recently, socio-psychological research on stereotyping emphasises the role of 'social representations'. Moscovici, who points out the figurative and fixed core of 'social representations', seems to draw symmetry with the function of Lacan's imaginary. See Robert M. Farr and Serge Moscovici (eds.), *Social Representations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>35</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge 2001[1992]), p. 230.

<sup>36</sup> Both Žižek and Adorno would disagree with such a simplistic definition of the radical subject as opposed to an identifiable external enemy (the capitalist or the fascist).

<sup>37</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967 [1951]), p. 453.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, fn, 159.

<sup>41</sup> Anecdotically, Eichmann refused to read Nabokov's novel *Lolita*, offered by an Israeli officer, because he thought of it as being "unwholesome." According to Arendt, this incident reveals Eichmann's lack of spontaneity.

<sup>42</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1992 [1963]), pp. 287-288, quoted in Yaacov Lozowick, "Malicious Clerks: the Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil," in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed. by Steven E. Ascheim (Berkeley, California, London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 215.

<sup>43</sup> It astonishes the frequency with which the filmic representation of fascism through perverse schemata appears in Italian post-war cinema. This might be related to the fact that fascism had already a long tradition in Italy where it first emerged, leaving an indelible and diachronic mark on its history. See Stanley G. Payne, *The History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Certainly, there are more than these three films to have narrativised the perverse parameters of fascism. For instance, Roberto Rossellini was the first to imply a link between Nazism and perversion in *Rome, Open City* (1945); nonetheless, that was a peripheral feature of the filmic text, while the films I selected inscribe this link in the central stage of their narrative. These films were also the first to create an imagery that explicitly eschewed perverse sexuality in fascist politics.

<sup>45</sup> Visconti says about the theme of his film: "Nazism was absolutely negative but in order to make a film about Nazism, just a small part should be taken, and I took one family. In this family, I wanted to unleash the lowest and the least noble instincts, and it is an example, Nazism is not there as a whole: Nazism also had other aspects, but I left them aside." My translation of the original in French: "Le nazisme était totalement négatif mais pour faire un film sur le nazisme, il faut prendre un petit fragment, et j'ai pris une famille, dans cette famille j'ai voulu déchaîner les instincts les plus bas, les moins nobles, et c'est un exemple, le nazisme n'est pas là en entier: le nazisme a eu également d'autres aspects, mais je les ai laissés de côté." See Franz Gevandan, "Visconti le Magnifique," *Cinéma 76*, no. 211 (1976): 73-99.

<sup>46</sup> Probably, the most (in)famous film of this genre is *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS* (1974) by Don Edmonds.

<sup>47</sup> In fact, Pasolini's film exposes more explicitly than other films the relationship between perversion and fascism, without defining a specific form of the latter. Notwithstanding the clear references to Mussolini's

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fascism and Nazism, through militaristic images, Pasolini does not specify the type of fascism the four libertines represent in the film narrative. Only the title *Salò* signifies Mussolini's fascist regime. Pasolini wanted to expand his critique, so that it includes the growing neo-capitalist and neo-fascist tendencies both in Italy and worldwide, during the time of the film's release. Is it by chance that Pasolini decided to film *Salò* the year the fascist party gained its highest percentages in Italy's national elections, since the end of the Second World War? (Source: Stanley G. Payne, *The History of Fascism, 1914-1945*).

<sup>48</sup> The technical aspects of the film remain outside the scope of my critique, since the aim is not to assess the artistic value of these films. My critical focus is the representation of the nexus between fascism and perversion as a message articulated within the cultural discourse. I take into account only technical details related to this message.

<sup>49</sup> Ravetto notes: "By Oedipalizing fascism, these films suggest, like psychoanalysis itself, that desire can only be expressed as a form of sadism or masochism, and that fascist meaning, like all meaning, must predicated on sexual difference. And since fascism is considered an aberration, or a form of social perversity, it must also express itself as sexually perverse. This insistence in sexualising fascism not only keeps fascism alive in the hearts and minds of popular culture and its sexual imaginary; it also squelches more radical critiques of both sexual politics and fascist political economies (such as those of Pasolini, Cavani, and Wertmuller) in favor of the structural apparatus of repression." See Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 95.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> One of the four fascists assures that '*there is a way to kill someone for a thousand times and that they will find it*'.

<sup>52</sup> From an interview with Pasolini taken by Gideon Bachman during the filming of *Salò*. See Gideon Bachman, "Pasolini on de Sade," *Film Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Winter, 1975/76): 39-45 (p. 40).

<sup>53</sup> Pasolini's three previous films, *Decameron* (1970), *The Canterbury Tales* (1971) and *Arabian Nights* (1974), comprise his *Trilogia della Vita*.

### **3. 1970s – 1980s: Neo-Freudian Perspectives**

#### **3.1 The Chaos of the Creator**

Freud's early successors who applied the psychoanalytic discoveries to non-clinical contexts, often produced doctrinaire accounts, rigidly relying on the dominant Oedipal logic. Nonetheless, a new generation of Freudian analysts in the second half of the century reframed many of the traditional concepts by taking into account the implications of pre- or post-Oedipal development. In recent Neo-Freudian narratives which create links between fascism and perversion, there is a swerve from the interpretative monotony of the Oedipal paradigm to the scrutiny and the illumination of pre-genital influences in the psychic domain.

From the European school of modern Neo-Freudians, Chasseguet-Smirgel is a leading name whose work on perversion expanded the psychoanalytic conception of the term, viewing it as an indivisible feature of psychic reality. It is known since Freud that, on the level of fantasy, perverse scenarios, both conscious and unconscious, operate in all psychic structures.<sup>1</sup> Chasseguet-Smirgel seems to re-address this point and chart its intricacy with other aspects of reality, not just for the individual, but also for the group. She links the notion of perversion to various frames, such as aesthetics, group psychology and political ideology, departing from its traditional conception as a disorder of the sexual instinct. From a wider angle, perversion embraces more than plain sexual behaviours and includes behaviours associated with creativity and innovation. Under the influence of pre-genital idealisations, there is a latent part in everyone's psychic structure founded on the disavowal of reality that resists the acknowledgement of sexual difference and the difference between generations.

Disavowal is a mechanism resonant of a splitting of the ego, which seems to typically occur in perversion.<sup>2</sup> According to Chasseguet-Smirgel, however, it is not sufficient to delineate the disavowal of castration as the main stipulation for defining perversion. Such a view would fail to notice the general pre-genital tendency all individuals share of disavowing and eliminating sexual differences. Some manifestations of this tendency are artistic expression and violent behaviour, as both reveal unwillingness to conform to a

reality of differences, where one has to sacrifice pleasure. Chasseguet-Smirgel poses the following rhetorical question:

Shouldn't we associate historical ruptures which give an inkling of the advent of a new world, with the confusion between the sexes and generations, peculiar to perversion, as if the hope for a new social and political reality went hand in hand with an attempt at destroying sexual reality and truth?<sup>3</sup>

In this vein, perversion is a dimension that permeates the human condition, influencing social, cultural and political relations. From the perverse rudiments of our psychic texture, creativity emanates. The pervert takes the position of the creator, by dethroning the father from his domineering position of the law. An example of this creative process that passes through the subversion of the father is Sade. The Sadean pervert goes beyond the limits of the paternal universe and in its place, he establishes another chaotic and sadistic world impervious to any constraints, so that ultimately otherness is eradicated, which is the aim of the pervert. Thus, according to Chasseguet-Smirgel's postulation, the pervert takes a reactionary position against the father, aspiring to instigate a new law.

As far as politics are concerned, Chasseguet-Smirgel sees all ideologies aiming at a common target: to persuade groups that they have the power to abolish development – by actualising an infantile dream of omnipotence and opening a window to infinity and the dethroning of death. Developmentally, after the first year of life, as early omnipotence declines and the ego ideal is formed from the residues of primary narcissism, the child has to face a dilemma that functions as the prototype for ambivalence. The child has to decide between recognition of the heteronymity of the world of objects or regression to an archaic stage, which encloses the perverse core of our psychic reality (the wish for sexual gratification through unification with the mother). According to this conception, the regressive tendencies of the ego ideal determine the perverse side of any subject. This is best exemplified by neurotic ambivalence, where the subject oscillates between the conformity to the paternal law and its 'perverse' fantasmatic transgression.

Development means a constant effort to overcome obstacles set by difference. Life changes with each day, which is something that challenges and deprives the individual from personal pleasure, inserting psychic pain to everyday experience. Ideologies pledge

to put an end to this routine confrontation of difference and Nazism emblematised that. As the father is the authority that institutes difference, fascist/Nazi ideology attempted to expel his figure from the group and obliterate the superego which substitutes for paternal power. This rests on the regressive wish of the group as a 'brotherhood' to possess "the mother in the regressive manner of primary fusion."<sup>4</sup> The fascist leader's rhetoric does not originate in a position of identification with the father; it stems rather from a charisma in stirring up, on a collective echelon, the archaic wish of fusion between ego and ego-ideal. The role of the fascist leader is to promote this wish and thus sustain a regime which serves a narcissistic pre-genital illusion, that is, a perverse fantasy of a universe of non-difference.

Together with the leader, the groups of people who comply with his illusory wishes are included in this perverse frame, revealing the ubiquity of perversity that Chasseguet-Smirgel discerns in psychic reality. The leader ratifies his power over his aficionados, by nurturing pre-oedipal perverse dynamics.

[The leader] may be compared to the pervert's mother who makes her son believe that there is no need to wait and to grow up in order to take the father's role and possess the mother.<sup>5</sup>

Perversion is an act of disobedience, inasmuch as it opposes the authority of the Father. Through disavowal, something resists the recognition of the paternal phallus as the differentiating factor between the father and the mother. As a result, the pervert does not conform to the law of sexual difference and remains driven by a desire of omnipotence. The leader is there to evoke this desire. The ubiquitous perversity of the human condition is what goes against paternal authority, fostering an element of omnipotence that Chasseguet-Smirgel finds in all ideologies.

As external schemes, ideologies form a projective stage, in which omnipotence comes into play and thus returns to the ego. Omnipotence is attested through scenarios of power, such as propagandistic messages which single out an external inferior enemy that begrudges the pleasurable edifice of the in-group. Behind all these phenomena, Chasseguet-Smirgel distinguishes a singular factor: the expatriation of the father and his substitution by chaos.<sup>6</sup> By breaking down the patriarchal dome and abrogating the



authority of the father, all revolutionary movements enfold perversion as their motive force. The force that fuelled the utopian world of Sade nourishes any revolutionary act as well.

Put in this Sadean frame, any revolutionary movement christens a vision of establishing a new order, where all differences are recanted. For Chasseguet-Smirgel this entails the installation of a chaotic universe, alluding to the disastrous vision of fascism's new order as abetting evidence for her suggestion. The fascist militant's aspirations converged with the creative prospects of the pervert to reinstate early omnipotence as an ideal condition only to create chaos ultimately. To the degree that Chasseguet-Smirgel's psychoanalytic theorisation encompasses any radical act, the conceptualisation of the 'revolutionary' follows a perverse trajectory that violates and subverts the Oedipal dynamics, with the goal to found a world of non-difference. No matter whether 'revolution' comes from the extreme right or the extreme left, it anyway depends on the same underlying perverse processes.

But can one be radical without giving vent to the perverse elements of his/her psychic reality? If not, then minority influence and any 'heretical' provocation of conventional codes regarding morality, ideology, culture, tradition and so on, is reduced to a manifestation of the perverse factor of psychic reality. The advocacy of difference, in most cases, belongs to a minority which initiates a process of introducing novelty. Therefore, if this process is grounded on perversity, novelty and creation are *a priori* perverse matters.

But what does the radicalism of the Holocaust have to say about the creativity of the 'perverse' fascist? The only 'creative' process to be associated with the Holocaust was the construction of a technologically and organisationally proficient apparatus of mass production that resembled the manufacturing basis of the capitalist model, conventional and conservative in its basis. This means that either fascism was a pseudo-revolutionary movement that tried to conceal its conservative-liberal constitution or that revolutionary acts lack the creative perversity that Chasseguet-Smirgel discerned in Sade.

This is better understood, if Chasseguet-Smirgel's conservatism is taken into consideration. As far as her psychoanalytic standpoint is concerned, although she elaborates the omnipresence of the perverse psychic factor, the Freudian principles

related to the role of the father in the Oedipal drama are underscored, as what secure a normative and lawful socio-political condition. However, Chasseguet-Smirgel disentangles Freud from the Marxist dialectics of the Frankfurt School and thus, her suggestions can be juxtaposed as the conservative antipode to the latter. Any infringement of prevalent moral maxims is an antagonistic and hostile act against the father.

Therefore, contrary to Horkheimer and Adorno's view, conformity and submission appear to be constructive political attitudes, according to Chasseguet-Smirgel's theorisation. Unless the two terms underscore the acceptance of a democratic authority, any conformity with non-democratic authority figures, digressive of the existing paternal social edifice, is fused with perversity. In other words, as long as someone complies with the traditional political status quo, i.e. liberal democracy, s/he displays a healthy political attitude. As soon as s/he diverges from this given establishment, following a subversive type of political authority, such as fascism, her/his attitude is linked to perverse pre-Oedipal idealisations and (ultimately) pathology. Having said this, in the case of Nazism, was submission to Hitler's morality sustained by perverse components? Hitler ascended to power through democratic procedures, establishing an alternative morality, although he played the role of a paternal figure for German people. This exposes a contradiction which Chasseguet-Smirgel's thesis fails to resolve.

Whitebook highlights the ideological antithesis between Chasseguet-Smirgel's ideas and the radical thought of Herbert Marcuse, who evangelised the utopian thesis of liberating sexual polymorphism in the late Frankfurt School.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, despite the mediating ideological chasm, a common thread appears to stitch the narratives of the two ideological opponents, linking utopian politics to perversion; two conflicting ideological perspectives have actually produced coterminous discursive statements that both lead to problems. An anti-authoritarian individual can express a liberal attitude towards sexuality, yet unconventional sexual practices involving aggression may form part of it, limiting the cathartic aspects of non-normative sexuality that Marcuse expected.<sup>8</sup> In other words, sadism cannot fall into extinction, even in an ideal, tolerant and liberating political system, simply because it naturally resides in the aggressive component of the drive, not related to ideology, although sadism, as a term *per se* is ideological and instrumental.

What is more, the pervert of Chasseguet-Smirgel's scrutiny is less a creator and more a re-creator. He deconstructs and constructs from the beginning an idealised chaotic world. But, since his deconstruction involves aggression, while his reconstruction leads to chaos, all types of perversion assume a destructive character, despite their diverse and multifaceted nature.

Revolutionary movements, seen as regressive phenomena, are products of the idealisation of the archaic stages of development. But if emphasis is given to the regressive qua subversive tendencies of the ego ideal, the liability of the superego for these tendencies is neglected. Chasseguet-Smirgel exempts the superego from any aversive nuance, fallaciously considered to promote sanctioned social reality solely. In so doing, the superego is conceived as the aftermath of the resolution of the Oedipus complex through identification with the father. The father's power marks the terrain in which the Oedipal conflict is dramatised. As a seductive hero, the father calls for identification and at the same time, as a rival, he stirs up antagonism.

Rebellion against the father defies the threat of his punishment which takes the form of guilt, after the institution of the superego. Following Chasseguet-Smirgel, the pervert who rebels against and transgresses the paternal-superegoic authority is not tormented by guilt, due to a pre-genital ideal that (re)fuses with the superego. Only through successful Oedipal identification, ideal ego and superego collaborate in setting up an austere circuit of guilt. Since the father's authority is transmitted to the superego, with which the ego ideal converges, Chasseguet-Smirgel considers superegoic guilt as a safety valve for the normative status of paternal power. Even the thought of defying the authority of the father and turning punishment against him is enough to evoke guilt and anxiety. Trying to break the cycle of guilt would only breed more of the latter.

The superego plays the role of the guardian of the paternal law and guarantees the intactness of the paternal universe, which is regulated and mediated through the law. As if this universe represents the only reality, deviations from the superegoic axioms are ascribed to perverse tendencies. The father as the representative of the superego is recognised as the only authentic and sensible authority.<sup>9</sup> But this view is subject to bewilderment and misconception. The normative licit aspect of the superego is only one aspect of it and Chasseguet-Smirgel seems to disregard its primeval character, namely

Freud's conceptualisation of the superego as "pure culture of the death instinct" and "the representative of the internal world, of the id."<sup>10</sup> The aim of this superegoic primitiveness is to engrave a cavity of pre- or anti-morality in the ego. Therefore, the morality of the superego does not have a given indubitable value, as Chasseguet-Smirgel's view presupposes. Her conception of the superego and the id as antithetical intra-psychic forces, with the first promoting the stability and the stamina of the ego, is strongly conservative.

This is because, despite her Neo-Freudian contributions, perversion is still a condition much defined on the basis of an austere Oedipal criterion. Without the paternal heritage of the superego, guilt appears to be absent from the pervert's universe. In this way, the acknowledgement of sexual difference becomes a question of morality. But it is difficult to exclude the pervert from the experience of guilt, since, apart from sexuality, he actually seems to fit quite well within the basic frame of existing morality.

Even Sade's horrific literary acts, which function as the prototype for the classification of the perversions and the designation of sadism, were only recreated in the sexual scenarios of his written work with little resemblance to his actual life.<sup>11</sup> As a typical neurotic case, Sade indulged himself in fantasies fabricated around a persistent perverse thematic, something which definitely does not justify the exorbitant punishment Sade received: a total of 27 years in prison, an archetypal representation for any sadistic act and a proto-fascist emblematic figure. That was Sade's sentence, through which he liquidated the price for his literary libertinage. Sade's creative body of work did not originate in a perverse organisation, as Chasseguet-Smirgel proposes. It may be his ordinary neurotic structure subjected to repression and superegoic guilt that fuelled the perverse content of the fantasies Sade conveyed in his writings.

### 3.2 The Odium of the Feminine Abyss

The names of Chasseguet-Smirgel, Joyce McDougall and Margaret Mahler represent a modern feminine force in psychoanalysis, whose contributions advanced the Freudian doctrine and influenced the psychoanalytic speculation of other authors. One such example is Klaus Theweleit's work *Male Fantasies*, which is deservedly considered to be one of the most groundbreaking works on fascism in Germany.<sup>12</sup> The author tackles the historical burden of fascism that seemed to have passed to 'repression' in post-war Germany, where any direct or public reference to Nazism was virtually absent.

Theweleit produced an impressive narrative, based on an extensive study of 250 novels and memoirs of the German *Freikorps*, a proto-fascist military group upon which the *S.A.* (*Sturmabteilung*) and National Socialism built their power. The group consisted of officers who came out of the degrading defeat of Germany in the First World War. After 1918, they were engaged in constant belligerent activities (among which Rosa Luxemburg's execution is enlisted) receiving generous financial rewards. Eventually, the *Freikorps* came under the auspice of Nazism, bestowing the party with the presence of senior officials and avowed Nazi figures, such as Rudolph Hoess.<sup>13</sup>

*Male Fantasies* as a text attempts to elaborate a theory of fascism spanning from the past to the present. Theweleit treats the assemblage of popular literature in his work as the main source for exploring the fantasies, emotions and images that do not haunt the *Freikorps* only, but also the fascist, the Nazi and, essentially, the entire edifice of male dominance. In his reading of these male fantasies, Klaus Theweleit deploys a research approach that runs through psychoanalysis and archival analysis of material or theoretical ideas derived from cultural discourse. The theoretical standpoint regarding perversion that Theweleit adopts is derived from contemporary Freudian views, which relate fascism to pre-Oedipal patterns, like those developed by Chasseguet-Smirgel and Stoller. He perceives the fantasies of the *Freikorps*' militia, as being archetypical of the fascist or the despotic male and having their basis in pre-genital wishes.<sup>14</sup>

Creating a robust and galvanising narrative, Theweleit's analytical focus is on the desire of the fascist and its essential link to the mother, rather than the Oedipal father. War and destruction do not reflect an Oedipal desire to subvert the father and gain unconstrained

access to the love of the mother, but an archaic desire to abolish both parental imagoes. Through this psychoanalytic speculation, Theweleit maps out the sinuous entwining between the desire of the fascist and the fantasy of destruction of the mother that seems to uphold the urge to warfare.

The perverse wish to eradicate the father and unify with the mother was not the sole determinant for the structure and the resulting violence of the *Freikorps*. More than that, the prevailing wish was to obliterate, together with the father, the mother as well. Maternal features of affection had to be eclipsed from the world of the fascist. The fascist male engages in warfare and violence as a response to the desire to annihilate the presence of the mother, both as an image and as an imago.<sup>15</sup> The supremacy of a corporeal image that rests on hardness, uttermost violence, muscular beauty and strict discipline fuels the main fantasy of the fascist and harbours his desire to erase the female maternal body. It is not homoeroticism that brings the *Freikorps* together, but the common desire to annihilate the figure of the mother and form a rigid organic body of brutal masculinity, against the threat of the devouring feminine.

Theweleit breaks off the tradition of the Frankfurt School's Freudo-Marxist accounts that produced popular slogans about utopian politics in the 1960s. For such accounts, fascism meant self-destruction, since it perverted the individual's critical reason. An authoritarian paternal imago suppresses and perverts sexuality, cultivating irrational attitudes, such as dictatorial obedience and submission. The internalisation of this authority by the individual constitutes the Oedipal framework of the Frankfurt School approach. Nonetheless, Theweleit emphasises pre-Oedipal desires as indispensable elements of individuality, noticeably influenced by Neo-Freudian views.

In this vein, the perverse core of fascism is not the result of an Oedipal misidentification, but the product of a primitive ego maintained by a sexualised mechanism against psychosis. Margaret Mahler's notion of *separation-individuation* is pivotal for Theweleit's analysis. Mahler introduced the term after years of analytic work with psychotic children, but Theweleit implements the logic of *separation-individuation*, in order to adumbrate a perverse condition that works as a defence against psychosis, rather than a psychotic condition *per se*.<sup>16</sup> Thus, according to his analysis, the *Freikorps*'

preoccupation with war served their wish to escape (to individuate themselves) from the hated image of woman and the body that enfolds her sexuality.

As a source of fear for males, feminine sexuality intimidates the fragile egos of the fascist soldiers who see in the image of the woman the possibility of their annihilation. For Theweleit, German fascism was a perverse phenomenon grounded on violent defences against the psychotic threat of being gorged by the woman. So, rather than the expression of repressed homosexuality, fascism was a configuration of regressive violence against any affective display towards women. This is what solidified the fascist male's masonry. Under the perverse impact of his male fantasy, "women are robbed of their sexuality and transformed into inanimate objects."<sup>17</sup> Within this misogynistic realm, Nazism appeared to be the most solid and violent example of the male fear of the feminine. The archaic ego of the fascist male soldier is reflected upon a crude desire, incapable of recognising otherness, that is, the acknowledgement and respect for the other's desire. The pleasure associated with the desire of the other undergoes repression:

The focus of repression in the soldier male is the "desire to desire"; concomitantly, the core of all fascist propaganda is a battle against everything that constitutes enjoyment and pleasure.<sup>18</sup>

By excluding pleasure from his universe, the fascist releases the amorphous and brutal rigour of his primitive desires, destructive *par excellence*. The perseverance of these desires is what produces the anti-erotic substance of fascism which prioritises the sensual experience of the body at the expense of contentment and enjoyment. This is why authoritarianism as the central axis of the critique of fascism in the Frankfurt School is abandoned in Theweleit's work, since it is not sufficient to explain the seductive components of fascist ideology that spring from a pre-Oedipal source rather than an Oedipal one, as authoritarianism suggests. Theweleit's narrative places the authoritarianism of the Frankfurt School outside its Oedipal conception, yet to the degree that both Theweleit and Frankfurt School thinkers highlight the pre-Oedipal canopy of the fascist's position, they circumscribe the archaic and perverse basis of all fascist movements. The point of demarcation is that Theweleit proceeds in an extensive exploration of this pre-Oedipal character, inquiring into their content as expressed by the

popular and propagandistic narratives of fascism, without revolving around the notion of authoritarianism, as a product of the absent identification with the Oedipal father. The lure of fascism stems from the odium and the fear of the female body that feeds its fantasmatic constructs of violence and aggression accompanying male dominance.

Despite its inspired provocation regarding the callousness of male sovereignty and the unmasking of its fragile basis, Theweleit's narrative produces a feeble interlacing between gender issues, sexuality and the ferocity of fascism's barbarism. The blurring of the margins between Nazism, fascism, the military man and the male tyrant suggests that masculinity is formed by the fear and outré of the feminine as the image that haunts male fantasies and nurtures destructive impulses. In this tone, male domination is built upon a perverse basis.

If the abhorrence for the feminine resides in its unrepresentable status and the concomitant horror, the lack of representation is not a sufficient exegesis for the destructive elements that Theweleit recognises in fascism as a defence against the former. Following Lacan, as Theweleit does in parts of his narrative, lack is not something that resides in the feminine solely, although paradigmatically embodied by it, but something that carves a lacuna at the centre of any identity, the fascist's identity, the masculine identity and so on. It can be excess or lack that circumscribes this lacuna; in both cases, it is something that agitates the subject, forming not only the basis for her hatred, but also the precondition for her ability to love, as I will discuss in the following chapters.

Theweleit suggests that desire, in the service of *Eros*, can only grow through the internalisation of the feminine, as a position that responds to gender differences in a respectful and warm, non-cruel manner. This means, the internalisation of the elements linked to the female body lays the foundation of the ability to love. What comes forth is once more the enigma that woman constitutes for symbolic reality. The very emptiness of the woman is what returns to the fantasy of the fascist disguised in the form of the "eternal feminine", as Žižek notes.<sup>19</sup> In psychoanalysis, the dark continent of woman is an allusion to her lack that cannot be taken into representation. So, in fascism the (mis)recognition of this lack is connected with the feminine, as renunciation of the male image of omnipotence, the superman. The image of the superman stands for no other than the omnipotent imaginary father.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the Nazi negates, but does not foreclose



the dead (symbolic) father. The fascist's father does not undergo repression and this may be the reason it has an uncanny effect: He returns as an animate cadaver with no distorted and horrific features, but with the image of the other, in a bureaucratic appearance, similar to that of the four characters of Pasolini's film *Salò*. Fascism negates woman as one of the names of the father, which is different from the desire for her annihilation.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, the fascist desired not the eradication of the woman but her 'promotion' to an *Aryan* image in accordance with the Nazi project. In fact, the fascist treatment of woman resembles the radical feminist promotion of a female image as a replica of the grandiose imaginary frauds of man. Namely it bolsters male domination and the image of the vigorous superiority of man, which feminism opposes.

Theweleit's approach does not tackle one pivotal component of fascism, namely the role of anti-Semitism in it. The extermination of the Jew, seen as a practice confirmatory of the granite masculinity of the Nazi soldier, loses its distinctive and constitutive nuance for Nazi ideology and comes to reflect a broader gender issue, related to a deleterious fantasmatic retort to feminine sexuality. Such gender complexes bewilder fascism's ideological podium and its relevance with the allegedly other major type of totalitarianism, that of Stalinism, which is also accountable for similar atrocities and anti-Semitic barbarities. So, can we discern the desire of the dissolution of the mother's body, behind the dissolution of the Jews in the concentration camps? It is either the same male fantasy that sustains both 'totalitarianisms', neglecting their ideological incongruence, or else the Stalinist apparatus is not stamped by the same fantasy of dominative masculinity, which Theweleit considers to be the issue at the heart of fascist tyranny. Nonetheless, if male dominance was unequivocally promoted by fascism, Stalinism concealed it under an ostensible gender pluralism represented by the equality of the members of the party. Theweleit may be correct in his view of violence being related to male fantasies against the threatening unrepresentability of the feminine, yet it provides a general frame, which does not help with the understanding and the critique of the particular features of fascist ideology. What also needs to be pointed out is the position of women, during the third Reich, which was directly linked to motherhood. This means that the male fantasies of the fascists endorsed exactly the image that raised fear and antipathy in them. On the other hand, a number of women were employed in military and anti-aircraft units, office-

work or labour work.<sup>22</sup> Though not indicative of the favourable position of woman, yet it has something to say about the women that supported and actually voted for Hitler, despite the Nazi party's blatant anti-feminism. In what way is the emptiness of these women related to the fascist fantasy of the abolition of the feminine?

Adopting a pseudo-revolutionary façade, fascism aspires to subvert an old establishment by creating an ostensible new order, which is an oxymoron, since the latter resides in the same traditional patriarchal structures of power. On the whole, ideologies foster rigid and monolithic systems, either in new or recycled forms. It must be noted that they never succeed in abolishing desire (as an anarchic 'anything goes'), although a fantasy of post-desire, post-difference paves their political ambition. Historical fascism did not instate the perverse 'chaotic universe' that Chasseguet-Smirgel linked to the defilement of the paternal law and Theweleit to the obliteration of the female (maternal) body. The replacement of the paternal law was a futile and pompous rhetoric, destined to fail, for there can be no other law than the one the father embodies. Instead, we could say that fascism attempted to set up a different relation to the law - a non-patriarchal law - rather ineffectively, as it duplicated the same patriarchal system which *ad definitionem* excludes the feminine dimension.

In their construal of fascist phenomena, Chasseguet-Smirgel and Theweleit re-articulated and de-centred Freudian ideas from the Oedipal problematic, focusing on pre-genital underlying processes. Perversion, as a pre-genital condition, is an inherent and distinctive component of human reality, where Chasseguet-Smirgel attributes Nazi violence, as a result of disavowal of differences and a consequent subversion of the father. For Theweleit, the fascist wishes to abrogate the mother's feminine hypostasis, implementing perversion as a defence to psychosis. Although femininity is addressed, Neo-Freudian accounts offered only a disjointed fathoming of the latter, without eschewing the supremacy of the Oedipal father. This suggests a predicament for psychoanalysis that Lacanian theorists have tried to resolve.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol.7, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 135-243 (p. 165, note 2).

<sup>2</sup> See Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* (London: Free Association Books, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, Lacan's theorisation about the father adumbrates his diverse role on symbolic, imaginary and real level. For Lacan, the father of the superego is the imaginary father. See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 61-63.

<sup>10</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id" (1923), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 12-66 (p. 53).

<sup>11</sup> See Maurice Lever, *Sade: A Biography*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (London: Harper Collins, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Vol.1, Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. by Stephen Conway (Cambridge: Polity, 1987) and *Male Fantasies, Vol. 2, Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. by Chris Turner and Erica Carter (Cambridge: Polity, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> See James Taylor and Warren Shaw, *A Dictionary of the Third Reich* (London: Grafton, 1987), p. 121.

<sup>14</sup> Something that Theweleit unearths, by dissecting archival material of the time (e.g. propagandistic texts and images).

<sup>15</sup> The notion of imago does not refer simply to an image. It also involves unconscious feelings and behaviours related to this image.

<sup>16</sup> See Mahler, M. and Furur, M., *On Human Symbiosis and the Vicissitudes of Individuation Vol.1: Infantile Psychoses* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies. Vol. 1, Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, p. 51.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> See Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (eds.), *The Žižek Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>21</sup> According to Lacan's famous statement, "Woman is one of the names-of-the-Father." See Slavoj Žižek, "Woman is One of the Names-of-the-Father, or How Not to Misread Lacan's Formulas of Sexuation," *Lacanian Ink* 10, (1995). Available from: < <http://www.lacan.com/zizwoman.htm> > [accessed 23 June 2006].

<sup>22</sup> Taylor and Shaw, *A Dictionary of the Third Reich*.

## 4. 1990s: The Surfeit of Fascist *Jouissance*

### 4.1 The Lacanian Perspective

So far, the exploratory spectrum of this study provided a retrospective and informative panorama of the versatile discursive arguments about fascism and its links to perversion. In recent theoretical literature, Slavoj Žižek and Juliet Flower MacCannell drew on Lacanian psychoanalysis as a critical medium for dissecting post-modern theoretical currents or lifestyles, as well as modernist considerations.<sup>1</sup> Both scholars treated issues related to fascism, in a meticulous and fertile implementation of Lacanian concepts. Yet, despite their erudite appeal, the readings of Žižek and MacCannell on fascist politics have recourse to the psychoanalytic knowledge on perversion, which is far from being unproblematic. Even if perversion has something to say about fascism, what does fascism have to say about the category of perversion? The mystification, regarding the relation of the two notions, remains unresolved.

Lacan's psychoanalytic theorisation views the suffering and the solace of the subject as states bound to language. As soon as the subject enters the realm of the signifiers, she loses immediacy with materiality.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the subject uses language is an attempt to master this early loss (the fading of physical unmediated proximity with the material world) and articulate an ecumenical truth about her existence.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the truth remains incomplete, since this aim depends on symbolic means. This irreversible and unrecoverable loss, thereby, carves a lacuna in the representations of and by the subject. There, in this vacuum, the kernel of what Lacan calls the real resides, resisting symbolisation. This is a painful constant for the subject, but also the source of her desire. The subject's *raison d'être* evolves around reinstating this real order of immediacy lost forever, a loss that gave its place to desire, which is the effect of the lack etched on the subject the moment she speaks and begins to circulate in the realm of the signifiers.

The position the subject occupies in the signifying chain, i.e. signifiers that represent her, determines the relation of the subject to the real which takes the form of a nostalgic *jouissance*. Due to its ample meanings, the French term typically remains untranslated in English, referring to the enjoyment – the closest English translation – that the subject

experiences as an extraordinary combination of pleasure and pain, every time she approximates the real kernel of her existence. This unrepresentable co-occurrence of pleasure and suffering commonly hypostatizes the paradoxical adherence of the neurotic to his/her symptom.<sup>4</sup> Language, as the *modus operandi* of the subject for tackling the real, is accountable for this strange co-occurrence. *Jouissance* is beyond the signifier, yet caused by the latter, which permits instantaneous access solely.

Lacan's conception of subjectivity evolving from a central lack, a constitutive lack that gives rise to desire, forms an essential theoretical pedestal for MacCannell's and Žižek's suggestions about the role of ideology in relation to this real kernel and the desire of the subject. The potential relation between the fascist and the pervert in terms of accessing *jouissance* is the epicentre of the narratives that I discuss in this section. In a typical Lacanian description of the perverse subject, unrestrained *jouissance* is not something renounced by the symbolic, so the pervert constantly transgresses the symbolic limit in search for it. The pervert does not acknowledge castration and thereby does not bind his/her *jouissance* to the phallic signifier.

#### **4.1.1 *The Eradication of Oedipal Ethics***

In a number of texts, Juliet Flower MacCannell has produced a narrative that exposes the relation of fascist politics and ethics to the central Lacanian notion of *jouissance*.<sup>5</sup> The relation to real *jouissance* is what determines the structure of the subject, as a neurotic, a psychotic or a pervert. In this theoretical context, MacCannell formulated a dialectic of fascism, extending the modernist work of Horkheimer and Adorno, with whom she appears to agree on the catastrophic consequences of the bourgeois infringement and appropriation of the Enlightenment. The principal ideals of *Liberté, Egalité* and *Fraternité* were severely instrumentalised and all this time, have remained unfulfilled.

For MacCannell, the dominant Oedipal model of society that prevailed after the Enlightenment holds the culpability for this failure. Maintained by male despots, who MacCannell calls "malevolent clones," the Oedipal system of society took the form of a sadistic Other (superego).<sup>6</sup> Fascism is an aberration of the fraternal structure of society

which concurs with the liberal capitalist order that Horkheimer and Adorno cauterise in their work.<sup>7</sup> National Socialism and fascism are not disorders of “patriarchy” (the relation to the ancestor and the prime position of the father in traditional societies), but deviations from the modern democratic form of fraternity. This fraternal political structure founds the regime of the sons, which is nothing but “patriarchy” reshaped.<sup>8</sup> The Nazi Holocaust was a decisive historical occurrence for re-evaluating familial relations. It endorsed the aggressive narcissistic ends of the fascist to take the place of the parent and become the surviving master who replaces “the weak and feeble parents for good.”<sup>9</sup> In this regard, fascism was a pathological deviation from the granite basis of fraternal/liberal democratic ideology and the core of Oedipal ethics.

In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud ascribes the rudiment of social organisation to the mob of the brothers who succeeded their despotic father’s power, after they cannibalistically devoured him and reconstituted his dominant figure by the creation of God (a stern moral superego).<sup>10</sup> As a result, the regime of the brother came into existence, by abolishing a totalitarian paternal micro-establishment and inaugurating a more pluralistic one. This nascent pluralism regulated the economy of *jouissance*, so to say, the enjoyment of the mother, previously held by the father. All brothers could grab a limited piece of this *jouissance*, strictly defined by law. This reveals a proto-democratic organisation of social relations in the fraternal Oedipal society.

Fascism appears as a breach in this model, in analogy with perversion that violates the Oedipal law. MacCannell draws the deviating and destructive for traditional parent-child relationships character of fascism.<sup>11</sup> She suggests that fascism strives for “maternal *jouissance*,” that is, the enjoyment rooted in the primordial unrepresentable evil Thing, i.e. the source of the maternal voice/superego. According to her argument, “The fascist is on the way to a *jouissance* not restricted by the word, by the ethical framing of excess and lack.”<sup>12</sup> This *jouissance* unrestrained by the signifier is commonly associated with the pervert who enjoys the symbolic; he refuses to sacrifice and confine his *jouissance* to symbolic boundaries. Similarly, the fascist surpasses Oedipal phallic *jouissance*.

Nevertheless, the feminine position towards *jouissance* also moves beyond the phallic signifier. The woman does not come under the auspice of the paternal constraint of the phallic word, going as far as to sacrifice herself to unlimited *jouissance*. This suggests a

thorny parallel with the fascist who ostracises the paternal ‘despot’ in his barbarous *Will-to-Jouissance*. Confronting the risk of turning these two parallel positions into a hazardous equation, MacCannell locates the difference in the woman’s efforts. Despite her deviation from the function of the phallic signifier, the woman still tries to relate her *jouissance* to the signifier; she tries to talk about *it*. This means that she does not disavow the phallic signifier like the pervert does, which explains why she is not placed *completely* outside the phallic function, on the side of unlimited fatal *jouissance* – something that would turn her into a callous figure.

On the side of unlimited *jouissance*, death lies and this is where the fascist position is located. Nazism was an aggressive act against Oedipal ethics, as it attempted to instate a condition of unlimited *jouissance*. Therefore, Nazism comprises a negative ontological example for re-examining traditional ethics operating on familial relations:

It [Nazism] unwittingly enabled us to do away with our wish to do away with our parents and thereby “freely” enjoy. It did so by undoing the stricture that the sexual drive is never open to consciousness, the Oedipal stricture. The aggression against the parental relation was so fierce on the part of fascism that it could not help but open our eyes to that parental relation-that it was a relation to us.<sup>13</sup>

In line with MacCannell, as our post-modern world departs from Oedipal ethics, part of the current ethical reconstruction has its origins in the Nazi extremities. But where does the erasure of the Oedipal substratum of parental relations situate the fascist regarding the Other, if not in a perverse position?

In her elaboration of fascist ethics, MacCannell appears to map out a perverse relation of fascism to *jouissance*, which also insinuates a perverse relation to the Other.<sup>14</sup> Based on psychoanalytic conceptualisations of perversion and Lacan’s ethical speculation in *Seminar VII*, MacCannell juxtaposes the ethics of the fascist with the ethics of femininity, alluding to Eichmann as an emblematic figure for demarcating the two ethical attitudes. Taking the relation to *jouissance* as the defining criterion, MacCannell draws the difference between Eichmann’s perverse route to *jouissance* and the feminine pathway towards the latter.

Eichmann personifies the bureaucratic banality of Nazi officials that Arendt considered as the source of Nazi barbarity, claiming that evil is banal.<sup>15</sup> During his trial in Jerusalem, the Nazi administrator of the 'Final Solution' not only exonerated himself by advocating his apathetic subordination to the orders of the Führer as a simple executive tool, but also attested his faithfulness to the Kantian ethical imperative as the main principle that guided him in his life. He went as far as to summon up extensive extracts from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in order to convince the court for his pro-Kantian posture.

MacCannell treats his claim as an example of fascism's perverse implementation of the Kantian doctrine. Assisted by Lacan's logic in "Kant with Sade"<sup>16</sup> and Hannah Arendt's theorisation about the banality of evil,<sup>17</sup> she conceives Eichmann's ethical attitude as commensurable to the argument that sees Sade as the truth of Kantian ethics.<sup>18</sup> The banality of Eichmann and the apathy of Sade are compatible manifestations of a common position, where both turn themselves into the objects of the invocatory drive (the voice of the Führer, in Eichmann's case), which means that the divisive character of subjectivity, namely, lack or the recognition of otherness, is eradicated.

Therefore, Eichmann and Sade occupy the same perverse frame in terms of *jouissance*, which is different from feminine *jouissance*. Although the woman slips away from the phallic function, she still tries to discover channels for relating her *jouissance* to the symbolic and manage to speak about it. Both the fascist *qua* Sade and the woman are not fully inscribed in the symbolic, for their structures are marked by a nucleus that persists and goes beyond symbolic boundaries: this is the *object a*, the remainder of lost *jouissance*. The pervert situates himself in the position of the object of the drive, whereas the woman tries to pertain herself not to this object, but its lack, namely the phallus, without fully succeeding in this. There is a surplus enjoyment in both positions and MacCannell demarcates them, pointing towards the new possibilities the feminine position opens for ethics.

MacCannell draws a parallel between Arendt and Lacan, as each fleshes out the perverse synecdoche of rigidly adhering to an ethical edict. She argues:

Lacan found the implications of Kant's maxims – the voice within – scandalously close to Sade's. Arendt, looking at a different kind of perversion, found Adolf Eichmann's self-



proclaimed inner sense of his own “duty” a “version of Kant for the household use of the little man.”<sup>19</sup>

From perspectives, Arendt and Lacan somehow relate perversion the ‘malfunction’ of the Kantian ethical duty and its Enlightenment reasoning. Behind the face of the bureaucrat, perverse sexuality is the fulcrum of his commitment to the ethical decrees of the system. Sade’s *Will-to-Jouissance* elevated to the level of an absolute Kantian duty (a universal will) is commensurable with the fascist’s will, which acquires a universal status as the *Will-of-the-Führer*. In accordance with Kant who postulated that only a universalised maxim could constitute an ethical duty, Eichmann, as well as other Nazi officers, was identified with the will behind the maxim that decreed their duty, that is, Führer’s will. Eichmann’s action was guided by a single ethical edict: “Act in such a way that had the Führer known, he would approve.”<sup>20</sup>

The fascist ethical maxim did not simply demand Eichmann to unconditionally obey orders as his duty, but also to identify with the will of the one who expresses it. His assertion that, on his part, he held nothing against Jews further evinces the Kantian basis of his attitude. It purports to have no pathological motives (personal interests such as the loathing of the Jews) influencing Eichmann’s actions. The fascist atrocities can be thereby understood as the veracity of Kantian ethics, in analogy with Sade’s perverse ratification of the latter.

Nevertheless, there are a number of difficulties with MacCannell’s account. The ‘different type of perversion’ that Arendt identified in Eichmann never becomes lucid in the text, while the question emerges whether every subject who claims an obdurate obedience to a moral law is a potential (or actual) Sadean pervert. Eichmann’s perverse adherence to the Nazi law suggests a thorny postulation which requires first the clarification of a basic problem with Lacan’s argument. What is at stake is Sadean instrumentalisation, namely, the reduction of the subject to the object of the Other’s *jouissance*, a position permeated by apathy. An oxymoron comes forth, since this position also engrosses the pervert’s *jouissance*, a motivating force for the pervert that contradicts his apathetic instrumentalisation. The subject who undertakes this

instrumental function does not focus only on the Other's *jouissance*, but also on her own *jouissance*, both clenched in the same position.<sup>21</sup>

MacCannell's theorisation about fascism is an alteration of Lacan's construal of the Sadean fantasy, which is the inverse of the matheme of fantasy:  $\$ \diamond a$ .<sup>22</sup> As it happens with Sade, the fascist reverses the fantasmatic relation to the *object a* and instead of being the subject himself, he transforms into the object of the invocatory drive ( $a \diamond \$$ ). The fascist becomes the object of 'maternal *jouissance*'.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, by no means can this be taken as an unequivocal and definite criterion for identifying perversion. First, because it is a structural description particularly bound to the Sadean fantasy, without being replicated anywhere else in Lacan's work or having a particular reference to the perversions. Taking the position of the object does not constitute a canonical definition of the pervert. Without clear elaboration of these intricacies, the reasoning of "Kant with Sade" cannot be generalised, as it is not an argument of a given explanatory value. Lacan never claimed that the Sadean reversal of fantasy describes the position of the pervert.

Furthermore, MacCannell does not sufficiently canvass the transgressive nature of *jouissance* (the modus operandi of the Sadean fantasy) and its relation to Eichmann's clinging to the law. How does transgression occur by the very obedience to the law? It is true that the law in itself generates excess, but it is something MacCannell needs to clarify. The comparison of fascism with femininity, in terms of access to *jouissance*, reveals in both cases a surfeit of enjoyment. In the woman, this reflects a metaphysical experience, whereas, in the fascist, the surplus of *jouissance*, i.e. the excessive character of the atrocities committed, acquires a morally transgressive character qua perversion.

However, even if the woman tries to fasten her *jouissance* to the phallic function, unlike the pervert, it is precisely this surplus of *jouissance* that frames both the feminine and the perverse position. Moreover, given that lack and excess are tautological concepts in the Lacanian corpus, in what way did Eichmann as a pervert embody the lack in the drive and how is it different from embodying the excess of the feminine? Despite MacCannell's effort to separate the two, one thing remains: both the pervert and the woman bear upon a *jouissance* beyond the limits of the symbolic, where common moral designations become impaired. Thus, if the fascist assumes a foreign, meaningless *jouissance*, this renders opaque the line of demarcation between its perverse fabric and

female enjoyment. Sheila Kunkle writes about the meaninglessness of the fascist *jouissance*:

And so, the “banality” of the Nazi Order, the very bureaucratization that allowed a sort of distance from the moralising of actions, brought its own libidinal impact; that is the torturers and killers experienced an enjoyment from their brutality by the very fact of being “meaningless.”<sup>24</sup>

But as far as the Nazi bureaucrat is concerned, my view is that he enjoyed his brutal exploitations for the very fact that they were *meaning-ful*, in the sense that they served a moralising function in accordance with the Nazi ideological vision. Even the Holocaust had a *real* meaning for the fascist, since he truly believed that the extermination of the Jews was a ‘necessary evil’ for the rise of the Aryan ideal. As I will argue later in the present study, this ideal substantiated the law and the identity of the fascist. For this reason, it is unlikely that Eichmann conveyed a “need for empty signifiers,” as MacCannell characteristically writes.<sup>25</sup> Signifiers are always empty *per se*, but for the Nazi officer, Hitler was the provider of a fantasmatic certainty that filled up this emptiness.

Rather than an ostensible symmetry in the accomplishment of the Kantian duty between Sade and Eichmann, it is more a dissymmetry that describes their moral duties. The Sadean subject ascribes the sought-for *jouissance* to the Other’s Will, an abstract, faceless and imperceptible source. This renders Sade’s fantasmatic site Kantian, since Kant’s originator of the law is as abstract as the Other is. Hence, Lacan postulates that Sade is Kant. In Eichmann’s Kantianism, the categorical imperative takes a form that serves the will of the Führer, as MacCannell notes. Hitler stands as a visible enunciator of a law that, consequently, cannot acquire a universal status. Inasmuch as this law serves the particular interests of the Führer and the zealots of Nazi ideology, the will behind the law is not subjectless. Furthermore, the disinterestedness that accompanies the performance of the ethical duty – another point of similitude with Sade and the chimerical apathy the Sadean pervert displays when he inflicts pain to others – is recanted.

Sade as the 'perversion' of Kant is precisely what it literally means: a sly twisting of an ethical attitude which has the potential to sustain evil. Zupančič has effectively demonstrated this 'perverse' twist, arguing that Sade actually hides himself behind the apathy of the ethical duty, only to get rid of the responsibility for his action.<sup>26</sup> Without in effect eradicating his pathological interests, Sade formulates a pseudo-Kantian duty that makes it incongruous with the authentic Kantian ethics. Yet, Zupančič appears to agree that such pseudo-Kantianism is essentially perverse. In that sense, Eichmann is not a pervert because of the 'Kant-with-Sade' prism that MacCannell takes, but because of his pseudo-Kantianism.

If Kantian ethics were nothing but a Sadean scenario, the fascist atrocities would have been clearly assigned to a perverse context. Sadean heroes derive sexual *jouissance* from the dismemberment and the execution of their victims. It is difficult to see fascist 'heroes' ceding in a similar *jouissance*. German fascism's bureaucratic form may invoke Kantian ethics, but it is not compatible with Sadean apathy. Based on Arendt's parallelism of Eichmann's bureaucratism with Kant's disinterestedness, MacCannell adds the Sadean dimension, ignoring its sexual underpinning, which seems to further mystify the relation of fascism to perversion.

MacCannell employs the term 'bureaucratic genocide' in order to denote the threat arising from an ethical system, where will is attributed to people, like in Führer's case.<sup>27</sup> This is an application of Kantian axioms which links perversion to a condition of decomposing effects for society and intensely embroils it with criminological issues and morality. I do not discard the possibility and the risk that arise, once the *will* behind ethical decisions is ascribed to individuals or a group of people. Rather my emphasis is laid in the risk of fixing perversion upon this particular form of ethics, as well as upon the potential calamitous consequences of its application. It is not only a moralising conservatism that benefits from disowning such ethics as perverse, but also, more unpromisingly, the field of ethics is sexualised.

MacCannell argues that the genocidal programme never went on paper because of "practical reasons."<sup>28</sup> She hypothesises that if the programme had a written edition, the international community would have rallied against Nazism, much earlier than the Second World War. But did 'practical reasons' really influence the administration of the

extermination programme in the concentration camps? One must bear in mind that for the Nazi such a programme never became a symbolic reality; it was never a 'genocidal programme'. Although 'Final Solution' stands for massacre, the term was only included in the Nazi glossary in 1941-1942. Before this late period, Nazism favoured the term 'resettlement' and it is not clear whether its use served as a plaster for the execution of Jews, at that point.<sup>29</sup> The general warfare is more likely to have amplified the perception of the Jew as the principal adversary who needed to be annihilated, like any other enemy on the battleground. So, it is difficult to see the Jewish 'genocide', as a plan accomplished by Nazis reduced to objects of the voice of the master, without their own personal interests involved. If they did not take action, they believed their own welfare was at stake, along with their Fatherland's integrity.

More to the point, the initial Nazi programme configured the vassalage of the Jew, so that the inferiority of the latter compared to the primacy of the Aryan ideal is sanctioned. Even if the Holocaust did not take a written programmatic form, the principal anti-democratic, anti-Semitic and imperialistic programmatic principles of the Nazi party were known and written, as early as 1920.<sup>30</sup> The international community took action only after 1939, in the final period of Nazism, when the party's principles became legal reality and formed a systematic policy which culminated in the cataclysm of the Second World War. Furthermore, when mass graves of executed Polish soldiers, among them Jews, were discovered, the massacre was deliberately attributed to Nazism, despite evidence inculcating Stalinism. Definitely there were more Nazi officers, apart from Eichmann, of similar bureaucratic ethos, for whom the Führer's will counted the most. The ethics of "Kant with Sade" would effortlessly describe them. It is tempting to interpret a bureaucratic system with such a massive catastrophic impact, impossible to be inscribed in the symbolic, as a perverse application of the Kantian axiom. But inevitably such an interpretation entails Lacanian reductionism.<sup>31</sup>

If the Sadean fantasy is an imaginary repercussion of male domination, which contextualises fascism, this contests the feminist ethic that MacCannell sees as a promising field for contemporary ethical speculation. However, the main characteristic of the Sadean fantasy is the crossing of the borders of a monolithic and tyrannical law. Would not this be subversive of male sovereignty then? In our post-Oedipal era, as

MacCannell notes, it is a necessary task to scrutinise the function of perversion as a category in politics if not in clinical practice.<sup>32</sup> The logic of perversion, as it stands in clinical psychopathology, can be of little help in producing a comprehensive account of political phenomena of a significant historical impact. Instead of discarding the pervert, by using depreciative designations, it would be more prolific to explore the implications of the subject carrying the perverse epithet for a world of post-Oedipal ethics.

Linking perversion to deviation from the patriarchal institution of social relations, which fascism never really defied, is a misleading simplification and a segregating act against the subject labelled as pervert. Traditional forms of patriarchy under no circumstances encompass and integrate the so-called pervert into their social fabric. As I argue in the last part, the pervert finds a way to compromise his desire of boundless *jouissance* with the limits of the law of the father. Rather than a direct confrontation with patriarchy, the pervert takes a mediating position, setting a compromise between the feminine and the masculine posture vis-à-vis *jouissance*. This is his/her answer to the question of sexual difference. Precisely because this forms a conventional and, at the same time, contumacious attitude, perversion has been conjoined in politics both with conservative authoritarianism and rebellious subversion.

I convey my support for MacCannell's view about the need to encourage a post-patriarchal ethic that goes through the compass of feminine ethics. Perversion may not open a feminine pathway to *jouissance*, but it is still an attempt to resolve the feminine enigma. The pervert proffers himself as the object that completes the woman, namely he becomes the imaginary phallus, as a presence that fills woman's lack. This can lead to useful insights regarding the debate on post-Oedipal ethics and, as I put forward later in the present study, the pervert, by taking the position of the object, breeds anxiety not only in the woman, but also in the male dominant socio-political edifice in general.

#### 4.1.2 *Fascism's Disavowal of the Real*

Among the most celebrated names in contemporary social theory, over the last two decades, has been that of Slavoj Žižek, whose prolific and polychromatic body of work has proffered one of the most splendidly fabricated critiques and theories of ideology. Despite being regarded at times as a post-Marxist, Žižek himself situates his rhetoric in a continuum with traditional Marxist thought. But it is not simple to resolve Žižek's relation to orthodox Marxism, considering the elusiveness of locating his stance within a particular political frame all the years of his international scholar presence. As Sean Homer notes, the ambiguity of Žižek's orthodox Marxist position is accentuated by his scholastic and systematic employ of Lacan.<sup>33</sup> In Homer's words:

For Žižek, it is the Lacanian notion of the Real that separates his project from *both* post-Marxism and classical Marxism. If post-Marxism asserts the absolute irreducibility and particularity of political struggles to any single determining instance – the inherent contradictions of the capital, for example – Lacanian psychoanalysis argues precisely the opposite.<sup>34</sup>

Without doubt, the cogent interlacing of Lacanian theorisation with Hegelianism manifests Žižek's prowess in articulating a highly pertinent critique of ideology for our epoch, but whether this comes from a position of Marxist orthodoxy or a position of a Lacanian doctrinaire who monitors Marxist politics is an open question.

Through this Lacanian prism, Žižek sees subjectivity as fragmented and decentred, considering its subordinate status to the unsurpassable realm of the signifiers. The acquisition of a consummate identity dwells in impossibility, inasmuch as it is bound to desire, provoked by a lacuna which is impossible to fill up. Thus, for Žižek, socio-political relations evolve from states of lack, linguistic fluidity and contingency. What temporarily arrests this fluid state of the subject's slithering in the realm of the signifiers, giving rise to her self-identity, is what Lacan calls *point de capiton*. The term refers to certain fundamental 'anchoring' points in the signifying chain where the signifier is tied to the signified, providing an illusory stability in signification.<sup>35</sup> In this context,

ideology is conceptualised as a terrain of firm meanings, determined and comprised by numerous *points de capiton*.<sup>36</sup>

The real is the central Lacanian concept that Žižek implements in rhetoric. He associates the real with antagonism (e.g. class conflict) as the unsymbolisable and irreducible gap that lies in the heart of the socio-symbolic order and around which society is formed. As Žižek argues, “*class struggle* designates the very antagonism that prevents the objective (social) reality from constituting itself as a self-enclosed whole.”<sup>37</sup> This logic is indebted to Laclau and Mouffe who were the first to postulate that social antagonism is what impedes the closure of society, marking thus its impossibility.<sup>38</sup> Žižek expanded this view and associated antagonism with the notion of the real.

Functioning as a hegemonic fantasmatic veil, ideology covers the lacuna of the symbolic, in the form of a fantasy, so that it protracts desire and hence subjectivity. On the imaginary level, ideology functions as the ‘mirror’ that reflects antagonisms, that is to say, the real unrepresentable kernel that undermines the political. Around this emptiness of representation, the fictional narrative of ideology, its meaning, is to unfurl. The role of socio-ideological fantasy is to provide consistency to the symbolic order, by veiling its void, and to foster the illusion of a coherent social unity.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, fantasy has both unifying and disjunctive features, as its role is to fill the void of the symbolic, but also to circumscribe this void. As Žižek notes, “the notion of fantasy offers an exemplary case of the dialectical *coincidentia oppositorum*.”<sup>40</sup> On the one side, it provides a “hallucinatory realisation of desire” and on the other side, it evokes disturbing images about the Other’s *jouissance* to which the subject has no (symbolic or imaginary) access. In so reasoning, ideology promises unity and, at the same time, creates another fantasy, where the failure of acquiring the anticipated ideological unity is ascribed.

Pertaining to Jacques Derrida’s work *Specters of Marx*, where the typical ontological conception of the living is seen to be incomplete and inseparable from the spectre, namely, a ghostly embodiment that haunts the living present,<sup>41</sup> Žižek elaborates the spectral apparitions of the real in the politico-ideological domain. He makes a distinction between this ‘spectre’ and ‘symbolic fiction’, that is, reality *per se*. Both have a common fantasmatic hypostasis, yet they perform antithetical functions. Symbolic fiction



forecloses the real antagonism at the crux of reality, only to return as a spectre, as another fantasy. This dual fantasmatic process fuels racist acts, like anti-Semitism, insofar as it reveals a disavowal of real antagonism and a solidification of this disavowal by means of another fantasy, such as the fabrication of the “conceptual Jew.” The Nazi community embodies this fantasmatic structure, where the “conceptual Jew” suggests the disguised spectral form in which the real returns.<sup>42</sup>

Ideology runs through disavowal, as far as it seeks its actualisation by projecting inherent inconsistencies, namely, antagonistic relations, to an external embodiment (e.g. economic factors). This process succumbs to a perverse logic, inasmuch as it suggests a disavowal of real antagonism and thus an ideological disabling of symbolic split (castration):

What we are thus arguing is not simply that ideology permeates also the alleged extra-ideological strata of everyday life, but that this materialization of ideology in the external materiality renders visible inherent antagonisms that the explicit formulation of ideology cannot afford to acknowledge. It is as if an ideological edifice, in order to function ‘normally’, must obey a kind of imp of perversity, and articulate its inherent antagonism in the externality of its material existence.<sup>43</sup>

For Žižek, fascism appears to illustrate at best this perverse feature of ideology. He repeatedly alludes to fascism, Nazism and ‘totalitarianism’ in many works, yet this does not form a consistent, linear and progressive narrative. Nevertheless, these allusions suffice to give a perverse nuance to fascism. Žižek often refers to the figure of the Jew as what plays a fetishistic role for the fascist and conceals the lack in the Other.<sup>44</sup> In his article “The Fetish of the Party,” where Žižek contemplates on the role of the political fetish in Stalinism, he juxtaposes the latter to Fascism. If for Stalinism the ‘Party’ is the fetish, for fascism it is the Jew; he embodies the exorbitant surplus, the real residue of fascist ideology that undermines its actualisation.

[...] [In Fascism] the Jew functions as a *fetish* that masks class struggle and comes in its place. Fascism struggles against capitalism and liberalism, which are supposed to destroy and corrupt the harmony of the society as “all organic” where particular “states” have the function of “members,” that is to say, where “each and everyone has his natural and

determined place” (the “head” and the “hands”). Fascism thus tries to restore a harmonious *relation* between the classes in the framework of an organic all, and the Jew incarnates the moment that introduces a discord “from outside.” The Jew is the surplus that “disturbs” the harmonious cooperation of the “head” and the “hands,” of “capital” and “labor.”<sup>45</sup>

The fetishistic functioning of the Jew solidifies fascist ideology and reveals its perverse core. Fascism disavows the Jew, as the delegate of capitalist power and, at the same time, the grime of the social stratum, associated with the low classes.<sup>46</sup> Nazism, in particular, fabricated a perverse fantasy around the malevolent Jew, seen as the incarnation of the obscene Other who sets up conspiracies against the Aryan nation, while he indulges himself in impure unrepresentable enjoyment.<sup>47</sup> In order to maintain its utopianism, Nazism, unable to confront the real of antagonism, projected it to the presence of the Jew as the obscene Other. By attributing Germany’s financial crisis to the figure of the exploiter Jew, the Nazi managed to hide the inconsistencies of his ideology. Put in terms of disavowal, the Nazi *knew very well* that the Jew was not the source of evil, *but* at the same time he continued to believe that he was indeed the sardonic personification of malice for the German nation’s wealth. Although the Nazi was aware of this manipulative strategy and the inveigled opposition to the Jew, at the same time he *really* believed the Jew was the source of his misfortune and therefore his principal adversary.<sup>48</sup>

Since its introduction by Freud in his paper on “Fetishism,” the standard psychoanalytic conception of disavowal suggests the failure to recognise sexual difference that marks perversion.<sup>49</sup> What is disavowed is the perception of the mother’s lack of penis as the primary differentiating factor between the sexes. The perception of the absence of penis in the mother contradicts the belief that she actually has one, which means her lack and thus her desire are not acknowledged. The pervert stands against subordination to the symbolic law, the phallic function, which requires the acceptance of castration.

Žižek has also demonstrated how contemporary liberalism disposes the conditions for the emanation of new ‘totalitarian’ forms that do not derive their power from their dour opposition to the permissive cornucopia of late capitalist societies.<sup>50</sup> Present fundamentalist acts do not weave any austere prohibitions that could ‘save’ the subject from the exorbitant freedom and sybaritism of contemporary social relations. It may be that the ‘totalitarian’ master’s commands request self-sacrifice and dismissal of pleasure

in the name of a greater cause, yet his power resides more in a concealed decree to partake in an act of unimpeded transgression.

The 'totalitarian' master asks people to relinquish pleasure and to sacrifice themselves for a higher value, in favour of a dark God, as Lacan notes.<sup>51</sup> In this regard, the master defers (moral) punishment and urges the community towards an "unconstrained transgression."<sup>52</sup> The subject of the community is allowed to transgress common moral prohibitions, without any punitive upshots overhanging. Thus, someone can even perform homicide, as long as this act complies with the axioms of the 'totalitarian' master.

This condition fosters fascist 'totalitarian' formations; but it differs from compulsive obedience that provides libidinal satisfaction to the authoritarian individual, as typical Freudo-Marxism would suggest. For Žižek, this obedient attitude follows more the logic of 'repressive desublimation'.<sup>53</sup> As we saw earlier, the Frankfurt School introduced the term, referring to an essential 'totalitarian' deployment. The implicit decree of the 'totalitarian' master ordains: 'You may!'. By obeying it, one can enjoy all the things s/he had to abandon in his/her subservience to the law. Not very different from the superegoic command: 'Enjoy!', Žižek discerns the perverse circuit that repressive desublimation sets up, as the superego dictates precisely what it meant to prohibit and punish.<sup>54</sup>

In a 'totalitarian' system, an ethnic over-identification suffices to abolish the validity of liberal society's morals. This reveals, according to Žižek, the shallow differentiation between duty and pleasure.<sup>55</sup> Despite the hedonism and permissiveness that perforate present social relations, the subject is not free. Restrictions and regulations still systematise her social behaviour and permissiveness itself functions as a concealed type of confinement for the subject. 'Permissive' societies decree pleasure as a duty, whereas in 'totalitarianism' duty becomes the valve of the subject's pleasure.<sup>56</sup>

In this regard, ideology works in a (false) transgressive manner, inasmuch as it brings members of a community together through identification with a transgressive type of enjoyment. Transgression in psychoanalysis has been regarded as the typical strategy for extracting *jouissance* in perversion.<sup>57</sup> In that context, the crystallisation of Nazism as a coherent ideological formation lies on the articulation of a decree that requests collective identification on the basis of some shared guilt, followed by its fetishistic disavowal. The first axis that brings Nazi community together is a fantasy of solidarity, "the same

solidarity-in-guilt adduced by the participation in a common transgression.”<sup>58</sup> The second axis of the Nazi fantasy is sketched by the transgressive practices that its members are entitled to. The torture and elimination of the Jew is part of this Nazi ‘false transgression’.

Consequently, all transformations brought by the Nazi ‘revolution’ were nothing but pseudo-changes. The underlying fantasy of Nazism remained intact, holding a safe distance from the real.<sup>59</sup> Nazism did not come anywhere near the real kernel of its identity in its performance as a reformatory political movement. Žižek explains this by discerning the role of negativity in ideology, applying a fundamental dialectical idea to his rhetoric: Hegel’s notion of ‘inner negativity’, according to which “an entity is negated, passes over into its opposite, as a result of the development of its own potential.”<sup>60</sup> Fascism fails to efficiently negate liberal capitalism’s very negation: the antagonisms that reside in the latter. Rooted in these antagonisms, fascism is not the external antithesis to liberalism, but precisely its intrinsic negation. Fascism is the “inherent self-negation of capitalism.”<sup>61</sup>

As an internal force operating in capitalism, fascist negation is the outcome of capitalism’s attempt to regulate any disjunctive element that appears in its ideological territory and threatens its power. In periods of crisis, capitalism remains intact, by producing fascism as its self-negation. The negation of antagonism is reflected in the role of disavowal; the latter manifests the negativity of the perverse structure and appears to be the main mechanism in the ideological veiling of the real.

Through disavowal, the fantasmatic layer that sustains fascist mastery promises to eradicate the opposition between the bourgeois capitalist and the ‘enslaved’ proletariat, by providing a guarding master, with a strong unifying will. However, always something disturbs its vision:

There is always a surplus of the “invisible hand” that contradicts the design of the Master. The only way of recognizing this surplus is (for the fascist whose “epistemic” field is that of the Master) to again “personalize” the “invisible hand” and imagine another Master, a hidden master who in reality pulls all the strings and whose clandestine activity is the true secret behind this anonymous “invisible hand” of the market, i.e., the Jew.<sup>62</sup>

Despite its explanatory aptitude, the reading of the capitalist Jew as the “invisible hand” of the hidden master is inconsistent with his fetishisation, as described in the previous paragraphs. As another master who undermines the ideal vision of the fascist master, the Jew cannot be conceptualised as occupying both the position of the fetish, that is, *the object a*, and the position of the one who usurps the object, that is the master. If the Jew represents a master that contravenes and conspires against the fascist project, what we have is a discourse where the fascist master tries to conceal his lack/castration by imagining another competitive master, another authority that limits his access to *jouissance*. Rather than a perverse process, this contours more an ‘ordinary neurotic’ response to difference (unless the master places himself in the position of the object, as the Sadean pervert does).

The general use of disavowal as the *a priori* ideogram of perversion may constitute an incandescent illustration of the fascist phenomenon, but it ultimately mystifies the latter. Žižek needs to clarify and demarcate the perverse function of fascism from the perversity of all other ideologies. If ‘false transgression’ and ‘fetishistic disavowal’ do not characterise the formation of a fascist community solely, then every community is formed in a proto-fascist manner or fascism is as perverse as any other ideology. From this perspective, fascism is not merely a fraction of past ‘totalitarianism’, but a perpetual current and one must expect its occurrence at some point again. Although I agree with this view, what needs to become clear is whether fascism will never disappear, because of the perverse features of ideology or subjectivity in general.

Can we distinguish ideologies, based on the fetishisation of different embodiments of the same unknown factor, namely, the *object a*? When Žižek draws a difference between fascist ideology and Stalinism, he applies a certain topological logic, by tracing the disturbing kernel (antagonism) in different apparitions. If for fascism, the Jew is the embodiment of the real, for Stalinism that would be the Party itself.<sup>63</sup> However, there are many ideological divergences between different versions of fascism; it would be difficult to attribute them simply to different apparitions of the object or reduce them to anti-Semitism as the common thread that links fascist groups, originating in disavowal.

Is disavowal the only way to take cognition of the party, the Jew, the immigrant and so on? If all these embody the surplus element that marks the lack of the symbolic, this

excess is always fetishistic, always perverse. Considering that the ‘sublime object of ideology’ is responsible for perverse *jouissance* through false transgression, as it is the case with fascism, this may as well mean that perversion and ideology are tautological notions. As far as the understanding of fascism is concerned, this seems to have a great explanatory power, yet Žižek needs also to demonstrate how this knowledge contributes to the understanding of the notion of perversion and what its implications are.

As far as disavowal is a negative force in psychoanalysis, this negativity associated with ideology also percolates the notion of perversion. It is not only this negative relation to the real which is essential in politics, but also the positive elements of the identity that emerges from imaginary processes of identification. The latter may involve repression, negation or disavowal of the real; they are all constructive processes of building a certain identity, which are not fundamentally negative. My critique of Žižek’s view of ideology does not reject the lack, the emptiness that he recognises in the crux of social and political relations, but the prioritisation of disavowal as the organising factor of ideology and indicative of a negative perverse operation.

An argument that resides in disavowal cannot really capture the diverse relations of power and domination that operate in the field of politics and the array of identities that mediate social relations. Social identities depend on identification with various master signifiers and images. Thus, if these identities rely on imaginary processes, through which they acquire their positive (fantasmatic) content, Žižek’s emphasis on the real neglects the formative role of the imaginary for political praxis. The centrality of the notion of the real that substantiates Žižek’s resourceful theorisation is also what attenuates its implications for political action. The real is a negative force, inasmuch as it thwarts any attempt to cover it. In this vein, it is impossible for Žižek’s political proposal to acquire “any positive content and thus reduces the political act to one of dissidence and opposition,” as Homer notes.<sup>64</sup>

The problem is that Žižek inventively informs us, about the impossibility and the negativity, namely, the real, around which social relations become possible, yet his enlightening theoretical suggestions never quite make it in the political arena as a guiding scheme for action. Homer draws upon this limitation of Žižek’s theorisation, which may form an influential and adroit critique of ideology, but when it comes to the question of

political agency, his Lacanian rhetoric stumbles upon the lack of any contemplation of the political synecdoches of his work or any schematic groundwork for social and political praxis.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, considering that the real cannot be historicized, Žižek leaves unresolved the inability for psychoanalysis to historicize socio-political phenomena and thus form a more pragmatic basis for political action. In addition to these limitations of the notion of the real in Žižek's work, Roberts and Joseph point out its inadequacy in explaining the structuring of capitalism.<sup>66</sup> Despite its ontological status, the real fails to bridge the fissure between human reality as determined by biology and socio-cultural reality. Thus, the notion of the real enables us to contemplate the structuring of "our relation to capitalism," rather than the structuring of capitalism in itself.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, Stavrakakis points to another inconsistency present in Žižek's work, as far as the distinction between deconstructionist and Lacanian positions are concerned.<sup>68</sup> According to Žižek, the deconstructionist conceptualisation of lack and finitude posits the latter as "the limit of ethico-political action" and any attempt to defy lack is pessimistically associated with evil. However, Žižek counter-argues that evil resides in the *a priori* acceptance of finitude without considering the aspect of "divine miracles."<sup>69</sup> Stavrakakis is critical of Žižek's connection of the notion of lack to deconstruction, while emphasising the Lacanian basis of its logic. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek underpins the lacking status of the Other in Lacanian theory, yet in later texts he associates lack with deconstruction.<sup>70</sup> Stavrakakis interprets this shift as an attempt to insert certain optimism in his implementation of Lacanian theory for endorsing of radical politics.

Yet this 'purification' from negativity is not sufficient for solidifying Žižek's theoretico-political suggestions. The question of whether the resolution of postmodern pessimism goes through "the utopian disavowal of lack and negativity in political discourse" is raised.<sup>71</sup> This suggests a problem in terms of differentiating 'false transgression' that results in the reproduction of the law from a 'real act' that successfully re-articulates the socio-symbolic order.

Following Žižek, ideology provides the fantasmatic means to an unconscious and instantaneous access to *jouissance*; it is an instrument of excavating *jouissance* in the symbolic. Thus, was it a perverse fantasy and disavowal that made the fascist cross the line

and commit his atrocities? It is difficult to contemplate ideology and fascist barbarity without taking into account another factor, central to socio-political research: power and its relation to mastery. Power, as the pillar of the political, may play a decisive role in transforming ideology to a system of domination and sustaining it. This field has never been a focal point in Žižek's critique of ideology (perhaps because it operates more in a symbolic-imaginary frame than a real one, as I will be arguing in the next part).

A political programme that needs to be developed as an antithesis to dominative power mechanisms requires a plan that clearly sketches power dynamics and their link to ideology. Žižek takes power as a prerequisite for defining ideological space.<sup>72</sup> However, it seems to me that the symbolic space of ideology is pre-fabricated and power is what turns it into a proper fantasy of domination, as soon as this narrative is taken under the canopy of undisputable certainty. Therefore, ideology is not the legitimising factor of domination, but power sanctions a pre-existing ideology turning it to domination. With regard to the disavowal of the Jew, the main perverse aspect of the fascist ideology, the belief that the Jew was indeed the source of malevolence for Germany, contradicting the knowledge that he was not, operated in the fascist discourse before it became a dominant system. It was an ideological belief long before the Nazi party came to power.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For these authors, post-modernism does not really break the tradition of modernity, but on the contrary, it follows its pathway. Nonetheless, post-modernism denounces modernity's most essential tool, namely the supremacy of critical reason.

<sup>2</sup> Or *mater-reality*, that is, the early illusion of being *one* with the mother.

<sup>3</sup> This does not allude to elocution only, but also to other ways of communication (e.g. writing, the use of gestures).

<sup>4</sup> See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 91-92.

<sup>5</sup> See Juliet Flower MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy* (London, New York: Routledge, 1991), "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of *Jouissance*," in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 65-99 and "Fascism and the Voice of Conscience" in *The Hysteric's Guide to the Future of the Female Subject* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 138-139.

<sup>6</sup> MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.



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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo" (1913), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 13, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-1974), pp. 1-161.

<sup>11</sup> MacCannell, "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of *Jouissance*," p. 88.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy*, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> MacCannell, "Fascism and the Voice of Conscience," pp. 127-152.

<sup>15</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1992 [1963]).

<sup>16</sup> See Jacques Lacan, "Kant with Sade," trans. by James B. Swenson, *October* 51 (Winter, 1989): 55-104.

<sup>17</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.

<sup>18</sup> The ethical discussion that contemplates on its relation to perversion is the focus of the fourth chapter.

<sup>19</sup> MacCannell, "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of *Jouissance*," p.73.

<sup>20</sup> MacCannell, "Fascism and the Voice of Conscience," p.139.

<sup>21</sup> I proceed in a thorough discussion of this argument in the third part of the study.

<sup>22</sup> Lacan, "Kant with Sade," pp. 55-104.

<sup>23</sup> MacCannell, "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of *Jouissance*," p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> See Sheila Kunkle, "Introduction", *Other Voices: The (e)Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1, (February 2000). Available from: < <http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/kunkle/introduction.html> > [accessed 7 October 2003].

<sup>25</sup> MacCannell, "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of *Jouissance*," p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> See Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 1999). A more detailed discussion of this argument is developed in the third part of my work.

<sup>27</sup> MacCannell, "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of *Jouissance*," p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> See James Taylor and Warren Shaw, *A Dictionary of the Third Reich*, (London: Grafton, 1987), pp. 116-118.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 232-234. Moreover, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* explicitly states that the superiority of the German race would bring the strong to the dominant position, by abolishing the weak; this is something that echoes Nietzschean philosophy. See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Hutchinson, 1972).

<sup>31</sup> MacCannell herself notes the problem with this: "One should not too casually connect fascism with sadism [...] if we do not operate through the Discourses we risk equations that are overly simplistic, and we will miss the difference between "the feminine" – as what is without discourse – and the "sadistic." MacCannell, "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of *Jouissance*," p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> See Sean Homer, "It's the Political Economy, Stupid! On Žižek's Marxism," *Radical Philosophy* 108 (July/August, 2001): 7-16.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> See Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 42. It must be noted that Laclau and Mouffe were the first to make use of the idea of the *point de capiton* in relation to hegemony and the formation of identities. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 88.

<sup>37</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "I Hear You with My Eyes or The Invisible Master," in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. by Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 91-126 (p. 113). It also appears in Slavoj Žižek, "Between Symbolic Fiction and Fantasmatic Spectre: Towards a Lacanian Theory of Ideology," *Analysis* 5 (1994): 49-62 (p. 59).

<sup>38</sup> See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

<sup>39</sup> See Sean Homer, "The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy," *New Formations* no.38 (Summer, 1999): 78-90 (p. 85).

<sup>40</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "I Hear You with My Eyes or The Invisible Master," p. 116.

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<sup>41</sup> Derrida introduces the notion of *hauntology* to refer to this pseudo-material incarnation of the spirit that haunts and challenges ontological present. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> Žižek, "Between Symbolic Fiction and Fantasmatic Spectre: Towards a Lacanian Theory of Ideology," *Analysis*, 5, 1994, pp. 49-62 (p. 61)

<sup>43</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "Fantasy as a Political Category: A Lacanian Approach," in *The Žižek Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 87-101 (p. 89).

<sup>44</sup> In the political terrain, Slavoj Žižek class conflict embodies the lack in the Other. See Slavoj Žižek, "Traits de Perversion dans les Structures Politiques" in *Traits de Perversion dans les Structures Cliniques*, Fondation du Champ Freudien (Navarin Editeur, 1990).

<sup>45</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "The Fetish of the Party," in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 3-29 (p. 20). This is an argument that Žižek has articulated previously. See "Traits de Perversion dans les Structures Politiques," p. 498-499.

<sup>46</sup> Žižek, "The Fetish of the Party," p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "Re-visioning 'Lacanian' Social Criticism: The Law and its Obscene Double," *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (1996), pp. 15-26 (p. 24).

<sup>48</sup> Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, p. 244. Žižek replicates here the logic of disavowal as described by Octave Mannoni (the logic of "I know, but nevertheless..." Ibid., 248).

<sup>49</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" (1927), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 21, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-1974), pp. 152-157.

<sup>50</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London, New York: Verso, 1999), p. 390.

<sup>51</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Allain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Hammondsport: Penguin, 1979), p. 275.

<sup>52</sup> Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, p. 391.

<sup>53</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "You May!," *London Review of Books* 21, no. 6 (18 March 1999). Available from: <[http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n06/zize01\\_.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n06/zize01_.html)> [accessed 12 April 2003].

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Žižek points out that the perverse undercurrent of 'totalitarianism' differs from typical perverse scenarios. In a reversal of the common perception of sadomasochism as a condition of 'playful' submission and 'totalitarianism' as a case of real submission, Žižek argues that the former constitutes a real performance, while the latter suggests a fake link between the figure of the totalitarian master and the superegoic ordain: 'Enjoy!'. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London, New York: Verso, 1999), p. 391.

<sup>57</sup> See Philip H. F. Hill, *Using Lacanian Clinical Technique: An Introduction* (London: Press for the Habilitation of Psychoanalysis, 2002), p. 167.

<sup>58</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "In his Bold Gaze My Ruin Is Writ Large," in *Everything You Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 211-272 (p. 226).

<sup>59</sup> In Žižekian terms, the Nazi did not traverse his fantasy. One should stand clear of his/her fantasy in order to maintain his symbolic consistency, since it is not possible to "fully assume (in the sense of symbolic integration) the fantasmatic kernel of my being." See Slavoj Žižek, "Fantasy as a Political Category: A Lacanian Approach," *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 1, no. 2 (1996): 77-85 (p. 82). By getting close to fantasy too suffocatingly or too frequently, the subject meets her *aphanisis*, a term introduced by Ernest Jones, initially referring to the loss of desire. Lacan expounded *aphanisis*, as the condition of the *fading of the subject*. Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London, New York: Verso, 2001 [1991]), p. 180.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>62</sup> Žižek, "The Fetish of the Party," pp. 21-22.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> Homer, "It's the Political Economy, Stupid! On Žižek's Marxism," p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> See Sean Homer, "The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy," *New Formations* no. 38 (Summer, 1999): 78-90 (pp. 89-90).

<sup>66</sup> See John Michael Roberts and Jonathan Joseph, "Derrida, Foucault and Žižek: Being Realistic About Social Theory," *New Formations* no. 56 (Autumn, 2005): 109-120.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>68</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, "The Lure of Antigone: *Aporias* of an Ethics of the Political," in *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek*, ed. by Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos and Matthew Sharpe (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), pp. 171-182. In this paper, originally published in *Umbr(a)*, Stavrakakis highlights some problems with Žižek's argumentation that touch on Lacan's ethical speculation and its relevance for radical politics. For Žižek, an essential radical praxis is not exhausted in resistance, rather it presupposes the drastic re-articulation of existent socio-symbolic relations through the interference of a real act (Ibid., p. 172). Only an act that ruptures the fantasmatic consistency of the subject and causes an ephemeral disruption of the Other is considered as a genuine ethical act. Žižek links the act to the death drive and borrows from *Seminar VII* Lacan's example of Antigone, as the heroic figure and the emblem of an ethical act. Stavrakakis objects to the use of Antigone as the supreme ethical exemplar, inasmuch as she "can only function as a model for *radical* political action on the condition that she is stripped of her *radically* inhuman (anti-social and anti-political) desire." (Ibid., p. 173) Antigone comprises nothing but the core of another fantasy about the radical ethico-political act that needs to be traversed, as she does not constitute an emblem of the "non-subjective, non-intentional encounter with the real." (Ibid., p. 176).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. As Stavrakakis notes, In *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*, Žižek associates lack with the ethics of finitude or with the social as the terrain of "structural undecidability."

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>72</sup> In one of his few allusions to the term, Žižek notes: "We are within ideological space proper [...] the moment this content is functional with regard to some relation of social domination ('power', 'exploitation') in an inherently non-transparent way: the very logic of legitimising the relation of domination must remain concealed if it is to be effective." See Slavoj Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," *Mapping Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 1-33 (p. 8).

## Part I: Conclusion

The first part of this study explored the chronological unfolding of a narrativised theme: the relation between fascism and perverse types of sexuality. Theoretical works from social theory, psychoanalysis and political philosophy, elaborating issues on ideology, Nazism, fascism and totalitarianism, constituted the core of my endeavour to illustrate the habitual allusion to the problematic perverse glossary in their exegeses, traced from the early 1940s up to today.

For leftist views, perversion is something inherent to the logic of capitalist commodity. Taken by the Frankfurt School, this view frames fascism as a self-destructive perversion of rationalism in Western society. Due to repression or suppression of the natural instinct, perverse sexuality is materialised in authoritarian irrational non-sexual practices. This is best exemplified by the Nazi tortures. As part of the Freudian leftist view, Reich's narrative is close to the thought of the Frankfurt School. According to his narrative, fascism is grounded in the perverse expression of malformed biological instincts, which were previously subjected to capitalist repression.

But if the Freudian left saw in psychoanalysis a revolutionary thrust congruent with Marx's ideal, one cannot say the same about the orthodox Freudian interpretation of the fascist phenomenon. Conservative in its basis, Jones's narrative perceives fascism as a response to the rapid technological, scientific and social transformations of the Western world. The latter opens a way to perverse regressions that destabilise the Oedipal basis of society. More recently, Chasseuget-Smirgel seems to agree with this view. She interprets Nazism as an example of the Sadean obliteration of the paternal law of society, whereas for Theweleit it is more the maternal imago at the epicentre of this obliteration. The fascists' male dominant vision is a response to the odium of the maternal body with which they are perversely fused.

Finally, the Lacanians abandoned pre-Oedipal-centred arguments by incorporating in their contemplation the role of factors such as the real and *jouissance*. MacCannell proposes a perverse relation of fascism to *jouissance* with a catastrophic impact on traditional ethics of the good, whereas Žižek sees perverse elements percolating various aspects of ideology and 'totalitarianism', fascism and Nazism.

My intention, through this critical overview, was to clarify the multitude of theoretical configurations that operates in narratives that, either conspicuously or between the lines, associate fascism with the category of perversion. To that purpose, I tried to put across the inherent inconsistencies of each text, so that the thorny ramification of their arguments becomes lucid and set a discussion on the need to proceed to a novel scrutiny of the discursive conundrum that the casual approach of fascism through a perverse prism constitutes. What came forth was that, since fascist ideology was materialised as a historical phenomenon, a growing number of discourses entreated various theoretical ideas in order to provide an adequate explanation of this historical contingency.

From the early accounts of the exponents of the Frankfurt School and the psychoanalytic school to the works of contemporary thinkers in social theory, fascism was dissected in its diverse constituents. Still no representative account of fascist ideology has been produced, yet a common sediment that remains after different types of theoretical distillation of the phenomenon is a link to perverse features. An underlying sadomasochistic structure, a sadistic subversion of the paternal law or the obliteration of the feminine body, a variation of Sadean morality, an ideological product of perverse disavowal are some of the ideas blended in the melting pot of fascism.

Having questioned each of these ideas, the following part of my elaboration will cast a shadow over this extensive 'perversification' of fascism that goes through psychoanalysis. This enables me to revise suggestions articulated from within the field of psychoanalysis and proceed to a novel theorisation of perversion.

## **PART II**

### **Discourse**

## Introduction:

### The Domination of the Fascist and the Sadean Master<sup>1</sup>

Lacanian concepts have been widely used within the field of ideology critique.<sup>2</sup> Yet, a basic problem with the implementation of psychoanalytic concepts for this purpose is that they can become, in themselves, a certain ideological narrative rather than offering the means for dissecting ideology. A Lacanian critique of ideology has to evolve from an extra-ideological position. In this regard, the analysis of the connection between fascism and perversion should elucidate an ideological phenomenon from a psychoanalytic perspective, without using the psychoanalytic theory on perversion as a way to defend and re-integrate views coming from either rightist or leftist perspectives. It may be that Žižek ingeniously rearticulates Marxist-Leninist critique *via* a Lacanian-Hegelian prism, but is his rhetoric extra-ideological, when, alongside original psychoanalytic suggestions, Žižek's work also sets a theoretical basis for a new radical left?<sup>3</sup> If the Lacanian corpus serves as the plinth of a Marxist resistance to capitalism, does this lead to an advancement of Lacanian theory or to a self-serving application of it? Before psychoanalytic insights on perversion are applied to specific ideological conditions, such as fascism, we have to answer the question of who benefits from this intersection. Is it psychoanalysis or ideological indoctrination?

The point of demarcation of the present analysis is the disengagement of psychoanalysis from a discursive contextualisation that follows a specific ideological orientation. It is not a critique of fascism. There is no vantage point in the present elaboration that allows a more sophisticated account of the phenomenon. It is more a critique of the implementation of psychoanalytic concepts as an unsurpassable bastion for such accounts. In other words, the aim here is not the articulation of a psychoanalytic explanation of the fascist phenomenon. The focus is more on the statements enunciated by narratives which inject perverse sexuality to fascism. These statements are analysed on the level of discourse, what organises the subject's reality.

In the present part, the notion of discourse that I implement coincides with its Lacanian conception that does not negate a reality outside discourse; rather it underpins the

inaccessibility of this reality, as it belongs to the level of the real. This is the discourse of the unconscious that only psychoanalysis can elucidate, as an intellectual tool that goes beyond discursive limits. If we move beyond discourse, where no ideology operates, psychoanalysis can bestow us with a capacious view of the factors that ground the association of fascism with the category of perversion. Such a linkage is inadequate in explicating the fascist phenomenon, as far as its ideological parameters and its barbaric practices are concerned.

There is a common denominator behind fascist ideology and its historical atrocities that has to be re-examined; this is the transcendence of a certain limit, an excess that cannot be captured by existing narratives. But what is this excess and what is its status? To interpret it as a deviation from the norm seems to favour the use of negative terms (perversion is one of them), regardless of whether one alludes to sexuality or socio-political issues. In the space of the present writing, I discuss the limits that the pervert and the fascist appear to surpass, challenging the idea of deviation. In this vein, the contradiction and the impasse of identifying the fascist with the pervert is exposed, as a critique of the narratives that draw this association. Behind contradiction, the troublesome character of the Lacanian real, the unsymbolisable kernel of our subjectivity, as Žižek characteristically says, is brought forth in an attempt to increase awareness of the numerous ways the real intervenes in the individual and collective life of the subject.<sup>4</sup> The real that lies under symbolic reality obstructs a singular account of historical phenomena, revealing the impossible and the risks of capturing and fully positivising it.

This analytic effort underscores a central argument: rigid use and common references to psychoanalytic ideas, which have not yet reached a certain consensus and remain highly contentious and intricate, as is the case for the theory on perversion, tend to bewilder instead of explicate socio-political phenomena. Arguments woven within the psychoanalytic discourse fail to capture the picture of fascism, inasmuch as they rest on the ambiguity which surrounds the explanations of perversion. Psychoanalysis, despite its highly systematic and explanatory insights regarding neurosis and psychosis, has not been so far effective in formulating an unequivocal account of perversion. Moral implications, the lack of a standard clinical picture and the ubiquitous presence of so-



called perverse traits in non-perverse psychic structures explain partially the complexity that surrounds the notion of perversion.

It is hard not to wonder if 'perverse', as a designation in clinical, political, cultural or even psychoanalytic discourse, serves as a substitute for the Lacanian notion of the real: the space of impossible truth. The term 'perverse' appears as a signifier for any parasitic condition that escapes firm symbolic meaning. But considering that the quintessence of subjectivity, namely desire, is founded in a lack ungraspable by signification, then 'perverse' designates the status of all desiring subjects. In fact, one of the shrewdest psychoanalytic observations is that desire emanates from infantile 'perverse' sexuality. Judith Feher-Gurewicz notes the adjacency between desire and perversion:

In Lacan's view, perversion is akin to desire per se. For him, as for Freud, human desire itself is perverse, insofar as it defies the laws of adaptation and survival found in the animal world.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to a common analytic conception, the category of perversion bears on the excessive element of sexuality which escapes the phallic function and cannot be incorporated into symbolic reality. To that effect, perversion is considered transgressive of coded sexual behaviours that serve normative or reproductive purposes.

Had not the Oedipal organisation of desire gained a certain privileged status in modern society, that is the sovereignty of the phallic constitution of desire, excess might have come under a different label. Psychoanalysis shares the responsibility for this, together with the major institutions of society. Consequently, any act that deviates from this Oedipal organising pattern receives the perverse designation, just to mark the supremacy of the organisation and a denouncement of any element which is not part of it; any element that fails to undergo repression. One problem with this definition of perversion, following a strict Oedipal logic, is that so-called perverse scenarios operate in the fantasies and the language of all subjects. Even if the subject does not act them out, that is to say, she does not perform these scenarios within a symbolic space, the phantasmagoria of perverse sexual acts fuels desire and dramatises an excessive, yet pleasurable enjoyment, in so long as it remains in fantasy.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Parts from the following chapters can also be found in Antonios Vadolas, “The Perverse Domination of the Fascist and the Sadean Master” in *Perversion: Psychoanalytic Perspectives, Perspectives on Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Dany Nobus and Lisa Downing (London and New York: Karnac, 2006), pp. 187-215.

<sup>2</sup> The works of Laclau and Slavoj Žižek exemplify some of the ways psychoanalysis has been used for the critique of ideology.

<sup>3</sup> See for example two characteristic books from Žižek’s prolific body of work: *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000) and *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> See Judith Feher-Gurewich, “A Lacanian Approach to the Logic of Perversion,” *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 191-207 (pp. 191-192).

## 5. Power and Mastery through the Lacanian Prism

### 5.1 The Conflux of Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Discourse Analysis

So far in the present study, my allusions to the notion of discourse were related to the theoretical framework that shaped the production of each narrative included in my critique. For the remaining parts, my analysis revolves around the logic of discourse as conceived by Lacan and its paradigmatic application into socio-political analysis by researchers such as Stavrakakis and Laclau (especially in his late work). The latter's reading of hegemony set the basis for the implementation of Lacanian theory in discourse analysis.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe developed a discourse theory that expands the frame of discourse analysis, so that it embraces all social practices and elucidates the formation of social systems and subjective identities.<sup>1</sup> This initiated an unbroken effort to apply discourse analysis to the field of social research in a highly comprehensive and systematic way, integrating components from Marxism, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis and revising previous suggestions. Specifically, Laclau and Mouffe abandoned the dichotomy between the discursive and the non-discursive, while criticising Foucault for retaining it, in spite of its inconsistency. Such a dichotomy is insubstantial or else it is possible only as the product of articulation within a discursive frame. This is because "every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence."<sup>2</sup> Discourse is a "differential and structured system of positions," that is, it involves the articulation of meanings comprised by linguistic and non-linguistic elements.<sup>3</sup> Language is entrenched in practices and materiality, so it is not possible to separate them, but only to perceive them as strongly interlaced. Moreover, there is strong homology between discursivity and the incomplete character of social systems. All systems of meaningful practice rely upon discursive exteriors that partially constitute such orders, while potentially subverting them.<sup>4</sup>

Meanings have a relational character, bound to the ellipsis of a stable centre and the impossibility of obtaining a society perceived "as a sutured and self-defined totality."<sup>5</sup> If

the latter was possible, identities would achieve fixity, belonging to a single discursive frame, and conflict would concern different elements of the same discourse.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, social meanings attributed to any objects and practices are subject to context and contingency. The discontinuity imposed by the lack of any fixity of meaning founds the political terrain, enabling a permanent renegotiation and re-creation of social meanings.<sup>7</sup> The field of politics acquires a possible and necessary character through the ongoing challenging of the hegemonic status of meanings that relatively prevailed in preceding political schemata. Meanings are re-articulated in novel signifying sequences, as part of a dialectics and rhetoric that defends their validity and extends their social acceptance.<sup>8</sup> For Laclau and Mouffe, a radical democratic ideal emerges from the persistent “politicization and re-politicization of the social, as well as the institution of more egalitarian and progressive identities and relations.”<sup>9</sup>

Already in their early elaboration of discourse, Laclau and Mouffe have recourse to Lacanian theory: they conceptualise discursivity as being dominated by *nodal points* that coincide with Lacan’s *points de capiton*, that is, the signifiers, the words that form a knot of relatively definite meanings in discourse and establish identity:

The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be *a* meaning. If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a *society*, the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object. Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, *nodal points*. (Lacan has insisted on these partial fixations through his concept of *points de capiton*, that is, of privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of the signifying chain. This limitation of the productivity of the signifying chain establishes the positions that make predication possible – a discourse incapable of generating any fixity of meaning is the discourse of the psychotic).<sup>10</sup>

Laclau and Mouffe were the first to accentuate the theoretical valence of the *point de capiton* (the ‘quilting’ point) that Žižek expanded later in his work.<sup>11</sup> As signifiers float within a certain discursive context, losing their traditional meaning, a master signifier

intercedes providing a certain point of fixation that redefines the identity of signifiers within the signifying chain.

Laclau's gradual congruence with the Lacanian cogito is amply indebted to his constructive dialogues with Slavoj Žižek. After Žižek's critique of the view of antagonism as originating in incompatible subject positions, Laclau reformulated the discourse theory initially developed in *Hegemony*. The early conception of antagonistic relations, according to Žižek's critique, entails the expectation of their ultimate transcendence following a final emancipatory goal, such as the deposing of the 'capitalist' by the 'proletarian':

Where here is the ideological illusion proper to the subject-position? It lies precisely in the fact that it is the 'capitalist', this external enemy, who is preventing me from achieving an identity with myself: the illusion is that after the eventual annihilation of the antagonistic enemy, I will finally abolish the antagonism and arrive at an identity with myself.<sup>12</sup>

Laclau and Mouffe's argument fails to discern that what is negated in social antagonism is always-already negated; what social antagonism negates is not the fullness of subjectivity, but the division of the subject that generates her efforts and expectations to obtain a complete identity through identificatory acts.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory succumbs to the ideological illusion of completing identity through the enemy's defeat. Yet the rival other stands for nothing else than the "externalization" of the subject's insurmountable division ("auto-negativity").<sup>14</sup>

Stavrakakis delineates the shifts in Laclau's theorisation, underscoring its significance for bringing Lacanian psychoanalysis to discourse theory.<sup>15</sup> The first major change marks a departure from the conception of subjectivity as different subject-positions, in *Hegemony*, to the conception of the subject as lack, in *New Reflections*.<sup>16</sup> This follows from the acceptance of the constitutive division that characterises subjectivity and its implications for the theory of identity. It is because of this fundamental and inerasable lack of identity that the subject experiences the need to identify with something. Such a theorisation of identity as a process of identifications opens the possibility of reflecting on the bond between the subjective and the objective domain.<sup>17</sup> As Stavrakakis notes, the

lacking status of the subject that constitutes her as such comes to occupy the space of where her essence was previously situated. The strength of Lacanian psychoanalysis lies in the fact that it is not inscribed in an essentialist frame that reduces the social to the individual level; this is what makes possible the convergence of psychoanalysis and socio-political analysis, considering that only part of the subject's lack can be ephemerally "filled with socio-political objects of identification."<sup>18</sup> The focus of psychoanalysis is not only the void that marks the lacking status of the subject, but also what covers this void and accounts for its endless reproduction. In Stavrakakis' words:

Lacanian theory is equally concerned with the objective level, the level of the object of identification per se (Lacanian categories such as the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary encompass the whole of human experience and not only the so-called "subjective" level, and, of course, concepts such as fantasy, the Other and object petit a display thoroughly "objective" logics without leading, however, to any kind of objectivism).<sup>19</sup>

In line with this view, my analysis focuses on subjective lack and 'objective' relations involved in mastering lack, always in relation to the question of fascism's pertinence to the category of perversion. For Lacan, the subject is a social subject from the moment of her constitution, when she emerges in the field of the Other. By dissecting the ways discourse affects the subject and its catalytic role in the formation of inter-subjective ties, as it enables desire to circulate, Lacanian psychoanalysis and discourse theory coincide. Yet, this does not mean that the irreconcilable relation of psychoanalysis to discourse theory is dissolved, as Homer notes; in his view, the conflux of the two fields is nothing more than "a mere displacement."<sup>20</sup>

Whether Lacanian psychoanalysis and discourse theory can ideally converge is an ongoing debate and even if the issue remains unresolved, there are fruitful discussions emerging from it. It may be that Laclau first opened this new dimension of Lacanian psychoanalysis in his discourse analysis, yet through the critical suggestions of names such as Žižek, Homer and Stavrakakis, psychoanalytic ideas in social research have evolved. Rather than a reflexive application of Lacanian theory, my analysis encompasses these critical views, aware of the new possibilities and the limitations of

applying psychoanalysis into the field of socio-political research. In spite of the common ground with Laclau, my implementation of the Lacanian discourse also marks a discrepancy with his approach, especially at its early stage in *Hegemony*. In this vein, I recognise the importance of the notion of the *point de capiton* (or the master signifier), yet my priority is set on the analytical thrust of notions such as the *object a*, the phallus and the quintessential Lacanian notion of *jouissance*, which do not form the basic glossary for Laclau. For example, Glynos and Stavrakakis argued that Laclau's work does not engage with the category of *jouissance*, while Žižek has demonstrated its essential role in ideology and politics, discussing phenomena of fundamentalism and racism or the Nazi fantasy.<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, in exploring the link between fascism and perversion, my emphasis is laid on the concept of *jouissance* and desire (the real and the symbolic). This means that the question of the real is there, like in Laclau, but it is linked to the enjoyment lost forever, as the main differentiating factor between subjective positions. The perverse position and the fascist position are two nominal divisions that suggest a different type of enjoyment from the ordinary 'normal' subject. Of course, *jouissance* itself cannot be divided; precisely because it escapes any attempt for a comprehensive symbolic classification and representation. Yet *jouissance* divides our symbolic categories and this is manifest also in psychoanalysis, since it is our access to real *jouissance* that determines our position as a neurotic, pervert or psychotic. One can privilege imaginary, symbolic or real means in the acquisition of *jouissance*, reflecting his/her structure.

Based on these 'divisions of enjoyment', I develop my critique, asking whether the fascist follows the pervert's pathway to the gaining of *jouissance*. If discourse regulates *jouissance*, it is a valuable tool for analysing socio-political concepts such as ideology and power in relation to the clinical designation of perversion. Glynos and Stavrakakis note:

Given that our own *jouissance* is structured around how we think the Other takes its *jouissance*, and given that *jouissance* sustains our public official discourse, we immediately see the significance of categories. From this perspective, it is possible to articulate political theory with praxis by linking the critique of ideological discourse with an ethico-political shift that parallels the Lacanian 'crossing of the social fantasy'.<sup>22</sup>

My perspective coincides with Glynos and Stavrakakis's application of Lacanian theory into socio-political analysis, emphasising the implications of the symbolic and the real register, that is, the level of the signifier and the level of *jouissance*, respectively. Rather than a drastic dissymmetry, however, Laclau aligns himself with Glynos and Stavrakakis' approach, despite their criticism.<sup>23</sup> He reiterates the main points of his theory of hegemony that accentuate the impossibility of any complete symbolic identification or of an object that could fill the constitutive lack of the subject. There is no definite hegemonic link between "the signifier of fullness and the various objects incarnating it," because of the incommensurability of the anticipated *jouissance* and the one which is achieved.<sup>24</sup>

Laclau underlines the parallel flowing of his ideas to those of Glynos and Stavrakakis, noting that his understanding of discourse is not that of "something restricted to the linguistic conceived in its narrow sense, but a relational complex of which enjoyment is a constitutive element."<sup>25</sup> Within this discursive frame that I contoured here with regard to its inventive and fluid character, its restrictions and contradictions, I develop my own psychoanalytic suggestions in the field of socio-political analysis.

## **5.2 The Discursive Framework of Power**

This chapter's discussion commences with an exploration of the notion of power and its implications for defining the fascist and the perverse position in discourse. Is it a shared position the two terms occupy? If so, to what extent power relations that obviously characterise fascism as an ideology, resonate perverse relations? What is at stake is the role of perversion, as an operative category, in the understanding of socio-political conditions, as well as in the deciphering of the enigma of subjectivity. The concept of power may be the crux of political science, yet by no means is conspicuous or given that does not need to be equivocally defined. Therefore, a clarification of the notion of power is indispensable.

Nevertheless, a recollection of the political, philosophical and sociological accounts of the notion, over the years, would require a separate research effort. In the space of the



present analysis, a number of theoretical remarks about power aim to provide an overview of its basic conceptualisations, demonstrating that power is neither self-evident nor a sheer object of empirical investigation. From a commonsensical perspective, the reins of power are formally held by official state institutions and authority figures. But a reference to someone's power always involves his/her relation with another term. This indicates that power is inscribed within the discursive field of intersubjective communication, something that reflects its relational hypostasis. A communicative act entails an underlying power relation. For this reason, I focus on Michel Foucault's theorisation about discourse and power, before developing a Lacanian conceptualisation of the two interrelated notions.

Early attempts to define the term are found in Aristotle's *Politics* and centuries later in the work of Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke.<sup>26</sup> With the decline of the great empires, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the emergence of modern national states, the notion of power obtained a restored interest for theorists. The germinal sociological domain of the time forwarded a conception of power as someone's ability to inflict his/her will on others, in spite of any form of resistance.

According to Weber, "Power (*Macht*) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests."<sup>27</sup> In this regard, one exercises power by manoeuvring controlling stipulations that may involve coercion or various threats towards others who are therefore forced to succumb to his will, despite their own opposing interests. Weber also drew a distinction between *Macht* (power) and *Herrschaft* (domination, authority).<sup>28</sup> Domination entails a minimum of compliance and voluntarism, in a social milieu of myopically obeying commands. Weber's definition is essential, bringing power to its scientific exploration and its relation to formal organisations. He produced a graspable and inclusive account of power, yet his definition of the latter is rather general.<sup>29</sup>

Even after Weber's original work, analyses of the notion of power remained sporadic until the 1960s, when the introduction of Marxist thought to academic circles initiated a fervent scrutiny of power phenomena.<sup>30</sup> It was in this decade and the 1970s that Foucault became arguably the most influential name in the philosophical elaboration of power, considering the pervasiveness of the term in his momentous body of work.

Exploring the surfacing of ‘disciplinary society’ in modern society, Foucault fabricates an extensive theorisation of power, with ample applications.<sup>31</sup> He analyses the discursive channels that produce power, espousing a post-structural prism that does not obey a materialist logic. Power is not materialised as a commodity, which one can acquire, accumulate or dispense. Rather it has an omnipresent, impersonal and dislocated character, impossible to circumscribe and centre it within a certain context.

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And ‘Power’, in so far as it is permanent, repetitious, inert and self-reproducing is simply the overall effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on all of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement.<sup>32</sup>

Foucault contemplated power as a camouflaged effect of discourse; Rather than being imposed over subjects, power is disseminated and permeates subjectivity through the composite arteries of discourse. Power regulates the complex network of human relations, as a mechanism of submission and domination that imbues every aspect of human life that has to do with overcoming any type of resistance.<sup>33</sup> Power does not inhere to particular subjects of a certain superior standing; rather it is the artefact of deeds and interactions (shaped by discourse) that endow subjects with authority. Their relation to other subjects is what ascertains their power.

One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society.<sup>34</sup>

Foucault departs from traditional juridical views of power as being fundamentally negative, limiting or repressive.<sup>35</sup> His model conceptualises power as being essentially productive, regardless of any restrictive or prohibitive forms it may take. In this regard, it produces the subject’s behaviour, sentiment, cognition and ultimately subjectivity itself.<sup>36</sup> It guides the subject as to what identity, moral code, manners and so on she must assume. For that to be effective, power presents ‘truth’ in various frames which enable the subject to make some sense of her living. Institutions founded by discourse support a body of

knowledge that produces power, that is to say, it has an effect on the perception, the cogito and the performance of the subject.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Foucault recognises a knowledgeable notion of power, since it is not ascribed to a natural source, but it is symbolically constructed.

Solid and shared systems of knowledge are woven around beliefs that produce and sustain power. The stronger the embracing of the validity and verisimilitude of the ideas promoted by belief systems, the more rigid and dominative their effect is. Because they consolidate everyday, commonplace knowledge, by means of providing a figurative and a corporeal frame to the representatives of this knowledge.<sup>38</sup> The ideas of these systems of knowledge appear to represent absolute 'truths', acquiring a normalizing valence that regulates and dominates the subject's cogito, standpoint and praxis. The efficacy of power is augmented and reproduced, as long as subjects in such a way encompass 'truth' in their rhetoric or practices that willingly abide by self-discipline. Thus, power operates anytime, anyplace through everyday actions that reproduce discursive hegemony.

The discursive constitution of power is manifested through its regulative control over the subject's body and soul. According to Foucault's famous statement, "Power is the effect and instrument of political anatomy. The soul is the prison of the body."<sup>39</sup> In a reversal of the typical theological contemplation, it is the soul that dominates the body as the outcome of discourse, rather than the other way around. The body is subjected to the prevalent discursive doctrine of power, so perversion, for instance, constitutes a category that refers to a deviation from prevalent discourses which determine normative sexual practices. Knowledge, produced by discourse, defines normative and deviant behaviour, legitimate and illicit actions, moral and depraved attitudes and so on.

No distinction operates between subjects who receive the effects of power and subjects who do not. Foucault views power as pervasive and ingrained in all subjective interactions based on language, without a distinction between loci of power and non-power. Everyone inscribed within a certain discursive context is subjugated to the effects of power, reproducing and expanding them through their daily actions. The multiple effects of power may appear as enduring, but, in reality, they are perpetuated, as long as the subject's praxes reproduce the 'truthful' knowledge of a dominant discourse. Therefore, power does not have an obdurate soundness, since another discourse that

envelops 'truth' may appear to question it. This is why power cannot be concretised nor reduced to any objectifiable entity, but rather manifests itself as a terrain of struggle.

Nevertheless, Foucault's conceptualisation of power as a ubiquitous discursive force bears upon a common criticism that questions its explanatory thrust.<sup>40</sup> If power pervades and shapes all social relations, then its dominative effects are extended even to rhetoric and praxes produced within a liberating discursive frame that endorses humanistic credos about emancipation.<sup>41</sup> Foucault's cogitation differs from theories that stress economic factors, when defining power. Yet, he disregards the dynamics of intersubjective communication that escapes the boundaries of discourse and the limits of language. In other words, Foucault neglects the subject of the unconscious; rather he reduces the subject to knowledgeable and articulated stipulations. However, subjectivity, due to its unconscious constitution, transcends the symbolic space of language and therefore power. In the following section, power is related to this unconscious dimension, through its psychoanalytic scrutiny.

### **5.3 The Circuit of Power**

Power may be a fundamental concept in the field of politics and ideology, yet in psychoanalysis the absence of any elaboration of the concept, even from 'psycho-political' works, is striking. The only name, for whom power formed a pivotal axis for his psychoanalytic theory, is that of Alfred Adler.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, Adler used the term as an alternative to Freud's centrality of sexuality, limiting power to complexes of superiority and inferiority. Therefore, a more thorough and prismatic elaboration is required, in line with contemporary psychoanalytic views.

If we dissect the rudimentary elements that sustain ideological modes of power, we can elucidate the unconscious economy that determines their hegemony and expose any possible connection with existing clinical categories. With regard to this hypothesis, the aim of my psychoanalytic discussion of power, in the present and the subsequent sections, is to excavate its role in politics and particular ideological contexts, such as fascism, and reveal any links to perversion.

My intention is not to dismiss previous accounts, but shed light on a different dimension of power that moves away from traditional accounts, encompassing the psychoanalytic dimension. Psychoanalysis can illuminate the closed circuits that power produces, *a propos* of the divided subject, enmeshed in power networks. Despite the overall ellipsis of an extensive psychoanalytic account of power, a Lacanian conceptualisation of the term is feasible. There is substantial theoretical resourcefulness in Lacan's ideas on discourse that may further elucidate some basic aspects of power, i.e. its intersubjective and relational hypostasis.

From a psychoanalytic angle, the closest one can get to the notion of power is through exploring the role of the phallus, as what traditionally represents authority and dominance in the socio-symbolic register. It may be that power has been long associated with so-called phallic objects (e.g. sceptres), but, in reality, this perception is misconceiving for at least two reasons. First, it continues to misconstrue the phallus as what corresponds to the male copulatory organ.<sup>43</sup> Second, phallic symbols cannot capture the essence of symbolic power, that is its ubiquitous and non-visible status.

As an alternative to this unproductive view of the phallus, Lacan's theorisation about the latter links the phallus primarily to the symbolic, as the signifier of lack.<sup>44</sup> It is the signifier which on the level of discourse acquires a unitary value and installs the symbolic register for the subject. In this manner, the phallus is linked to mastery, given that the unitary function of the (phallic) signifier is assumed by the master signifier ( $S_1$ ) which represents the subject as subject.<sup>45</sup> Lacan delineates the relation of the phallus to the  $S_1$  in *Seminar XX*, where he elaborates the famous formulas on sexuation. He argues that the phallus is "incarnated in the  $S_1$ , which of, all the signifiers, is the signifier for which there is no signified, and which, with respect to meaning (*sens*), symbolizes the failure thereof."<sup>46</sup> The phallus substantiates the master signifier, in such a way that identification with the phallic signifier also suggests identification with the  $S_1$ . The phallus is the primary signifier that institutes and together with the master signifier, as its counterpart, hierarchises the socio-symbolic order. In this regard, power inheres to the hegemonic status of the phallic/master signifiers. The phallic signifier *qua*  $S_1$  organises and controls the signifying process, signs and concepts, in tune with the function of the master signifier.

The acceptance of the phallic signifier as the master regulates an essential symbolic process, insofar as the subject's constitution depends on her symbolic identification with the signifier of the symbolic father's authority, namely the paternal phallus or the Name-of-the-Father. The  $S_1$  is concomitant with the role of the Name-of-the-Father – the signifier of lack  $S(\emptyset)$  – where the subject is alienated.<sup>47</sup> According to Fink, “the  $S(\emptyset)$  stands in for a signifier that is neither ready-made nor *prêt à porter*, and represents the forging of a new master signifier.”<sup>48</sup> Only then, the subject accepts the law of the signifier (the Law), the representative of which is considered to be the father. This symbolic process enables the subject to develop her identity, as symbolic order and meaning acquire fixed status only in relation to the phallus and its synergy with the  $S_1$  and the Name-of-the-Father.<sup>49</sup>

According to Philip Hill, power relations proceed from the early relationship between the infant and its mother.<sup>50</sup> There is a foundational dissymmetry in this dyadic relationship that sets the basis for the inequalities of power later in life. The infant is powerless in relation to the speaking mother, whose possession of language suggests a superior powerful position. She subjects the powerless infant to her desires and demands, deriving her enjoyment from it. It is an early master-slave dialectic which is constitutive of subjectivity, since only through this subjugation to the (m)Other's power (the production of meaning through the signifiers) the subject can assume her sexual identity.<sup>51</sup> The child has to enter the socio-symbolic order, to become an ‘effect of the signifier’, and follow the laws that organise it. The signifier sets up power relations, insofar as we all have to subordinate ourselves and sacrifice the early imaginary unity with the mother, as we enter the symbolic.

The emergence of the subject marks the prime moment of the exercise of power and this is the power of the Law. The symbolic father, the Name-of-the-Father, is the agent of Law's power, as “the paternal metaphor demands the sacrifice of *jouissance*,” according to Stavrakakis.<sup>52</sup> The ostracism of *jouissance* (castration) instates the signifier, giving rise to the subject and engendering the anticipation of fullness (lost forever). In this context, castration is an “act of power.”<sup>53</sup> It inscribes a lack and, concomitantly, generates desire. The symbolic basis of power differs from its imaginary inscription that encourages antagonism and the obliteration of the other. It imposes the order of a master or else the

field of the Other that makes social coexistence possible. The phallic signifier *qua*  $S_1$  is there to serve the desire to desire, which is also the source of power, inasmuch as the desideratum emerges as an initial elocution: “*I wish...*”

Thus, subjectivity and the formation of identity are contingent on the power the signifier imposes over the subject.<sup>54</sup> In this regard, power refers to a symbolic process and inheres to the signifier. The master, as the subject who embodies the signifier, proffers his body and comes under the aegis of the signifier. He links his existence to the signifier ‘One’, what, according to Lacan, stands for the signifying order.<sup>55</sup> The phallus comes to represent the wholeness of being, ‘the One’ and the power that controls the excess (the drive) of desire. This reveals the power of the signifier, since it is through its unifying conformation that the master procures the mastery over his body. Nevertheless, the mastery of desire is elusive, inasmuch as it requires the repudiation of *jouissance*, namely the excess that marks the division of the subject (precisely what the master tries to conceal). Indeed, according to Lacan’s elaboration of the master’s discourse, as I will elaborate later in this part, *jouissance* is assigned to the side of the slave. A homeostatic status of desire’s satisfaction should be maintained, which means any excess is disallowed.

In this vein, the  $S_1$  concurring with the phallus, forms the signifier of power, that is, the control of the satisfaction of desire. Phallus and mastery are tightly interlaced and condensed into a symbolic segment, the primary signifier. What accentuates the common operation of the phallus and the  $S_1$  is that they appear to enfold the ‘truth’ of the subject’s existence, regardless of the ellipsis of any supreme guarantor of their truthful status. This means that the supremacy of the phallic/master signifier is totally arbitrary and the same is applied to its power. Following Lacan’s elaboration on the master signifier, in the late 1960s and the 1970s, the  $S_1$  is nonsensical and meaningless; it is only through its relation to other signifiers ( $S_2$ ) that acquires its function in the signifying chain.<sup>56</sup>

The  $S_1$  has to be in force for meaning to be produced, otherwise  $S_2$ s are unpinned and disorganised. In that sense, the phallus as the  $S_1$  is also the primary *point de capiton*. Inasmuch as symbolic communication suggests a metonymic slithering in the realm of the signifiers, trying to master lack, the phallus becomes the fundamental anchoring point that pins the endless circulation of the subject in the signifying chain.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the *points de capiton* constitute moments of fixity in discourse, functioning as the ‘signifieds’ that

make discourse meaningful for the subject. By means of being repressed or 'veiled', the phallus operates in discourse and makes signification possible, as it is the 'signified' that lies behind all signifiers.<sup>58</sup> The signification of the phallus does not mark only lack and the desire to fill it, but also the very fullness of being. As the primary *point de caption* and  $S_1$ , the phallus is the signifier that stands for completeness and unity; yet, at the same time, it represents the ellipsis of those qualities.

Power cannot be placed outside discourse, since it always requires two terms; it reveals itself in a relational manner, as we saw in Foucault earlier. The master/phallic signifier is dominant, as long as it produces  $S_2$ , knowledge. The prioritised pre-eminence of  $S_1$  accounts for all power relations, since knowledge, roles and identities in society are shaped and organised by the sovereignty of the master signifier(s). It is more appropriate to speak about identification, rather than identities, that may involve either an image or a signifier.<sup>59</sup> As such, identifications are always incomplete, they are failed attempts to recover the pre-symbolic fullness of being. The implications for politics would be a system to dwell in the place of the master signifier, deriving its power and domination from the latter. Each political system wishes to establish a universal order, but of course this is an impossible task, as long as this wish lies in a particular master signifier(s), functioning as the phallus for this system.

As Žižek notes, the phallic function obeys the logic of an oxymoron, since it is what sets the limit in the symbolic order and, at the same time, lays the conditions for its transgression.<sup>60</sup> In Lacan's formula of sexuation, the phallus represents the castration of the Other, the Other as lacking. In Žižek's words, "the Phi, the signifier of the phallic power, phallus in its fascinating presence, merely gives body to the impotence/inconsistency of the Other."<sup>61</sup> The signifier of the Other's castration, the  $\$$ , marks the impossibility of a complete Other. What is more, the phallus binds this impossibility to an exception, a position which absconds castration and thus abides by no prohibition to *jouissance*. Excessive *jouissance* is prohibited by the phallus, yet its unfeasible locus is constituted by the phallic presence as what escapes it. This 'beyond' is best embodied by the primordial father and the feminine position, as two exceptions which affirm the rule, namely the phallic function.<sup>62</sup> Power is determined by the phallic



limit (embodied by the master) and its prohibited transgression (embodied by the woman and the primordial father).

As Žižek applies Lacan's logic of sexuation to the field of power, he perceives public power as a terrain of phallic function that enmeshes the subject in a paradoxical condition: the subject identifies with the symbolic locus of power, namely, the Law of its phallic function, but this identification remains fractional, inasmuch as the subject sets forth an exception to its universality, by contravening the Law.<sup>63</sup> Conversely, public power dilutes the universal propel of the phallus, by forwarding a complete identification with the Law, thus imposing the latter as limit. The phallic supremacy of the master signifier weaves the symbolic lining of power, but also its limit.

### 5.3.1 *The Role of Fantasy in Power*

The master's powerful position is not sustained through symbolic means solely. In order to conceal its paradoxical relation to the Law, power resorts to an imaginary agency that assists and supplements its symbolic architecture, considering that symbolic structures, such as the phallic/master signifier, are *ad definitionem* incomplete. The symbolic register is constituted by an excess which undergoes repression. The primordial father's excessive enjoyment, his omnipotent power, has to be renounced in order for effective signification to take place. Nevertheless, precisely because it is never abandoned, but is repressed instead, excess fosters fantasmatic scenarios about the fullness of being that goes beyond the finitude of the signifier.

The phallus as a signifier emanates from the repression of the excess of the father. Together with the primordial father, the woman is one of the names of the father which stands for excess.<sup>64</sup> But if woman subordinates her excessive *jouissance* to the domination of the master, namely, the domination of the phallus (she tries to relate *it* to the signifier, to find the words to denote it) the pervert does not sacrifice excess for the sake of the phallus. The pervert stands neither subservient to the signifier nor beyond the latter, he stands in both positions at the same time.

This draws him close to the position of the master, who also does not repudiate excess, inasmuch as he envisions a state of fullness. The differentiating boundary between the two is the phallus. The master aims to relate fullness to the phallic signifier; in a similar fashion, he demands woman to relate her *jouissance* to the signifier, whereas the pervert aims to reach fullness beyond the phallic signifier, since he is never identified with it as the master is. The pervert embodies the phallus as an imaginary object, so he does not search for it, while the master embodies the phallus as the signifier of castration, which means he always searches for the imaginary means to restore its supremacy. In this regard, the pervert's act undermines any type of authority, which explains the animosity he confronts in every masterful context.<sup>65</sup>

The search for fullness capsizes the idea that power belongs entirely to the symbolic order which may suggest that the more one is incorporated into the symbolic, the more power s/he acquires. Žižek takes a different angle, arguing that the exercise of power, more than relying on symbolic grounds, "it always involves a residue of the non-symbolized real (in the guise of the unfathomable *je ne sais quoi* which is supposed to account for the Master's charisma)."<sup>66</sup> According to this logic, power unfolds around a master, whose unconstrained enjoyment reflects the structural excess of the exercise of power in itself. In other words, the very identification with a symbolic system of power is what produces excess. The more one identifies with the phallic/master signifier, the more this produces an excess transgressive of the function of the signifier, approximating the real. Power breeds a real surfeit and tries to eradicate it, precisely by simulating it.<sup>67</sup>

My view is that the "total Master,"<sup>68</sup> who assumes this real surplus, constitutes a necessary fantasy for any power apparatus organised by master signifiers (thus, acquiring a phallic eminence). Male dominance, for example, can be interpreted as a system assisted by a fantasy of omnipotence. Only through this fantasmatic route, such a symbolic system can conceal its incomplete and vacant status and maintain the absolute value of the phallic  $S_1$ . This is what I consider as the fantasy of power, as far as it comprises a motive force for the subject who exercises power. Power seeps through all aspects of subjectivity, as Foucault argues, but it acquires meaning, only because there is a locus in the subject that remains devoid from symbolic meaning.<sup>69</sup> Power is structured and obtains meaning around something that does not exist. This empty place is occupied

by fantasy, which can be an ideological scheme, a perverse sexual scenario or anything that asseverates the recovering of an excessive prohibited enjoyment. This fantasmatic operation produces images of fascination or identification which set power relations in motion.

From a Freudian perspective, the origins of power rest in the subject's desire to recover the omnipotent narcissistic condition of the first year of life: the illusory unity between the infant and its mother who provided satisfaction to its needs. The desideratum's aim is to master the lack that carves the subject's early omnipotence. Lack emerges, after the first object cathexes, when separation occurs together with the realisation that there is a world external to the subject's body and not always responsive to her needs. This desideratum sustains power and vice versa, bringing fantasy into play.

Fantasy provides a stage for the fulfilment of desire. It augurs a condition where the lacking status of the Other is recanted, bringing 'back' the lost fullness, the limitless enjoyment of the Other. The fantasy of power is focused on the lost *jouissance* of the Other; what the Other lacks and remains incomplete. This is why power aims at recovering the *jouissance*, once belonged to the subject or the nation and was stolen by the Other, as Žižek has demonstrated.<sup>70</sup> The search for *jouissance* renders any relationship subject to power. Of course, fullness is something that fantasy creates, since the Other's locus is incomplete *ad definitionem*. The Other is constituted as lacking, inasmuch as it ensues from the castration of *jouissance*, its prohibition imposed by the law of the symbolic.

Thus, instead of filling the lack of the Other, fantasy veils it; it is an operation that does not complete the Other, but it is enough to constitute a defence against the castration of the latter and raise the illusory expectation of completion.<sup>71</sup> The fantasmatic stage is occupied by scenarios that configure the recuperation of the lost object of desire. But being nothing more than a stage, fantasy, in effect, marks the lack of the Other, precisely by screening the missing object. This means that fantasy serves desire by promising exactly its elimination. Rather than covering lack, it is more appropriate to say that fantasy makes lack more bearable by staging the object. The non-existence of the object can be tolerated, when fantasy veils it. As Stavrakakis notes, this fantasmatic operation has a total character, extensively regulated by the imaginary, that is, the register of subjectivity which is fundamentally absolute.<sup>72</sup>

The role of fantasy in mobilising the subject towards the retrieval of lost *jouissance* constitutes the motive force behind symbolic power. Since power relies on the synergy of the master signifier with the phallus, fantasy proffers a guarantee for the supremacy of the phallic/master signifier and fosters the illusory certainty about the efficacy of the symbolic to represent all. In other words, fantasy is there to disguise what the master fails to see: the hollowness of his signifier and thus, his power. A closed circuit is set up, between the phallus and its fantasmatic support that hypostatizes power formations.

Power does not come from everywhere nor it emanates from knowledge; yet it circulates and permeates intersubjective relations, as Foucault has suggested. Power is formative for all types of socio-political relations, but it cannot be personalised and included into a certain knowledgeable frame, because there is always something that escapes from its discursive locus. The power of the phallic position imposes and, at the same time, transcends the limit of the law. Power is a product of discourse, but rather than being an aftermath of knowledge, it seems to rise from what generates and controls this knowledge, namely, the master's phallic authority to whom institutions of knowledge conform. Knowledge is already subordinate to the power of the phallus, a signifier of absolute value, and its underlying fantasy.

All power relations are mediated by these two factors: the phallic master and the fantasy he promotes. In the sphere of the political, power produces ideologies as fantasmatic contexts for the possibility of a harmonious and prosperous society.<sup>73</sup> Stavrakakis notes:

Every political promise is supported by a reference to a lost state of harmony, unity and fullness, a reference to a pre-symbolic real which most political projects aspire to bring back.<sup>74</sup>

But given fantasy's dual character, there is a positive and a negative side in it. On the one hand, it constructs a content that promises the accomplishments of the goals of power (the impossible task of satisfying desire and completing the other) and on the other hand, it circumscribes a condition that thwarts power's aspirations. Ultimately, fantasy maintains lack by becoming "a simulacrum of what in the order of the signifier resists signification, that is to say the real, of what represents itself as lost."<sup>75</sup> In this regard, the subject implements fantasy to screen her ongoing desire of regaining her fullness lost

forever.<sup>76</sup> With fantasmatic omnipotence as its motivating fulcrum, power promises to fulfil what the subject cannot succeed in doing on her own: the erasure of her desiring status by providing the object.

Therefore, power occupies the two sides of the law, its normative moral side and its 'profane', 'perverse' (excessive) side. This explains the common view that sees every power mechanism as indistinguishable from corruption and deception, i.e. its 'dark side', in line with Žižek who demonstrated how the law sustains itself through illegal enjoyment.<sup>77</sup> More than a paranoid idea, it is a reflection of the fantasy's dualistic character, which nurtures power's subsistence. Sanctioning totalising and unrestricted fantasies, power goes beyond the normative arena, in the sphere of the 'perverse' and the 'obscene'. Due to this absolute fantasy, each power institution is aware of the other side of the law, but this has to be disguised. Hence, perversion appears as a designation for what exceeds the norm without having the authorisation or the eulogy of power.

Fabricating ideological fantasms around fullness, power exploits the desire of the subject and consequently the law of desire, since it imposes the latter as its limit, just to transgress it. Power transgresses the law precisely because it tries to evade, through fantasy, the limitations of the symbolic and the incomplete identification with the signifier (disregarding the fact that identification is never complete). What justifies and holds this evasion is the *object a*, that is, the remainder of lost *jouissance* which is screened in fantasy. Since the *object a* itself escapes symbolisation inscribed as either an excess or lack in the symbolic, power, which runs after the object, similarly exceeds the symbolic or engraves a lack in it. The *object a* is the residue of *jouissance*, which is left after the subject enters the symbolic function. In this fashion, the object of *jouissance* is an effect of the symbolic and it is there to coalesce the impossible prohibited real with desire. According to Stavrakakis, "the object performs a symbolic function (supporting the lacking fullness of the symbolic) by promising an imaginary mastery of the impossible real."<sup>78</sup> As long as the object subsumes the prohibited *jouissance* (the fullness of being) it lets desire circulate around it consistently.<sup>79</sup> But the *object a* and the phallus as the primary signifier without signified occupy two different positions in discourse. The phallus is inscribed in the symbolic (as  $S_1$ ), whereas the object has real (predominantly)

and imaginary qualities. For this reason, the two should not be equated, even though there is a complementary relationship between them.

Both the phallus and the object support desire by promising an encounter with the castrated real but the phallus is a promise in which the symbolic dimension is dominant (since it is seen as an answer to the disintegration of imaginary unity) while what is dominant in the object is the real *as lacking* (this is again the symbolic dimension) and being represented by an *imaginary* fullness.<sup>80</sup>

The phallus and the *object a* underscore the failure of signification: the first is an absolute, yet empty signifier, while the second is the unsymbolisable kernel that comes to occupy this very emptiness. In this regard, the real object resides in the space the phallus cannot symbolise; it is what undercuts the supremacy of the phallus, by posing a 'beyond'. At the same time, the *object a* is what substantiates the phallus, in its function as the signifier of castration.

What erroneously occurs in discourse, with implications for politics, is that the absolute value of the phallus is interchanged with the totality of the *object a*, a condition of regaining fullness. In this case, the phallus is reduced to an object, the imaginary phallus, as the effect of power. Namely, it sanctions the practices of power which suppose to aim towards a completed Other, by regaining the object. The problem is that the *object a* tackles a *jouissance* the phallus prohibits; thus, when power equates the two, it endorses a contradiction, an illusion that excessive enjoyment can be subordinated to the phallus.

In political power, when the object is linked with the phallus as its positivisation, an oxymoron emerges, insofar as the phallus functions as the signifier for lack and as such it must remain empty, in order for desire to circulate. By linking the signifier to various objects, power exploits desire and instates a symbolic-imaginary circuit which ultimately violates the law and legitimises the excesses of power. If we apply that to types of power held by liberalism, as the master signifier, one sees how this exploitation of desire operates, considering the perpetual manufacturing of products, around which social and personal welfare is enfolded.

After all, do not advertising and marketing commodify an imaginary process of elevating an ordinary object to the level of the real object?<sup>81</sup> A washing powder, a car, a

bank company and any other commodity acquire the status of objects which cause desire, promising its satisfaction once somebody attains them or, literally, purchases them, since the guarantee of desire's satisfaction in liberalism always comes with a price. The multitude of these fantasmatic apparitions of the object sustains the dominance of the master and the supremacy of the phallic signifier (liberal capitalism in this case). The excessive enjoyment associated with the object feeds the fantasy of delivering to the Other Its lost *jouissance* which can complete It and recant the division of subjectivity, forming a unity among subjects.<sup>82</sup>

The subject creates fantasmatic scenarios and sets them against the background of symbolic reality's limitations. Fantasy is a *sine qua non* for the subject's existence and the circulation of her desire; it comprises the motive force behind the desire to be desired. Power exploits this force, so that it instrumentalises desire or obtains the other's desire, through oppressive means. Even if I am not desired, the exercise of power enforces or better usurps the desire of the other. It is enough for the other to pretend s/he desires me, in order to fill me with *jouissance*.

Millions of people worshipped leaders of 'totalitarian' regimes, in a conflux of exaltation with feelings of rage and repulsion. One of the most chilling moments in recent history was the televised execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the last Romanian communist leader. By the end of 1989 and just four days prior to his death, Ceaușescu held a mass rally in front of the Central Committee building (euphemistically named as the House of People) that was propagandistically portrayed as an unprompted act of support towards his leadership, following an upheaval in the town Timișoara. As Ceaușescu hailed the thousands of people gathered, extolling the accomplishments of the socialist revolution, soon exultation turned to booing, while the wrath of the assembled audience erupted against their leader. This episode led to further turmoil and a generalised revolution that culminated in Ceaușescu's execution, after a three-day mock trial.

The incident marks the role of power in disguising the lack of desire. Power is 'totalitarian' and hubristic, when it comes down to its fantasmatic parameter. Ceaușescu's fantasy of power encompassed the arrogance of the primordial father in *Totem and Taboo*, which, ultimately, turned to become the hubris that drove the brothers of the horde to the cannibalistic slaughtering of their father.<sup>83</sup> In other words, his attempt to

embrace excess through his phallic mastery, ultimately failed. The ideological fantasy that Ceaușescu implemented cracked apart, revealing the Other's lack.<sup>84</sup>

The inevitable schism between the imaginary domination of the ego and symbolic difference is defied by the master signifier that sanctions ideological schemata of power on the premise of reconciling the two, imaginary bliss and symbolic emptiness. But the Other of language always remains incomplete, disturbing narcissism from finding completeness in an image. Nonetheless, fantasy always resists this painful realisation, in so long as it relies on an image perceived as durable and coherent.<sup>85</sup> This underlines the narcissistic status of power.

But within this narcissistic context, fantasy also nurtures an archaic fear: the fear of fragmentation, the mark of which is carried by the *object a*, as the missing object that disturbs narcissism. The fantasy of power seduces the ego of the subject, exploiting the profoundly narcissistic wish of instating a dominant and proficient ego. Power promises to satisfy desire *via* imaginary means (a fantasy of unification with the object of desire) that cultivate an image associated with an ultimate Good. The law secures the Good, which means every fantasy of power makes sure that pleasure is met, even when someone exceeds its limits, where s/he stumbles upon *jouissance*.

The fantasy of power touches the impossible realm of *jouissance*, but it does so from a safe vantage point. The fantasmatic certainty, provided by the master, builds a safe pleasurable milieu, where the subject can find her *self*, her ego as a varnished reflection. Otherwise, the space of *jouissance* unleashes uncertainty and anxiety, as one approximates the unknown and unrepresentable factor of the real. Even when one surpasses the boundaries of the symbolic, power makes sure that the intactness of the law remains. It offers a fantasmatic locus of identification for the subject that functions as certification for the desire of the Other. If you follow the Good of power, then you meet the desire of the Other, yet this is a cultural and knowledgeable Other.

To reiterate the main concept of this section, power has been theorised as the closed circuit enacted by the master signifier and the phallus, when the two converge in the dominant position in discourse. Assisted by fantasmatic scenarios, the master promises the regaining of the object the Other lacks. Power's implemented fantasy supports reality, since it regulates the relationship with the other as *object a*.<sup>86</sup> We are never unified with the



other, yet fantasy appears to suggest that unification is not impossible. This is the aspect of fantasy that power exploits, which inevitably leads to the exploitation of desire.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 107. They also note: “The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition.” Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe, and Žižek* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 91-92.

<sup>7</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> See Kate Nash, *Contemporary Political Sociology: Globalization, Politics, and Power* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 112.

<sup>11</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, “Beyond Discourse-Analysis,” in Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 249-260 (p. 251).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>15</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, “Laclau with Lacan: Comments on the Relation between Discourse Theory and Lacanian Psychoanalysis,” in *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume III: Society, Politics, Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 314-337 (p. 316).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> See Sean Homer, “Psychoanalysis, Representation, Politics: On the (Im)possibility of a Psychoanalytic Theory of Ideology?” *The Letter: Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis*, no. 7 (Summer, 1996): 97-109, as cited in Stavrakakis, “Laclau with Lacan: Comments on the Relation between Discourse Theory and Lacanian Psychoanalysis,” p. 316.

<sup>21</sup> See Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, “Encounters of the Real Kind: Sussing Out the Limits of Laclau’s Embrace of Lacan,” *Journal for Lacanian Studies* 1, no. 1(2003): 110-128.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>23</sup> See Ernesto Laclau, “Discourse and Jouissance: A Reply to Glynos and Stavrakakis,” *Journal for Lacanian Studies* 1, no. 2 (2003): 278-285.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>26</sup> See (in Greek) Νίκος Δεμερτζής, “Θεωρίες περί της Εξουσίας,” *Θεωρία και Κοινωνία*, 3 (1990): 23-47.

<sup>27</sup> See Talcott Parsons (ed.) *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. by A.R. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (London: W. Hodge, 1947), p. 152.

<sup>28</sup> See Max Weber, *Basic Concepts in Sociology*, trans. by H.P. Secher (London: Peter Owen, 1962).

<sup>29</sup> See Peter Michael Blau and W. Richard Scott, *Formal Organizations: A Comparative Approach* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 27-28.

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<sup>30</sup> See more on this topic in Max Black (ed.), *The Social Theories of Talcott Parsons: A Critical Examination* (London: Feffer and Simons, 1976) and Steven Lukes (ed.), *Power* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

<sup>32</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 93.

<sup>33</sup> See Νίκος Δεμερτζής, “Θεωρίες περί της Εξουσίας,” p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, p. 93.

<sup>35</sup> Foucault contrasts his conception of power with the juridico-discursive model of power. See Margaret A. McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, p. 194.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> For example, representatives of medical or religious institutions affirm the authority of the discourses that sustain these institutions.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> Nancy Fraser criticises Foucault’s theorisation about power as a “catchall concept” which thus explains everything and nothing at the same time. See the author’s work: *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 31-33.

<sup>41</sup> See Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 46.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Adler associates neurosis with the “Will-to-Power”. See Alfred Adler, *The Neurotic Constitution: Outlines of a Comparative Individualistic Psychology and Psychotherapy*, trans. by Bernard Glueck and John E. Lind (London: Kegan Paul, 1921).

<sup>43</sup> As Sean Homer notes, Freud, in his allusions to the phallus, links the term to the penis, as a bodily organ. Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> See Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 311-322.

<sup>45</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XVII: L’Envers de la Psychoanalyse, 1969-1979*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> See Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995) p. 75. Fink provides a succinct yet comprehensive definition of the terms used in this section (Ibid., p. 173):

$S_1$  – The master signifier or unary signifier. The signifier that commands or as commandment. When isolated, it subjugates the subject; when it is linked up with another signifier, subjectivation occurs, and a subject of/as meaning results.

$S(A)$  – Signifier of the lack in the Other. As the Other is incomplete, lack is an inherent characteristic of the Other, but that lack is not always apparent to the subject, and even when apparent, cannot always be named. Here we have a signifier that names that lack; it is the anchoring point of the entire symbolic order, related to every other signifier ( $S_2$ ), but foreclosed (as the Name-of the Father) in psychosis [...]

$\Phi$  – The phallus as signifier of desire or *jouissance*; not negativizable.

$\Phi_x$  – The phallic function, associated with symbolic castration: the alienation to which speaking beings are subjected due to their being in language.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 116. The woman’s position eludes the master signifier, contrary to man’s position which is always subjugated to a master signifier.

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<sup>49</sup> As Herzogenrath notes, “The *name of the father*, the *unary signifier*  $S_1$  and the *phallus* in Lacanian terminology are thus different ‘registers’ of one and the same function.” See Bernd Herzogenrath, *An Art of Desire: Reading Paul Auster* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), p. 45 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>50</sup> See Philip H. F. Hill, *Using Lacanian Clinical Technique: An Introduction* (London: Press for the Habilitation of Psychoanalysis, 2002), p. 81.

<sup>51</sup> Philip Hill views power relations as what hypostatise human existence, inasmuch as they inaugurate conflicts essential for the development of language, gender and sexual identity. In that sense, power relations also determine our quest for pleasure and enjoyment. It is in the neurotic’s fundamental fantasy, where enjoyment is related to the power of the Other to generate excitation in the subject. This is corroborative of the relation between the mother and the infant. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>52</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 42.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, p. 143.

<sup>56</sup> Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, p. 75.

<sup>57</sup> Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 57

<sup>58</sup> See Jonathan Scott Lee, *Jacques Lacan* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1990), pp. 66-67.

<sup>59</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> “[...] the paradox of the phallic function resides in a kind of short-circuit between the function and its meta-function: the phallic function coincides with its own self-limitation, with the setting up of a non-phallic exception.” See Slavoj Žižek, “Woman is One of the Names-of-the-Father, or How Not to Misread Lacan’s Formulas of Sexuation,” *Lacanian Ink* 10. Available from: < <http://www.lacan.com/zizwoman.htm> > [accessed 23 June 2006].

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> For Žižek, the exception of the feminine is best exemplified by “the Lady in courtly love.” Žižek says: “In the case of Woman – the mythical She, the Queen from Rider Haggard’s novel of the same name for example – as well as in the case of the primordial father, we are dealing with an agency of power which is pre-symbolic, unbridled by the Law of castration; in both cases, the role of this fantasmatic agency is to fill out the vicious cycle of the symbolic order, the void of its origins: what the notion of Woman (or of the primordial father) provides is the mythical starting point of unbridled fullness whose ‘primordial repression’ constitutes the symbolic order.” Woman debilitates the supremacy of the phallic signifier, as an all-encompassing universal function, since the latter does not impose a limit over her enjoyment. She is not subject to an exception, which means her existence does not fully come under phallic power and mastery. See Žižek, “Woman is One of the Names-of-the-Father, or How Not to Misread Lacan’s Formulas of Sexuation,” *Lacanian Ink* 10. Available from: < <http://www.lacan.com/zizwoman.htm> > [accessed 23 June 2006].

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Žižek, “Woman is One of the Names-of-the-Father, or How Not to Misread Lacan’s Formulas of Sexuation,” available from: < <http://www.lacan.com/zizwoman.htm> > [accessed 23 June 2006].

<sup>65</sup> In the following chapters, I develop an elaboration of three systems that reveals the incongruence of the pervert with mastery.

<sup>66</sup> Žižek, “Woman is One of the Names-of-the-Father, or How Not to Misread Lacan’s Formulas of Sexuation,” available from: < <http://www.lacan.com/zizwoman.htm> > [accessed 23 June 2006].

<sup>67</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! : Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), p.27.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> This is the zone of *ex-sistence*. See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 58.

<sup>70</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), especially chapter 6.

<sup>71</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 46.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> This is an innovative idea Žižek introduced in (the now classic) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

<sup>74</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 52.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 47. This is “the part of ourselves that is sacrificed/castrated when we enter the symbolic system of language and social relations.” Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>77</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 54-57. Perhaps, this explains why a masculine figure that wears a uniform indicative of institutional power and authority (e.g. a police officer) constitutes a common pornographic theme. As one obeys the law, one must also obey the perverse orders of this authoritarian figure. But this does not add an extra element to obedience, but it reveals the obverse side of it, the very enjoyment found in obedience *per se* (Žižek has demonstrated that in relation to the obedience to the law and the superegoic demands). Thus, such pornographic images function, at the level of the imaginary real. Power as something beyond representation is fixated to an image of authoritarian phallic power. The fact that it is linked to the phallic signifier disguises its underlying perverse character.

<sup>78</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 47.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>81</sup> For a discussion of the advertising discourse, see Yannis Stavrakakis, “On the Critique of Advertising Discourse: A Lacanian View,” *Third Text* 51 (2000): 85-90.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>83</sup> See Sigmund Freud, “Totem and Taboo” (1913) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 13, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-1974), pp. 1-161.

<sup>84</sup> When fantasy is thwarted by the symbolic, the death drive emerges; this explains the wrath of the Romanian people and the prompt execution of Ceaușescu and his wife.

<sup>85</sup> The fantasmatic agent of power functions as the narcissistic attendant of the subject’s imaginary consistency. The image that the subject perceives as a whole and assumes as her identity is the united whole that power promises: an integrated and self-actualised individual and society. Yet this disregards that the subject’s identity is an illusory product, a narcissistic misrecognition which is constantly challenged by the symbolic modes of intersubjectivity.

<sup>86</sup> Is not the idea of the *object a*, based on a perverse rationale, that eradicates the other as separate autarkic existence?

## 6. The Lacanian Discourse<sup>1</sup>

### 6.1 The Four Discourses

When one approaches fascism as a symbolic category, as a system that organises the circulation of the signifiers in a certain social setting, the question of the operating discourse is raised. The fascist principles imbue and hierarchise social relationships, influencing speech and overall communication. Psychoanalysis, as a critical tool, makes it possible to contemplate the organising terms of the fascist discourse and discourses on fascism. Not only does psychoanalysis supplement the understanding of other discourses, but it also augments the vigour of its theories, by constantly reappraising ideas applied either to the clinic or to social theory.

With regard to the goal of critically elucidating the discursive incongruence between fascism and perversion through psychoanalysis, recourse to Lacan's model of the four discourses is essential, since the primary focus is on collective phenomena that shape social bonds. Lacan did not develop a schema of a distinct perverse discourse, although the perverse subject is inscribed in the field of the Other. This means he can relate his desire to the Other and form social relationships. As a problematic omission, this further mystifies the notion of perversion, since one has to rely on the model of the four discourses that regulate social bonds between neurotic subjects, strictly speaking. If the absence of a discourse of the pervert constitutes a paradox, it is not the same for psychosis, where the subject does not operate within discourse. The psychotic subject does not address the other, which means difference is not acknowledged at all. The subject is one with the Other, who *exists*, in psychosis. When it comes to the pervert, the latter tries to make the Other exist through the other. In a common psychoanalytic perception, the pervert has the knowledge about the lack in the Other, but he disavows it and tries to conceal it.<sup>2</sup> If we reduce fascism (a type of social bond) to a perverse structure, it becomes difficult to match fascism to one of the four discourses, given the absence of the perverse discourse. Does such a discourse exist and if it does so, what is fascism's pertinence to it? What is the prevalent discourse in fascism?

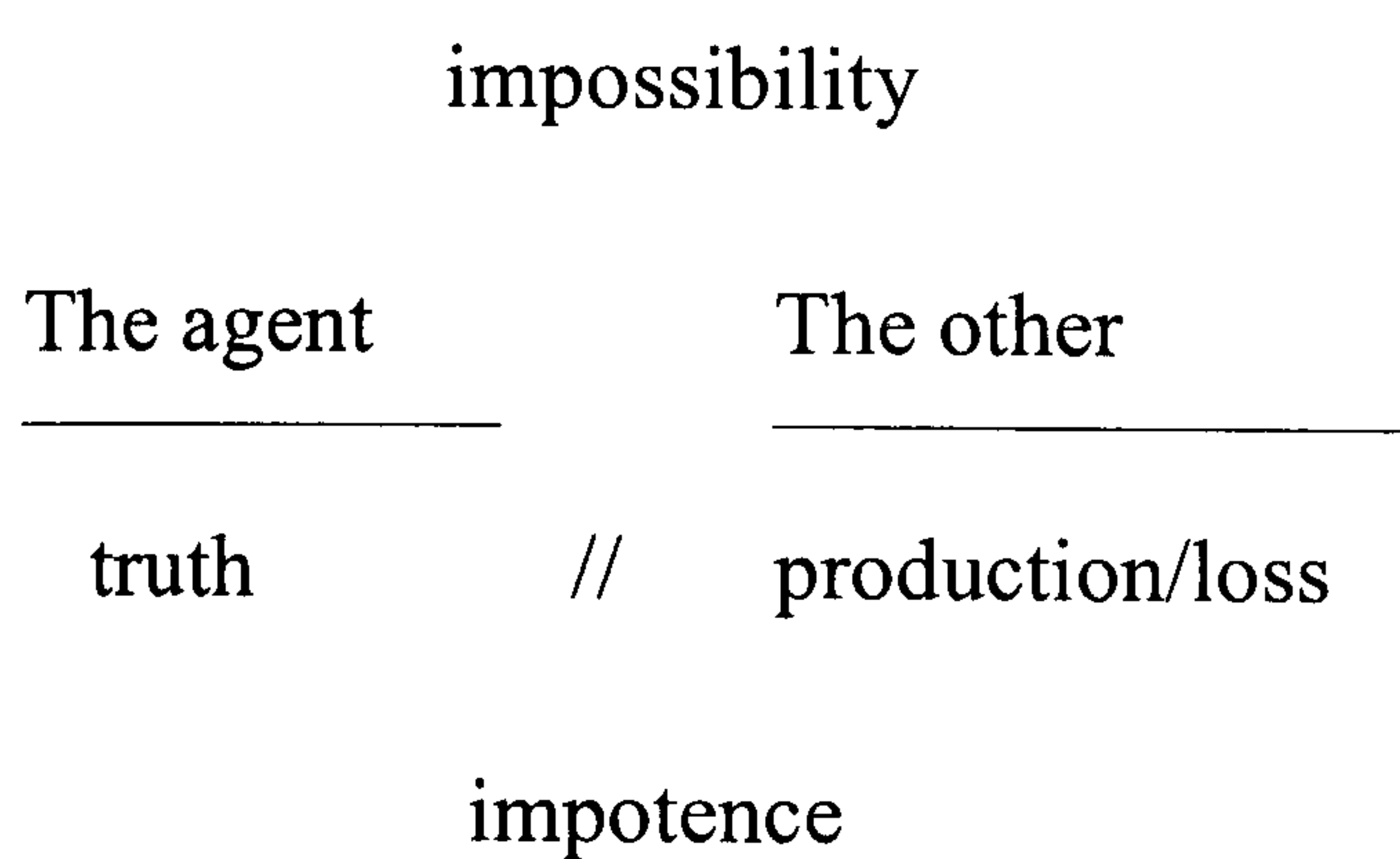
The significance of Lacan's theorisation about discourse lies in the identification of a number of possible symbolic forms, through which the unconscious reveals itself in the intersubjective milieu of communication and configuration of social ties. Language does not involve only one individual, but always entails the presence of another subject with whom there is an exchange of messages through signification. This interaction, through the formation and interchange of messages, is shaped by discourse and, *ad interim*, is independent or goes beyond the borders of discourse.

Language is a prerequisite for discourse. Without introduction to the system of language, the subject remains in a pre-subjective position and makes no effort to communicate; all communication is organised by instinctual behaviours that lack the multiplicity of meanings inaugurated by language only. Discourse fabricates the context of the symbolic and imaginary world of the subject, the borders of which are engraved and constantly defied by death, trauma, violence, anxiety, sexual act and the like.

These are the gaps that evince the impossibility of discourse to encompass everything in the signifying chain. The function of the signifying chain is always a 'dys-function', due to the obstacle of these gaps that resist symbolisation and reveal the dimension of the real in discourse. This is the most important element in the Lacanian discourse. The real goes beyond language, manifesting itself as lack or excess, i.e. what is without words, around which desire circulates.<sup>3</sup> Symbolic communication only marks an occasion in discourse; truth continues to operate outside the capacity of language and seeps into social relations. Within the limits of discourse, it is possible to interact and relate to other subjects due to language. As Stavrakakis puts it, "it is exactly because total communication is impossible, because it is exposed as an impossible fantasy, that communication itself becomes possible."<sup>4</sup>

Lacan delineates four discourses that describe the relation of the subject to the real: the discourse of the Master, the discourse of the University, the discourse of the Hysteric and the discourse of the Analyst (see table 1, p. 160). For each of them, Lacan develops a corresponding schema, an algorithm. A rotation of a quarter turn determines the structure of each discourse. Three fundamental terms operate in each discourse: the signifier, the subject and the object. But the signifier never has a singular status. By nature, the signifier is defined as the difference between two terms: *darkness* as opposition to *light*, *cold* as

opposition to *warm*, *good* as opposition to *evil* and so on. Thus, as far as the signifier is concerned, we *a priori* deal with a signifying chain of two terms: the master signifier (S<sub>1</sub>) and the knowledge (S<sub>2</sub>) that originates from the signifier. Therefore, we have four terms in each discourse: S<sub>1</sub>, S<sub>2</sub>, the split subject (\$) that results from the relation of one (the master) signifier to another and the *object a* or the surplus of enjoyment (*a*), occupy four different positions that determine the type of the discourse in function. The four positions are summarised as follows:



These positions remain fixed for all discourses. Only the terms that occupy these positions shift for a quarter turn, in each discourse. On the two horizontal sides, above and under the schema, Lacan posited two disjunctions in intersubjective communication: impossibility, seen at the upper side of the schema, and impotence, seen at the bottom. Both disjunctions underline the fact that desire cannot be completely deciphered; communication, as far as it speaks desire, remains incomplete and impossible. The position of the agent is the dominant position. In the position of production, the most innovative element of Lacanian discourse is found; this is *jouissance*, bound to the signifier and knowledge.

In *Seminar XVII*, the relationship between *jouissance* and knowledge is articulated for the first time. Lacan states that “knowledge is the *jouissance* of the Other”<sup>5</sup> and it is precisely what Jacques Allain-Miller calls discursive *jouissance*.<sup>6</sup> Discourse is the intersection of the signifier, knowledge and *jouissance*. The emergence of the signifier introduces the symbolic terrain of the Other and, at the same time, sets up the *jouissance* located in the Other: “the signifier is the cause of *jouissance* [...] the signifier is what puts an end to *jouissance*.”<sup>7</sup> The knowledge produced by the signifier initiates a repetitive alteration

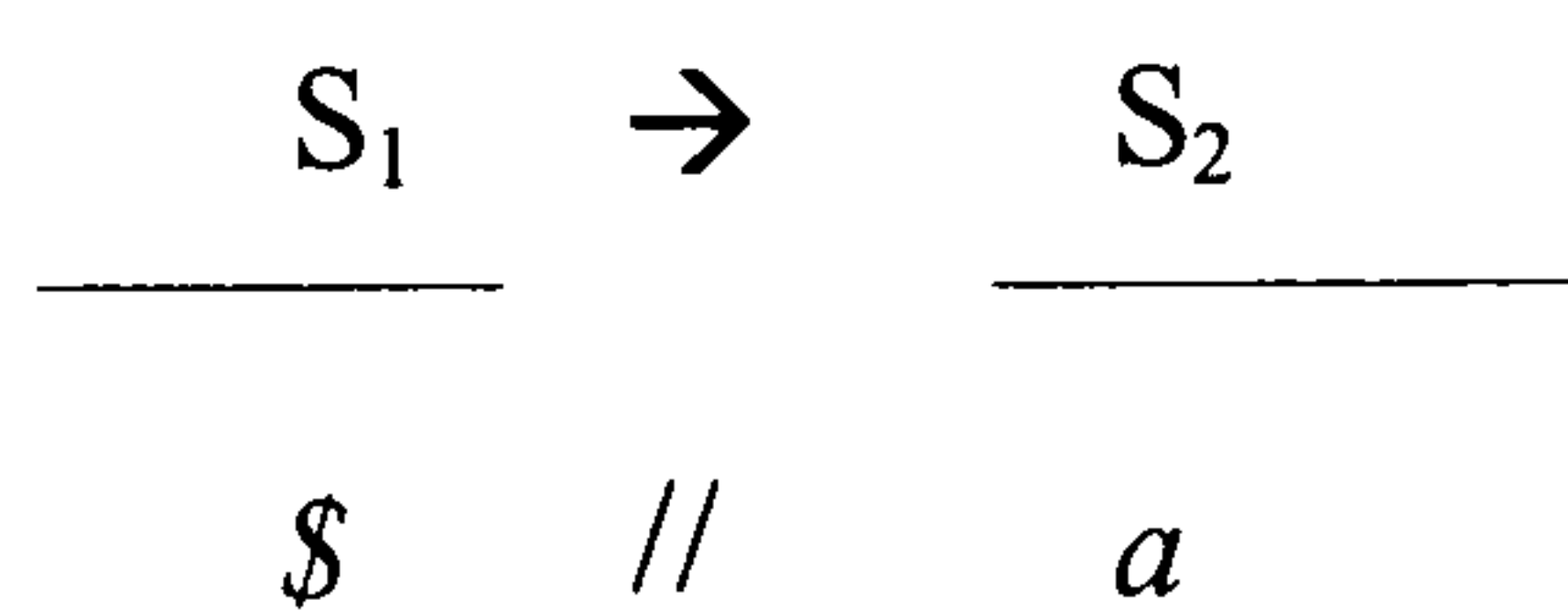
between the three: signifier, Other and knowledge. The return of *jouissance* marks the limit of knowledge and *vice versa*.

Knowledge is what causes life to stop at a certain limit on the way to *jouissance*. For the path towards death – this is what it is a question of, it’s a discourse on masochism – the path towards death is nothing other than what is called *jouissance*.<sup>8</sup>

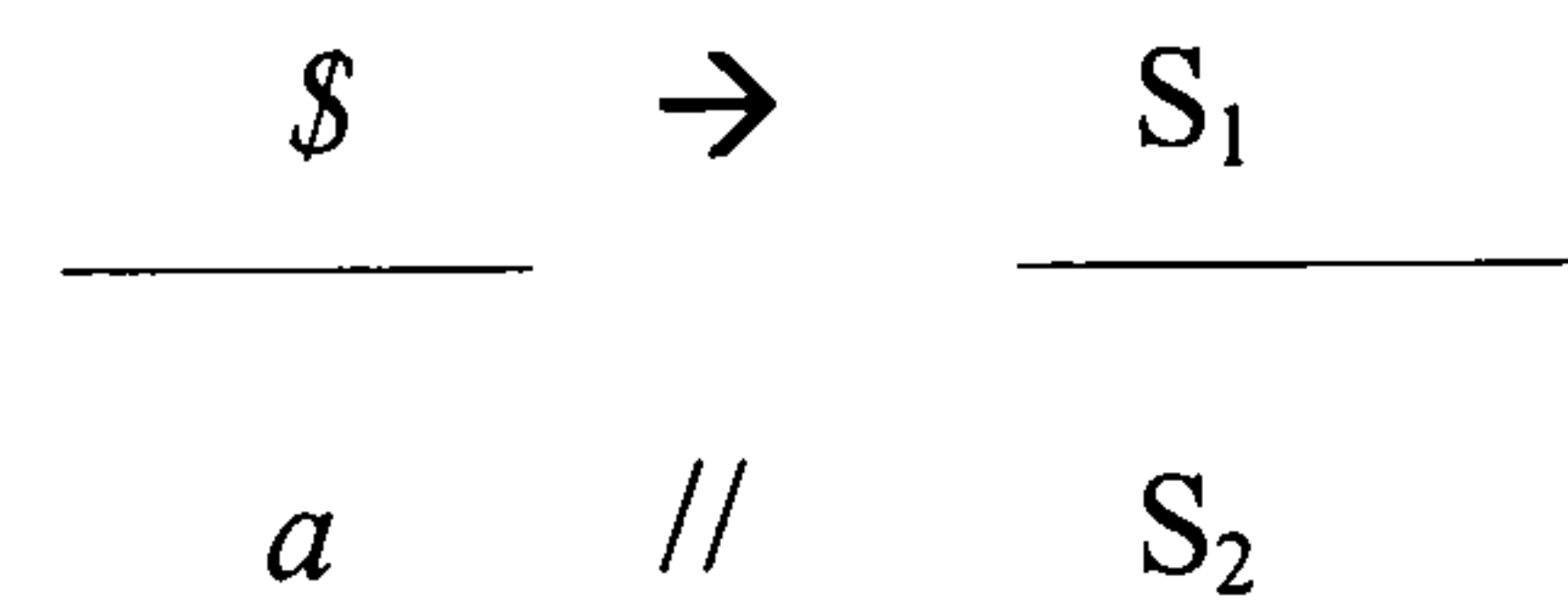
Knowledge is what maintains subjectivity and keeps at bay the fatal finale of *jouissance*, namely the death of the subject. The previous conception of *jouissance*, as the artefact of transgression,<sup>9</sup> is abandoned in *Seminar XVII*. There, Lacan theorises about *jouissance* on different grounds and conceives it as the product of discourse, the surplus of articulation, “a falling into the field of something that is the order of *jouissance* - a bonus.”<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1: Lacan’s Four Discourses**

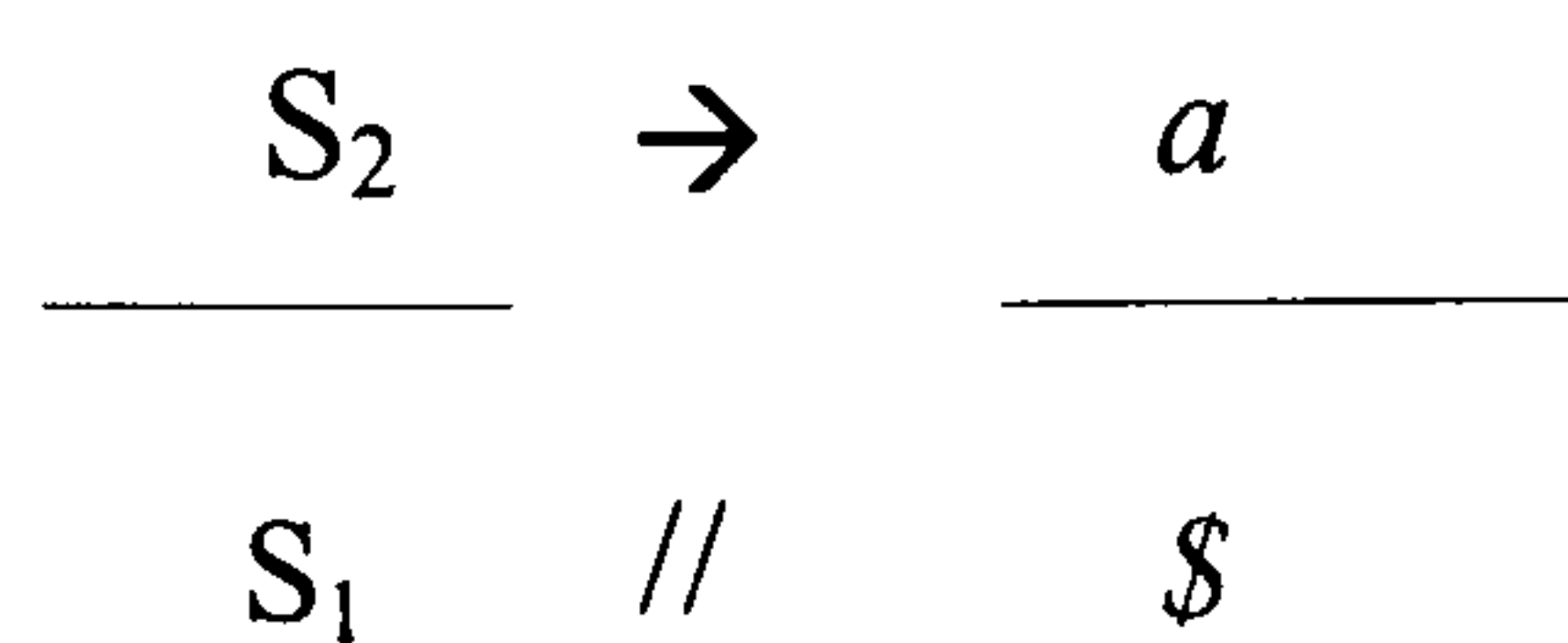
*The discourse of the Master*



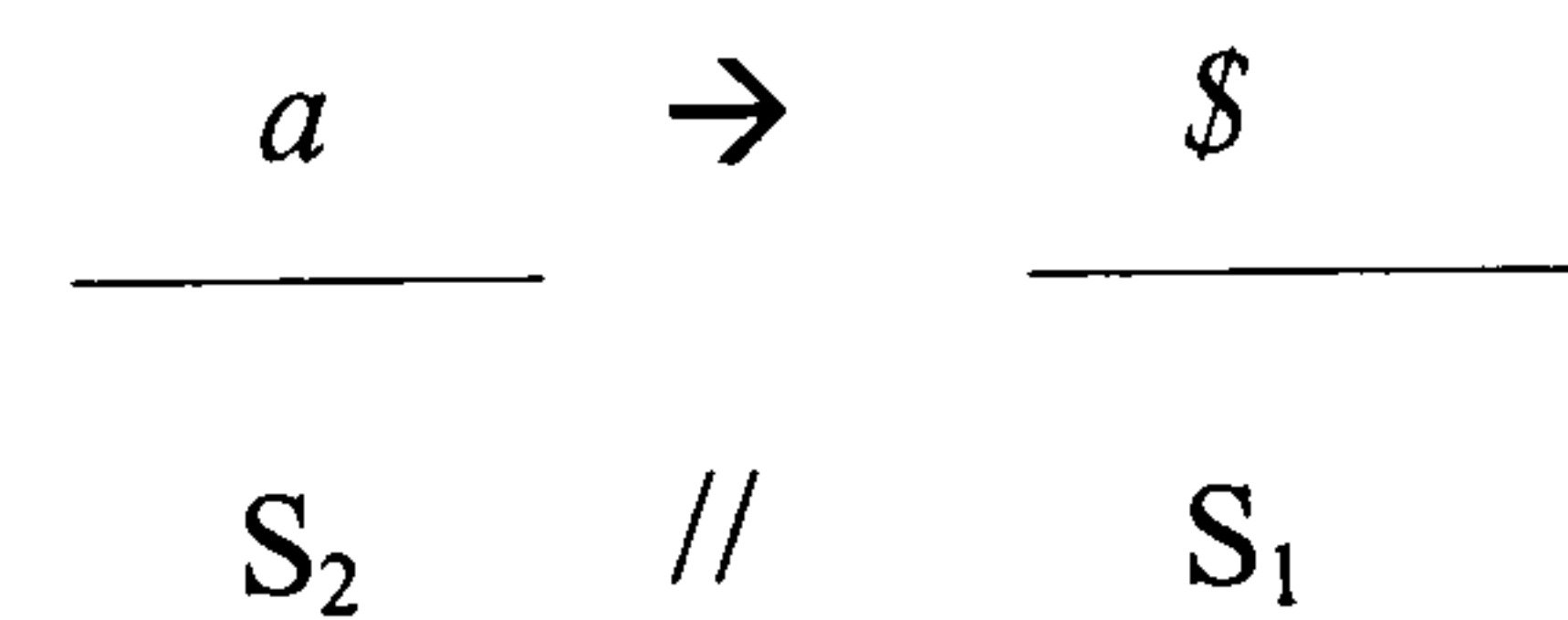
*The discourse of the Hysteric*



*The discourse of the University*



*The discourse of the Analyst*





## 6.2 The Position of the Fascist and the Pervert in Discourse

The first formalised discourse that Lacan introduces in *Seminar XVII* is the discourse of the Master. The master signifier, the  $S_1$ , occupies the dominant position, but the symbolic prominence of the signifier is totally arbitrary and absurd. In the name of this supremacy of the signifier, the master asks for obedience, without any justification. One must obey, because it has to be so. The power of the master is indisputable and uncompromising. Based on this power, derived from the signifier, the master decrees the other to obey him. The other is not just the receiver of the master's edict; he is the slave that genuflects the master, but, in effect, the slave is the one who possesses knowledge ( $S_2$ ).

The master is ignorant and indifferent towards this knowledge, inasmuch as his only concern is to be served and obeyed. What troubles him is to secure the productivity of the system, by making the slave work ceaselessly for him, for his *jouissance*. Therefore, the knowledge about how to increase and maintain the productivity of this system belongs to the slave who works for the master. In the place of production, the surplus element of the discourse, the object (*a*) appears as the product of the slave's exertion. The master appropriates this surplus value of the slave's labour, whereas the slave is not in a position to enjoy the surplus enjoyment he produces.

The discourse of the master is behind any ideology. Lacan develops the rationale of this discourse, based on a Marxist theorisation about labour as the force that produces a surplus value, appropriated by the capitalist. The master has to present himself as if he is certain and assertive regarding the ascendancy of the power his phallic signifier represents, as we previously saw. Because the dominance of the master signifier(s) is what sustains and solidifies his power and commands. The fantasy of power serves the sovereignty of the master signifier(s), disguising its lack. The master, as representative of this indisputable power, is non-lacking or, more precisely, he presents himself as if he escaped castration. Of course, the master is divided by the signifier, he is subjected to the Other, like any other subject. However, this division is concealed and occupies the position of Truth. The master must conceal his divided status and hence his desire.

If we had to isolate the prevalence of a particular discourse in all ideological forms of power (capitalism, communism, fascism and so on), that would be the discourse of the

master. The master dominates the discourse, since he sets its foundation. The discourse of the master produces the *object a*, which the master confiscates and enjoys, although he presents himself as if he does not do so. This occurs because surplus *jouissance* is the very perverse element of discourse that cannot be incorporated into the social order, since it is a disorganising and agitating factor, circumscribing lack. Therefore, the subject of obedience never finds the sought-for *jouissance*. The master displaces the surplus factor to the enemy, who is supposed to steal this enjoyment, as Žižek suggested.<sup>11</sup> Otherwise, the master disguises it under a negative camouflage (e.g. political and moralistic narratives of perversion that designate surplus *jouissance* as evil) or a positive mask (e.g. the endless and ever-growing list of material objects in capitalism that promise the experience of that *jouissance*). But the subject is the one who produces this *extra-enjoyment*; it is the residue of obedience to the master's symbolic law.

The death-coveting element in fascism, which is linked to *jouissance*, is the real production, the surfeit, of the obedience to a strict law. The obedience to the laws of the master/Führer that demanded the extinction of the Jew opened up the floodgate of *jouissance*, the bloodshed that indelibly sealed the history of the Second World War. The unsymbolisable character and the immensity of the atrocities gave rise to an unbearable *jouissance*, experienced as disgust, fear, wrath and so on. The same *jouissance* fuelled the collective guilt that followed the atrocities; guilt functions as an alarm call that notifies the subject that the law is leaking and it has to be either restored or totally abandoned.<sup>12</sup>

The master/fascist usurped the surplus enjoyment produced by the execution of the commands, associated with the atrocities of the war. As soon as the fantasmatic edifice of Nazism fell, the arbitrariness of its master signifier(s) (e.g. Aryanism) and the divided status of the master emerged. The painful realisation of the fallible status of the law of Nazism 'hystericised' the German other who demanded a new sufficient master. In the discourse of the master, the other never attains his/her *jouissance*, but constantly moves from obedience to hysteria, setting in motion a continuous recycling of masters. German people needed a trustworthy master, since Hitler represented the ultimate signifier of German potency and its detrimental refutation led to distrust towards other masterful discourses. The phantasm of repeating the same mistake, as with Hitler, haunted German

people for decades. It was not an easy task for post-1945 masters to persuade the people about the superiority of the novel signifiers they represented.

By turning the previous algebraic structure for a quarter, a second discourse is put together, with the four symbols rearranged in different positions. A new type of social bond emerges that aims to fill the lack of desire, by contouring a knowledgeable object. This is the territory of the university, the 'sacred' temple of knowledge. This time the dominant position is taken by the  $S_2$  which replaces the supremacy of the arbitrary master signifier with the supremacy of knowledge. Knowledge dominates discourse commanding its eternal reproduction. This command is addressed to the surplus value of the object (*a*). In other words, knowledge focuses on the vindication of the surplus *jouissance*, produced by labour activity. This dominative knowledge is different from psychoanalytic knowledge, inasmuch as the latter is inscribed within a "discourse of love" which revolves around the "nothingness" of the *object a*.<sup>13</sup> Psychoanalysis 'hunts' the *object a*, precisely what cannot be reduced to absolute knowledge, and this 'hunting' is what renders the psychoanalytic discourse a discourse of love.

The agent of the discourse is still in fetters. Knowledge may be dominant, but only due to the assurance provided by the master, who rests perdu in the position of Truth and whom the agent serves.<sup>14</sup> The hidden master is there to give his pledge to the subject who *knows* that she will avoid castration, ambiguity, anxiety and division, through knowledge. The more one learns, the more s/he reaches completeness. Alas, it is unfortunate for the subject to actually find herself in the opposite position, by succumbing to the infinite empire of knowledge. The more one knows, the more signifiers one has at his/her disposal, the more divided s/he becomes by them.

Therefore, the struggle for filling up the gap of desire is doomed to failure that leaves a rather bitter taste: the perpetual multiplication of desire misled by various objects that suppose to satisfy it. This would explain, for example, the vast amount of research produced nowadays, in various academic fields of psychology. All scientific research disciplines produce theories or point out practices, interventions, techniques, cognitive skills, emotions, etc. (often contradictory one to the other, depending on the master, i.e. the theoretician or the scholar, whose ideas organise the research) that all suppose to advance the quality of life of the subject. As a result, today, more than any other time, the

subject is multilaterally split and encumbered by different identities, roles and lifestyles, without achieving the promised quality.<sup>15</sup>

Instead of desire getting its satisfaction through knowledge, the researcher or the subject of knowledge in general, is left only with a 'paraplegic' desire. The more 'hypertrophic' knowledge becomes, the more desire is ossified. Desire remains unfulfilled in the discourse of the university. Knowledge hypothecates desire. The *object a*, in the position of the other, remains unutterable, because of an unsurpassable structural limitation: the *object a* is impossible to be symbolically represented. In that way, in the position of the production, the subject encounters her importunate division, continuing to resist it, through the acquisition of more knowledge, without being able to identify the master. Because the relationship between the subject and her master signifier is that of impotence, the subject never knows who she is and what she wants.

Knowledge is a central component also in the discourse of the hysteric, but it is the reverse of the university discourse. It is not articulated as certainty generated by the concealed master signifier(s), but as a demand for knowledge, addressed to the master signifier. The dominant position of the discourse is occupied by the divided subject who interrogates the other as a master. The hysteric wants the master to justify the supremacy of his non-sensical signifier, by producing knowledge that speaks about the division of the hysteric subject. Therefore, in the position of production, knowledge as  $S_2$  is found.

But, since the lack of the subject reigns in the dominant position, the knowledge of the master is incapable of filling this lack. The latter is always accountable for the perpetual conflicts and the questions the hysteric holds in relation to her division. In this way, what is maintained is desire and what remains veiled is the object (*a*) of desire that occupies the position of truth. The hysteric becomes feverish and excited, through the provocation of the Other. The knowledge, the answer that she receives from him constitutes her *jouissance* as the loss in the field of production. In this case, knowledge is not the medium for *jouissance*, as it is for the master or for the university. Knowledge is the means for justifying lack, so that the latter is sustained. It is important to preserve lack, for this is where *jouissance* is situated.

Given the absence of a discourse of the pervert, if we had to incorporate the pervert into a specific discursive system, what would this one be? It seems more appropriate to place the

pervert in the same discursive structure as the hysteric, rather than the master, where the fascist is placed.<sup>16</sup> Sadism, masochism, voyeurism, exhibitionism and so on are considered as 'deviations'; yet in the discourse of the hysteric desire itself deviates from the position of the *object a*, the object-cause of desire, which remains inaccessible on the level of impotence. This 'deviation of desire' marks the discursive position of both the pervert and the hysteric. The *object a*, occupying the position of truth, is responsible for any deviation from the law of the master. Whatever knowledge the Other endows the hysteric with, whatever scenarios the Other asks the pervert to perform, desire always remains insatiated. *Object a* is the perverse core of subjectivity and, as far as it resists the master signifier, it always maintains its deviant and excessive character.

Perverse desire, obsessive desire and hysteric desire can be taken into the same discourse. The division of the subject 'hystericises' all subjects, whose lack introduced by language is translated to desire of the Other. The pervert, similar to the hysteric, wishes to maintain this lack in the Other, because his existence depends exactly on this lack. But lack for the pervert means *jouissance*, whereas for the hysteric it means law. The perverse ritual is a constant effort to fill up this lack in the Other, which always fails, leading to a vicious cycle that disavowal only partially describes.

Disavowal marks two moments in the pervert's effort to meet the desire of the Other. First, it allows the pervert to be aware of the lack in the Other and second, it thwarts the acknowledgement of this lack. These two types of knowledge co-exist, but I believe, in such a way that one, actually, triggers the other. The moment desire returns as the ending of the pervert's *jouissance*, another struggle begins to extinguish this return which marks the realisation and the maintenance of desire, the lack in the Other. The result is the same as in the discourse of the hysteric. The difference is that the hysteric requests knowledge, so that she relates herself to the law, whereas the pervert seeks knowledge to transcend the law and relate himself to *jouissance*. Yet, both the hysteric and the pervert are stuck in the impossibility of fulfilling desire.

The pervert is dominated by the Other, no more and no less than any other ordinary neurotic subject, inasmuch as desire is always the desire of the Other. The power of a perverse fantasy is derived by this dominant position of the Other. This is different from fascism, which obtains its power through a totalising fantasy that seeks for the domination

of the Other. Through the absolute value and the domination of the master signifier, the fascist tries to manipulate the desire of the Other. Fascism produces a fantasy of domination, whereas perversion produces a fantasy that searches for a way to escape domination. The pervert vetoes the conformity to the ideal signifier(s), proffered by the master. For him, priority is not given to the signifier, but to *jouissance*.

The fourth algebraic formula Lacan juxtaposes to the other three discourses is the discourse of the analyst. According to Lacan, this discursive type is not limited to the analytic experience solely:

If we characterise a discourse by focusing on what is dominant in it, there is the discourse of the analyst, and this is not to be confused with the psychoanalysing discourse, with the discourse effectively engaged in the analytic experience.<sup>17</sup>

The subversive element that demarcates the discourse of the analyst from the discourse of the dominant master is that lack occupies the dominant position. This means that no type of 'prefab' knowledge or master signifiers occupy the locus of desire. Quite the opposite, desire suggests a position that questions and provokes knowledge, so that the divided status of the subject comes to light. The analysis of dreams, lapsuses, parapraxes and free associations that comprise the main psychoanalytic armoury leads to the realisation of the splitting of the subject between conscious and unconscious. A new master signifier is the dead end of the other's associations. The analyst has to assist the other to associate the new master signifier with other signifiers, in a dialectical manner.

Psychoanalysis deploys the power of the cause of desire, in order to bring about a reconfiguration of the analysand's desire.<sup>18</sup>

With the exception of the discourse of the analyst, all other discourses accentuate and cement their power, the fantasmatic basis of which is revealed by the strong and autonomous ego that they try to build and maintain. Psychoanalysis, by putting forward the gap, the lack in the subject, questions and provokes the dominance of the ego. Alongside, it challenges the power of the  $S_1$  that fuels the fantasmatic efficiency of the ego, by forging an absolute identity (symbolic identification).

Of course, the four discourses of Lacan do not exhaust all possible types of relations that found intersubjective ties. According to Fink, Lacan's intention was to develop a more expanded formalisation of discourse, on the grounds of the fantasy that the subject promotes, when she speaks or communicates through other symbolic means, apart from speech.<sup>19</sup> As examples, one can think of Lacan's attempts to theorise about the structure of fantasy in perversion or phobias. In any case, this does not mean that there has been a separate phobic, obsessional or perverse discourse formalised. In the absence of such discourse, it becomes rather problematic to discuss the intersubjective implications of phenomena related to one of these notions. Moreover, perverse fantasy, perverse psychic structure and perverse discourse do not necessarily coincide. Fantasy is a fundamental aspect of discourse, whereas the psychic structure of the subject does not restrain her in a particular fixed discourse. Under certain conditions, the subject can shift from one discourse to another.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The proceeding discussion of the theory of the four discourses is based on the following works: Paul Verhaeghe, "Lacan and the Discourse of the Hysteric" in *Does the Woman Exist? : From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine*; trans. by Marc du Ry (London: Rebus Press, 1997), pp. 95-118, Bruce Fink, "The Master Signifier and the Four Discourses" in *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Dany Nobus (London: Rebus Press, 1998), pp. 29-47 and Θάνος Λίποβατς, "Οι Τέσσερις Λόγοι," *Ζητήματα Πολιτικής Ψυχολογίας* (Αθήνα: Εξάντας, 1991), σσ. 45-64.

<sup>2</sup> See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996) and Jean Laplanche and Jean.-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (London: Karnac and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1988 [1973]).

<sup>3</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970*, trans. by Russel Grigg from unedited French Manuscripts (Printed by Anthony Rowe Ltd, Eastbourne), p.3.

<sup>4</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> See Jacques-Alain Miller, "Paradigms of Jouissance," *Lacanian Ink* 17 (2000): 10-47.

<sup>7</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. by J.-A. Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970*, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Tavistock, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970*, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), especially chapter 6.

<sup>12</sup> This point is developed further in the following part.

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<sup>13</sup> See Bice Benvenuto, *Concerning the Rites of Psychoanalysis: Or, The Villa of the Mysteries* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the despotism of university knowledge is conveyed through the overgrowing *scientific* research in psychology based on mere statistical evidence. By attributing complex behaviours to biological malfunctions, such as neurochemical imbalances or heredity, we exempt the role of the master, namely the global capitalist, from the causes and the elision of those behaviours.

<sup>15</sup> In a newspaper article some years ago, there was an interesting presentation of the variety of places you can visit in France for your vacations. Depending on the group with which you identified yourself, there were different recommended places: one for the jet-set, one for the middle class, one for gay people, one for celebrities and another one for intellectuals. In this fashion, even your vacations (the *vacuum* left from not working) are filled with knowledge. You visit a place not because you follow your desire, but because you are *with people you know*. Perhaps, this is one more manifestation of the current post-modern profile that characterises social relations.

<sup>16</sup> Thanos Lipowatz has drawn the compatibility of the hysteric position with the perverse position in discourse. See Θάνος Λίποβατς, “Οι Τέσσερις Λόγοι,” *Ζητήματα Πολιτικής Ψυχολογίας*.

<sup>17</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969/1970*, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Bruce Fink, “The Master Signifier and the Four Discourses,” p. 30.



## 7. Three Masters, Three Systems of Domination

### 7.1 Discursive Systems of Power

By alluding to Lacan's four discourses, my intention was to evince the discursive incongruity between fascism and perversion. Unlike the pervert, caught up in his ceaseless and repetitive acts and scenarios, the fascist takes a position in discourse which produces a definite fantasy of domination. This serves the power of fascism's master signifier, breeding the illusory certainty of seizing the phallus.

The pervert is dominated by the Other, inasmuch as he serves the Other's *jouissance*, whereas the master seeks for domination of the Other. The master derives his power from the signifier (the phallus), yet he positivises the lack of the Other, around an object (*a*), and makes the slave work, in order to postpone the acquisition and, eventually, extinguish the missing status of the object and the concomitant lack in the Other. For example, as Žižek demonstrated, the fascist master constructed the figure of the evil Jew to substantiate lack.<sup>1</sup> The obliteration of the Jew, but also the vassalage of the non-Aryan on the supremacy of the Nazi edifice, would secure the prospect of a complete Aryan Other. Desire would be desiccated, which is impossible, of course.

But, in exploring perversion's relation to discourse, another point needs explication. This is the dissymmetry of the Sadean fantasy with the perversions, in their common conception (i.e. sexual deviations). Sadean philosophy, as it is conveyed in works such as *The 120 Days of Sodom*, is not just a catalogue of all possible perversions; rather than this simplifying perception of Sade's work, Sadean philosophy constructs a utopian system, which clinicians, like Krafft-Ebing, obscurely, reduced to mere perverse activity. In his discourse, Lacan never likened explicitly Sade with a formalised theory on perversion. It is unfair to reduce Sade's imaginary system to the precursor of fascist barbarity and perverse sexuality.

Lacan's ideas in *Seminar VII* and "Kant with Sade" fuelled platitudinous views on perversion.<sup>2</sup> Instead of reciting them, it would be more appropriate to isolate, for a while, Sade from this 'perversology' and juxtapose his philosophical system to two other discursive systems introduced here: 'Oedipalism' and 'totalitarianism'. Regarding them as

separate masterful discursive systems, my analysis draws again on Lacan's four discourses as a valuable tool for dissecting the relations that organise the three systems.

My argument suggests that all three reflect opalescent organisations of the discourse of the master. In the dominant position, we find three different ideals that represent the master and they claim to pack Truth into a message they address to the other, the one who obeys the system; three different packets, three different ideals about the impossible articulation of desire. Thus, setting the focus of this section, the three systems are discussed, on the basis of law and language, as the crux that formalises the relationships within each system.

The second factor that provides the consistency for each system is the notion of power that regulates a closed circuit between signifier, fantasy and desire. Earlier in the present part, it was argued that power has a symbolic hypostasis, insofar as it inheres to the sovereign phallic signifier. Yet it implements fantasy (as an 'imaginarisation' of the loss) that solidifies the certainty that the lost object is retrievable.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, power bestows the fantasmatic support of relationships operating in each system (for example, money, weapons, certificates of knowledge, whip and the like are the products of the 'imaginarisation' of loss and therefore their possession has become identical with the possession of power, with the possession of the phallus).

Writing this, loss takes us to the most rudimentary element of each discursive system. This is the dimension of the real. I associate each system with the real, in the way Žižek has recently re-elaborated the notion, since his early works. According to his reading, the real can be seen in a triadic form: as symbolic Real, imaginary Real and real Real.<sup>4</sup> In my view of Žižek's distinction, the real is not divided into three different 'reals', but rather is approximated on three different levels. The symbolic Real is a structure derived from pure material signifiers, empty from meaning or signification. The imaginary Real is the inexplicable 'something', ingrained in the world of appearances. It is the void, around which the allure of the image is formed and something of the unsymbolisable sublime comes forth. Finally, the real Real is not just a structure of the real, but the ultimate limit, where one encounters horror, namely, the unbearable traumatic Thing.

### 7.1.1 *The Oedipal System*

There is one simple reason to begin with the Oedipal system: it is the system, reflecting the main, ordinary (neurotic) and normative organisation of liberal or social democratic societies. Freud developed the theory of the Oedipus complex, as the definitive ban to infantile sexuality, by studying the familial relationships of Western individualist social contexts. His conceptualisation of social dynamics was a variation of the relationships found in the family. The early interchanges with the mother and the father are formative for the emergence of power relations, which will later mark all social relations. The father introduces the phallic signifier which prohibits the enjoyment of the mother and so it fuels the fantasy of regaining it. In the Oedipal paradigm, we have the crucial relationship between the father and the son. The father holds the reins of power (the power to punish-castrate or the imaginary role of the father, in Lacanian terms), while the son has to become the successor that drives this chariot of power. The Oedipus complex is largely a question of power, encompassing prohibition, law, obedience and punishment; yet all these relations are mediated by fantasy, in order to effectively regulate the child's position regarding the Thing (the Mother, as the archaic unrepresentable object of desire).

The boy has to repress a certain kind of knowledge/*jouissance*, that is maternal *jouissance*, in order to resolve the conflict. Therefore, a complete Oedipal organisation resides in repression and the solidification of a superego that says: "enjoy, as little as possible." This is the law that keeps the subject in safe distance from the Thing. It is the paternal (not necessary patriarchal) law that maintains our subjectivity. Not only does the law maintain our fantasies and desires, but it also preserves our 'neuroticism'. This is why the real of this circuit marks its presence in the profuse perverse fantasies of most neurotic and ordinary subjects. This is the imaginary Real, in its versatile fantasmatic apparitions and images in the subject's life.<sup>5</sup>

It was Freud who mapped out the basis of the Oedipal system first. In *Totem and Taboo*, he wove a modelling of the initial social organisation around the myth of the primordial father, derived from his previous analysis of the Oedipus complex.<sup>6</sup> The myth is well known: the brothers of the primal horde kill and devour their father, as a result of the overgrown hatred against him. The father was the despotic and powerful figure who had

exclusive access to the *jouissance* of the Thing, the mother, forbidding his sons from partaking in this type of enjoyment. But mother was not constituted as the desired object, until prohibition by the father was established. Prior to such prohibition, this primordial community was a world without difference. After the brothers had committed their crime and given expression to their hatred, the love feelings for their father turned hatred into remorse, into guilt. The totem substituted the father as well as the creation of God, Freud argued. The initial totemic religion was a product of guilt.

Nevertheless, what Freud did not say is whether the sons, actually, slept with the mother (like the actual Oedipus did), the sacred and forbidden feminine figure of the horde that the father had usurped. In that case, the sons would have violated the law of the Thing and satisfied both incestual and aggressive wishes. But is there any way back to lack once those primitive wishes are fulfilled? As Zupančič has shown, as soon as one crosses desire s/he enters the realm of the impossible, the territory of the drive.<sup>7</sup> With regard to Oedipus, Zupančič suggests that he did not assume the responsibility for his destiny; similarly, the Oedipal basis of current liberalism thwarts responsibility for its actions (e.g. economic inequalities), with the difference that it does not identify with its lack, its symptom, as Oedipus did. In this context, it is difficult to dare the impossible and reorganise social relations. Instead, liberalism is perpetuated.

There are implications of Freud's myth for politics. Joel Whitebook connects the readings of *Totem and Taboo* focused on the murder of the omnipotent Father with conservative thinking, whereas the egalitarian facet of Freud's essay is discerned in the pact of the brothers who thwarted omnipotence. Cornelius Castoriadis punctuates the importance of the Oedipus complex for the mythical basis of democratic and egalitarian politics, by putting emphasis in the child's repudiation of the drive that supported infantile omnipotence and fuelled its incestuous and aggressive wishes.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the child realises its decentred status, when it confronts the law of symbolic reality, heteronymous to the drive.

Re-instating the authority of the primordial father, the leader assumed a political and a religious role, setting up a patriarchal society. He took away the 'sin' from society, but he needed to represent the lost prohibition and the penalising power of the father. In other words, paternal power needed to be restored. Thus, the leader/master occupied a position,

from where he could punish and use violence, as a medium of his power, in order to preserve the imaginary good of his mastery. He castrates, by presenting himself as if he is not castrated. Punishment, as a castrating tactic, is the supporting agency of any system of domination. The master makes the slave work, due to continuous and looming threats of punishment. In this way, the idea of the good is maintained, by the existence of another supra-judgmental position, that of God, who punishes and expresses his will through the moral law.

As far as social rules and moral code are concerned, law and God occupy the two sides of the same coin. We do not have to go back a long time, in order to find examples of hyperbolic cults of leaders that ascribed a god-like image to authoritarian political figures. This 'equation' with God is actually an equation with His unrestrained power to punish. The possibility of imposing a punitive law is what augments the potency of authoritarian leadership.

Personality cults have been associated frequently with leaders such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin,<sup>9</sup> Mao Zedong and more who fabricated an infallible dominative image. Public and private spaces were ornamented with their visual representations, while their exaltation by mass media or artistic creations was an imperative. In this manner, the powerful posture of these leaders was magnified to a pious image of absolute virtue and laud. Thus, the cult of personality is an exploitative political strategy that aims to secure the legitimacy of the leader to punish, in spite of oppressive policies which may challenge his 'paternal' authority.<sup>10</sup> But when a representative of paternal authority identifies with the authority itself, we move from 'Oedipalism' that limits and represses real excess, to 'totalitarianism' that, more than simply repressing it, negates excess and transforms it into a punitive force.

### ***7.1.2 The Totalitarian System***

For the second system of my elaboration, I implement the designation 'totalitarian' as the typological label conditioned with references to such diverse oppressive regimes as

Nazism and Stalinism. Totalitarianism has a sinuous and profoundly ideologised history as a term, before becoming the cliché notion that has been overused in the last 15 years.

Since its first use in 1923 by the opponents of Italian Fascism, the term has been associated with different ideological fields. Although initially a caustic reference to Mussolini's authoritarianism, the latter included the totalitarian designation in his rhetoric in order to denote the voluntary will that upheld the fascist movement (the 'fierce totalitarian will') and the all-embracing spirit of the fascist state.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, in Soviet Russia, the term never acquired a general positive connotation and Stalin considered it as relevant to Italian and German fascism, although Hitler as well did not espouse its use.

Yet, under the influence of anti-Nazi expatriated German intellectuals, the West maintained the general meaning of totalitarianism for alluding to Nazism. In this regard, Italian fascism presaged the imminent transpirations in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia that set the conditions for the full surfacing of the current notion of totalitarianism:<sup>12</sup> the shared characteristics between the Nazi and the Stalinist regime, such as hyperbolic interventionism and accretion and power, illimitable administration and control. The two regimes formed the pattern for the distillation of the prevailing meaning of the notion, after the end of the Second World War. They represented states that regulate all aspects of socio-political relations, in public and private sphere, assisted by propagandistic ideological messages and the cultivation of fear among people.

Largely configured by German scholars, exiled to the United States, the concept of 'totalitarianism' received an academic currency and recognition, but that was repercussive of a liberal standpoint. Despite the anti-fascist use of the term in the 1930s and the contention regarding its relevance to Stalinist Russia, liberal academics employed the concept of totalitarianism for dissecting phenomena in communist political systems, often associated with Nazi atrocities.<sup>13</sup> Two were the major works that defined the liberal conceptual landscape of totalitarianism, during the Cold War years: Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski's *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* which outlined the main features of totalitarianism<sup>14</sup> and Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* which constituted a philosophical analysis of the preconditions that fostered the rise of totalitarian regimes. Arendt included Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia in the same framework, as commensurable totalitarian schemata that aimed at the abolition of the state.<sup>15</sup> Another

influential, yet controversial work is Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* which juxtaposes liberal democracy to totalitarianism.<sup>16</sup> All these works adumbrated the current context, as well as the controversy, around the notion of 'totalitarianism'.

Slavoj Žižek confronts the conceptual equation of totalitarianism with both Nazism and Stalinism, as undifferentiated political regimes and castigates narratives, like Arendt's, as accountable for the current misapplication of the term. He considers totalitarianism as a concomitant rightist notion that functions as a melting pot for discrepancies between historical manifestations of fascism and communism. It reflects a futile theorisation that supports the current liberal-democratic sovereignty, assuming the role of an ideological "stopgap."<sup>17</sup> Rather than a stimulant for our cogito, the concept of totalitarianism functions as an ideological soporific and an "antioxidant" that ambushes free radical dialectics and secures the hegemony of the liberal democratic discourse.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Žižek proceeds to a polemic of the use of the notion of 'totalitarianism', focusing more on the need to differentiate Nazism from Stalinism and confront their unequivocal equation.

My use of the term is not directly linked to these two regimes, but rather underscores the possibility of any masterful condition to turn into a close oppressive system. This possibility is open also to liberal democracy; my alluding to totalitarianism does not originate in an ideological posture that presents liberalism as the antidote to fascism and communism. Žižek is right to point out the bewilderment of such distinct phenomena by Western intellectuals that dates back to Arendt's work and the introduction of the term 'totalitarianism'.

Having said this, my view is that the incongruity between fascist and Stalinist phenomena is so conspicuous that it cannot be simply surpassed by the (mis)use of a typological term or any naïve tendency to equate the two. Moreover, the renunciation of the term 'totalitarianism' would only serve as an attestation of the insufficiency to expose the differences between fascism and communism. The consistent use of the term 'totalitarianism' by Žižek – even though he puts it in brackets – seems to support this suggestion. If nothing, this is indicative of Žižek's familiar oscillating gesture, according to which he repudiates certain notions, although himself repeatedly makes use of them.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the present elaboration employs the notion of totalitarianism in order to denote its amplitude of meanings, rather than a fixed meaning opposed to liberal democracy. Its use

is closer to the idea of totalising certainty about the closure of society, an aspiration cultivated by every system of mastery. I maintain the central idea of totalitarianism as referring to an inclusive administration of all aspects of social and private life of the subject. However, the focus is not on drawing a line of demarcation between liberalism and regimes of modernity, but on describing a process regulated by power and discourse that reflects both similarities and differences between political systems.

In this vein, my attempt is to reveal the self-subversive effect of the concept of 'totalitarianism' as used within the liberal democratic discourse, which favours 'Oedipalism' according to my previous argumentation. Liberal capitalism can shift into the 'totalitarian' system by extending its existing repressive strictures. The possibility of a totalitarian bureaucratic capitalism is not eliminated, especially when its current globalised vision runs through upward accretion of wealth and their power. In our epoch, multinational companies increasingly magnify and expand their power in the international terrain, controlling economy and influencing policies. This growing reification of social relations, cultivates the ascendance of an economic 'oligarchy' of exorbitant wealth. Probably, Castoriadis was quite right in his view of the Soviet Russia as comprising an exaggerated version of capitalism; It set a system which revealed the common basis of the Soviet Union with Western societies, with the first forming a more esoteric "bureaucratic totalitarian capitalism."<sup>20</sup>

Repression is the *modus operandi* of the Oedipal system and the generator of a series of apparitions of the real through unutterable images (the sublime of visual arts, for example). The rigid augmentation of repression, which maintains the imaginary real, flows into a state of 'over-repression' that changes the circuit of *jouissance*, in its relation to the law. The law's edict shifts and takes the form of this decree: "Enjoy *this* little (*a*) as much as possible," which means that the imaginary element of the real does not operate anymore. In its lieu, the real accompanies certain empty symbolic codes and practices, like fascism's 'Final Solution', for instance.

This is the symbolic real, which curves the symbolic, or I would say it *perverts* the symbolic. The supposed perverse maxim "Enjoy!" is limited to specific orders of the law. One should find his or her unlimited *jouissance* in the obedience of these strictures of the law. There is over-identification with the law.<sup>21</sup> There is not just repression of Oedipal



knowledge, but also negation of this knowledge. By inventing numerous anonymous signifiers, similar to the 'Final Solution', the Nazis tried to negate the truth of the massacring in the concentration camps. This is how the system of totalitarian oppression is organised, which in the case of fascism asks for the execution of the Jew as an act promoted by the law. It is a law that calls for over-identification with the authority that permits the *jouissance* of obedience to the master.

Knowledge (S<sub>2</sub>) in totalitarianism is denounced; actions, such as the burning of books or austere policies against critical thinking, in favour of natural and physical activity, reveal this. Among other intellectual movements to have been vilified by totalitarianism, psychoanalysis was deplored by both Nazism and Stalinism. Knowledge was seen as the limit to the *jouissance* of the people. Scientists in the Stalinist order were the slaves, working for the *jouissance* of the master, the communist party. But it was not an effort to produce knowledge about *jouissance*, but a way to ensure *jouissance*.<sup>22</sup> The repetition of the fascist and Stalinist crimes was driven by the desire to break the limit of knowledge and ensure the master signifiers (the superiority of the Aryan race or communism, respectively) met their end: to satisfy desire, which is of course impossible.

For the fascist, the fantasy that fuels his *Will-to-Power* is the image of the Superman, as the narcissistic image of perfect physical wholeness and dynamism that any German should identify with. What fantasy injects to power is the necessary consistency and certainty of the law, which points towards a certain good. This good takes the place of the object, as an imaginary embodiment of the real, which is presented as the true and divine thing. State power must take a position of certainty, regarding the supremacy and truthfulness of this good. It has to show that it possesses the knowledge and the means to secure the good. For this reason, the subject of power cannot show signs of guilt, if the latter is seen as the experience of something 'gone wrong'. The good, as dictated by the despotic (imaginary) father, can only be right and this is what power has to promote. Otherwise, if guilt is recognised by power, what is renounced is the absolute righteous value of the supreme good. This becomes corruptible, since it cannot keep its promise and fulfil desire; something escapes from its supremacy.

Narcissistic omnipotence leaves no space for polyphony in desire. Nevertheless, the multitude of desire's transformations is something that marks the impossibility of desire to

reach satisfaction, which is also what stamps the impossibility of the totalitarian fantasy; because totalitarianism is rooted in the omnipotence (the absolute mastery of desire) ingrained in every ideological fantasy of power. If totalitarianism inhabits desire for lost omnipotence, it is desire for non-difference at the same time. Driven by this narcissistic force, totalitarianism abolishes democratic pluralism. It manifests itself as a political movement that sternly advocates its eminence compared to other parties and promotes an ideal that promises to recover society's "organic unity and eliminate any division and disharmony; with totalitarianism the dawn of 'utopia' is never too far away," Stavrakakis points out.<sup>23</sup>

Totalitarianism can take different forms, depending on their fantasmatic content, their underlying ideology. Any ideological content of power aims to veil the common unknown factor that exceeds all moral and clinical designations, namely the real. Totalitarian ideologies attempt to mask the real with imaginary constructs, that is 'totalised representations' about omnipotence.<sup>24</sup> The fantasy of non-difference is delivered as a fictional construct (ideology) providing consistency and certainty to any system of mastery. Yet, when ideology is *fused* with the impossible (in other words, with what hypostatizes it), totalitarianism occupies the political lieu as a system of omnipotence. Ideology merges with the fantasy of domination found in the upper level of the master's discourse, on the level of impossibility.

For totalitarian power, the impossible (real) lies tangible in everyone's reach, in symbolic reality, as the phallus comes to embody this real; but as soon as someone reaches out for this symbolic real, its failure to grasp it emerges. The subject grasps an empty fantasy. Fascist imperialism and the execution of the Jew were attempts to capture the impossible, the fullness of being as feasible conditions. But the more the impossible is fused with fantasies and utopian ideals, the more barbarous the realisation of the failure to capture it appears to be.

### 7.1.3 *The Sadean System*

The third system is defined by the literary works of marquis de Sade. But it must be noted that the Sadean system should not be regarded as perverse *per se*. Sade as a historical figure fits better the first system of repression. Given that his writings are anything but commensurate with his normal life, Sade is an ordinary neurotic who obsessively compiles the abundance of his fantasies. He tried all his life to decipher the imaginary real of his fantasies, to find the signifiers to describe it.

The system Sade created in *The 120 Days of Sodom* is of neither repression nor oppression. The Sadean system comes closer to the idea of utopia, as a subversive system of the real Real.<sup>25</sup> The dominant position in the discourse of the Sadean master is taken by signifiers, which are not empty, but over-charged with *jouissance*. In the totalitarian system, the real is disguised behind meaningless signifiers. In Sade, this very meaninglessness becomes the unbearable meaning of his master signifiers, which renders his system utterly subversive. For example, 'dismemberment', 'ceaseless tortures' and 'repetitive death' organise a system of domination that simply cannot exist. It is *de facto* 'u-topian', as it dwells in the dimension of the real. It is a subversive system sustained by a subversive fantasy of power. The fantasy of the Sadean subject encompassing the real, in its absolute, chaotic, diabolic and interminable form, marks the impossibility of this masterful system.

The notorious Sadean fantasy of the indestructible body that maintains its beauty eternally, through perpetual torments does not renounce unity. If the unity of the image is eradicated in Sade's writings, unity as a recycled substance and bacchanal energy is maintained. This substance is the *jouissance* of the body as an interconnected mass, where the boundaries between the organic and inorganic are blurred. Enjoyment sutures the severed parts. For this reason, the Sadean fantasy is incompatible with totalitarian power which always reveals itself through a polished image of unity and a final goal (e.g. the 'Final Solution'). In Sade, there is no end, but eternity and infinity. His system does not seek so much accumulation of *jouissance* as diffusion of *jouissance*. In this respect, it is not the eradication of differences, as we saw it is for Chasseguet-Smirgel,<sup>26</sup> but more the confirmation of differences, in an anarchic and fragmented mode. As far as it relies on

fantasy, even Sade delineates a space of *jouissance* that forms an oxymoron: it percolates the symbolic and, in spite of its dissolving effects, the signifier does not fade in excess, but rather captures it.

The fantasy Sade fabricated in his writings, illustrates power relations not *per se* perverse, but characterised as such by an *a posteriori* moral designation determined by Oedipal power: the fantasy (castration of *jouissance*) that the master promotes. Ideological narratives prevaricate the acknowledgment of Sade's radical thrust that imbues his discursive system, by denouncing it, as the inspiring source for the atrocities of Nazism. This ideological tactic aims to conceal political responsibility and guilt under the veil of perversion. It circumscribes the common ideological approach that disguises the real component, operating in politics. This is why current capitalism cannot be seen as advancement, compared to preceding systems. As Kunkle notes, commenting on Žižek:

In contemporary conditions with the loss of symbolic prohibitions and the increasing presence of the superego command to enjoy beyond interdiction, we end up with the ultimate paradox of the overlapping of transgression and the norm, and this means perversion is less shocking and subversive.<sup>27</sup>

If the real Real also characterises perversion, which one of the two 'reals' is responsible for the *perverse* designation? This would simply divulge the paradox and the failure of perversion as a designation. Does the pervert really instrumentalise himself for the Other's *jouissance*? Does he really cross the limit of the pleasure principle? The Other's *jouissance* in Lacan has a pleasurable connotation and this is understood, when one sees the Other as pointing towards a certain good, the ideal of the master signifier, that bans excess. In the case of the Sadean heroes, sadistic or masochistic pain takes the form of a good, having a transaction value. In the space of the Sadean system, pain is pleasurable. If the sadistic ritual serves a good, desire is put in a waiting list. This is similar to the way Lacan sees power's morality, declaring: "As far as desires are concerned, come back later. Make them wait."<sup>28</sup>

Freud supports this point, when he argues that dominant power gives expression to the drive through aggression. This occurs in relation to a certain law and gives an outward expression to the death drive. Yet pleasure is derived from the expression of the sexual

drive. Freud seems to recognise the bond between the outbound expression of the drive and the notion of power by stating:

The libido has the task of making the destroying instinct innocuous, and it fulfils the task by diverting that instinct to a great extent outwards – soon with the help of a special organic system, the muscular apparatus- towards objects in the external world. The instinct is then called the destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery, or the will to power.<sup>29</sup>

The filmic transposition by Pasolini of the fascist system of *Salò*, where Mussolini's regime is identified with the Sadean system, fails to represent the real domination of the Sadean master, but it succeeds in capturing the barbarous domination of the totalitarian system. The film does not work as a representation of perverse sexuality, because it is basically a film on domination. The system of *Salò* lacks perverse sensualism; instead, harsh images of sexual exploitation dominate the spectacle.

The film does not succeed in elevating fascism at the echelon of the Sadean real Real. Thus, fascism remains within the totalitarian context of the symbolic real.<sup>30</sup> As Žižek has demonstrated, one (positive) side of the fascist fantasy serves the cramming of the emptiness of the Aryan ideal, so that *jouissance* stems from this ideal only. The other (negative) side of this fantasy, serves the same purpose: to fill an empty ideal that demands the obliteration of the non-Aryan outcasts, with Jews first in line.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the symbolic reality established by the fascist law is the procurator of his *jouissance*, which is arid and empty of any sensationalism or erotic passion.<sup>32</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This point was presented in the previous part. See Slavoj Žižek, "The Fetish of the Party," in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 3-29.

<sup>2</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII, 1959-1960, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1992) and "Kant with Sade," trans. by James B. Swenson *October* 51 (Winter, 1989): 55-75.

<sup>3</sup> I make use of the term 'imaginarisation' as it has been used in seminars by the NLS. Bogdan Wolf has used the term in order to describe the imaginary encompassing of the real.

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<sup>4</sup> See the forward from Slavoj Žižek's *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment As A Political Factor* (London, New York: Verso, 2001, [1991]). See also Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001). See also a graphic illustration of Žižek's theoretical ideas in Ben Wright's recent film, *Slavoj Žižek: The Reality of the Virtual* (2004).

<sup>5</sup> We find examples of the imaginary Real in films and other visual media, as well as in body tattooing and piercing. Films, such as *The Night Porter* or *The Damned*, which were discussed earlier, produce images and narratives of decadent perverse sexuality that aim to capture the real and horrific essence of fascism, to capture the 'grimace of the real', as Žižek says, through imaginary means. I believe such filmic creations are organised by a fantasy that stages the obscenity and the brutality of the real through these 'perverse' images, resonant of a fantasy produced within the Oedipal system. Perverse *jouissance*, prohibited by the law, is expressed *via* imaginary forms and fantasies.

<sup>6</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo" (1912-13), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 13, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-1974), pp. 1-161.

<sup>7</sup> See Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> See Cornelius Castoriadis, "Psychoanalysis: Project and Elucidation," in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, trans. by Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), cited in Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 96-97.

<sup>9</sup> I must note here that this cult was not a general phenomenon that characterised a political system, such as the Soviet Union, but it was always associated to a particular leader. As an example, Nikita Khrushchev severely criticised and denounced the cult of the individual in the secret speech he delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956. He also quoted Marx, stating his "antipathy to any cult of the individual."

<sup>10</sup> See Daniel Chirot, *The Power and Prevalence of Evil in Our Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 302.

<sup>11</sup> See Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Critics of Totalitarianism," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* ed. by Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 181-201 (p. 184).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. What is more, Mussolini's fascist regime has been neglected or exempt from this totalitarian frame.

<sup>14</sup> See Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965). Friedrich together with Brzezinski develop a model which charts six features of 'totalitarianism'. In short, these are: an official ideology which demands conformity with a totalising vision; a sole confrontational party, bureaucratically and hierarchically structured; control by armed security forces, applied in an arbitrary and terroristic manner; monopolistic control of mass communication and weapons; the entire economy is centrally controlled and directed. For further discussion of these features, see Achim Siegel, "Introduction: The Changing Fortunes of the Totalitarian Paradigm in Communist Studies," in *The Totalitarian Paradigm After The End Of Communism*, ed. by Achim Siegel (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 9-35.

<sup>15</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: George and Unwin, 1958 [1951]). Notwithstanding the differences regarding their approach and focus, Arendt makes similar suggestions to those by Friedrich and Brzezinski, as far as the fundamental aspects of totalitarianism are concerned. She alludes to the use of massification, terroristic practices and propagandistic communication as indispensable elements of totalitarian power.

<sup>16</sup> See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol.1: The Spell of Plato and Vol.2: The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

<sup>17</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2002 [2001]), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> For an illustrative analysis of Žižek's oscillation between antithetical positions, see Matthew Sharpe, "What's Left on Žižek? The Antinomies of Žižek's Sociopolitical Reason," in *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek*, ed. by Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos and Matthew Sharpe (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), pp. 147-168.

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<sup>20</sup> See Cornelius Castoriadis, "Institution and Autonomy," in *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals* ed. by Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1-20 (p. 17).

<sup>21</sup> This is not perversion, in its typical conception. I believe perversion should be used more literally, referring to conditions that manipulate the law and try to disguise the lack in the Other. As I will argue in the next chapters, this is not the case for the pervert who implements *jouissance* in order to both fill and eradicate the lack in the Other.

<sup>22</sup> The technological rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, during the cold war years prioritised less knowledge and more the supremacy of the master signifier that organised it: liberalism versus communism and vice versa. Nevertheless, a strange *jouissance* accompanied these years, especially in the early 1980s when there was much discussion about the possibility of a nuclear war or star wars between the two superpowers. One cannot forget the shivering distress that this possibility generated together with a 'perverse' fascination with this idea. As soon as the Eastern block collapsed in the early 1990s, this *jouissance* also faded away.

<sup>23</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 120.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> See Marquis de Sade, *The 120 days of Sodom and Other Writings*, trans. by Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver, (New York: Grove Press, 1966).

<sup>26</sup> See Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* (London: Free Association Books, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> See Sheila Kunkle, "Žižek's Paradox," *Journal for Lacanian Studies* 1, no. 2 (2003): 224-242 (p. 233).

<sup>28</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Tavistock, 1992), p. 315.

<sup>29</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19, trans. by J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 159-170 (p. 163).

<sup>30</sup> Everything in the film is determined by austere formalism and written laws that generate the fascists' *jouissance*. All look familiar and remote at the same time. The four fascists have no names, no past and their mechanistic functioning bewilders their status as subjects; something places them discreetly beyond the signifying chain, since they cannot be adequately described through words. Yet, their figures are very common and banal and easily incorporated into symbolic reality. They have the impersonal appearance of the bureaucrat similar to that of countless anonymous faces, whose distinctiveness fades, as soon as they disappear in the crowd.

<sup>31</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "The Seven Veils of Fantasy," in *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, ed. by D. Nobus (London: Rebus Press, 1998), pp. 190-218.

<sup>32</sup> For this reason, I believe the perverse eroticism that percolates the representational space of *The Night Porter* remains detached from the film's Nazi references. On the contrary, it seems that Max's relationship with Lucia alienates him from the totalitarian domination of fascism, taking him to a real space of *jouissance*, where all symbolic boundaries deteriorate.

## Part II: Conclusion

By implementing the logic of the four discourses that Lacan outlined in his *Seminar XVII*, the goal of this part's critical analysis was focused on the type of discourse that better describes fascism and questions its link to perversion, at a systematic level. Narratives about fascism create implicit or explicit discursive links of the phenomenon with perversion. Put in Lacanian terms, fascism constitutes a discourse that forwards perverse desire.

The first step was to differentiate these two notions by implementing the Lacanian theory of discourse and to situate the fascist and the pervert in dissimilar positions, regarding the social bonds they form. Each discourse produces a certain fantasy that serves power, that is, the circuit ratified by the phallic signifier as embodied by the master. Fantasy secures the domination of the master and the phallus, promising the satisfaction of desire. At the level of fantasy, it is very difficult to distinguish the lines that dichotomise the power of the fascist from that of the pervert, since they both strive for the same goal, to make the Other complete, non-lacking. Power serves desire and desire is always the desire of the Other (both objective and subjective genitive).

Nonetheless, at least, one factor makes fascism and perversion incompatible and this is domination. Fascist power is assisted by a fantasy of domination. In all its forms there is an inferior other, a slave that has to work for the fascist's *jouissance*. This was elucidated by the discourse of the master. It is necessary to take perversion into a different discourse than the fascist and Lacan theorisation about discourse served this aim. Thus, in the present analysis, perversion was related to Lacan's discourse of the hysteric, challenging the crossing boundaries between neurosis and perversion.

By connecting ideologies to the fantasmatic constructs of power that the master discourse produces, I attempted to put forward an elaboration that disengages psychoanalytic research on concepts under development (such as perversion) from their casual linking to ideological issues. Psychoanalytic research should be conducted within the discourse of the analyst, exploring the lack inherent to all forms of subjectivity.



## **PART III**

### **Ethics**

## **Introduction:**

### **Imagine the Law: Domination and the Ethics of Desire**

Having explored the discursive framework of fascism's relation to perversion, here the main axis of my critique intersects with the debate on the ethical issues raised by historical fascism. Once again, we find allusions to the category of perversion, which appears to be an explanatory tool for analysing not only irregular sexual behaviours, but also fierce socio-political acts that challenge existing morality. The psychoanalytic exploration of ethical questions is an essential task which can elucidate unconscious processes. Lacan states that the status of the unconscious is not ontological but ethical, namely beyond being and the underlying causality that Freud discerned in it.<sup>1</sup> Just as the unconscious marks a trans-individual terrain outside the subject's grasp, similarly ethics is a field beyond materialist conceptions of good and evil. Thus, by applying psychoanalysis to the question of ethics, my aim is to emphasise its primacy in the study of the unconscious and its resistance to the ontological sovereignty of Western philosophy that relates ethics to the ontological domain.

The Second World War and the Nazi atrocities comprised the fulcrum for a radical reconsideration of contemporary ethics in an attempt to comprehend the failure of ethical principles to sustain the social edifice. It is a failure that calls for a retrospective assessment of ethics. In an unexpected fashion, the thought of Sade would be the focus of philosophical speculation and the starting point for a reappraisal of traditional morality. Contrary to such morality, the eighteenth century writer came to embody the brutality and the abhorrence that could be derived from an ethical attitude, revealing ethics' potential for evil.

The ethical scrutiny of the historical atrocities of fascism and the Holocaust has struck on a paradoxical, yet astonishing affinity between the thoughts of Kant and Sade, expounded by several prominent scholars.<sup>2</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno were the first to draw the parallel between the Enlightenment philosopher's thought and Sadean cruelty. Years later, Lacan made another allusion to the subtle link between the two.<sup>3</sup> This link is the epicentre of the present part's critique, as my critique unfolds around the postulation

that the fascist crimes were an ontological example of the fulfilment of Kantian ethics, as well as the truth of Sade. If the fascist atrocities constitute the legacy of Sade, whose name for many, accurately or not, is synonymous with perverse sexuality, inevitably Kantian ethics and fascism are endowed with a rather perverse aura.

In order to explore this hypothesis, I further expand the previous discussion on Eichmann,<sup>4</sup> but in line with the objectives of this part which focuses primarily on ethics and the rather uneasy question, regarding the executions the Nazi officer conducted: Did Eichmann follow his duty, embodying Kant's moral thesis? Considering the evil caused by the performance of such duty, this ironical Kantian position paves a morality *qua* Sade's resemblance to Kant. We saw earlier MacCannell's argument that Eichmann's Kantianism actually reflects his perverse structure, amounting to the validity of Lacan's theorisation in "Kant with Sade."<sup>5</sup> This indicates something cunning about Eichmann's ethical duty, which I take as representative of the National Socialist duty and explore whether it was its perversity that caused the unforeseen and irrevocable atrocities modern European history witnessed.

Was fascist catastrophe something originating in the position of the fascist, a position charged with an enjoyment not to be abandoned in the name of the neighbour, in other words, in the name of otherness? The lack of acknowledgement of the law of otherness (Difference) brings us to the standard view of perversion in psychoanalysis.

Nevertheless, a narrative that singles out a perverse core in fascism turns an ideological formation into a regressive structure, considering perversion's relation to early narcissism and infantile sexuality. What does regressive mean in the field of politics, if not the prevalence of an omnipotent narcissistic fantasmatic position? One of the points to be elaborated in the present part is the way omnipotence intertwines with totalitarian politics and fascism in particular, exploring its relation to perversion. Imagining a rigid law, which is not lacking, sets up a system of domination that alternates between violence and fantasies of grandeur. Thus, a logic that passes from the fantasy of omnipotence to perverse scenarios will form the vector for my reappraisal of ethical propositions in the field of psychoanalysis.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Barthes, Bataille, Beauvoir, Blanchot, Deleuze, Foucault and Klossowski are some of the names that restored the interest in Sade's work.

<sup>3</sup> See Jacques Lacan, "Kant with Sade," trans. by James B. Swenson, *October* 51 (Winter, 1989): 55-75 and *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Tavistock, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> As pointed out in the first chapter, in his trial, Eichmann said he had nothing personal against Jews; on the contrary, he was even sympathetic towards them. However, he had to perform his duty as a Nazi officer, conducting the execution of Jewish people. The radical aspect of Eichmann's statement lies on the startling banality and bureaucratic nature of it. Never before have a bureaucratic ethics been associated with evil, something that led Hannah Arendt to the conception of the notion of the banality of evil, after her interview with Eichmann. See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (New York: Penguin, 1992 [1963]).

<sup>5</sup> See Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of Jouissance," in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 65-99 and "Fascism and the Voice of Conscience" in *The Hysteric's Guide to the Future of the Female Subject* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 138-139.

## 8. Sade with Kant and Eichmann

### 8.1 The Kant in Sade

In 1795, Sade published one of his principal works, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, a book that came after several years of imprisonment and a number of scandalous incidents of its auteur that often troubled the French magistrates.<sup>1</sup> It is in this work that Sade weaves the model of his ‘aberrant’ morality. In the ‘fifth dialogue’ of the *Philosophy*, one finds the illustrious pamphlet “Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans,” where Sade develops his ‘sinister’ ideas about religion and manners.

Eight years earlier, in 1787, Kant wrote *The Critique of Practical Reason*, a major philosophical oeuvre, which expanded Kant’s contribution in the terrain of ethical speculation. Kant’s ethical stance is defined by one’s obedience to a supreme ethical categorical imperative impervious to any heteronomous will, that is any ethical attitude determined by hypothetical imperatives and laws instituted by someone else.

The pioneering element of Kantian ethics was that it moved beyond the common perception of a predetermined supreme good, since such a perception involves a heteronomous content. What is ultimately valued in Kant is not the good but the law. For him, “there is only one moral good, defined as an act accomplished in conformity with duty and strictly for the sake of duty,” as Zupančič notes.<sup>2</sup> By this token, Kant became the first philosopher to swerve from traditional ethics of the good. Leading a new ethical paradigm beyond good, Kant would have been astounded to find the affirmation of his ethical edifice in Sade’s philosophy of evil and virility.

Horkheimer and Adorno made a critical effort to draw a line of comparison between Kant and Sade in their pivotal work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, bracing their dialectical critique of Western culture.<sup>3</sup> For the two authors, Sade is not a brutal uncivilised mind, but primarily an intellectual, whose literal world presages Western civilisation’s catastrophic turn, after the French Revolution. The liberal model that prevailed in Western society usurped and severely distorted the Enlightenment principles. Liberalism is camouflaged in Kantian reason, so that it conveys an ostensible continuity with Enlightenment tradition; it promotes an ethical attitude of unconditional obedience to law

as the supreme value *qua* Kant, in order to preserve its hegemony. The perverse figure of Sade is the bourgeois prototype for the appropriation of Kantian logic that culminated in capitalist domination and the disastrous rise of fascism. According to Kant, all personal egotistic interests must be denounced, as external restrictions to an ethical act that conforms to a universal ethical duty. Sade's philosophy posits an analogous duty, which decrees the quest of pleasure for the sake of pleasure, indifferent to any barriers that impede the strict performance of this duty. In that sense, the moral law must be abolished as restrictive to the supremacy of the corporeal pleasure of the master.

A similar subversion inheres to Kantian thought, since the Enlightenment philosopher loathed a morality that was determined by egotistic and sentimental interests.<sup>4</sup> The only thing that is valued is the ethical duty itself and the very supremacy of the duty boycotts sentimentality. In both Kant and Sade, the unyielding character of the ethical maxim defines an icy duty that recognises no other legality than itself. The ethical law leaves no space for sentiments; the ethical subject is a cold performer of her duty.

Nevertheless, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the renunciation of any authentic and humane disposition unveils the cold basis of the market relations that a materialistic society attempts to conceal under a cloak of emotionalism.<sup>5</sup> The perverse scenes of Sade's writings are snapshots of an emotionless capitalist life and reified social relations that lie under the veil of pseudo-sentimentality and intellectualism. Sade removes this veil, revealing the vain emptiness of bourgeois rationality. Thus, his libertinage, along with Kant's moral philosophy, exemplifies, at best, the hidden apathy and remoteness of bourgeois morality which instrumentalised any type of activity, even sexual behaviour. In so long as sexual pleasure is reduced to an indifferent motorized activity, it serves domination.

The instrumentalisation of Kantian thought endorsed Nazism, as the mythological disguise and expansion of liberalism.<sup>6</sup> In this light, the ethics of pure practical reason has been a catastrophe, since Kantian rationality, rather than harmonising social relations, became the pedestal for the growth of fascist barbarity. For Horkheimer and Adorno, Sade is the emblem of this catastrophic system that perverted the Enlightenment reason. Sweeping the limits of pleasure and morality, Sade configures a system of mere

exploitation which is self-subversive *per se*, namely it converts the aura of Enlightenment to a destructive and evil energy.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the ostensible incompatibility of the philosophies of Sade and Kant, their unexpected congruence in Horkheimer and Adorno's work laid the cards for similar works to follow. Years later, Lacan recited the link between Sade and Kant, in a more radical and unorthodox fashion, arguing that the first constitutes the truth of the latter, in his seminal essay "Kant with Sade."<sup>8</sup>

Serving different purposes from the critique of the *Dialectic*, Lacan contemplates the relation that embraces this heretical couple, initially when he discusses the ethics of psychoanalysis in *Seminar VII*, between 1959 and 1960. According to Lacan's ethical speculation, psychoanalytic practice must repudiate any pre-fixed idea of 'the good' shared by the analyst or the analysand's ego. If the analyst forwards his good, the analytic process is transformed into a narcissistic confirmation of his/her ego. Neither the analysand's idea of the good benefits the analytic process, inasmuch as his/her suffering reveals incongruence between desire and the good maintained by his/her ego.

The last chapter of the seminar on ethics begins with this question: "Have you acted in conformity with your desire?"<sup>9</sup> For Lacan desire is singular; there is just one desire instead of desires in the plural. Desires are nothing more than metonymic manifestations of one primordial desire: the desire of the primeval Thing lost forever. Ethical is any act which conforms to the desire of the actor and therefore gains the status of a universal principle, disengaged from the sphere of egotistic interests, since desire goes beyond the level of the good.<sup>10</sup> So, an ethical act encompasses judgement implicitly or explicitly, for which desire is taken as a canon.

The desire of the subject is exalted and acquires the status of a universal maxim, a duty the subject has to perform at any rate, just like Kant's ethical duty. Desire as the obdurate maxim constitutes the only valid ethical law and this is what renders the ethics of psychoanalysis Kantian at stake. Psychoanalysis must remain outside the normative field of each culture and the goods/ideals it endorses. In order to illustrate this, Lacan alludes to Antigone as the ethical heroine and an archetype for psychoanalytic ethics; it is an allusion that still causes contention regarding its validity.

Lacan continued to elaborate and revise his theorisation about the ethics of desire, as Zupančič points out. In *Seminar VII*, Lacan conceives the moral law as “desire in its pure state,” but in *Seminar XI* he places the drive as the ultimate goal of analysis, without however the question of desire losing its centrality.<sup>11</sup> Zupančič ingeniously demonstrates the implication of desire and drive for ethics. The two are not so much incompatible as formative of a continuum. Desire constitutes a defence, a ‘compromise formation’ against the real enjoyment of the drive.<sup>12</sup> In order for the subject to enter the realm of the drive, she needs first to cross the boundary defined by her desiring status.<sup>13</sup>

In *Seminar VII*, Lacan has recourse to Sade as the embodiment of Kant’s ethical universal axiom, according to which a moral attitude is accomplished by a condition of apathy, that is, the expulsion of all egotistic sentiments.<sup>14</sup> Egotistic interests are ‘pathological’ and they should be sacrificed in the name of the universalised axiom; the universal moral law itself is the supreme good. This is a pure ethical attitude according to Kant which becomes commensurable with the pervert’s sacrifice of enjoyment in the name of the Other’s enjoyment.

In 1962, when Lacan writes “Kant with Sade,” he expounds this relation between Kantian ethics and Sadean fantasy. Based on the treatise “Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen...”<sup>15</sup> Lacan reads Sade’s philosophical crux in the form of a maxim of a supreme value, just as Kant enunciates the categorical imperative.<sup>16</sup> Sade’s anti-moral maxim is the absolute rule that ensures the right to *jouissance*. The rule is:

I have the right of enjoyment over your body, anyone can say to me, and I will exercise this right, without any limit stopping me in the capriciousness of the exactions that I might have the taste to satiate.<sup>17</sup>

The Sadean maxim enables Lacan to illustrate the division of the subject manifested in the axiomatic values that determine her discursive position; that is the subject of the enunciation (the particular *I*) and the subject of the statement (the universal *me*). This means that the subject who speaks in the maxim is not Sade; the ‘I’ at the beginning of the sentence belongs to the ‘anyone’ of the sentence and not to Sade. This ‘anyone’ is the Other that takes the place of the subject of the enunciation, whereas Sade takes the place



of the statement, namely he personifies the enunciation, through the object of the sentence: 'me'.

The division between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the statement is commensurate with Kant's stipulation of an identity caught up between the supremacy of a universal law and the distinctive position of the legislator. Sade exemplifies the ethical priority of the subject of enunciation. For him all other subjects are nothing but the mediums to accomplish his purpose, which is to make the Other exist and the place of enunciation to be occupied by Nature.

What other than Nature's voice suggests to us personal hatreds, revenges, wars, in a word, all those causes of perpetual murder? Now, if she incites us to murderous acts, she has need of them; that once grasped, how may we suppose ourselves guilty in her regard when we do nothing more than obey her intentions?<sup>18</sup>

If the supremacy of the law conforms to a wry analogy with the Freudian superego, then Sade appears to be the envoy of Kantian ethics. By admitting blind obedience to one single demand of the Other (Nature), the imperative 'Enjoy!' in its absolute superegoic dimension, as Lacan suggested, the Sadean subject instrumentalises himself in order to meet the demand and transposes his divided status to the victim.<sup>19</sup> The blatant and uncompromised obedience to the Other's demand resembles the apathy that accompanies the submission to the categorical imperative of Kant: 'Do your duty!' The superego decrees always-another duty for the subject to pursue, succumbing to its rigidity that evokes the stiffness of the Kantian duty. The ferocious character of the superego is manifest in the relentless demands on the subject, who is caught up in a vicious cycle of austere obedience to the law and her incapacity to meet those demands. The more the subject adheres to the letter of the law the more the superego tightens its noose around the subject through the instrument of guilt.

There we have the formation of a paradoxical couple, where morality and anti-morality have a common denominator: Sade's cruel sexual ordeals are in accordance with Kantian ethics. On the basis of this speculation, where Sade's fundamental axiom is equivalent to Kant's ethical dictum, Lacan argues that it is Kant *with* Sade and not '*after*' or '*and*', wishing to emphasise the continuance of their thought that occupies the two sides of the

same coin. In this manner, Lacan adumbrates the perverse lining of Enlightenment, since one finds in Sade the ‘repressed’ truth of Kant.

Lacan is influenced by Horkheimer and Adorno’s argument, despite the fact that he does not allude to their work.<sup>20</sup> Having taken a different pathway, Lacan thus reaches a similar conclusion to that of the authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In the *Dialectic*, Sade accomplishes Kantian ethics better than Kant, forming a negative antipode to the ethical philosophy of the latter. Instead of its affirmation, Sade twists the Kantian reason of Enlightenment and he submits it to a dystopic subversion. Nonetheless, Lacan argues that Sade crystallises the truth of Kant’s reason. They are both occupants of the same positive axis solidified by a relation of complementarity rather than by dichotomy.<sup>21</sup> Sade is not the *perversion* of Kant, but more the necessary supplement for understanding the latter. Lacan’s argument appears to suggest that Sade is the truth of Kant.

Probably, this claim is not as ‘outrageous’ as its reverse form. If Sade reveals the truth of Kant, then it can also be argued that Kant is the truth of Sade. In that case, the problem with this coupling is perspicuous, as the ethical subject’s counterpart is the Sadean villain and perversion comes to emblematised the truth of Kantian ethics. The latter comes to sanction torture and exploitation.

## 8.2 (Pseudo) Ethics of Domination

For Kant it is not essential to bind the ethical maxim to the particular person who enunciates it; quite the opposite, the one thing that counts is for the moral law to be obeyed and its supreme value is related to the absence of a particular enunciator. Since the moral law possesses an impersonal character, the ethical command originates from no obvious source. On performing this duty all egotistic sentiments are eliminated; all but one fundamental sentiment which Kant does not fail to notice: this is pain, as the quintessential experience of the ethical duty. Accomplishing your duty for the sake of it leaves pleasure aside and paves the way for an ethical attitude of constant torment.

This prerequisite appears to be accomplished by the libertinage exalted by Sade. In the Sadean universe, the experience of *jouissance* becomes its canopy, as pain is

superimposed on pleasure. With Sade as a main reference in the *Ethics* seminar, Lacan introduces the term ‘transgressive *jouissance*’; this is where pleasure and *jouissance* are severed and the two states are no longer synonymous.<sup>22</sup> To enjoy the transgressive character of *jouissance* means to surrender oneself to more pain. Pain is a component of *jouissance*, which rises above the limit that the pleasure principle inflicts. The latter functions on the basis of the law of homeostasis. By keeping excitation to an optimum low level, pleasure is obtained. The symbolic law ensures the preservation of this optimum level, by proscribing any excessive excitation, since it commands the subject to “enjoy as little as possible.”<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, this limit is often crossed, since it cannot be strictly charted, and the subject finds herself in a gorge, over-flooded with excitation.

The notion of *jouissance*, during the years that followed the *Ethics* seminar, became equivalent to the experience of both pleasure and pain as a single packet. *Jouissance* is tied to the impossible, forming a copula between death and libido.<sup>24</sup> Sade gives pain its privileged position, something that brings him on the side of Kant. The exchange of unremitting torments dominates the Sadean system stretching its boundaries from finitude to infinity, from pleasure to *jouissance*.<sup>25</sup> Pleasure easily lapses giving way to pain, as the permanent inhabitant of the subject’s existence.

Let us proceed to a scrutiny of the ethical status of the Sadean executioner, when he exploits Other people’s pain and humiliation. Sade’s heroes personify and substantiate the ethical duty. To say that Sade’s world principally enfolds *jouissance* means that the pursuit of *jouissance* becomes a painful ethical duty for the Sadean hero that carries him beyond the realm of pleasure. But is it possible to swing the pendulum towards the opposite direction and see pain as a subversive idiosyncratic tactic to gain pleasure in accordance with the subversive flavour of Sade’s system? It is contentious whether we are dealing with a painful Sadean duty *qua* Kant or with a Sadean ploy of gaining pleasure out of pain that cannot acquire a universal eminence. The relation between the Sadean world and *jouissance*, as its basic constituent, diverges from the rectilinear relation that characterises the Kantian subject and the ethical maxim.

What is to be elaborated in the following sections is a counter-argument to the ethical affiliation of Sade to Kant. Given its Sadean connotation, transgressive *jouissance* has been thought as the *modus operandi* of the pervert’s *jouissance*. Is it the transgression of

the law that brings *jouissance* to the sadist and the fascist? Were the fascist atrocities the product of following desire as an ethical maxim of supreme value?

### 8.2.1 *The Sadean Imaginary Ethics*

The Sadean subject acts in accordance with an imaginary law. Sade imagines the law as a structure that has a certain limit which he crosses, yielding to enjoyment. Of course, it is something that Sade can only claim in his writings, where he invents new signifiers to denote transgressive and destructive *jouissance*, since he never crossed the limit of fantasy in his actual life. The peculiar virtue of crime, that is, evil sought for evil's sake (what Sade calls the Supreme-Being-in-Evil)<sup>26</sup> all indicate the *jouissance* one encounters, when he transgresses the law:

All those duties are imaginary, since they are only conventional.<sup>27</sup>

Once you concede me the proprietary right of enjoyment, that right is independent of the effects enjoyment produces; from this moment on, it becomes one, whether this enjoyment be beneficial or damaging to the object which must submit itself to me.<sup>28</sup>

It cannot be denied that we have the right to decree laws that compel woman to yield to the flames of him who would have her; violence itself being one of that right's effects, we can employ it lawfully. Indeed! Has Nature not proven we have that right, by bestowing upon us the strength needed to bend women to our will?<sup>29</sup>

The term that seems to describe the Sadean pervert's relation to *jouissance* and his "right of enjoyment" is instrumentalisation. According to Lacan, the Sadean executioner renders himself an instrument of the Other's *jouissance*,<sup>30</sup> taking the position of the enunciator of the ethical maxim that Lacan articulates in "Kant with Sade."<sup>31</sup> In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, we find an illustration of a similar instrumentalisation:

When Nature inculcated in him the irresistible desire to commit crime, she most prudently arranged to put beyond his reach those acts which could disturb her operations

or conflict with her will. Ha, my friend, be sure that all the rest is entirely permitted, and that she has not been so idiotic as to give us the power of discomfiting her or disturbing her workings. The blind instruments of her inspirations, were she to order us to set fire, the only crime possible would be in resisting her: all the criminals on earth are nothing but agents of her caprices...<sup>32</sup>

By becoming an instrument of the Other's enjoyment (Nature), the Sadean pervert serves the Other's *Will-to-Enjoy*. Nonetheless, such an interpretation of perversion places the pervert in the position of the servant and disregards his own *jouissance* that opposes the universality of the ethical maxim. The Sadean executioner may maintain the rigidity and the uncompromising character of the ethical duty, yet he links it to his own particular interests, in other words to his fantasies. This is something that contradicts the idea of a universal ethical duty, from which one derives no personal pleasure, but unconditionally obeys it, regardless of what the consequences for oneself may be. If the Sadean executioner is personally interested in the act he performs, in line with his fantasies, his apathy is not the manifestation of an ethical attitude, but more the acting out of a cruel fantasy.

Consequently, the Sadean subject, as well as the ordinary pervert, fails to reduce himself to a mere object. As Zupančič notes, it is impossible to eliminate all pathological interests in a Kantian ethical act, without crossing the limit of the Other.<sup>33</sup> This means that neither the Sadean nor the ordinary pervert can totally reduce themselves to an object, since the desire of the Other is still there. In my view, a hint of hypocrisy inheres to someone's offering of her/himself as an instrument for the Other's enjoyment; because her/his own enjoyment resides precisely in the instrumentalised position s/he takes. Surprisingly, Lacan does not seem to discern this contradiction, when he schematises the formula of the Sadean fantasy.

Nevertheless, this fantasmatic structure embraces the potentiality for evil and cruelty, when someone places him/herself in the position of the executioner of the categorical imperative. Zupančič notices the problem of such instrumentalisation, pointing out its pseudo-Kantianism or what she calls the 'Sadean trap'.<sup>34</sup> Distancing herself from the Kantianism that Lacan discerns in Sade, yet maintaining Lacan's argument on the

pervert's instrumentalisation, Zupančič states that the perverse subject who ascribes his *jouissance* to the Other is *hiding behind the law*:

The Kantian subject cannot escape the Real involved in unconditional duty by hiding behind the image of his fellow-man – but neither can this subject hide behind his duty, and as an excuse for his actions. [...] On the contrary, the subject is fully responsible for what he refers to as his duty. The type of discourse where I use my duty as an excuse for my actions is perverse in the strictest sense of the word.<sup>35</sup>

For Zupančič, perversion is a condition that misappropriates Kantian ethics, since it uses the Other as an excuse for its ethical façade. The Sadean subject ascribes the performance of his action to a necessity (e.g. Nature); he presents himself as the sheer instrument of the Other's will, but not because *he wants to*. The Sadean pervert disavows his own personal interests (desire) and hence responsibility, becoming the marionette of a superior power. As Žižek puts it, in agreement with Zupančič, the pervert would extract *jouissance* through his very exoneration for the act he performs.<sup>36</sup> The sadist, for instance, would find enjoyable the idea of imposing pain on the other being fully aware that it is not him who accounts for this action, but the Other, whose will the sadist serves:

This position of the sadistic pervert provides the answer to the question: How can the subject be guilty when he merely realizes an 'objective', externally imposed necessity? By subjectively assuming this 'objective necessity' – by finding *enjoyment* in what is imposed on him.<sup>37</sup>

This is precisely what Kantian ethics proscribes: the summoning of the law, as a subterfuge for satisfying personal interests. The Sadean pervert mistreats Kant's fundamental lie for setting his ploy. When the subject claims to 'have no other choice' but to perform a duty that violates the rights and the good of her fellow-man, she acts against "freedom and ethics," taking a position of enunciation that constitutes, according to Kant the fundamental lie (*proton pseudos*).<sup>38</sup> This lie always has consequences; the sense of guilt and fallibility are permanent counterparts of the ethical subject that mark her status even when her act is compelled by an imperative force. The Other sets the ultimate boundary for the subject's pathological interests, which means a genuine ethical

act (a 'successful' act) inevitably affects the Other. The Sadean pervert is firm and categorical about his tortures being imposed against his own interests and he is himself supposed to perform a painful duty. But Zupančič defines perverse ethics as the act that uses Kant's imperative as an *excuse*. Someone may attribute his/her intention to harm another person to his/her action, by justifying it as his/her duty. In that case, s/he hides behind the duty, in spite of Kant being categorical about the ethical subject's obligation to assume full responsibility for what s/he considers to be his/her duty.<sup>39</sup> This means Kantian ethics is not Sadean in its core. Kant forbids the position of the Sadean executioner, considering its incompatibility with the position of the ethical subject.

Thus, the theme of instrumentalisation in perversion is problematic, as it is not necessarily indicative of the indifference that accompanies the obedience to the ethical duty. The famous Sadean apathy is far from being affirmative of the fundamental iciness that accompanies the performance of the Kantian duty. As Žižek notes, their incommensurability does not lie in the fact that Sade embodies brutal apathy, while Kant leaves a humane crevice that allows empathy for our fellow being.<sup>40</sup> Quite the reverse, it is the Kantian subject who fully and methodically assumes apathy; she is 'effectively cold', in contrast with the sadist's fraudulent apathetic coldness that enables him to perform his tortures.

Departing from Lacan's argument, Žižek and Zupančič correctly, I believe, disengage Kantian ethics from the Sadean fantasy. Yet, for both, Sade still exemplifies a perverse position, which has been occupied by bureaucratic fascists such as Eichmann who, in tune with the pseudo-Kantianism of the Sadean subject, attributed the responsibility for his executions to the will of the Führer (the Other).

But it seems to me that there is a difference here from the position of the ordinary pervert. If the pervert is a pharisaic ethical mimic who does not assume the responsibility of his actions, how can we explain the fact that he has to pay for the consequences of his transgression? The Nazi subject operated within a system secured by the presence of a master, while the pervert is always an outsider; he cannot bring his existence under the auspice of a master. In other words, he is fully aware that his actions are penalised, just as Eichmann was certain that his actions would be rewarded by his master.

The pervert is aware of the legal consequences of his actions and the punishment he receives, which may indicate that he embraces guilt as expiation for his sexual misdemeanour. I believe that the punishment of the pervert is intrinsic to his act, not because he surrenders to a transgression of the law, but because he cannot complete his act. Of course, this does not mean his act is ethical, since I consent with Zupančič's suggestion that pathological interests are not totally eliminated in the pervert, like in any other ordinary ('neurotic') subject. This means that guilt is there, contrary to fascism, where it is denounced.<sup>41</sup>

Considering the fraudulent position of the Sadean executioner, we can say that the Sadean pervert, in reality, instrumentalises the Other. He uses the latter for staging a fantasy from which he actually derives enjoyment through an ostensible self-instrumentalisation. Less a servant and more a master who possesses knowledge about how to make the law complete, the Sadean pervert simply instrumentalises the Other. By overturning the abstract status of the Other, tying it to the particular other, the pervert renders the Other the pedestal of any possible torment, marking It with the stain of the division of the subject. The pain the victim expresses is the pain of the Other, the former is the embodiment of the latter. The subject, who confronts the pervert's act by appearing startled, appalled or speechless, unleashes the *jouissance* that fills the Other (*and* the pervert, according to my argument here).

When the Sadean libertines articulate the worst possible blasphemies against God, it seems to be a constitutive and an integral part of their libertinage. Blasphemy is a *sine qua non* element of Sade's sexual scenarios, because it eliminates the status of the Other as the curator of difference. The Sadean subject treats the Other for his own end; he reduces the Other to an instrument of his own pleasure, which is the opposite of Lacan's argument. The Sadean executioner lacks the respect that Kant recognises in the Other, reminding us to treat our fellow being as an end-in-itself. This is epitomised by the alternative formula of the ethical maxim Kant articulated: *So act that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.*<sup>42</sup> An individual should never be the means, but the end of an ethical action. The Sadean pervert tortures the Other by turning the latter to an instrument of his pleasure rather than proffering himself as an instrument for the Other's



*jouissance*. The ethical duty demands that all pathological personal interests, propensities and satisfactions must be sacrificed to serve the universal maxim. Yet, as Zupančič suggests, the definitive boundary of the subject's pathology does not reside in the subject, but in the Other.<sup>43</sup> In Lacanian terms, the pathological interests of the subject, her desire, are bound to the desire of the Other.

Lacan's argument about instrumentalisation is ineffective, in front of the executioner's pleasure, tied to the infliction of pain and torture onto the Other. The action is not guided by an impersonal but a personal valence, that is to say, it reflects the egotistic interests of the sadist, the fantasies that impel his tortures, through which he serves the *jouissance* of the Other. Essentially, the Sadean pervert wants to deceive the other and usurp his/her *jouissance*, rather than proffering it to the Other.<sup>44</sup>

Taking this into account, it is more appropriate to speak about the Sadean 'master', rather than the 'pervert'. The Sadean ploy identifies the other with the locus of the Other, which suggests a discrepancy with the universality of Kantian ethics, as Sade reduces the impersonal character of the ethical maxim to a discernible source. The *jouissance* of the torture is attributed to the Other, but its place is occupied by the victim, a specific physical presence. For Kant, the ethical maxim is transcendental of any material substance, which seems to be compatible only with the abstract status of the Other. Clairwil in *Juliette* enunciates a fantasy that conveys his personal interests and pleasure:

I would like, Clairwil answered, to find a crime which even when I had left off doing it, would go on having a perpetual effect, in such a way that so long as I lived, at every hour of the day and as I lay sleeping at night, I would be constantly the cause of a particular disorder, and that this disorder might broaden to the point where it brought about a corruption so universal or a disturbance so formal that even after my life was over I would survive in the everlasting continuation of my wickedness.<sup>45</sup>

Clairwil, as a Sadean master, does not want to abolish his individual pathological interests for the sake of a universal ideal, but more to reduce the universal to the particular, the corruption for which his name will be acknowledged. Furthermore, *a propos* of the executioner's relation to pain and humiliation, as the only sentiments that Kant acknowledges when one follows one's duty, neither the Sadean nor the fascist

executioner embrace these sentiments, as they are imposed on the other. The executioner transfers the painful experience of the duty to the Other (“I *have to* perform this act”).

Seen as a system of domination, Sade’s world is organised in a similar mode as the other two systems elaborated earlier (‘Oedipalism’ and ‘totalitarianism’), insofar as they all necessitate a master to dominate discourse. The ascendancy of the phallic/master signifier forms the ideal that substantiates the structure of any system, since it generates idealised visions, namely, fantasies that concretise the system. Yet different masters organise these discursive systems, assisted by divergent fantasies, on the basis of which Sadean organisation is distinguished from totalitarianism. Their idealisations delineate different approximations of the real. The ideals that support the edifice of Sade’s moral philosophy of pain are themselves hollow, but the fantasy of a destructive Nature qualifies and empowers them.

My friend, it is from Nature roués obtain the principles they put into action; I’ve told you a thousand times over that Nature, who for the perfect maintenance of the laws of her general equilibrium, has sometimes need of vices and sometimes of virtues, inspires now this impulse, now that one, in accordance with what she requires; hence, we do no kind of evil in surrendering ourselves to these impulses, of whatever sort you may suppose them to be.<sup>46</sup>

Sade is concerned less with inventing new ways to access *jouissance* and more with developing new methods of maintaining and perpetuating *jouissance*, in other words evil, prioritised as the supreme Good. Only the enduring dominion of evil *jouissance* would satisfy Nature and give some tranquillity to the Sadean master’s mind; the main goal would be for *jouissance* to dissolve the symbolic and ultimately turn against itself. However, if *jouissance* has to be prolonged, in perversion, this is not because of its recognition as a supreme duty, but as a condition that keeps desire out. It is possible to isolate perversion here from its Sadean contextualisation, arguing that perverse action is not driven by the superiority of a duty to *jouir*; it plays more the role of the deterrence of desire, which is the limit the so-called pervert wishes to cross. Rather than defining or embodying perversion, Sade *employs* it for the accomplishment of his duty: the dominance of *jouissance*. Nevertheless, for the ordinary pervert, *jouissance* never

acquires a masterful position that commands its accomplishment as an absolute duty. In the position of the master in discourse, we find the pervert's division, as previously elaborated, and *jouissance* constitutes his defence to desire, which is the reverse of what the neurotic does, for whom desire is a defence against *jouissance*.<sup>47</sup> Despite their opposing aims, at the end, desire/division is perpetuated in both the pervert and the neurotic, as I argue further in the final part. Inasmuch as desire for Lacan is associated with a defence against *jouissance*, it loses its raw transgressive force and becomes a "compromise formation." Stavrakakis notes: "Even in perversion, where 'desire appears by presenting itself as what lays down the law, namely a subversion of the law, it is in fact well and truly the support of a law'."<sup>48</sup>

Evil in Kant suggests a deviation from the absolute renunciation of pathological interests (desires), as the categorical imperative decrees. Evil does not stem from the apathetic obedience to an universalisable law; rather it emerges, when the ethical stance of the subject favours a pleasurable good marked by personal desire and not by an unyielding obedience to the moral law. Thus, the subject needs to take the responsibility for choosing her ethical posture between pleasure and the apathy of the law.

However, a nagging problem surfaces in relation to evil. In spite of the absolute character of the categorical imperative, anything can come under the claim of forming a universalised duty. Zupančič emphatically notes: "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?"<sup>49</sup> So applying a universalised moral dictum is not enough. One has to identify with the will behind this dictum. Kant delineates a categorical ethical duty that requires not only the subject's conformity with it, but also her conformity to be the sole 'content' or 'motive' of her action. Only then is she released from the pathological elements of her will.

This is Kant's transcendental subject, whose fundamental emptiness, brings her close to Lacan's conception of the subject as decentred.<sup>50</sup> As Zupančič points out, Kant makes a distinction between form and *pure* form, as the form which is 'outside' of any content; this does not suggest that pure form is entirely empty, insofar as it provides form only for itself, but it is entirely a surplus.<sup>51</sup> This Kantian articulation suggests an ostensible dissymmetry with Lacan, inasmuch as the surplus is conceptualised as a form, whereas

for Lacan it is an object. But Zupančič elucidates a deeper consensus between the two. Kant defines the ‘genuine drive’ of the will “in terms of pure form as an absence of any *Triebfeder*,” that is, the ellipsis of any drive which characterises the ethical act proper.<sup>52</sup> By the same token, Lacan defines desire “precisely as the *pure form of demand*, as that which remains of demand when all the particular objects (or ‘contents’) that may come to satisfy it are removed. Hence the *objet petit a* can be understood as a void that has acquired a form.”<sup>53</sup> For Kant, pure form, what is devoid of any motive, itself must become a force that motivates the action of the subject, whereas for Lacan the emptiness of the *objet a* leaves the demand always for another object, becoming, in this fashion, the motive force for desire’s circulation.

Here, Zupančič demonstrates the paradox of Kant’s thesis, since the categorical imperative must form the only motive and causal factor for the subject’s adherence to it, regardless of the fact that the imperative does not reflect any pleasurable conditions that may qualify it as a cause and motive for the subject’s action.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the imperative is expected to meet the criteria for embodying causality, when it is essentially isolated from any pathological foundation, i.e. what hypostatizes causality in subjectivity.

### **8.2.2 *Eichmann’s Perverse Ethics***

For the fascist, the picture is different from the Sade’s vision of utter destruction. The ideological amalgam of fascism envisaged a world of rejuvenated nature. The Nazi ideal supported a palpable desire to restore the potency and leadership of Germany. For this reason, desire was not to be excluded, but to be purified and become clean from the contaminating influence and obscenity of *jouissance*.<sup>55</sup> Evidently, Nazism revealed a type of particularism – a certain fantasy that guided its action – that does not converge with Kantian ethics.

As I discussed earlier, MacCannell’s applied the “Kant with Sade” prism to the analysis of Eichmann’s ethical attitude. Discarding all personal interests, even his alleged sympathy for Jewish people, Eichmann contributed to the fascist atrocities with nothing more than the accomplishment of his bureaucratic duty.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the duty he

declared is linked to a visible source of lucid personal interests. The central authoritarian figure of Hitler, fabricating the ideology of National Socialism (in *Mein Kampf*), is what promoted a certain fantasy of good that set the ambitious plans and visions of German rebirth. Just as it happens with implicit or explicit racism and fundamentalism, there is a master who embodies an absolute (phallic) ideal which is rendered universal, by disregarding intersubjective difference.

Rather than acquiring a universal value, the ideal of the master eradicates the universality of the maxim, since it is linked to personal interests. Hitler turned this ideal to the rudimentary constituent of the new German identity, the good that secures this identity. The primary interest of Nazi officers was the realisation of this good, which means Eichmann did not simply follow the orders of a superior source, but discerned in Hitler the valid patronage of a seductive good, the pre-eminence of 'Fatherland'. After all, it was Eichmann's interests, writing for the anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Sturmer* that gave him the recognition by the Nazi party and his position in the security office. The role of the executioner was his prize and he found a purpose in serving it at his best without questioning its futile character.

At the time, for a great number of people it was unthinkable to perceive 'Fatherland' as a signifier without any supreme value in itself.<sup>57</sup> Stavrakakis notes that what sustains the coherence of a large group of people is the leader (from Freud's perspective) or "an idea occupying the position of a *point de capiton*, a common point of reference."<sup>58</sup> It is the *point of capiton* or else the master signifier that forges unity and as soon as it is recanted, this unity dissolves. The master signifier that supported the domination of fascism was, like any other signifier, totally arbitrary, fake and contingent. But 'Fatherland' had to present the opposite qualities, namely that its supremacy is given and undisputed.

Hitler envisaged a new order, which hardly appeals as a new world of ethics, since it was nothing but one more myth, a fantasy that hypostatized the imperialistic aspirations of Nazism and supported a traditional idea of good. As early as 1920, the programme of the Nazi party rejected the Treaty of Versailles and declared the right of Germany to deal with other nations.<sup>59</sup> Of course, there was no justification for this right, apart from the imaginary supremacy of the German race. One must bear in mind that the rise of German fascism is not a historical contingency but also a reaction to interwar politics and the

humiliation that Germany endured by the great political powers of the time after the degrading Treaty of Versailles. The treaty declared Germany as solely responsible for the First World War and opened the way for Allied armies to occupy its soil, leaving only the debris of the nation's previous wealth.

In the context of rising nationalism after 1920,<sup>60</sup> the timing was propitious for Hitler to build a new German identity which was intended to fill the lacuna of the historical narrative of Germany. Global socio-economic conditions during the years of Depression also favoured the ambition of the nation's rebirth. The economic nadir of the late twenties, repercussive of the crack in liberalism's blossoming, alongside the decline of the old empires and the rise of revolutionary movements, created a general atmosphere of malaise. As Stavrakakis notes, "it was mass unemployment, misery and anxiety (especially of the middle classes) that led to Hitler's hegemony, to the hegemony of the Nazi utopian promise."<sup>61</sup> The fiction of the Other was severely mistrusted and Nazism emerged as a violent challenge to the Other that led to the increase of its power after the 1930 election. The victorious ascendance of Nazism to power was an indication that the fascist fantasy seized the desire of the German people, whether voluntarily or against their will.

But it is necessary now to clarify the theoretical distinction between the fascist, the Sadean character and the pervert. The fascist is not in solidarity with the Sadean hero at least on the level of fantasy. What the first seeks is the dominance of a supreme good associated with the ascendancy of a certain identity. Nazism's avowed purpose, for instance, was the Aryan race to prevail in a powerful German nation/state, which would eventually conquer the rest of the world.<sup>62</sup> The barbaric acts that followed and culminated in the Second World War inscribed the field of the impossible, without defying the impossible; Nazism employed a chimerical fantasy to cover it. In line with Žižek's view, rather than traversing the fantasy, in what would have been a genuine ethical act, the Nazi act was intrinsically restricted by the deadlock of its utopian project and the subsequent negation to relinquish the fantasy that sustained this utopianism.<sup>63</sup> The rage and the violence of the fascist emerged from thwarting the inherent impossibility of his regeneration project. The first step for reconstructing the identity of the Aryan German

was to bury the bones of the old system. Catastrophe was necessary for the German rebirth.

We are promoting catastrophic policies, for only catastrophe –that is, the collapse of the liberal system- will clear the way for the new order [...] Every weakening of the system is good, very good for us and our German revolution.<sup>64</sup>

Among the delegates of the old, traditional and firm system, Jews were first in line to become the target of Nazi violence, as the malformed part of the organic unity of Nazism. “The Jewish-capitalist world will not survive the twentieth century,” Hitler predicted in 1939, fusing anti-Semitism with liberalism, as the main target of what he sought to abolish.<sup>65</sup> The fascist atrocities of the war had an immense cost on the Jewish people, but the rage was not limited solely against the Jewish community, but also against anyone who was an obstacle to the accomplishment of the Nazi imperialistic project. Jews were not only the real blots in the identity of the Nazi German, as Žižek suggested, but they also represented more than anything else the inherent limit of the fantasmatic core of fascism, that is, the Aryan image of the superman.<sup>66</sup>

Seen as contemptible delegates of a different symbolic system, Jews, together with other heterogeneous populations also isolated in concentration camps, such as gypsies, prostitutes, homosexuals, people with disabilities and more, embodied precisely the unsurpassable aperture between the Nazi imaginary representation and its symbolic refutation, namely difference. The extinction of Jews served the purpose of restoring the omnipotent image of the German, upon which the new identity would be erected. A fixed meaning was associated with a rigid image, because phallic mastery secures its omnipotent ascendancy only on an imaginary basis. The Jew functioned as the external embodiment of an internal limit to this identity; that is the falsification of fantasy by symbolic reality. Their extinction, their death was a *real solution* for the Nazi, serving an ultimate good.

As Žižek has noted, Jew was the partial object (*a*) for Nazism.<sup>67</sup> This means that the Jew embodied a real excess that the symbolic fabric of Nazism could not incorporate. The real surfeit of the object needed to be isolated in order to maintain the meta-identity of the new German. Since excess is neither eradicated nor absorbed by the symbolic, the Nazi

encompassed it through fantasy, converting the real into the energy that fuels fantasy (the staging of the object in fantasy). The annihilation of the Jew served as the affirmation of the superiority of Nazi identity. Between the construction of an imaginary identity and its symbolic appraisal, the *object a* emerges as the copula, the undifferentiated object that interlocks the imaginary and the symbolic synapses.<sup>68</sup> Žižek says that what bridges the distance between an imaginary expectation and its symbolic falsification is the surplus embodied by an agent, the *object a*:

The distance between what we wanted to achieve and the effective result of our activity, the surplus of the result over the subject's intention, is again embodied in another agent, in a kind of meta-subject (God, Reason, Jew).<sup>69</sup>

By attacking the *object a*, as a regressive result of the occurred schism with the Other, the German fascist wanted to fabricate a new identity that concealed castration, the possibility of another degrading treaty. But rather than eliminating the object, fascism situated it exclusively in the realm of pleasurable fantasies, concealing the Other's castration. The Other of fascism is not there as a curator of meaning, but as a presence marked by the opposite role: to offer a signifying canopy that maintains and disguises the very meaninglessness, the absurdity of the law of Nazism's totalitarian system. The bureaucratic language that gave birth to signifiers such as the 'Final Solution', in order to represent the atrocities, divulges an Other who occupies the sphere of the empty signifier. The bureaucratic and cold tone of the fascist speech refuses the other.<sup>70</sup>

Sade and the fascist occupy a similar discursive position of mastery, but they are two antagonistic masters, since their ideals are incompatible and conflicting. In his writings, Sade expresses rage and prioritises pain, torture and murder. Nevertheless, crime is not valid because of the supremacy of an aristocratic powerful identity, but because of the supremacy of evil itself that the Sadean hero willingly serves. Evil, as the supreme good, is self-destructive and definitely not reproductive. This means that it will eventually turn its evil against itself. The act of sodomy in Sade's work is the epitome of the antithesis to reproduction and the affirmation of the death of the human race.

The domination of the Sadean hero aims at nothingness, an empty space ingrained by evil. But he wants to give an ontological status to this nothingness by engraving it onto



the individual, an act that can only lead to death. Death is what defies the Sadean fantasy, as the inherent frontier to the *sine die* upholding of evil. For Sade, death, instead of a solution, suggests convolution of his philosophical speculation of the supreme value of evil, because together with death as a limit, desire re-surfaces. The ire of the Sadean hero, the unfolding of the death drive from the collision of the imaginary to a symbolic limit, gives birth to the Sadean notion of the second death: the extinction of the symbolic order itself as the triumph of evil and its infinite torment over the other. Yet the *object a* is not refuted; it is what emerges from the fissure between Sade's fantasy and its symbolic revocation. The *object a* is the key to unlock real *jouissance*, but it ends up perpetuating desire instead. The object-cause of desire is also Sade's evil object.

In this regard, the fascist and the Sadean pervert secure different conceptions of the good, diverging from the position of the ordinary pervert. For the latter, the primary interest is in the sexualisation of a body that remains intact and never loses its potency. He does not wish to eradicate the symbolic, but to transform it into an *enjoying* register. Therefore, he accepts a certain limit, namely desire, to the infinite access to *jouissance*, which is not to say he is not bothered by this restriction. But it is a similar nuisance as with the neurotic's position, who tries to ostracise *jouissance* from the symbolic, although his desire prompts him to *jouir*. This explains why the pervert does not take his posture as an opposition to the masters and institutions that regulate socio-symbolic relations. He is not an activist or someone who implements sexuality to deliberately subvert a certain political system.

For Sade, despite his graphic perverse illustrations, the body's potential for sexual pleasure is the last thing that interests him. The body constitutes more a corporeal field for infinite access to *jouissance*. The scenes of the crimes do not mark the end of the Sadean orgy, but rather the opposite. The dissolution of the body is where everything begins and where divine beauty is attained.<sup>71</sup> In the case of Nazism, the dissolution of the body of the Jew is the validation of the finitude of the Jewish society. Leaving no traces of the body is the closing scene for the 'Final Solution' of Nazism.

Here we have the construction of what Zupančič calls the 'image of suffering', namely, the general yet essential ideological strategy of creating an image that aims to conceal an act that goes beyond strict confines, an act that has an "unfamiliar, 'out-of-place'

effect.”<sup>72</sup> A real act is structurally ‘evil,’ insofar as it opens the dimension of the impossible; this is what ideology veils under an image of ‘radical evil’ that prevents the subject from tackling the impossible real.<sup>73</sup> In this regard, the image of the Jew conspiring against the German nation and causing malice presents the impossible act (the acceptance of the Jewish other) as suffering. This image secures the Good of Nazi ideology which has nothing to do with *the* act. The genuine ethical act requires the recognition of this ‘extimate’ locus of our being which is fundamentally empty, without concealing it under the mask of a “Good larger than the good of those affected by our actions.”<sup>74</sup>

Parallel to the extinction of the Jewish population, one can evoke and juxtapose the Nazi experimentation on eugenics. The ‘good’ gene ascertains the longevity and prevalence of the Aryan image. The reproduction of the ‘good’ gene gives corporeal eternity and life in the fascist ideal.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Maurice Lever notes in Sade’s biography how the orgies in La Coste caused nuisance to the magistrates in 1775. See *Sade: A Biography*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (London: Harper Collins, 1993), pp. 256-258.

<sup>2</sup> See Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming, (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp. 81-119.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>5</sup> An example of this emotionalism would be the pretentious care for other people, such as the charitable activities of Western liberal society that Žižek has cauterised in his work. Liberalism tries to “fight” poverty from the vantage point of the wealth it builds through the exploitation of the poor. In Pasolini’s *Salò*, there is a graphic illustration of this capitalist pharisaism, as one of the fascist libertines forces a female victim to eat his excrement. When the young victim hesitates due to her repulsion, the libertine encourages her to eat the excrement by offering her a spoon.

<sup>6</sup> Nazism also instrumentalised Nietzsche’s notion of the superman, whose *Will-to-Power* is not affected by external forces, like Kantian ethics demands.

<sup>7</sup> Without doubt, Sade did not deserve the seclusion and the admonition his name underwent. Instead of erasing his name from history and inscribing it in manuals of psychopathology, Sade must remain a reference to the failure of instrumentalised rationality, the bareness of which he exposed in his writings.

<sup>8</sup> Lacan’s elaboration comes almost twenty years, after Horkheimer and Adorno’s seminal analysis. He wrote “Kant with Sade” for the purposes of a preface to a new edition of Sade’s *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. But as it was never published, the essay appeared later in Lacan’s *Écrits II* (Paris: Seuil, 1971 [1966]).

<sup>9</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Tavistock, 1992), p. 311.

<sup>10</sup> Which is a paradox, considering that desire also circulates around those goods.

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<sup>11</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239. The subject of desire becomes a subject of the drive when she does not desire anymore an "object proper." Zupančič exemplifies this by juxtaposing two fictional figures: Valmont, who sleeps with different women only to stay away from being in love, embodies the subject of desire. The gap between desire and love remains; he replicates and thus, 'purifies' his desire precisely by going to bed with different women. Contrary to Valmont, the figure of Don Juan encompasses the drive. His perpetual shift from one woman to the next is not motivated by lack, but precisely by something 'present,' namely the enjoyment of each woman being "the right one." But his satisfaction is always partial, bringing him back to the ceaseless circulation of the drive. This enjoyment is transcendental of self-limitations touching the impossibility of meeting the criteria for the possibility of endless self-transcendence. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>14</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*.

<sup>15</sup> See Marquis de Sade, "Philosophy in the Bedroom" in *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings*, trans. by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 181.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, Sade's maxim is nowhere to be found in his writings. It is something implicit in "Yet One More Effort, Frenchmen..." which means that Lacan devices the quotation.

<sup>17</sup> See Jacques Lacan, "Kant with Sade," trans. by James B. Swenson, *October* 51 (Winter, 1989): 55-75 (p. 58).

<sup>18</sup> Sade, "Philosophy in the Bedroom," p. 332.

<sup>19</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> See Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. by Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 312.

<sup>21</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, pp. 76-80.

<sup>22</sup> Prior to the *Ethics* Seminar, Lacan's allusions to *jouissance* denoted the pleasurable nuances of the sexual orgasm.

<sup>23</sup> See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 130.

<sup>25</sup> Like a pendulum, the Sadean system constantly oscillates between the boundaries of the possible and the impossible. It is a game with the subject's edge, namely her ego, the identification with the mirror image, which has its edges.

<sup>26</sup> Via the character of Saint-Fond in *Juliette*, who proclaims his renewed, but not particularly new belief in this God. See Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*, trans. by Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

<sup>27</sup> See Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, trans. by Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Sade, "Philosophy in the Bedroom," p. 320.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>30</sup> Lacan, "Kant with Sade," p. 63. The view that currently dominates the Lacanian understanding of perversion is that the pervert turns himself into an instrument of the Other's *jouissance*. It is from Lacan's "Kant with Sade" that this conceptualisation has been derived, despite the fact that Lacan does not refer to the pervert explicitly, but to the structure of the Sadean fantasy solely.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, p. 361.

<sup>33</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 57.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2002 [2001]), pp. 112-113. See also the second chapter of Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996) where he further contemplates on this aspect of Kantian ethics.

<sup>37</sup> Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*, p. 112.

<sup>38</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 56.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>40</sup> Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*, p. 113.
- <sup>41</sup> I develop this point later in the present part.
- <sup>42</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. xxii.
- <sup>43</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 56.
- <sup>44</sup> In that sense, the Sadean pervert is less a 'pervert' and more a master, in line with my previous elaboration.
- <sup>45</sup> Sade, *Juliette*, p. 525.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.
- <sup>47</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 235.
- <sup>48</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 175.
- <sup>49</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 92.
- <sup>50</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "Foreword: Why Is Kant Worth Fighting For?" in Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. vii-xiii (p. ix).
- <sup>51</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 17.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>55</sup> That was associated with the 'anti-social', 'immoral' and 'weak' populations that Nazism executed in the concentration camps: amongst Jews, there were also beggars, gypsies, prostitutes, alcoholics, hooligans, homosexuals, people with learning disabilities or mental disorders.
- <sup>56</sup> See Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of *Jouissance*" and "Fascism and the Voice of Conscience."
- <sup>57</sup> Oliver Hirschbiegel's recent masterpiece *Downfall* (2005) meticulously and brilliantly portrays the anticipation of National Socialism's fall. Until the very end, many Nazi officers and civilians, regardless of the impending catastrophe, did not give up their faith in the Nazi ideal and Hitler as the master who embodied this ideal.
- <sup>58</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 78.
- <sup>59</sup> See Dick Geary, *Hitler and Nazism* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 2.
- <sup>60</sup> The formation of the *Freikorps*'s paramilitary group, comprised by officers of the old Imperial Army, indicates the increase of nationalism in Germany, at the time.
- <sup>61</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 103.
- <sup>62</sup> "Germany today, the world tomorrow" was a popular slogan in Germany during the 1930s.
- <sup>63</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!" in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 90-135.
- <sup>64</sup> Gregor Strasser, June 1929, as quoted in James Taylor and Warren Shaw, *A Dictionary of the Third Reich* (London: Crafton Books), p. 319.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! : Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 2001, [1992]), pp. 89-90.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> It could be seen as a regression to the mirror stage that has common features with Freud's description of the anal stage (e.g. aggressivity).
- <sup>69</sup> Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! : Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 2001, [1992]), p. 39.
- <sup>70</sup> In the filmic texts of Pasolini, Visconti and Cavani, one finds illustrations of this speech. In all three films, any interaction between the fascist subjects is presented in a monotonous, cliché and mechanical fashion.
- <sup>71</sup> The sadist recognises the inherent limit to *jouissance* that desire constitutes. Yet his action does not target the extinction of desire, but its mastering and control, in the same way the neurotic tries to master *jouissance* through repetition.
- <sup>72</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 95.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

## 9. Ethics and Guilt

### 9.1 The Dilemma of Guilt

The sense of guilt is the most accessible state that marks morality and a distinctive feature of subjectivity. Only the subject of language can experience guilt as an indivisible and ubiquitous feature of the (moral) law. In this regard, guilt can be a valuable thread for exploring Sade's relation to Kantian ethics and its implication for fascism and perversion.

Conventionally, psychoanalysis regards perversion and psychosis as 'guilt-free' structures, counter to the neurotic condition, where guilt constitutes a constant torment. The reason for this is a unitary conception of guilt as the heritage of the resolution of the Oedipus complex, something that the pervert and the psychotic never accomplish. Thus, the way guilt or its supposed absence operate in each structure may have something to say about the desire of the subject in relation to the Other, which is exactly what determines her structure. It is not fortuitous then that Lacan links guilt, as the distillation of moral experience, with the ethics of desire. At the epicentre of his theorisation, in the late 1950s, we find guilt associated with the end of analysis, as the subject has to "assume his guilt and/or his constitutive [symbolic] debt."<sup>1</sup> In *Seminar VII*, Lacan makes a vital remark on guilt and its part in ethics, noting that guilt is found whenever someone has betrayed his desire, that is, s/he stepped back to the safety of the moral law:

In the last analysis, what a subject really feels guilty about when he manifests guilt at bottom always has to do with – whether or not it is admissible for a director of conscience- the extent to which he has given ground relative to his desire.<sup>2</sup>

What I call "giving ground relative to one's desire" is always accompanied in the destiny of the subject by some betrayal – you will observe it in every case and should note its importance. [...] something is played out in betrayal if one tolerates it, if driven by the idea of good – and by that I mean the good of the one who has just committed the act of betrayal – one gives ground to the point of giving up one's own claims [...] Once one has crossed that boundary where I combined in a single term contempt for the other and for oneself, there is no way back. It might be possible to do some repair work, but not to undo it [...] the only thing one can be guilty of is giving ground relative to one's desire.<sup>3</sup>

Lacan turns the tables, regarding the traditional conception of guilt as the consequence of transgressing the moral law, in favour of a voluptuous desire. The very loyalty to the moral law is what causes guilt, indicating a ‘betrayal’ of desire. In this view, it is erroneous to exclude guilt from the subject of perverse desire. Rather than something that either inhabits the subject’s experience or not, depending on her structure, guilt comes together as a single packet with the law and its incomplete status, its failure to satisfy desire.

So, what is guilt? Disengaging the notion from its strict Oedipal resonance, my dissection of its essence (the pervasive sense of failure that dominates the subject) conceives guilt as the eternal repetitive failure to cross all the way to the recovery of the lost Thing. Therefore, it does not originate so much in the subject’s adherence to the traditional moral law, as Lacan’s quotation suggests, but more in her realisation that she came close enough to the fulfilment of her desire, only to step back for fear of losing her desiring status, in other words her subjectivity.

The safety of the moral law alleviates guilt, but it does not erase the scars of getting too close to desire, where the Thing lies. The interplay of guilt with law is decisive for the ethical status of the subject. Guilt does not adumbrate an accomplished act, a route the subject crossed until its very end. It rather marks a certain point in a pathway that approximates the realisation of desire. There one encounters guilt, as beyond this point, the path bifurcates and the subject needs to make an ethical choice: to move either backwards or forwards *a propos* of desire.

The confrontation of an ethical dilemma explains the reason why guilt is always experienced as *stasis*, an inert condition, which demands from the subject to move in order to eliminate it. This is the perpetual movement of the subject and her desire, functioning as a centrifugal force. As soon as she stops, guilt returns to assess the subject’s movement, as a calculus for her proximity to desire. The tormenting sense of *αμαρτία* (*amartia*, sin), of having done something wrong, without knowing what the right thing to do is, reveals the ethical dilemma of guilt.

The subject has come to confront the real of her desire and she suffers for that. The dilemma that now emerges is whether to follow an imaginary or a symbolic resolution to

this state of suffering. The subject can consummate *jouissance* (through imaginary means) or accept the limit of the law, if she decides to maintain her desire to desire. Otherwise, the desire not to desire has only one *real* resolution: the pathway that leads to death. This pathway chalks the real dimension of guilt: the unbearable real that inhabits the crux of the subject's existence.

But following death would be nothing more than succumbing to the demand of the drive.<sup>4</sup> Freud interlocks guilt with the drive, by claiming that unconscious guilt constitutes a need for punishment.<sup>5</sup> This is a primarily biological conception of guilt and punishment, insofar as need is bound to the notion of the drive and comes before Oedipal guilt.<sup>6</sup> Being the result of a certain quantity of aggression, a derivative of the death drive, turned inwards, the need for punishment renders the subject the target of the death drive. If aggression releases the death drive outwards, against others, guilt, as need for punishment, directs the drive towards the ego.

Apart from Freud, Klein canvasses the early nexus of the drive and guilt more notably in her elaboration of the depressive position in child development.<sup>7</sup> In the second half of the first year of life, the infant believes it annihilated the mother's good breast and experiences guilt for the first time, a state that requests the reparation of the good breast. Creativity in later life is a constant struggle to repair this early loss. Freud and Klein make it clear that guilt has a primitive origin, namely the reservoir of the undifferentiated drive, where the unrepresentable Thing resides. In this regard, it is difficult to distinguish guilt from the function of the death drive. As far as it refers to aggression turned inwards,<sup>8</sup> guilt moves towards self-annihilation.

Every time we give priority to desire without going all the way, stopping at a certain point, guilt sets in as a self-punitive force that tempts us with obliteration. We want to annihilate ourselves, for we got too close to desire, without crossing all the way to its impossible satisfaction. We left the door half-open, without entering the chamber of desire which is empty *par excellence*. If guilt is the result of not following desire, this is because the subject betrayed it for a deceiving moral principle that secures the consistency of the other (as an eidolon of the subject's ego). If guilt touches the real core of subjectivity, as the approximation of the Thing, then a relation with the other two registers, the symbolic and the imaginary, can be drawn. The disturbing insistence of the

Thing marks the impossibility to represent all.<sup>9</sup> The failure of representation makes all imaginary attempts to fantasise the Thing crash on their symbolic refutation.

How does the subject respond to guilt and what is its significance for her ethical status? One type of guilt is dominated by an imaginary condition, this is the fantasy of the father-castrator, the Oedipal fantasy of castration that Freud elaborated. The imaginary suggests a resolution of guilt by prioritising the existence of a complete, absolute law, without pitfalls, namely an imaginary law. This requires the adherence to a fantasy of the law's ability to satiate desire (a fantasy promoted by power), a law that could serve the ultimate desire not to desire, which is impossible of course, since this scenario is always repudiated by the symbolic.

A type of guilt originating in an imaginary law does not relish this internal impossibility, rather the opposite. It drives the subject towards a fantasy that affirms the possibility of bringing back the dead father to life. Confronted with the impossible real, the insurmountable difference induced by the symbolic, fantasy collapses and guilt emerges as the recognition of the law's incompleteness. Pain, vulgarity and hate are among the states that mark the subject's experience of guilt. In this regard, guilt breaks the pleasant imaginary screen of the subject and makes her confront what has been excluded from her imaginary constitution; it reinstates the suffering of being, the constitutive lack as Zupančič suggests.<sup>10</sup>

A state of suffering for the ego, a crack in its imaginary form, is the view of guilt that Freud articulates in the last two chapters of his late masterpiece *Civilization and its Discontents*.<sup>11</sup> For Freud, the sense of guilt (or unconscious need for punishment) emanates from aggression turned inwards, jeopardising the ego with annihilation. This is evident in the clinical condition of depression, where guilt, remorse and self-reproach are some of its main features. But what really occurs in the depressive subject, what s/he really suffers from is a painful betrayal of desire. The imaginary screen that supports the ego of the subject has been cracked, leaving it exposed to the other side of the window.

Behind the window glass, the depressed subject enjoys staring at the world outside. Once the window is open, anxiety resurfaces signalling an approximation of the real.<sup>12</sup> Suicidal attempts of the depressive, such as falling out of the window or cutting his/her wrists, reflect the fracture of the imaginary, crossing its edge to where the real lies. This



act opens a hole in the Other, in line with Zupančič's analysis, letting the drive to penetrate.<sup>13</sup> Some of the painful guilt is released in this way from the depressive's ego or better from the rapture of her ego.<sup>14</sup> Guilt remains, even when the window is closed or the subject convalesces from a suicidal attempt. Because the depressive came contiguously to the realisation of her desire, only to return to the imaginary deceit of her ego and a sanctimonious morality that betrays pure desire (the desire of excess).<sup>15</sup>

The dimension of the real (the realm of the drive) is pivotal in the way guilt is experienced. Rather than being synonymous with the drive, guilt appears as the unexpected ambiguity and thus a barrier to the ultimate realisation of desire, which would be the unification with the drive. It is a static point that both paves the way to pure desire and also diverts it so that drive encircles any other object but *the* object of desire.<sup>16</sup> The definitive limit the subject needs to cross, as Zupančič suggests, is the Other.<sup>17</sup> Only if she assumes the guilt of the Other's incompleteness, as a symbolic locus, she can penetrate the obstacle of desire, namely, its maintenance as unfulfilled, and move towards its essential goal, the embracing of the drive.

In Lacan, guilt is associated with symbolic castration and the Name-of-the-Father.<sup>18</sup> Thus, guilt requires the acceptance of the dead signifier, that is, the incompleteness of the law and concomitantly the incompleteness of being. Symbolic guilt is a memento of castration and asks the subject to make an ethical decision: either to recognise incompleteness and search for the missing phallus or to follow a fatal completeness towards death.<sup>19</sup> In some young children, we find a condition where speech disappears without an obvious reason, despite its previous normal onset. Contrary to psychosis or autism, the child *decides* not to speak. At a later point, the child may start using speech again normally. This symbolic rupture shows a resistance on the part of the child to bring its existence under the aegis of the symbolic law. From the moment language appears, the subject emerges together with her mortality. Life unfurls around the incomplete foundation of the subject's existence. No matter how painful the admission, the subject has to tolerate castration and symbolic guilt, because only then meaning can be formed and attached to life as a signifier.

Zupančič states that "guilt, in the sense of symbolic debt, arises when the subject knows that the Other knows;"<sup>20</sup> the Other knows It does not exist. The subject becomes guilty at

the instant when the desire of the Other becomes the desire of the subject, in other words the moment when lack and castration are accepted. Rather than plain self-knowledge about the subject's deed, it is a sort of "surplus-knowledge, a knowledge to which the desire of the subject is attached." This means that knowledge is dislodged from the "place of its enunciation" and this is what engraves the tragic dimension of the Oedipal drama.<sup>21</sup> Since birth, Oedipus is deprived of knowledge and thus of the desire that exempts him from the guilt (as a symbolic debt) of parricide and incest.

Yet this does not suggest that Oedipus has no responsibility for his destiny. With regard to Oedipus, Zupančič fabricates an original elaboration of his sense of guilt.<sup>22</sup> Oedipus' tragedy does not rest on his guilty status, but rather the reverse, the fact that he renounces guilt and "identifies with his blindness," namely, his symptom.<sup>23</sup> His blinding resembles the end of analysis, where the subject, having traversed her fantasy (the stumbling block of the imaginary), becomes the subject of the drive and not of desire; she identifies with her enjoyment, rather than with her desire.<sup>24</sup>

This process, however, suggests an objectification of the subject that needs to be clarified and distinguished from the pervert's identification with the object. In psychoanalysis, the aim is not to follow the drive, but to re-organise our position, our signifiers, in relation to it. This means that the supremacy of the symbolic and of desire are never really abandoned, which is basically the aim of the pervert, who imagines an infinite access to the drive.<sup>25</sup> After all, do not both drive and desire fail to meet their goal? They never acquire full satisfaction. Guilt is the evidence of this failure, showing that the subject accepted a lawful position, after failing to complete her desire in its pure form.

Freud views the Oedipal conflict as the determining factor for the secondary formation of guilt, after its primary configuration as a need for punishment. Oedipal guilt functions more as a regulatory mechanism between desire and drive. This is what accounts for the neurotic dimension of guilt, impressed by ambivalence, namely the persistence of the excess of the drive and desire as the barrier to its fulfilment. It is the instant where guilt makes its decree clear: *you should find an efficient way to pay off the symbolic debt, make the law complete or remain incomplete.*

The acceptance of castration is the only possible compensation for this inerasable debt, whereas its disguise under fantasmatic cloaks maintains the omnipotence of the imaginary father. The imaginary perception of the father that the subject holds, sustains his absolute dynamism, as the father himself is not castrated in his access to *jouissance*. The subject adheres to an ideal father figure who functions as a form of identification for the master.

As soon as a third person is introduced into the narcissistic relationship, there arises the possibility of real mediation, through the intermediary, of the transcendent personage, that is to say, of someone through whom desire and its accomplishment can be symbolically realised. At this moment, another register appears, that of law – in other words of guilt.<sup>26</sup>

Lacan sees law as the register of guilt. The possibility of a real mediation, introduced by the intervention of the father in the archaic and profoundly narcissistic dyad of the child with its mother, makes guilt and law emerge. Both originate in the real. Guilt as a product of a fierce crime became the prerequisite for the law's existence.<sup>27</sup> The origins of the law rest on a violent crime, the result of the outbound channelling of the death drive, which then became repressed as a result of guilt. At least this is what we learn from Freud's myth of the primordial father. When the brothers of the horde slaughtered and devoured their father, the enjoyment they undertook gave rise to the law. Rising from the ashes of the *jouissance* of the brothers' cannibalistic act, the experience of guilt tormented the brothers' horde and led them to the invention of the law, as a way to rehabilitate the father's authority.

A law was needed to ostracise the obscene *jouissance* their mouth tasted. The father was devoured and returned through the mouth as a law, a spoken prohibition (the Name-of-the-Father), instead of a prohibition imposed physically. Thus, if we try to situate the occurrence of guilt, this would be somewhere between the pits of *jouissance* and the foundations of the law. *Jouissance* 'or' law? The mediating conjuncture is the space guilt occupies.

## 9.2 Enjoy Guilt!

The law sanctions one main stipulation, this is the preservation of the desiring status of the subject. It commands 'Never give up your desire!' resisting the alluring and obliterating effects of a sadistic superego that goes the opposite way, towards the elimination of desire intrinsic to its commandment 'Enjoy!', as Lacan describes it in *Seminar XX*.<sup>28</sup> Identification with the superegoic command ('Enjoy!') fuses the superego with a fantasy of *jouissance*. In that case, the superego and guilt as its agent do not operate anymore. Nonetheless, the subject may take another direction and return to the safe distance of the law. Guilt suggests a point of ethical choice, where the subject has to decide whether she moves onwards or backwards *a propos* of her desire.

The matrix of guilt dwells in the superego. On its dark, vicious and destructive side, the superego is hostile to desire. It does not support desire but *a contrario* enjoys the eternal suffering that desire's betrayal causes to the subject. When the subject follows desire, her way to real enjoyment is disrupted, conforming to the law, which does not fulfil, but maintains desire. Because too close to desire the subject limps, as she loses her consistency. At the same time, the weight of guilt becomes unbearable, as the subject confronts the law's insufficiency, its lack. The superego induces guilt, whenever the subject takes a step closer to desire, but eventually betrays it, by retreating to the safety of the law.<sup>29</sup> The weight of guilt brings in mind the myth of Sisyphus. The eternal repetitive punishment of Sisyphus suggests that it is the inexorable pervasive sense of guilt that ultimately matters and provides justification to the burden of our existence. The stone Sisyphus drags is the burden of desire's impossibility to be fulfilled, its eternal failure that sustains guilt.

If the sovereignty of the superego in the pervert decrees the dissolution of desire by any means of *jouissance*, then this involves a fantasy, digressive from its expected function. Typically, fantasy is the pillar of desire, but the pervert fantasises meeting the dimension where desire is eliminated. Yet this still constitutes a desire, but it aims at an eternal condition of no desire, a condition of *jouissance*. Does this mean perversion is the adversary of desire? Not quite. The pervert reverses desire, yet still maintains it in this

negative reverse form, perhaps, justifying Freud's statement about perversion being the reverse condition of neurosis.<sup>30</sup>

Only Sade really opposes himself to desire. The Sadean fantasy is self-annihilating; it functions as the screening of a desire that aims at destroying itself.<sup>31</sup> The final goal for Sade would be not just to erase the law that maintains desire, but also to erase his image from the mirror. Every time desire returns, the Sadean pervert bursts into blasphemy and hostility:

And now Curval himself returns, grumbling between his teeth and swearing that all those dratted laws prevent a man from discharging at his ease [...]<sup>32</sup>

The Sadean hero does not stop at transgression, although the pervert, as well as the neurotic, does. Sade would be happy only when the law disintegrated, unleashing *jouissance* from its restraint. Perversion is just one case of circumventing the point of castration, of approximating the other, but not otherness. The pervert chooses *jouissance* or better the desire not to desire, but never covers all the way to the realisation of this desire; the door stays half-open. The pervert occupies the position of the object-cause of desire, which means he does not renounce it, but incarnates it. In contrast, the Sadean master, like any other master, incarnates the signifier.<sup>33</sup>

Precisely this betrayal of desire brings the pervert to the realm of guilt, contrary to the traditional psychoanalytic view that sees guilt, perceived as the heritage of the resolution of the Oedipus complex, absent from the perverse universe. The presence of guilt marks the contradiction in the pervert's relation to desire; desire and *jouissance* never meet, but the pervert, as well as the neurotic, is tormented by this impossible idea of uniting the two. In perversion, this contradiction is reflected by disavowal (what accounts for a splitting of the ego), whereas in neurosis it takes the form of ambivalence.<sup>34</sup> The pervert wants to protect himself from desire, whereas the neurotic wants to protect himself from *jouissance*.

Both the pervert and the neurotic betray desire and the sense of guilt mystifies the ethical decision that one has to take. Going all the way to *jouissance*, uniting with the primitive and brutal Thing is an ethical act. Only then, the desire not to desire finds its

pure actualisation, something that Lacan figures in the sublime icon of Antigone.<sup>35</sup> Any subject defying the ethical question, regardless of her psychic structure, also defies castration.

The subject's relation to castration is not only indicative of her structure, but also of her ethical posture. A subjective position which is not held back by castration, but instead acknowledges and painfully contravenes it, is ethical. Yet this renders the subject neither a pervert nor a psychotic. A common fulcrum pushes all subjects towards *jouissance*, since this driving force is desire, in its pure form – that is, its non-metonymic, non-symbolic form. This is the point where desire meets the death drive, where the dilemma of guilt is resolved by choosing *jouissance* rather than the law. Guilt paves the free way to enjoyment.

In a meticulous exploration of causality and freedom, Zupančič draws on Kant for whom guilt is a disguised manifestation of the subject's freedom.<sup>36</sup> Guilt is an essential indicator of the latter owing to its contradictory nature; namely it persists even when the subject knows that a certain action that generates it was not the outcome of her own will, but was imposed as “natural necessity.”<sup>37</sup> By giving up the question of *what* (object) generates this guilt, the subject experiences guilt as freedom, this is the *pressure of freedom*:

Guilt is the way in which the subject originally participates in freedom, and it is precisely at this point where we encounter the division or split which is constitutive of the ethical subject, the division expressed in ‘*I couldn't have done anything else, but still, I am guilty*’.<sup>38</sup>

For Kant, causality is strictly regulated by the Other, a source that can neither be reduced nor controlled by the subject. Yet the subject who comes to be aware of her vassalage on the Other and is prepared to abandon it, divulges a “crack in the Other,” where Kant locates the subject's autonomy and freedom. This is where Lacan's assertion that “There is no Other of the Other,” meets Kant's suggestion that *there is no Cause of the cause*.<sup>39</sup> Inscribing the autonomous status and the freedom of the subject in this suggestion, guilt arises as the affirmation of autonomy and freedom, as it implies that the subject could

always have acted otherwise. Guilt marks the free territory that actively implicates the subject in “*causal necessity*.”<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, guilt demarcates the freedom of the subject, but as I have argued, guilt manifests itself in a form of a decision the subject has to take. Guilt suggests a leak in the law, in its absolute causal character, which leaves the divided subject with two options: either to follow the law or to abandon it completely (The first opts for a restorative effort, whether by imaginary and/or symbolic means, while the second opts for a real transgression). This dilemma circumscribes the ethical status of the subject and her freedom.<sup>41</sup> Had it not been for guilt, desire would never be endured. It would have either been fulfilled or perpetually obfuscated by imaginary cloaks. Guilt takes the form of a dilemma, because it is rooted in the ethical choice the subject has to make.

Nevertheless, can defiance of the law be a sufficient ethical criterion? Since not all subjects follow pure desire as a duty, what is it that restricts desire from its *real*-isation? The strongest antistatic principle is probably imaginary narcissism, which maintains the certainty of desire’s absolute fulfilment, without succumbing to the drive. This is the imaginary resolution of guilt that betrays pure *jouissance*, pure death drive. The desire of eternal *jouissance* is screened in narcissistic fantasies the content of which is dominated by perverse scenes. Narcissism banishes the recognition of the Other, reinstating the real Other, the surveillant of *jouissance*. Nonetheless, being incompatible with narcissism, pure *jouissance* is left aside, unless it is infiltrated by the imaginary.

The only way to be infused by narcissism is through fantasy, ‘imaginarising’ the real Other. In the core of perverse fantasy, one finds exactly this ‘imaginarisation’ of the real.<sup>42</sup> The narcissistic component found in all fantasies and its imaginary hypostasis, cannot bear *jouissance*, but only pleasure. The imaginary, as the pillar of the ego, strives to maintain its consistency through fantasies. The dissolving effects of *jouissance* are filtered and distorted by the imaginary so they stay unrecognisable and inactive; this means the subject can only tolerate pleasurable *jouissance* through her fantasy. Žižek notes:

The Imaginary level is governed by the pleasure principle. It is striving for homeostatic balance, and the symbolic order in its blind automatism is always troubling this homeostasis; it is “beyond the pleasure principle.” When the human being is caught up in

the signifier's network, this network has the mortifying effect on him: he becomes part of a strange automatic order, disturbing his natural homeostatic balance.<sup>43</sup>

If the aim of the imaginary order is to reinstate homeostasis and achieve unity with the primordial Thing, then any disruptive element that perturbs this homeostatic balance must be excluded. The main 'nuisance' for the imaginary is created by the symbolic order as the symbolic law induces desire, while the imaginary rigidly and stubbornly requires its satisfaction.

But if law means guilt, the latter is antagonistic to any narcissistic fantasy. As previously elaborated, power produces such a fantasy that promises a system of self-sufficiency and completeness.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, bearing in mind its narcissistic support, it is possible to argue that power ostracises guilt. The prevalence of the imaginary is something that we encounter in Sade. The obscene and tyrannical superego overpowers and takes over the law commanding the Sadean hero to transgress it. When the superego replaces the law, are we in the realm of perversion? The cruelty of the superego rests on the guilt with which it burdens the subject. In this sense, guilt is the essence of the superegoic attacks; this is how the superego, as equivalent to the Kantian law, reveals itself.<sup>45</sup> Guilt is the only unambiguous apparition of the law. Seen as the upshot of the superego, guilt conspires with the death culture of the latter. If the Sadean superego occupies the same place as the Kantian law, a paradox emerges. But if the superego's stabs are responsible for the ubiquity of guilt, then the unyielding character of the superego as an ethical maxim is at stake; guilt leads to a bifurcated pathway that digresses from the absolute nature of the maxim.

The superego in its absolute character (as pure death drive) commands only one direction: lethal enjoyment; this means that the indecisiveness inherent to guilt does not conform to superegoic absolutism. The ethical maxim must not result in guilt, because the latter is a sign of a leak in the universality and supremacy of the maxim, a certain blot in its omnipotence. If guilt divulges the erroneous basis of the ethical duty, then the superego, as the matrix of guilt, cannot substitute the Kantian duty. In the Sadean universe, guilt is transformed into blasphemy; it takes the form of wrath against the Other who perpetuates desire. But once guilt is erased, the superego becomes impotent.



The superego commands an enjoyment that the subject is unable to bear, because the subject gets too close to *jouissance*, where the unbearable Thing resides and the o/Other breaks down. The subject then needs the law so that desire can restore the subject's integrity and consistency. Yet by keeping a safe distance from the Thing one may stand so far back that the subject results in an interminable apostasy and distance from desire. Because as far as desire is concerned, the subject is always too close or too far, never at the right place.<sup>46</sup>

This means that the superego never ceases punishing the subject with guilt for either enjoying too much or too little. Guilt is the extract of *jouissance* in the symbolic, the painful sense that accompanies our experience of having done something wrong. There is no better illustration of this than in the characters of Kafka and Dostoevsky. The experience of guilt is the symbolic reminder that at the end of the road lies death and what it leaves is an incomplete state of existence for the subject with which she has to come to terms. She has to bear it or use it as a crutch.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 170. Zupančič defines symbolic debt as “guilt at the fundamental level of being.” In this regard, the subject displays a ‘heroic’ ethos, by embracing her constitutive lack.

<sup>2</sup> Guilt surfaces, as one complies with the moral law or, as Lacan puts it, gives ground relative to his/her desire (*ceder sur son desir*). See Jacques Lacan, *Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Tavistock, 1992), p. 319.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

<sup>4</sup> As Zupančič argues, this is not the case for the ethics of the real and it suggests a misapprehension of the latter. The ethics of the real requests the realisation of the infinite (desire), an act with a transformative vigour for socio-political relations. In Zupančič's words: “‘Wanting *jouissance*’ maintains us on the side of desire, whereas ‘realizing desire’ transposes us to the side of the *jouissance*.” Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 255.

<sup>5</sup> See Sigmund Freud, “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (1924), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 159-170 (p. 166).

<sup>6</sup> For Freud, guilt comes into play after the formation of object cathexis and the process of the defusion of the drive (i.e. the desexualisation and resexualisation of the object), a process related to aggression. Since ego is the first cathected object, aggression is thereby turned towards it.

<sup>7</sup> See Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation, and Other Works, 1921-1945* (London: Free Press, 1984 [1937]).

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<sup>8</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 18, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 69-143.

<sup>9</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> Freud, Sigmund, "Civilization and its Discontent" (1930 [1929]), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 21, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 64-145.

<sup>12</sup> This explains why guilt is not experienced as anxiety. Guilt sets in as a self-punitive force for the subject's failure to encompass anxiety and fulfil desire.

<sup>13</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*.

<sup>14</sup> In that sense, depression is an "egotistic" disorder *par excellence*, an 'ego-pathy'.

<sup>15</sup> This is also why suicide in depression is not an ethical act, but a symptom. It is guided by an ego that cannot tolerate the real.

<sup>16</sup> In animals, anything that impedes the expression of the drive (e.g. aggression) increases the velocity of the latter. In humans, guilt appears after desire set in. This means, the Other must be present. Inasmuch as the pervert is related to the Other, he is also subject to guilt.

<sup>17</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> See Judith Roof, "A Verdict on the Paternal Metaphor, and Paternity Law," in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 101-123.

<sup>19</sup> This raises the question of whether there are more than one ways for someone to embody the ethical duty as Kant has uttered it or whether the Kantian way in itself is fruitless.

<sup>20</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, pp. 182-83.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185-86.

<sup>22</sup> For Zupančič the existentialist encircling of the notion of guilt refers to the tragic figure of Oedipus as an erroneous example. According to this example, Oedipus reflects the fundamental stipulation of subjectivity: the inescapable presence of (symbolic) guilt, preceding the emergence of the subject, and the difficult duty to interminably abide by the demand to pay off an ineradicable symbolic debt. The subject has to decipher the meaning of her being within this symbolic context of guilt that existed before her constitution. Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Is not what Renata Salecl describes as the logic of the drive (i.e. "I do not want to do this, but I am nonetheless doing it") the threshold of the pervert's position? Salecl demarcates the logic of the drive from the logic of desire, which says, "It is prohibited to do this, but I will nonetheless do it." Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*.

<sup>26</sup> See Jacques Lacan and Wladimir Granoff, "Fetishism: The Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real," *Journal for Lacanian Studies* 1, no. 2, (2003): 299-308, (p.304).

<sup>27</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo" (1913), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 13, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 1-161.

<sup>28</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*.

<sup>30</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol.7, trans. by J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 135-243 (p. 165).

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Klossowski writes: "Evil has to break out once and for all, the tares have to flourish so that the spirit can tear them up and destroy them. It is necessary to make evil reign once and for all in the world in order to destroy itself, and Sade's mind find peace at last." See Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, p. 485.

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<sup>33</sup> For this reason, the pervert may be provocative, but not subversive. Only Sade's system is self-subversive, since it forwards a self-destructive master, as self-annihilating signifier.

<sup>34</sup> 'I know very well a fact, but...' is the linguistic form that disavowal takes, as a mechanism that acknowledges castration and denounces it at the same time.

<sup>35</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, pp. 243-283.

<sup>36</sup> Here, guilt is separated from moral conscience.

<sup>37</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>41</sup> Zupančič argues that the freedom of the subject is revealed at the end of analysis, when she finds the possibility of choosing another perspective, another neurosis (that is the 'psychoanalytic postulate of freedom' that goes beyond the 'postulate of determinism'). Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> The term 'imaginarisation' has been used in seminars by the New Lacanian School, referring to the imaginary encompassing of the real.

<sup>43</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 132.

<sup>44</sup> In this regard, the Sadean fantasy, as any other fantasy, reflects a certain desire and turns pain into pleasure. But this is different from *jouissance*, where pain and pleasure merge. For this reason, the Sadean fantasy is pseudo-ethical and probably closer to Horkheimer and Adorno's view as a mythical position of pleasure. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973).

<sup>45</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "Kant with (or against) Sade," in *The Žižek Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 283-301.

<sup>46</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

## 10. From Imaginary to Democratic Ethics

### 10.1 Violent Utopianism

*The good of society before your own good*

Nazi party slogan

By implementing a fantasy that promises the means to satisfy the subject's desire, power endorses and commits itself to the service of a certain good. The character of the good must reflect an ideological nuance harmonic with power. The good is a fictional object, that is to say, a fantasy *par excellence* that supposes the accomplishment of desire. Thus, fantasy serves and sustains power relations; this is because power needs a moral law that echoes the phallic supremacy of the master and fuels the desire of the subject. But the realisation of the good does not achieve the fulfilment of desire but its eternal repetition and maintenance, because desire's satisfaction lies outside the domain of Good and the goods, according to Lacan's witticism in *Seminar VII*.<sup>1</sup>

Lacan defines an ethical position that opposes utilitarian and Christian ethics, in tune with Kant. Zupančič notes the symmetry between the ethical speculation of the two, as they both posit the ethical act, in the realm of impossibility, beyond any type of good, namely, in the dimension of the real. The ethical act is neither inscribed by the (socio-juridical) law nor by its mere transgression.<sup>2</sup> For Kant and Lacan morality *per se* is inscribed within impossibility, namely the "demand for the impossible," rather than the possible accomplishment of a certain Good, as traditional ethics proclaims. Lacan notes that the desire of the subject does not reside in the service of goods; rather than reaching satisfaction in power, desire is continually perpetuated.

[...] Part of the world has resolutely turned in the direction of the service of goods, thereby rejecting everything that has to do with the relationship of man to desire –it is what is known as the postrevolutionary perspective. The only thing to be said is that people don't seem to have realized that, by formulating things in this way, one is simply perpetuating the eternal tradition of power, namely, "Let's keep on working, and as far as desire is concerned, come back later."<sup>3</sup>

This is the futile character of all forms of power as far as desire is concerned. Power promises the satisfaction of desire, only to mislead and relinquish it at the end. The satisfaction of desire is always partial, but power does not acknowledge this, for such an admission would suggest that power's supreme ideal, its phallic constituent, has a partial value. The ideals a master proclaims, filtrated by a fantasy of gratifying desire, sustain the notion of the Good and the goods. But as Stavrakakis suggests, "what lies beyond the successive conceptions of the good, beyond the ways of traditional ethical thinking, is their ultimate failure, their inability to master the central impossibility, the constitutive lack around which human experience is organised."<sup>4</sup> An ideal is a *de facto* admission of the impossibility of desire to find full gratification, since it is nothing more than a signifier that captivates the desire of the subject. In this regard, an essential skill for the good master is the ability to galvanise the metonymic cycle of desire and make it flow over fantasmatic valleys.

The antithesis between the unifying aspirations of the imaginary and their symbolic repudiation reflects the antagonistic relation between power and guilt. The first has recourse to the sphere of fantasy, since it promises to quench desire's craving by proffering an ultimate good, incorruptible and divine. Towards the opposite direction, guilt serves to remind us the unattainable satisfaction of desire by the (moral) law, according to Lacan's twist of the traditional view of guilt as the outcome of transgression of the good. Lacan links guilt not to transgression but the credence one gives to the goods of power. Instead of the good alleviating guilt, it actually magnifies the latter, because the good drives the subject to a digression from the authentic course of her desire.

[...] On the far edge of guilt, insofar as it occupies the field of desire, there are the bonds of a permanent book-keeping.<sup>5</sup>

Guilt is a rehearsal of the incomplete status of subjectivity; it underlines and maintains the lack of the subject, whereas power and its good try to disguise lack. This antagonism between guilt and power is not surprising, considering the master signifier's absolute character to which power adheres. A master of guilt would appear as accountable for an

*αμαρτία* (amartia, sin), a fallacy, which would reveal his lack of the phallus, outstripping him of any symbolic power. But an erroneous status renders the master signifier invalid, because it reveals the divided, incomplete and erroneous standing of the master. The master has to hold on to the signifier of his power. As long as guilt is on the side of the servant, the master's reliability remains intact and his signifier appears to be capable of accomplishing its goal.

But this does not constitute an ethical attitude, for which symbolic guilt needs to be acknowledged. The fascist excluded symbolic guilt as incompatible with the supremacy of the ideal that he served, rendering his position pseudo-ethical. Power punishes due to privation (a lack in the real), which is different from symbolic lack (castration).<sup>6</sup> Sade, on the other hand, does not include guilt in his universe, at least not associated with a certain law. By breaking down all laws, symbolic guilt lacks the condition of its emergence. The imaginary takes over and this is where guilt is transformed to the essence of Sade's moral philosophy: the self-annihilating force, the evil that obliterates the ego and alongside its debris, evil eradicates itself. This is another point of departure from Kant's ethical duty which recognises symbolic guilt, despite its contradiction with the absolute character of the ethical maxim.

But are we ultimately left with an ethics of no viable good, an ethics of finitude? Alain Badiou objects to such a nihilistic perception of ethics that negates cogito, as he claims to be the case with contemporary ethical discourse and the so-called 'return to ethics'. This is the focus of his critical rhetoric on the question of ethics and the problem of evil.<sup>7</sup>

For Badiou, the ethical is not defined based on abstractions (Man, God, the Other), but based on concrete situations. Thus, he renounces the generalised use of the notion of ethics today as the province of human rights that defines man as a victim who should protect himself from Evil.<sup>8</sup> A consensual ethical view based on the recognition of Evil is problematic, since all attempts to establish unity among people in the name of a positive notion of the Good constitute the actual origins of Evil.

This is related to the latest denunciation of every revolutionary programme, negatively characterised as 'utopian', in order to denote its potential for inducing the horror of totalitarianism. In this vein, the will to promote and establish the Good, defending values such as justice and equality, is considered to be a force that generates Evil. For Badiou,

this pedant view is demoralising, since it impedes the vision for any act transformative of the existing order; it limits a political programme to an ethical commitment that concerns the ostracism of an a priori perception of Evil. The proscription of Man as immortal to imagine the Good and organise an effort to collectively open a horizon of new possibilities and effectively fracture the established order is equated with forbidding him humanity *per se*. The ethics against Evil encumbers its consideration of “the singularity of situations as such, which is the obligatory starting point of all properly human action.”<sup>9</sup>

Such ethics succumbs to an ideological conservatism that sanctions nihilism and man’s finitude; its abstract and general character grips any reflection on the singularity of situations. Rather than a general perception of man as a victim, the ethical concerns the formation of enduring axioms fitting to singular and determinate processes that Badiou calls ‘processes of truth’:

What I will call, in general, the ‘ethic of truth’ is the principle that enables the continuation of a truth-process – or to be more precise and complex, *that which lends consistency to the presence of some-one in the composition of the subject induced by the process of this truth.*<sup>10</sup>

Badiou proposes an ethic (rather than ethics) of the singular truths. This ethic endorses a greater affirmative cogito that characterises humanity and Man as Immortal. Thus, there is no *a priori* perception of Evil; the latter is identified through our radical efforts to break with conservative parameters towards new possibilities and the positive aptitude of Man for Good.

What Badiou considers as an authentic ethical discourse is the ethics identified with truth processes (truths and not a general truth embodied by an ethical maxim, such as that of Kant). Like Lacan who speaks about the ethics *of* psychoanalysis, we can only speak about an ethic particular to a situation, letting its truth emerge. Badiou states, “There is only the *ethic-of* (of politics, of love, of science, of art).”<sup>11</sup> The aim of the ethic of truths is not to form a safe panoply against an external and radical Evil; neither it is guided by the aspiration of establishing an abstract Law that would regulate all human relations. Badiou says that the ethic of truths attempts to deflect Evil, “through its own fidelity to truths” and the recognition that Evil lies underneath these truths.<sup>12</sup>

The ethic of truths requires a necessary *supplement* an irreducible force that breaks with the existing order of things, what Badiou calls the *event*; this is the equivalent, if we can say so, to Lacan's notion of the real. The evental supplement has as its effect the agony of the not-known which is associated with desire, in line with Lacan. Desire is inaccessible to knowledge and formative for the subject of the unconscious. Badiou interprets Lacan's decree "*do not give up on your desire!*" as the fidelity to the "vanished" event, to our "own seizure by a truth-process."<sup>13</sup> In Badiou's terms, the ethic of a truth can be articulated as follows: "Do all that you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance. Persevere in the interruption. Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you."<sup>14</sup> A truth that passes through the subject 'breaks' her; it incites an *excess beyond herself*.<sup>15</sup> In the ethic of a truth, there must be an *encounter*, which is commensurable with an 'ethic of the Real', since the real for Lacan is only momentarily accessed on the level of an encounter.

The ethical maxim provides consistency through one decree solely: 'Keep going!' [*Continuer!*].<sup>16</sup> But this consistency is maintained, as long as you 'keep going' in the direction of the real, of what you have encountered; in other words one must show fidelity to the real.<sup>17</sup> Fidelity is broken once you break with the "break which has seized you," namely the process of truth. In that case, the truth process is abandoned for returning to what Lacan called the 'service of goods'.<sup>18</sup> This suggests an irreversible betrayal that constitutes one type of Evil "made possible by a truth."<sup>19</sup> If we can put it in Lacanian terms, this is the betrayal of desire, in its pure real dimension; something that I associated with guilt. As Badiou notes, "the Good is Good only to the extent that it does not aspire to render the world good," that is, it does not make the world digress from the consistency of the ethic of a truth, the ethic of the Real.<sup>20</sup>

## 10.2 The Punitive Ideal

Power, defined as the circuit enacted by the domination of the phallic/master signifier, interweaves an ideological (fictional) narrative with fantasy, in order to provide an imaginary cloak for the subject and consistency in the two signifiers. The mediation of



fantasy turns the signifier into an ideal. This idealisation is far from what psychoanalysis aims, as we saw previously, since “psychoanalytic ethics is clearly not an ethics of the ideal or the good as in the case of traditional ethics. The ideal, as master signifier, belongs to the field of the ideological or even the utopian.”<sup>21</sup> In the name of this ideal, the exercise of violence as a form of punishment is legitimised. But it is not solely from the content of its narrative, its myth, that a certain ideological form of power, like fascism, derives its aggressive and violent character. The extent and the ways these ideals clash with reality are manifested in the exercise of violence.

As far as violence may reflect the regressive character of a certain ideology, it is not so much the content of the ideological narrative that triggers regression, as the masterful position of the leading delegate of any ideology. It is not the unconscious manipulation of the unconscious by the master that massifies the people, as Adorno suggested, but the strategy with which the master promotes a comprehensive fantasy. Fantasy is always regressive; inasmuch as it propels the action of the subject, the latter is subject to fantasy’s regressive effects. Although the identification with the master signifier (a dead letter) is a symbolic identification, the master who embodies it, conceals the emptiness of the signifier by pinning it on a certain fantasy.

The master obscures castration, but this differs from the pervert’s posture which does not acknowledge castration. For the dominant master, power is stretched to infinity with the use of a fantasy that suggests that castration can be undone. An imaginary law sustains the altitude of power’s ambitions. The master always ascribes power to himself and, in order to maintain this belief, he employs a fantasy of omnipotence, which means the position of the master is supported by a regressive fantasy. The condition of omnipotence may tickle the subject, as it operates under all psychic structures, but only the psychotic recovers the omnipotence of lost *jouissance*, precisely by losing subjectivity, the relation to the Other. For non-psychotic subjects, the desire to identify with an omnipotent image that resists castration is present in their fantasies.

The consistency of the discourse of the master is sustained by an imaginary narcissistic omnipotence, which turns it into a discourse of domination due to the categorical character of the ideal (the phallus) the master incarnates. Omnipotence leaves no space for symbolic guilt; in its place, punishment produces an epiphenomenon of guilt. As

shown splendidly by Kafka's writings, punishment induces guilt on the subject for no obvious reason, giving an empirical dimension to something that does not exist, namely, a complete law. For instance, God is a punitive god. Through punishment, the signifier of God acquires its arch-meaning. *Εν αρχή ην ο λόγος*, in the beginning there was *Logos* (discourse): the true discourse, as a matrix that generates meaning. God is full of meaning, but he experiences no guilt, because guilt is what empties out meaning implying lack.

Domination is inseparable from punishment. By using violence as a punitive practice, it ensures the commitment to the good, as if an ethical duty is performed. But a world of Kantian ethics would not require punishment, if a universal law were the supreme guiding principle. Punishment, as a hostile moralistic act that feeds the fantasy of omnipotence, becomes the legitimate route for aggression against anyone who renders the ideal of power contentious and empties out its meaning. It is very rare in politics for a leader to admit he was wrong, concerning his ideological fantasmatic vision. In that case, punishment, as the backbone of the law's superiority and integrality, would be rendered arbitrary and ineffective. The letter of the law has an absolute character and requires a master that possesses the ability and potency to decree and punish the transgressors of the law. In this way, the master does not present guilt as the cause of the law, but as its effect.

Domination authorises a tyrant whose ideal is supposed to complete the Other. Stavrakakis points out that an ethical position determined by "the fantasy of harmony applied both to the subject and to the social is not compatible with democracy, rather it can reinforce 'totalitarianism' or 'fragmentation'."<sup>22</sup> A Kafkaesque type of totalitarianism enacts an imaginary law, not because the law of the symbolic father is repudiated, but because it is thought that his authority would be restored through imaginary means and his law would be completed. In totalitarian fantasies, the image of the omnipotent (imaginary) father is archetypal for condensing the possible omnipotence, the excessive *jouissance*, of a regime, like Nazism.

Nonetheless, the imaginary law of Sade does not serve this purpose. The image of the father has to be stripped from any emblem of authority and become impotent. The fantasy of ultimate pleasure in evil is what substantiates the system of Sade. His philosophy goes against any type of law, for laws are the *modus operandi* of the tyrant and contradict the

natural supremacy of evil. The fantasy of evil, which takes over and eventually destroys itself, is the ultimate fantasy of *jouissance* for Sade. Totalitarianism blinds itself to the emptiness of the superego-style demands of the imaginary law, which is different from Sade's position who genuinely identifies those gaps, but still links them fantasmatically to the actualisation of ultimate evil. He also gives it a name: Supreme Being-in-Evil, in analogy with the Supreme Being (God). Sade does not want to cover the void, but to magnify it, so that it eventually erases the symbolic register. Again, this reveals the discrepancy between the Sadean subject and perversion as a category, considering that the ordinary pervert wishes to maintain lack, because this is where his enjoyment springs from.

According to Badiou, there are three manifestations of Evil, against which the ethic of truths is opposed to: first, it may have the meaning of 'simulacrum' or 'terror' related to an event that convokes the plenitude, rather than the void of the earlier situation. Second, a 'betrayal' of fidelity is another name for Evil and the third name is the identification of a truth with total power, what Badiou considers as 'disaster'.<sup>23</sup> Nazism embodies the second type of evil, as it displayed fidelity to the simulacrum, which is another name for the 'exercise of terror.'<sup>24</sup> As Badiou puts it:

When a radical break in a situation, under names borrowed from real truth-processes, convokes not the void but the 'full' particularity or presumed substance of that situation, we are dealing with a *simulacrum of truth*.<sup>25</sup>

The name is a trace for the event (the signifier that comes to represent the real) which remains in the situation after the event vanished and guides fidelity. Nazism borrowed names given to the major political events of modernity, such as 'revolution' and 'socialism'. Despite the ostensible congruence with these events, the point of demarcation is National Socialism's vocabulary of "plenitude, or of substance" which does not refer to the fundamental for the situation void located at its core, but to what is organised around it, that is, the "stable multiples of the situation."<sup>26</sup> Nazism aspires to a revolutionary act that would fulfil the 'true destiny' of the German community, namely, its ecumenical dominance. This reveals the particularism to which National Socialism succumbs, since it ties the 'event', the radical break it promises to bring, to the particular,

the welfare of a certain group of people. In this regard, the ‘event’ rather than ushering into being the void of an earlier situation and the name for it, it hypostatized its plenitude and “not the universality of that which is sustained, precisely, by no particular characteristic (no particular multiple), but the absolute particularity of a community, itself rooted in the characteristics of its soil, its blood, and its race.”<sup>27</sup>

Only fidelity to the event that “relates to the particularity of a situation only from the bias of its void” can be regarded as authentic.<sup>28</sup> *A contrario*, fidelity to a simulacrum “regulates its break with the situation not by the universality of the void, but by the closed particularity of an abstract set [*ensemble*] (the ‘Germans’ or the ‘Aryans’).”<sup>29</sup> What Badiou argues, in proximity with Žižek’s argument about the Nazi fantasy, is that in Nazism the void re-surfaced through the prioritisation of one particular name, that of the ‘Jew’. Despite other names, such as the Gypsies, the mentally ill, homosexuals, communists, the name ‘Jew’ was “the name of names,” as it is linked with revolutionary universalism; it is related to “what was in effect already *void* [*vide*] about this name – that is, what was *connected to the universality and eternity of truths*.”<sup>30</sup>

This conception of the ‘Jew’ in Nazism is close to Žižek’s theorisation who points out that the ‘Jew’ is the signifier that stands for the unrepresentable real.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Badiou’s view of Nazism as a case of fidelity to a simulacrum underpins the evil of particularising the universality of the void, what cannot be represented, which is the real, for Lacan. The simulacrum then in Lacanian terms could be associated with the plenitude of the master signifier(s), namely, ideals which are privileged in discourse as representative of the lost real. But this real is disguised by fantasy and the certainty of the master.

### 10.3 The Violence of Particularism

The political terrain is mediated by the interplay of laws. New laws and governments replace previous ones, each time shifting the master signifier. But one thing that cannot fluctuate is symbolic lack. Totalitarianism tries to conceal lack by promoting the imaginary acquisition of an absolute Good. Difference and lack are not acknowledged,

but reduced to an instrumental function: they are perceived as the obstacles to the actualisation of power's good.

Power can claim that desire lies in this good, legitimising the use of violence as a way to overcome any barrier to the accomplishment of this desire. In this vein, the categorical character of the fantasy of domination exploits the desire of the subject. By promising to accomplish the absolute good beyond reach, power incorporates the real in violent forms. The use of violence in order to erase the stain of the real is the main political strategy for totalitarian regimes. It envelops the real in a mystifying wrap presenting brutality and violence as the necessary evil for mastering it. Violence is camouflaged under punishment, endorsing the annihilation of the enemy – the one who is thought to be the enemy, the one who enjoys more by stealing my *jouissance*, as Žižek has suggested.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the ideological mosaic that seems to describe best the ideas of all fascist programmes, a common feature is their ideological endorsement of the use of violence. It was a way for historical fascism to conceal the invalidation of their utopian ideal. Instead of recognising aggression as the result of their fascist imaginary aspirations collapsing, in the face of impossibility, rather they ideologised and turned it into a part of their utopia. The further ascent of fascism to power gave violence the character of practical affirmation of omnipotence. The Nazi doctrine was not the only one that thoroughly embraced Hitler's principles of institutionalised violence. Neo-fascist groups also divulge their affiliation with violence seen as a sanctioned method of certifying power, mastery. But violence should not be connected solely to fascism, as an extreme case of a radical and deviating political movement that seized power. Fascism affirms the violence, intrinsic to any mechanism of domination.<sup>33</sup>

Violence and law are synonymous with the exercise of power. Freud noted that *violence* and *law* originate from the same source.<sup>34</sup> The prohibitive and punitive force of the law is the product of a violent act. If the law substituted the loss of the father, then superegoic law leads to the repetition of the *jouissance* of the primordial crime, since superegoic law aims at abolishing the law of desire. Prohibition generates crime and crime generates guilt resolved by imaginary (the impossible as possible) or symbolic (the impossible always remains impossible) means. In the sense of the repudiated death drive turned inwards, guilt sets up a law that functions as the other side of desire, its repressed truth.

The law (and together subjectivity) emerges as a signifier, after the repression of the Thing, and constantly tries to master the real effects of the latter.<sup>35</sup>

The violence that accompanies every mechanism of domination originates in the debility of the master to recognise that the phallic signifier which stands for his ideal is dead and empty. The gap that opens between the symbolic and the imaginary of the master triggers the superego in its very death essence seeking completeness, through fantasmatic scenarios (Sadecan, fascist or other scenarios of domination). These do not constitute ethical attitudes, as far as they rely on a particular fantasy and disregard Otherness. Although the recognition of Otherness is not sufficient for accomplishing an ethical act, it is an essential premise of an ethical gesture.

One of the early scenes in Pasolini's *Salò* illustrates the identification with a punitive superego. After the abduction of the victims, the four fascists conducted a sort of audition, before making their final selection. When Renata, one of the female victims, is brought in front of the fascist libertines, they remain indifferent to the sight of her nudity and celestial, undamaged beauty. Only when the girl falls on her knees and, in tears, pleads the fascists to punish and kill her, the fascists get fascinated and aroused by this spectacle,<sup>36</sup> In a synchronic mechanical movement, resembling erection, they get on their feet. Renata expresses guilt for the death of her mother who tried to save Renata from the fascists. The experience of guilt opens a gap in the symbolic-imaginary continuum and from this gap *jouissance* overflows. The girl cannot bear the springing *jouissance* and she is desperate for a fantasy that could veil her 'nudity' and humiliation. But this fantasy is on the side of the libertines, who are called to play the dual role of the superego. However, they leave the gap open unveiling it, instead of covering it, because their *jouissance* rests there. In this way, they induce the corruptive evil, the real lack, to an ideal form; they hold the role of the agent of privation.<sup>37</sup> Before Renata, the libertines rejected another girl for missing a tooth. The lack in that case was already there, which means their imaginary corruptive role was refuted.

The more the subject is burdened with guilt, the stronger and more voracious the superego becomes.<sup>38</sup> The superego originates in the gaps of the symbolic, the gaps on which the subject stumbles, fraught with guilt. The ferocious character of the superego resides in its guilt that drives the subject towards imaginary deceptions of covering the

gaps in the law. The superego is 'pure death drive',<sup>39</sup> marking the lacuna of the symbolic, but from a different angle, it is also responsible for the imaginary fillings of this empty space. By filling these gaps with fantasies, the superego is not tamed, but on the contrary it becomes more vicious, regarding its demands from the subject. Only the acceptance of the emptiness of the superegoic demands and the vacuum they originate from may ease the oppression of the superego. This requires the subject to use language in order to articulate what she cannot represent. In this way, she can approach the limits of the symbolic and revise the signifiers that organise her existence.

Zupančič reveals the risk of instrumentalisation of Kantian ethics when the categorical imperative is equated with the superegoic demand. Any ideology can implement this view in a manipulative manner, presenting "its own commandments as the truly authentic, spontaneous and 'honourable' inclinations of the subject."<sup>40</sup> The fantasmatic scenarios implemented for cramming the symbolic gaps fasten the law of the superego to the particular, a fixed image, that of the omnipotent father-castrator. His autarchy is totally imaginary and resembles the rigidity of the superego. This omnipotent father-castrator functions as the 'imaginarisation' of the real essence of the superego: the father who prohibits *jouissance* by means of castration and the father who has boundless access to *jouissance*.<sup>41</sup> It is an 'imaginarisation' that brings back the despotism of the primordial father, which is something that is a substitute for instead of constituting a law. The primordial father is lacking an image; nobody can represent him. He is the father of the drive, that is, the superego: it castrates but itself escapes castration, it knows no boundaries.<sup>42</sup>

Power offers an image to the primordial father, as part of the fantasy the master endorses. For instance, the imaginary and ideal father is engraved in visual representations of God or in statues of political leaders.<sup>43</sup> Conventions and rituals that dominate politics endow the image of the leader with apathy, so that he gives the impression of eliminating desire, becoming an *agalma* (statue) that Lacan associates with the *object a*.<sup>44</sup> This is because the father of the horde was an *agalma*, in that he had no desiring status. In politics, the fantasised aggressive-punitive position of the father, who has to impose the law of castration, is the image that feeds the fantasy of power. The father is the first one to be imagined as a punitive figure and the master comes to take his

place. As an image, the father-castrator seduces and/or calls for identification; in other words his image is linked to personal egotistic interests. But it is impossible for any subject to take over this omnipotent position completely. If this image has a particular interest for the individual, then the ethical duty decreed by this imaginary source cannot acquire a universal status.

The law of the ideal father supported the utopian 'Fatherland' of Nazism. The first law the Third Reich introduced was the recognition of *Reichsbürger*, the citizen of pure German blood as the supreme degree of humanity.<sup>45</sup> The law aimed at bringing the dead father back to life, through a flesh and blood image linked to Aryan identity. In this way, the law of guilt induced by the dead father of the symbolic is emasculated. Only the type of power that accepts the castrated status of the master signifier, in other words that the father is dead, recognises symbolic debt. The superiority of the law has to be recognised by the subject, because it is the backbone of her existence.

An ideal law gives a reason to live and become as complete as the law asks me to be, and power is there to show me the way towards completeness. An imaginary condition is formed then that more than filling the subject with hope, exploits the latter by making her believe in myths and believe in her-*self*, the solidity of her ego. Thus, the imaginary consistency of the subject is based on the recognition of power's ability to consummate the law and punish any deviation from it; this is the power one attributes to the imaginary father, the father of privation.<sup>46</sup>

In order to justify the imago of the father-castrator who deprives rather than castrates, the fascist needed to induce a real lack and did so, by eliminating the body of the Jew. Taking the form of an unbearable and irreversible punishment, such an 'imaginarisation' of the real helped the Nazi officer to solidify obedience to his authority and the Aryan ideal, inasmuch as German people did not perceive the execution of the Jew as a futile practice. Anyone who believed in the power of Nazism also believed that the superiority of the Aryan signifier could really eliminate the lack embodied by the Jew. Nevertheless, the real is not lacking, no matter how many Jews are executed. What the Nazi failed to discern was the futility of his master signifier which cannot be completed, despite its pre-eminence.



## 10.4 The Totalising Imaginary Dystopia

Seen in a wider constellation of totalitarian systems of domination,<sup>47</sup> where the knot between power and violence is manifested, fascism embodies the totalising amplification of the imaginary condition. This condition gives birth to the most egregious form of fantasmatic utopia, which subordinates the moral law to the constitutive elements of power (the master signifiers that organise ideology and its fantasmatic core).

Domination, as far as it supports the idea of the presence of an omnipotent father, never constitutes an ethical choice. There is an ideal which is linked to welfare and happiness, despite the fact that Kantian ethics does not pledge such a thing. Against happiness, Kantian ethics presupposes pain, in the performance of the duty. The imaginary expansion of domination overflows and exceeds the boundaries of the law; yet for the imaginary register, beyond the pleasure principle, there is more pleasure, breeding an absolute fantasy of mastery and domination. Pain is excluded as incommensurate with omnipotence.

Kant's system is about obedience to a supreme maxim, to a subjectless principle. Acknowledging the law as the supreme symbolic structure, the ethical maxim is not linked to a specific figure or an image. This could be the faceless Other of Lacan, supporting the "Kant with Sade" argument. But the picture is different. The master, as the incorporator of the maxim, has to be obeyed. He particularises it, limits it in an *I*, his *ego*, which is profoundly determined by fantasy. Fantasy is a repercussion of the personal interests of the ego, which is a misleading and unreliable source, insofar as the "ego is not a master in its own house" and does not speak itself.<sup>48</sup> Language always comes from elsewhere, i.e. the locus of the Other. But the ego acts as if it were autonomous, deriving its power from knowledge. Contrary to fascism, Sade goes against the ego, considering his polemic against any type of institutional tyranny of knowledge and in particular that of Enlightenment reason.

A system of domination requires the obedience of the subject to a visible, discernible authority. A fantasy model, in the service of power, inaugurates a circuit of obedience, based on imaginary punitive properties we recognise in the master. In order to establish his authority, the master redeems the imaginary guilt of the people, whose love and hate

towards him replicate the two poles of the ambivalence found in the relationship with the father. Obedience to power is not the same as doing one's ethical duty. Every system of power takes conformity and obedience as basic prerequisites, not so much as duties, but as an attitude connected to personal interest and wealth. The patriotism and fanaticism subjects display stem from entertaining the belief that their national identity is superior to that of others, as Žižek has been demonstrating in his work. Historically, the examples of conformity and obedience in totalitarian regimes generate some rather arduous questions. If totalising imaginary laws dissolve rather than promote socio-symbolic reality, what makes subjects obey them?

Taking Pasolini's *Salò* as an example again, without doubt the apathy of the fascists is not the sole aggravating aspect of the film. Probably, what is more outrageous is the young victims' lethargic obedience to their barbaric laws that eventually leads the victims themselves to corruption. The victims seem to be drained from all vital energy and captured in a fatal apathy. Pasolini stated prior to the film that his intention was to cause no pity for the horrific ordeals the young victims undergo.<sup>49</sup> By representing victimisation as a state of utter inertia, Pasolini encompasses a controversial view that sees responsibility lying not only on the side of the oppressor, but also on the side of the victim.

The most controversial ontological example of what Pasolini portrays is the Holocaust.<sup>50</sup> Stormy debates surround the inactivity Jewish victims displayed, during their ordeals in the concentration camps. The victims appeared to maintain a rather docile attitude, passively enduring their execution. The psychological theory of *Learned Helplessness* has been seen as a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon.<sup>51</sup> But helplessness originates not in the pain the real induces, but in the imaginary that aims at pleasure. Since the imaginary cannot achieve pleasure, at least the subject tries to remain apathetic staying away from more pain and dreaming of pleasure. The problem of course is that pain always returns. The more one excludes it, the more it comes back in its real savage form. Rather than ratifying a motivating utopia of liberation, the victims relied on a passive imaginary veiling of dystopia that cast a shadow over their future.

Whenever a dominant figure becomes the ambassador of the ethical maxim, we enter a sphere of violence, decisionism and particularism. This is because the universal is limited

to the particular: the image of the omnipotent master and his egotistic interests, namely the maintenance of the supremacy of his ideals. The ethics of desire can easily fall into the decoy of the particular, which suggests a pseudo-Kantian particularism. The object of desire can be disguised under numerous fantasmatic veils of particular interest for the subject, in other words it is easily concealed by the fantasmatic apparitions of the *object a*, the object-cause of desire.<sup>52</sup> Giving priority to the *object a* is not the same as following desire. But as soon as the imaginary collides with symbolic reality, aggression results from the realisation that one has to sacrifice the object, which exists only in fantasy, in order to function adequately in the symbolic. During the formation of the ego in the mirror stage, aggression accompanies the identification with the image.

In any case what the subject finds in this altered image of his body is the paradigm of all forms of resemblance that will bring over on to the world of objects a tinge of hostility, by projecting on them the manifestation of the narcissistic image, which, from the pleasure derived from the meeting himself in the mirror, becomes when confrontating his fellow man an outlet for his most intimate aggressivity. It is this image that becomes fixed, the ideal ego, from the point at which it stops as ego ideal.<sup>53</sup>

According to standard developmental logic, Lacan's mirror stage coincides with the anal period, as described by Freud, who observed the nihilistic and destructive tendencies arising, alongside the child's sacrifice of the anal object (an imaginary object) in order to please a symbolic demand (the parental demand for the child to defecate). This imaginary process, where the image is formed as a projection of an egotistic-narcissistic cathexis, using Freud's terms, is drilled by the signifier and the omnipotence of the first is eradicated by the mortality the latter introduces. The death the signifier induces, takes the form of guilt as a symbolic debt, a memento of the law's (and thus the subject's) incompleteness. The subject's sense of guilt as the reminder of incompleteness facilitates the exercise of power, by determining an a priori passive attitude towards it.

Nonetheless, guilt has to be an active force of responsibility, what marks the freedom of the subject, as Zupančič has suggested in her work.<sup>54</sup> In that way, the subject sees pain as an integral part of desire and not the expiation for not obeying a certain fantasy. Neither should pain be a type of good of supreme value, as it appears in Sade. Whereas, in the

first case, guilt as responsibility acknowledges the void of the symbolic law, in the second case, an imaginary dome overshadows it. As stated earlier, guilt is manifested as *stasis*, but this does not suggest a passive condition; rather it is a stasis that calls for a certain action, a decision for performing a certain ethical gesture.

There is one (psychotic) way to escape guilt that runs through the abrogation of the Other. Although some suggest a psychotic structure for Nazism, psychosis is far from what substantiated the utopian ideals of totalitarian regimes.<sup>55</sup> The master of totalitarian domination excluded guilt from his edifice by ascribing the responsibility of a violation of the moral law to the Other (God, Fatherland). In this way, an imaginary enunciator of the law is singled out that exempts the subject of the enunciated from guilt and its painful parameter. The statement of the enunciator then is linked to the particular interests of the subject of the enunciated, the executioner of a fantasmatic model.

In totalitarianism, the subject of the enunciation is given priority, but there is a concealment of the division of the subject of the enunciated. The two must congregate; the master becomes the carnal demonstration of the abstract enunciation. The master of power searches for the ideal gaze of the omnipotent Supreme Being, an ideal point in the locus of the Other (the all-seeing eye of God), from where he wishes to be seen. From this ideal point, the suffering that guilt induces is absent. The moment the master believes that he occupies this locus, seizing the supreme gaze, he takes the role of the 'object-ive' apathetic legislator, since his desiring status has been eliminated. Hitler's absolute power illustrates this point:

Adolf Hitler is Germany and Germany is Adolf Hitler. He who pledges himself to Hitler pledges himself to Germany.<sup>56</sup>

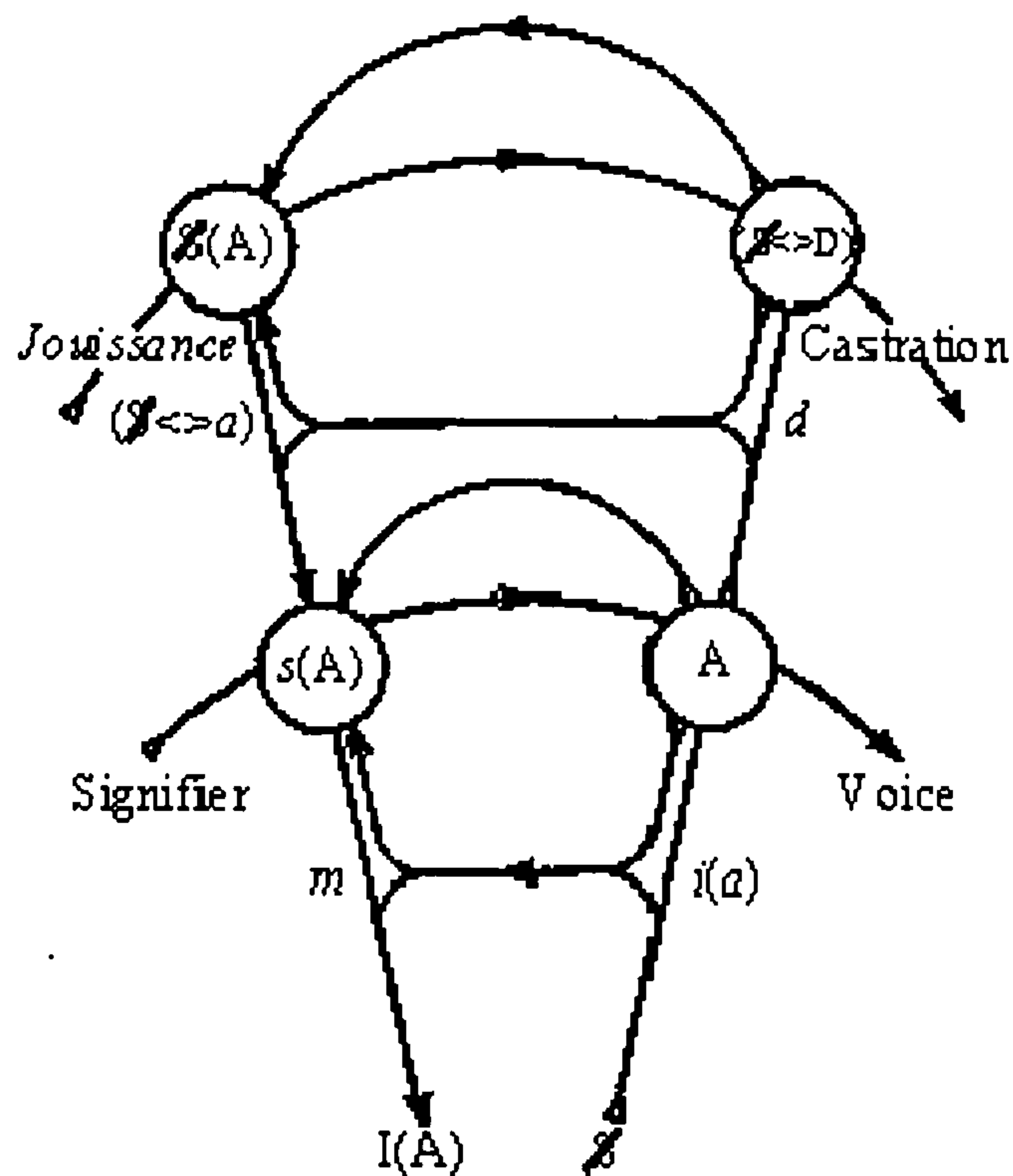
This is how Rudolf Hess, the deputy leader of the Third Reich, inaugurated his speech at the Nuremberg rallies in 1934. Hitler occupied this ideal space; he *was* the law, which flagrantly expunges the Kantian law as the ultimate utopianism. He was the tyrant that Sade's philosophy is opposed to.

Not only Sade, but even the ordinary pervert would not serve the ideal master as his Other, since for the pervert the Other is also incomplete. It is the perverse act that makes

the Other complete. The master, who incarnates the phallic signifier, identifies with the absolute power of the fullness of being that the phallus indicates as what is beyond its limit. With the support of an omnipotent fantasy which attempts to complete this identification, the subject takes the dominative position of the imaginary father, an invincible presence who imposes his will and punishments.<sup>57</sup> In this regard, the castrated status of the symbolic phallus is recanted. The master takes the place of the superego, as Žižek has demonstrated the link between the two;<sup>58</sup> this means that the superego is linked with a figure of domination and loses its impersonal character that renders it commensurable with the Kantian maxim.

In domination, the relationship with the Other is mediated by the imaginary. From this position, the master believes that 'everything is possible' and this becomes the main principle that regulates his relation to the Other, rendering his relationships dominative and exploitative. In that case, as it is found in totalitarian political systems, the *object a*, the product of the discourse of the master is sacrificed in the name of a fantasy of omnipotence. As the remainder of the real and the marker of the gap in the symbolic, the *object a* must be erased in the name of the unity that a political fantasy promises and the master embodies. As far as the so-called pervert occupies the position of the object, this explains his segregation by any discourse of domination in politics. A system of domination relies on the totalising value of the master signifier, something that the pervert does not acknowledge.

The dominant master therefore wishes to unfetter the imaginary from any symbolic restriction, so that it encompasses the whole of the real and disables the fatal effects of the latter. This means the cornucopia of *jouissance* that divides the symbolic and marks its castration has to be concealed under an imaginary cloak. The upper half vector in Lacan's completed graph of desire (Figure 1, p. 246) describes this division. It is this vector that the master of domination wishes to put out of action.



**Figure 1: The Completed Graph of Desire**

Once the real, as the excess that undermines the symbolic, has been rendered inactive, absorbed by imaginary omnipotence, the dominant master adopts a relation to the Other that can be thought of as  $i(a) \leftrightarrow \mathcal{S}$ . The subject of mastery identifies with the ideal image in the mirror that supports the identification with the ideal signifier.

The first words spoken (*le dit premier*) stand as a decree, a law, an aphorism, an oracle; they confer their obscure authority upon the real other. Take just one signifier as an emblem of this omnipotence, that is to say of this wholly potential power (*ce pouvoir tout en puissance*), this birth of possibility, and you have the unbroken line (*traite unaire*) which, by filling in the invisible mark that the subject derives from the signifier, alienates this subject in the primary identification that forms the ego ideal.<sup>59</sup>

Ideal ego and ego ideal become two sides of the same narcissistic position, sustaining a vain omnipotence that exorcises the fatality of the real. The three dimensionality of being is transfigured. An amplified imaginary takes over the other two dimensions. The symbolic, real and imaginary registers are no more equally perimetrical. The subject

identifies with the ideal reflection in the mirror, this is a flat image, since the subject cannot surmise what lies behind it and cannot represent the back view of herself. The other is needed, as another point of reflection, to recognise me as a three-dimensional lacking being and to take the position of gazing at myself that I cannot occupy. But otherness presupposes the recognition of the incomplete image, the emptiness of it, which is something the subject of domination tries to camouflage under narcissistic fantasies. Towards this goal, power fervently embraces rapid technological advances. When it is not applied to the construction of war weapons, technology is largely used by the media or else the industry of the image. Its use aims at the production of a pellucid image, as 'objective' as it can get. But what lies beyond this objectivity is not reality, but the concealment of its lack.

This is the reason why the particular in systems of political domination is external, having an observable status. The field of politics in itself is dominated by imaginary duality. For example, if in the past this duality was expressed in terms of East vs. West / Communism vs. Capitalism, today it has been transformed to Judeo-Christian democracy (e.g. United States' blessed nation) against Muslim fundamentalism. Suffice it to recall all propagandistic campaigns that display images of solidarity and unity that bring members of the same group together against an external threat. There is always a particular external threat that threatens unity (e.g. Muslim terrorism). This is the negative force that blemishes the lustre of the ego, i.e. the repressed real, and of course, it does not come from outside; rather the real is fantasmatically particularised as external, whereas it belongs more to the sphere of *extimacy*.

As I will elaborate further in the final part, particularist violence originates in the negation of the real fragmented status of the subject, a negation of the *object a*. This means symbolic guilt, as what cuts off something from the real, is also negated. What remains intact in the ethics of particularism or else the (pseudo)ethics of the system of domination is the internal coherence of the system procured by the universal, the absolute character of the fantasy of power. This imaginary coherence is impressed in the statues of leaders. Statues stand for the imaginary promise of unification with the Thing, evoking a sense of awe, certainty, coherence and eternity. They solidify the excess the law cannot

absorb. As a speaking subject, the leader is divided, but as a statuesque figure, he condenses the impossible and infinite *jouissance*.

Politics deploys strategies to eradicate symbolic guilt, in order to maintain its underlying fantasmatic pattern (a complete image and a complete law are possible). Symbolic debt says that ‘everything is not possible’ and this admission takes ambiguity, uncertainty, ambivalence, pain and anxiety as prerequisites for a political strategy that touches the real (without tying it to instrumental fantasies) as a *terra incognita* of infinite possibilities (knowledge, respect, comprehension of Otherness). According to Stavrakakis, the incomplete status of the Other, “the emptiness in the *locus* of democratic power,” is the catalyst for the creation of novel political directions that move beyond the imaginary decoys of past utopias.<sup>60</sup> Democracy proffers *points de capiton* which organise society around a fundamental lack, an admission of the antagonism and disharmony, without cramming it with positive fantasmatic content. Thus, the possibility that opens in democracy is the symbolic encircling of real lack through the signifier of the lack of the Other as the prioritised *point de capiton*.<sup>61</sup> In this case, the *point de capiton*, the democratic master signifier, does not sanction domination, since it is aware of its constitutive emptiness and its relational character (with other signifiers) that accounts for its meaning and power.

As a way to accomplish a genuine democratic ethos by ‘encircling the real’, Stavrakakis proposes the idea of sublimation which refers to a process that creates “a space for the unrepresentable within representation.”<sup>62</sup> Sublime democracy could posit the field of politics as the ‘art of the impossible’, characterised by an ongoing effort to “institutionalise within political reality, within the field of political institution, the moment of the impossible, the political modality of the real.”<sup>63</sup>

Without failing to notice the equivocal status of the notion of sublimation in Lacan and its imaginary quality, what Stavrakakis endorses is the symbolic encircling of the real as a feasible goal for a political programme that promotes an ethical attitude based on no ideals; this does not suggest an anarchic psychotic alternative, but a political agenda which rather than endorsing the absolute supremacy of master signifiers, cultivates the awareness of their lacking status.



In place of masterful absolutism, the subject finds the real of her symptom, namely, the real enclosed in a symbolic form, rather than the real Real or its imaginary covering; As Žižek points out, so-called ‘real democracy’, defined as a pure harmonious system without any ‘malfunction’, would be just another name for non-democracy.<sup>64</sup> Thus, apart from sublimation, Stavrakakis proposes the identification with the social symptom (what emerges within ideological discourse as the hindering factor for achieving harmony in society) as another democratic prospect.<sup>65</sup> For totalitarianism and anti-Semitism, ‘democracy’ and the ‘Jew’ comprise their symptom respectively.

Democracy’s different goal, as Stavrakakis suggests, must be the identification with the symptom, where one also identifies with the impossibility to represent all.<sup>66</sup> Democracy’s identification with the symptom is manifested through the electoral system, for each election brings forth the antagonism around which society evolves and traverses the fantasy of social unity; it instates ambiguity, “lack at the place of the principle of societal organisation.”<sup>67</sup> In this way, democracy surfaces as a challenge and an antistatic force against any totalising imaginary dystopia or the hegemony of certain master signifiers. As Stavrakakis puts the matter:

In order to have a non-totalisable relation to the Other we must relate –identify – with the lack in the Other and not with the Other *per se*.<sup>68</sup>

The radicalisation of democracy can only be the result of a continuous *ascesis*, it depends on our ability to move beyond the Scylla of conformity and the Charybdis of utopianism and maintain, in the fullness of time, our distance from both of them.<sup>69</sup>

It is not sufficient to endorse an ethics founded on the acknowledgment of the real (Otherness, difference) and its structural causality solely. Thus, Stavrakakis points out two strategies that tackle real causality: one that forwards a defensive evasion of real causality, a strategy sanctioned by traditional ethics. A second more defying strategy consents with Žižek’s conception of the ethics of the real and puts forward the encircling of the real, namely, the “symbolic recognition of the irreducibility of the real and an attempt to institutionalise social lack.”<sup>70</sup> The encounter with the real, in its pure excessive essence, without veiled by imaginary means, fractures the dominant socio-symbolic

relations, as it breaks down the absoluteness of the master signifier and accepts the phallus not as the signifier of power, but as the signifier of lack (which is the 'power' of desire). The encounter with the real can therefore pave the way to a genuine revolutionary praxis, inasmuch as it undermines and re-organises the symbolic.

This can be a fruitful application of the ethics of the real and the impossible, as refined by Zupančič. This is why the fundamental gesture for a democratic politics must not simply recognise symbolic difference, instead of engraving it in a field of competition, but encircle the very unrepresentable core of difference, its failure to be taken into signification. Inasmuch as domination is determined by the imaginary, it projects antagonism to an 'external' factor, that is, the *object a* that exposes the truth of the Other (the impossibility of becoming complete), as Žižek has shown in his work.<sup>71</sup> The factor that embodies this impossibility is denounced after it receives the designation 'perverse'. The pervert is excluded by power because he displays the impossibility of the symbolic to find completeness. This will be the focus of my argument, in the next part.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Tavistock, 1992), pp. 228-230.

<sup>2</sup> See Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, p. 318.

<sup>4</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, p. 318.

<sup>6</sup> See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 150-152.

<sup>7</sup> See Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 85.
- <sup>21</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 128.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 129.
- <sup>23</sup> Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, p. 71.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 77.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 73.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 68.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 74.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 75.
- <sup>31</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994).
- <sup>32</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), especially chapter 6.
- <sup>33</sup> As drawn earlier, this emphasises the possibility for the Oedipal system that maintains liberalism, to implement violent policies in order to secure its domination.
- <sup>34</sup> Freud writes about the two terms in his reply to Einstein's letter. "Why War?" (1933[1932]), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 22, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 199-215. Through a Lacanian prism, violence is a condition stirred up by the imaginary that does not recognise guilt, whereas the law, as a symbolic structure, emerges from the realisation of guilt; law is there to alleviate guilt, the painful experience of *jouissance*, the insurmountable void, but it is not effective in doing so.
- <sup>35</sup> See Slavoj Žižek *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, London: Routledge, 2001 [1992], p. 181. See also Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, pp. 83-84, where Lacan discusses the relation of the Law to the Thing. To the extent that desire is always the desire of the Thing (loss), we could say that desire is by default *necrophilic*.
- <sup>36</sup> This punitive position is probably what Henry Kissinger suggests, when he says, "Power is the greatest aphrodisiac." In other words, power tackles *jouissance*.
- <sup>37</sup> See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 62.
- <sup>38</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "Kant with (or against) Sade," in *The Žižek Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 283-301.
- <sup>39</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id" (1923), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), p. 53.
- <sup>40</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, p. 1.
- <sup>41</sup> The term 'imaginarisation' has been used in seminars of the New Lacanian School in London, alluding to an imaginary encompassing of the real.
- <sup>42</sup> One must bear in mind that the drive is a linguistic and not a biological effect. The real father is the biological father, the agent of castration, but not the castrator. The biological father of real omnipotence does not exist, as far as his power is derived from language. The biological father is told to be a father. See Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 61-63.
- <sup>43</sup> Suffice it to recall the icons of Orthodox churches, where God is represented through a gentle senile image, with long grey hair and beard, meek and merciful expression. This image is also quite similar to the Baba of Hinduism. Baba, meaning father/saviour, is considered a respected religious man, a saint.
- <sup>44</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VIII: Le Transfert, 1960-1961*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991).
- <sup>45</sup> See James Taylor and Warren Shaw, *A Dictionary of the Third Reich* (London: Grafton Books, 1987).
- <sup>46</sup> In Freud, the father succumbs to guilt, as the result of the superego's ordains.
- <sup>47</sup> Here, the Sadean fantasy is considered a product of a subversive system of domination, the domination of the real Real.
- <sup>48</sup> See Sigmund Freud, (1917) "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 139-143 (p. 143).

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<sup>49</sup> See the previous chapter.

<sup>50</sup> The designation “Holocaust” is doubtful in its own right, insofar as it is fallacious. The term indicates a complete and absolute extermination of a nation, which did not really occur, despite the vast monstrosity of the atrocities.

<sup>51</sup> See Seligman Martin E.P., *Helplessness: On Depression, Development and Death* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1975).

<sup>52</sup> Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 124-126.

<sup>53</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge), pp. 339-340.

<sup>54</sup> Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, especially chapter 2.

<sup>55</sup> See Money-Kyrle in the first chapter.

<sup>56</sup> The statement belongs to Rudolf Hess. Taylor and Shaw, *A Dictionary of the Third Reich*, p. 151.

<sup>57</sup> The imaginary father is the agent of privation who deprives the subject from its symbolic phallus. This means, he inscribes a lack in the real, a lack of lack, insofar as the symbolic phallus is the signifier of lack. See Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 150-152.

<sup>58</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London, New York: Verso, 1999), pp. 390-391. Totalitarianism is not a product of psychosis, since it is organised around a symbolic figure, a master that embodies the autarchic character of the superego, that is, the omnipotence of the master. His embodiment of the superego is fortified by the belief that he possesses the ideal knowledge of eradicating desire.

<sup>59</sup> Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 338.

<sup>60</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 138.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p.148, cited in Stavrakakis *Lacan and the Political*, p. 140

<sup>65</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 133.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133, p. 134. This view concurs with Žižek’s idea about traversing the social fantasy.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136. “If we need elections every once in a while it is because we accept that the hegemonic link between a concrete content and its incarnation of fullness has to be continuously re-established and renegotiated.”

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>71</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

### Part III: Conclusion

In this part, I endeavoured to disengage perversion from the ethical debate regarding fascist atrocities and their relation to Kantian ethics. The Sadean imaginary edifice is understood as a system of domination, as it was outlined in the previous part, different from the totalitarian system of Nazism, as far as fantasy and ideals are concerned. Both systems are incongruent with Kant's prioritisation of the moral law that requires an unyielding and indifferent adherence to the letter of the law, as an ethical duty.

To the extent that the performance of the Kantian duty must not originate in personal, egotistic interests, but in the enunciation of an impersonal abstract maxim that can acquire a universal status, both systems have failed to accomplish this duty. This is because the Other in both cases is reduced to an external particular source that serves the interests of the fascist or those of the Sadean subject that differ in terms of the master signifier and the concomitant fantasy that each system rests on. Specifically, the Sadean libertines' efforts serve the imaginary goal of an ultimate evil that sweeps everything just to destroy itself at the end, whereas the Nazi fascist imagines a supreme Aryan nation that imposes a new universal order. These two goals are determined by fantasies that reflect personal desires; therefore, they cannot acquire a universal status, as ethical duties.

When an imaginary condition prevails filtering the perception of otherness, violence inhabits the world of politics, because the gaps of the symbolic are crammed with fantasy. The *object a* that marks this gap has to be concealed. Thereby, the so-called pervert who identifies with the object exposes the gap that power tries to cloak. Only in this way, power can promote an ideal (the master signifier) that can complete the Other. For this reason, the pervert's position is dissimilar to that of the power of domination. The dominant master instrumentalises the Other (reduced to an other) as the imaginary overtakes the symbolic.

The sense of symbolic debt (i.e. symbolic guilt) that would hypostatise the Kantian ethical duty is absent in domination. The acceptance of castration and the dead status of the signifier are the limits of the symbolic, where one blunders upon death as the fundamental truth of existence. More than clinging to the certainty and the particularism of a fantasy of a supreme ideal that dominant power promotes, the subject has to come to

terms with symbolic death. This is the acceptance of a central lack, namely, the empty status of desire, that goes through the recognition of the desire of the Other and a real excess that cannot be absorbed by the latter. More than simply acknowledging it, a genuine ethical act would require identification with this excess.

## **PART IV**

### **Politics**

## Introduction:

### Politics and the Embodiment of *Jouissance*

Two suggestions weaved the argumentative core of the last two chapters: First, the fascist does not occupy the same discursive position as the pervert and second, the fulfilment of Kantian ethics does not go through the Sadean route of perversion. Zupančič has demonstrated that Sade's Kantianism is nothing but a perverse ploy that veils responsibility under apathy. Yet, contrary to Zupančič, my view is that perversion is a condition that little has to do with the Sadean system and even less with fascist ethics.

Even if one agrees that the Nazi administrative body established an anti-morality grounded in Kantian principles, it is difficult to explain this in terms of perverse functioning. Nazism obtains its hegemonic status through its master signifier, whereas the pervert is beyond any hegemonic context, precisely because he does not embody a signifier, but its very lack, the *object a*. If the discursive copulas between fascism and perversion are not effective, the nagging question left is whether there is any gain for the understanding of the category of perversion, when the latter becomes the main frame of reference for the discussion of extreme ideological phenomena and, particularly, totalitarianism(s).

The philology of perversion in psychoanalysis needs a critical reconsideration. Together with a novel scrutiny of the theory, perversion needs to be reappraised on the basis of its casual use in the interpretation of socio-political phenomena. Sado-masochism, fetishism, repressed homosexual tendencies are some favourite terms taken from the sexological lexicon of perversion in order to explain the flourishing of last century's fascism.

This part of the present study reflects on the vertiginous intoxication of fascism with perverse traits and its persistence in contemporary politics. At best, the notion of perversion has been implemented to describe and understand the excess found in certain types of behaviour that move beyond the norm. At worst, perversion turns out to be the stigmatising label for whatever behaviour does not fit with traditional schemata of power, in the Foucauldian sense here, as institutionalised bodies of knowledge. In any case, a breach in the unity of the social edifice is likely to be considered as a perverse act, not



only because it suggests transgression (this is something that the law can easily identify and restore), but also because it unveils the structural limitations of the law. The undermining character of the impossible can be easily labelled as perversion.

Therefore, the labelling of the pervert does not simply serve the purpose of producing another nominal category. More than the name of a dubious clinical or moral category, the epithet 'perverse' facilitates the segregating practices of an authoritarian norm. The marginal space where the pervert is placed by institutionalised authorities reveals less the risks that he brings about and more the manipulative and totalitarian character of authority. It is not difficult to realise the streak of stubbornness with which society refuses to abandon 'perversion' as a designation, contrary to the use of the other two major clinical designations of neurosis and psychosis, which is on the wane.

The advocates of the view of perversion as social malice draw on the anti-normative character of perversion, transforming it into an anti-social and anarchic notion. More than a capitalistic strategy of pathologising difference, the notion of perversion is apolitical *per se* and thus when the designation is used in order to denote opposition to values and the ideological purposes, perversion is subjected to an instrumentalisation by any ideological form of power. Having just a poor crop of evidence for the hollow anti-social elements of the pervert, it seems to be enough for a system of power to create an anti-democratic, anti-patriotic and anti-revolutionary image of the pervert, conditional on the dominant ideological frame through which power manifests itself.

Inevitably, the politics of fascism are sexualised, while the category of perversion embodies an ominous type of sexuality, even for the current and supposedly tolerant democratic edifice, becoming a source of misinterpretation and solecism. But non-normative does not necessarily mean anti-normative. By insisting in the use of perverse terms, accounts that claim an objective understanding of fascism attempt to conceal the gaps that render them ineffective. Inasmuch as they do not accept the impossibility of objectively capturing the phenomenon of fascism, they disguise it under the masking of perversion, which serves ideological purposes and maintains the expectation of a complete explanation of fascism. For instance, fascist atrocities are explained in terms of sadistic tendencies.

Without operating inside an ideologically sterilised frame, the psychoanalytic clinic has produced a remarkable body of knowledge on perversion, yet quite limited in comparison to the research in the other two typical psychoanalytic categories, namely neurosis and psychosis. Inasmuch as this knowledge is widely and copiously applied to extreme political conditions or violations of political laws, psychoanalysis succumbs to a synergy with a system that attempts to marginalize the so-called pervert. Even worse, psychoanalysis appears to be resistant to the idea of reappraising vague and problematic theoretical suggestions. Rather than fostering rigid scholasticism, psychoanalytic knowledge on perversion must form the podium upon which novel theoretical explorations regarding the 'perverse condition' could be initiated. A scholastic doctrine, as far as it conforms to an established and inflexible apparatus that ostracises any incommensurability with the general normative ethos in society, itself functions in a sort of 'proto-fascist' fashion. Perceiving the pervert as a destabilising factor for their hegemony, power mechanisms proclaim his untreatable and obdurate condition that needs close monitoring and control.

The main argument elaborated in the present part shifts from the discursive constructs about the fascist pervert to the 'fascist' outlook of discourses on perversion, recognising the need to proceed to a relinquishment of the prosaism that regards the category of perversion as social menace. My argument sees the so-called pervert as the subject that raises anxiety in authority figures and avatars of consolidated institutions, where I will also include the analyst. The uncomfortable position of anxiety caused by another subject's blatant digression from the normative sexual modality or morality leaves no space for negotiation. By labelling the subject a pervert, anxiety is given a name and a cause, without itself being openly confronted. In an endeavour to confront this label and encompass the tolerance of anxiety, as a basic psychoanalytic aim, I propose an alternative term for referring to the subject typically described by perverse designations. In contradistinction with the ordinary subject,<sup>1</sup> namely the subject that conforms to the prevalent normative socio-political schemata, I will refer to the *extra*-ordinary subject,<sup>2</sup> mainly as a way to accentuate the excess he embodies, this extra constituent to ordinariness, that becomes the source of provocation and anxiety for the institutional basis of society.

If we rely on the moralistic view of perversion as what breaks the law and the social norm by failing to acknowledge the desire of the Other, the issue of perversion cannot be detached from the field of clinical research and criminology. This is because, to a certain degree, an act departing from the prevalent norm is characterised as perverse, implying the manoeuvre of a hidden *jouissance* with which this act has been charged. Nevertheless, in reality, what becomes obvious is the autarchic and authoritarian attitude towards *jouissance*, displayed by all forms of power. Power serves a particular Good that needs to be protected from the corrupting effects of *jouissance*. The maintenance and the security of the provision of the Good and the goods or else commodities, as Lacan plays with the term in *Seminar XII*, account for the ‘fascist’ exclusion of *jouissance* from the social body.<sup>3</sup> Provocative *per se*, the acquisition of perverse *jouissance* has been associated with all marginal divisions of a society that has never sufficiently justified this marginalisation. Therefore, the validity of all discursive accounts that divide *jouissance* into perverse or/and fascist is in question.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> That is, the subject of a typical, non-pathological neurotic structure. The distinction between the ordinary and the pathological neurotic subject is not unproblematic, but the critique of the term goes beyond the scope of this part.

<sup>2</sup> There are places in the present part where I refer just to the *extra-ordinary*, omitting the term subject, in order to draw an analogy with the designation ‘pervert’ and avoid exposing the reader to the fatigue of repeating the word ‘subject’.

<sup>3</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Tavistock, 1992), pp. 218-230.

## 11. Beyond the Fascist Utopia

### 11.1 The Dark Veil of Fascism

Confusion and misjudgement of the genuine character of fascism revolves around its eroticisation through perverse sexuality. Such a methodical misinterpretation amplifies the shortage in the consensus regarding the constitutive elements of historical fascism and reveals its elusive core that cannot be grasped either by leftist or liberal historians. There is an ongoing debate among the latter about whether fascism was the extreme manifestation of bourgeois despotism or the negation of liberal democracy.

Yet this does not mean that there is no common ground between theoreticians. A general admission is shared, since Horkheimer and Adorno's acerbic criticism of fascism in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the fascist encroachment and (mis)appropriation of the Enlightenment principles and the ideals of the French Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the belief in fascism's perverse character is in itself a 'perverted' approach to the phenomenon and incongruous with rationalism. Forming less an effective critique of fascism and more an inadvertent support for the latter, such discursive links entail a seduction by the fascist ideology's imaginary web, woven around ideas of power, violence and pagan romanticism, the main purpose of which is precisely to blur the absence of a well-defined political planning and profile.

In post-First World War Germany, National Socialism discerned the influence of such utopianism over the youths and the intellectuals of the time and systematically cultivated the dark romantic image of superman, a kind of anti-Christ (not as a satanic figure, but as a hero opposed to any religious belief). For Nazism, Aryanism replaced religion. Against the Judeo-Christian dogma, National Socialism rigorously persecuted the Catholic and the Protestant Church, in favour of the icon of the fallen:

The cult of the fallen [...] was central to Fascist liturgy. Fascism created its own cult of martyrs and its own immortality for the fallen through public ritual and an attitude of collective transcendence.<sup>2</sup>

The cult of the fallen manifests the desire of the Nazi Other, in its demanding, voracious and superegoic form. It is the 'dark God' of sacrifice that Lacan linked to the horrors of Nazism, in *Seminar XI*.<sup>3</sup> The pagan and vitalist ideas demanded an alternative morality that clashed with the humbleness and the sense of guilt of the Judeo-Christian dogma. Fascist morality endorsed the 'new man' as an unrestrained type of (super)man motivated by an innate power of superiority. Placed within a dark frame of power and fascination, the fallen was celebrated for his departure from the kingdom of guilt, as what condemned man to mortality, doubt and lack.

It is this Nazi fascination with the cult of the fallen that I believe contradicts the suggestion that the Jew embodied a modern antichrist for Nazism. In my view, Nazism's hatred for the Jew, as well as other anti-Semitic manifestations, was fuelled by the solidity of the Jewish religious system and the claim of being 'God's favourite'. It was the positive content of the Jewish fantasy (The Jewish identity) that fostered the animosity and the antagonism of the Nazi fantasy, against the Jew and his religion. Instead of accepting guilt as the premise for immortality in another life, the fascist believed in secular immortality, achieved through physical vitality.

The Nazi experimentation with eugenics illustrates at best the intriguing vision of producing a post-human race that is pure and enduring. The search for knowledge that characterises contemporary genetics was absent, but somehow knowledge was there already subordinate to the master signifier or else the Nazi ideal; it just required the proper means for its application. Nazism's ideal was augmented by one image: the Aryan superman whose natural power is endowed with corporeal perfection. The realisation of this ideal laid down the basis for the destructive utopian politics of fascism.<sup>4</sup> In his discussion of the nihilistic character of contemporary ethical discourse, Badiou alludes to the example of euthanasia and notes Nazism's preoccupation with it, as with 'bio-ethics'.<sup>5</sup> Euthanasia reflects the contradictory essence of ethics that eulogises eudemonia and the dignity of living, yet conveys enthrallment with death, without encompassing it in its thought. Badiou argues:

Fundamentally, Nazism was a thoroughgoing ethics of Life. It had its own concept of 'dignified life', and it accepted, implacably, the necessity of putting an end to undignified lives. Nazism isolated and carried to its ultimate conclusion the nihilist core of the

‘ethical’ disposition once it has at its disposal the political means to be something other than prattle.<sup>6</sup>

The example of Nazism and euthanasia reveal the peril of setting state commissions on ‘bio-ethics’ and the contradiction that inheres to contemporary ethics: it is simultaneously “fatalist and non-tragic,” since death suggests an inassimilable agony, yet it is ‘dignified’ by becoming a discreet affair, losing its painful and intolerable character that would disturb the idea of living-well.<sup>7</sup> In Badiou’s words, the ethical discourse “allows death to ‘go about its business’, without opposing to it the Immortal of a resistance.”<sup>8</sup> The contemporary ethical discourse serves a ‘conservative desire’ that endorses the current stipulations of the Western *status quo* that amputate the prospect of a future of universal value and a ‘murderous desire’ that renders the claimed mastery of life to mastery of death.<sup>9</sup>

Today, within a sweeping atmosphere of ‘anything goes’, the fiction of the Other is in severe crisis and this means that the Other, as the benefactor of the subject’s pleasure, malfunctions.<sup>10</sup> The demand of the Other is not imperative anymore. The corrosion of the power of the Other as lacking does not lead to any liberating results, but rather facilitates a regression to fantasmatic phenomena of omnipotence. As the subject moves away from a symbolic questioning of power, she relapses into an egotistic narcissistic conception of it.

The problem arises from the obsession with the knowledge of the absolute Good, which belongs to the domain of imaginary impossibility. This obsession supports the nihilism of the ethics that defines Man in terms of happiness, as Badiou suggests.<sup>11</sup> Commonly, when the founding idea of politics is canvassed, the upholding of ecumenical welfare comes up as the main theme. The political domain is organised on the basis of the pursuit of a sovereign Good. As if this good is something graspable and definable, political authority always speaks on its behalf. It comes as no surprise then to see this Good failing, inasmuch as it stands for nothing but the *object a*. This little object-cause of desire can only be staged through imaginary means. The moment one comes too close to it, the object falls and fails to satisfy desire. The field of politics is doomed to such failure. The sovereign Good belongs to the imaginary order that hypostatizes political fantasies. Such

fantasies lay out an unreliable and faltering pathway, since they propel the subject towards endless misidentifications of the object and concurrent antagonisms.<sup>12</sup>

This imaginary continuum is what the presence of the so-called pervert disturbs. Reducing himself to a mere object, the pervert refuses to screen the object solely in fantasies. He rather takes it on the symbolic stage, materialising and passing it to *corpo-reality*. But the *corpo-reality* of the object needs to be disguised, as far as it marks the truth of subjectivity; this is the failure of the object to fill the Other's lack, opening the possibility of the monstrous primitive Thing's return. Refusing to play this game of deception, the assumed pervert incarnates the object and exposes the unbearable Truth of subjectivity.

### 11.1.1 *From Perversion to Subversion and Back*

A romanticised view of perversion discerns in the latter a revolutionary or a subversive thrust that can lead to political changes, either positive or negative. From the atrocities of the Second World War to the recent violence linked to terrorism, abolitionist praxes and revolutionary acts against the predominant *status quo* eradicate the continuity of the historical stream and bring the subject in confrontation with the real. Nevertheless, the ascription of any subversive element in politics to a perverse pivot constitutes a futile tactic, since it implies that novelty in politics runs through perversion. This is inaccurate and stamps innovation with a negative label.

The perverse label, moralistic *per se*, is affixed to any propensity to break off the normative chain<sup>13</sup> and expose the void that inheres to the body of sanctified knowledge shared by the majority. On the one side, knowledge serves the purpose of a monolithic and inflexible power mechanism, which favours the maintenance of a fantasy of unity. On the other, moralistic propositions offer nothing but pseudo-infinity of desire, which is linked to a recurrent metonymy of the 'One' through coded types of actions that suppose to actualise it.<sup>14</sup>

Unless it is perceived as a subtle strategy of eulogising prevalent power apparatuses, the labelling of the pervert is a practice that adds little to the deciphering of the transgressive

idiom of the subject who receives the label. Especially, if one considers that the so-called pervert, before his marginalisation due to labelling, did not detach himself from the institutional corpus of society, in spite of his provocative deeds, then there is little difference from the ordinary subject who harmoniously acquiesces with the officious social and political institutions. This shows that perversion as a pathological and negative designation simply fails to describe the subject characterised by it.

For this reason, I find it more appropriate to allude to the so-called pervert, as the *extra-ordinary* subject, who is sufficiently ordinary to comply with the main establishments, principles and values of social order (this is why, for example, I would not associate a serial killer with perversion, for the mere reason that the *extra-ordinary* subject displays a basic respect of fundamental human rights), yet not ordinary enough for an ideologico-political system to integrate him into its fabric.

The logic for using this designation is the *extra* element the subject adds to his access to *jouissance*. The so-called pervert, as the incarnation of this phallus, embodies something more than phallic *jouissance*, i.e. the enjoyment the phallus permits and the master regulates. Perverse enjoyment relativises the hegemony of the latter and opens the way to the derogatory and deviant label of perversion. The phallic signifier is the primary *point de capiton* and the signifier of power, as embodied by the master.

In the *point de capiton* a particular signifier is called to incarnate a function beyond its concreteness, it is 'emptied' from its particular signification in order to represent fullness in general and be able to articulate a large number of heterogeneous signifiers.<sup>15</sup>

Rather than an empty signifier, the pervert embodies the phallus as an object, in its real and imaginary dimension that undermines and exceeds the limits of the symbolic. Apart from the *point de capiton* that solidifies a certain socio-political edifice, Stavrakakis discerns the signifier that stands for what limits and undermines the latter, that is, "the signifier representing, within our fantasmatic scenario, the excluded real."<sup>16</sup> Both signifiers are empty *par excellence*, yet the 'signifier of exclusion' embodies 'pure negativity' as it counters the function of the *point de capiton*, namely, the shared point of reference that comes to incarnate the "universality of a certain group or collectivity, as a representative of the pure being or the systematicity of the system."<sup>17</sup> As an illustration of



the role of the two signifiers, we can say on Žižek's tracks that 'Nazism' was the *point de capiton* of fascist Germany, while the 'Jew' was the signifier that stood for the real.

In this respect, one of the enduring signifiers used by past and contemporary socio-political reality in excluding the destabilising dimension of the real, is the 'pervert'. Yet the problem is that the 'pervert' does not belong to a 'foreign body', as Jews were for Nazi Germany, but he is part of the same organic whole which is organised by a common *point de capiton*. This is the most terrifying aspect of 'perversion': I see myself reflected in the other, perceived as part of a continuum, a unified whole; but my idol reflected in the 'perverse' other becomes fragmented and repulsive, due to the unexpected *jouissance* that he makes me confront. Precisely because the so-called pervert appears to 'betray' the harmony of the socio-political order and therefore to undermine any fantasmatic ideological programme of maintaining an organic unity, he undergoes stringent segregative and punitive practices by the power of phallic mastery.

Both the *point de capiton* and the empty signifier of exclusion in socio-political relations are indispensable for setting up and organising a certain symbolic-fantasmatic system. The master holds the role of the *point de capiton*, while the empty signifier is vacant of any concrete content; thus, since it stands for the ungraspable real, it functions as an *objet petit a*.<sup>18</sup> In that sense, 'perversion' as an empty signifier of the excluded real assumes the role of the evanescent object. Its isolation from the socio-symbolic edifice serves the coherence of the latter and the hegemony of the master signifier.

The *extra-ordinary* subject has never really jeopardised the stability of entrenched constitutions, over the years. He never maintained such an antithesis to the prevalent socio-political *status quo* that would endanger it with decomposition. Rather the 'pervert' occupies a real space, the gap of the symbolic, exposing the lack in the Other and hence its desiring status. It is not a strategy that refutes the law. The pervert's wishful thinking is to make desire and *jouissance* meet, to bring law and desire in unison. Even in perversion, desire is not there just to subvert the law, but also to sustain it. It is the very conformity of the pervert that gives rise to the sexual scenarios he implements. The pervert wants to be the one who completes the law, yet the one, the other, who personifies the memento of the incomplete status of the law, the *object a* that circumscribes its structural gap, overruns the space of desire and fills it up with

*jouissance*. Conceptually different from the pleasure the law seems to guarantee, *jouissance* “is the name for a dimension of unnatural suffering and punishment that inhabits human pleasure, a dimension that is possible only because the body and its satisfaction are constitutively denatured, always already bound to representation.”<sup>19</sup> In perversion, as in neurosis, the law plays a dual role: it allows access to unlimited *jouissance*, but it also puts an end to this *jouissance*.

If there is something that we now know about the pervert, it is that what appears from the outside as satisfaction without restraint is defence, is well and truly the bringing into play, into action of a law in so far as it restraints, it stops, precisely the path of this *jouissance*.<sup>20</sup>

The so-called pervert or else the *extra-ordinary* subject does not radically contravene the prevalent socio-political principles; on the contrary, he finds himself quite adjusted to the institutional basis of society. However, the audacious manner, by which institutions segregate and barrage the *extra-ordinary*, is only one indication of the animosity with which perversion is perceived in social relations. Rather than a radical opposition, when the supposed pervert breaks the law, his intention is not to replace it with a different law. Breaking the law is nothing but the *modus operandi* for the *extra-ordinary* subject to extract the transgressive *jouissance* he wants the Other to dive into.

In this vein, his benefaction to the Other is the sexualisation of death, that is to say, the *extra-ordinary* gets off with something that escapes division, the division imposed by the phallic signifier as a landmark separating limited from limitless *jouissance*. This accounts for the segregative policies against the *extra-ordinary*, without paying attention to the fact that even this sexualisation is an illusive fantasmatic product. The *extra-ordinary* subject enjoys embodying the missing object that leaves a hole in the law of the Other (the empty space the phallic signifier inscribes).

He is not troubled by the echo of the desire of the Other that poses the question: *Che Vuoi?* The *extra-ordinary* knows what he wants: to turn himself into the object, as the inversion of the matheme of fantasy effectively illustrates this:  $a \langle \rangle \$.$ <sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, what he does not know is how to obstruct desire from returning. The *extra-ordinary* cares only about the gap in the law, the hole where he is to be inserted as the object. This is

neither a revolutionary nor a political act; yet the void in relation to the law *is* and *must* remain a political question, because the possibility of a radical transformation of society revolves around this void, when all ideological fantasies attempting to mask the latter fall down.<sup>22</sup>

If we were to follow the typical psychoanalytic glossary, the fulcrum of a revolutionary praxis would lie in a certain 'neurotic' rather than 'perverse' position. This does not suggest a pathological manifestation, but a structural component of any ordinary subject.<sup>23</sup> It is our 'neurotic' position in discourse that disturbs our relations with authority figures and established institutions, addressing demands towards them. At the level of discourse, someone has to start from a hysterical position, in order to rebel against authority. The frame of conformity where traditionally ordinary 'neurosis' has been placed is also the fitting context for *extra-ordinariness*.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the *extra-ordinary* is no more revolutionary or conformist than the ordinary subject is. He just follows a different pathway in the persistent challenging of the Other, demanding from It to face the truth of the incomplete status of Its existence.<sup>25</sup> This does not simply reveal the emptiness of the locus of the Other. More than this, it opens the possibility for this emptiness to be filled and the law to be completed, by becoming the object that covers the void.<sup>26</sup>

This provocation occurs in a manner which is not out of line with that of the hysteric. For this reason, in the previous chapters, the 'pervert' was included into the discourse of the hysteric. The hysteric desires eternal deception, the eternal repercussion of desire as it is served by the fiction of the Other at each time. This is why ideologies have not reached their end. Despite the severe crisis, the Other is still revealed through fictional constructs. Thus, it is not the 'perverse' structure as an antithesis to the 'neurotic' that introduces novelty.<sup>27</sup> The discursive manifestation of novelty as the provocation of the master suggests a common ground between the 'pervert' and the 'neurotic', but the former implements an alternative provocative practice that does not question the fullness of the signifier (the phallus), but its emptiness. Rather than completing the law with the *right* signifier, the 'pervert' seeks to complete the law with the *right* object. The *extra-ordinary* desires the eternal repetition of the Other's *jouissance* derived from a non-failing object,

but his desire is as deceiving as the hysteric's, since desire can never find its complete fulfilment and always needs the Other to sustain it.

If the *extra-ordinary* provokes authority, that is because he does not accept it as a hegemonic position of power that claims to have the knowledge of what the Other desires. The duty the *extra-ordinary* performs is not to refute desire *per se*, but rather its phallic, eternal repetition promoted by any tyrannical power. He unveils the idiocy of phallic *jouissance*, that is, its restrained and ephemeral status.<sup>28</sup>

One can erect as a duty the maxim of countering the desire of the tyrant, if the tyrant is the one who arrogates to himself the power to enslave the desire of the Other.<sup>29</sup>

The tyrant as the master of a totalising system of power claims to enchain the desire of the Other. In other words, he presents himself as if the knowledge of what the Other wants is kept in a box. The *extra-ordinary* knows that the box is empty, as empty as the *agalma*, the *object a*, can be.<sup>30</sup> He knows the fallacious arrogation of the tyrant. The latter does not have the phallus, although he claims to do so. Reduced to an object, the *extra-ordinary* compensates for the lack of the phallus (that is, an imaginary object that occupies the place of symbolic loss) and demonstrates the ubiquity, the elusion and the eternal circulation of the object, which is not to be included in any box.<sup>31</sup> It cannot be given as a gift to the Other, otherwise a mythical Other is implied. The omnipresence of the *object a* marks the inherent emptiness of the locus of the Other; it is what reminds the subject that *the* Other does not exist.

## 11.2 Tarnished Utopias

Regardless of the abundance of discursive arguments that one falls upon in works of historians, political scientists, sociologists and psychologists who presume to objectively explore the question of fascism, the nature of the latter remains an enigma. The plenitude of accounts reflects less a holistic approach and more a bewilderment of this particular

ideological phenomenon. Numerous allusions to fascism as a pastiche ideology<sup>32</sup> or the counterpart of 20<sup>th</sup> century communist totalitarianism<sup>33</sup> accumulate in its ambiguity, closing the blinds to the absconding character of its definition and comprehension.

Although I believe totalitarianism is not a futile designation, its amorphous and unreserved pertinence to fascism, likewise the notion of ‘perversion’, is inconsistent with the scientific objectivity that many analyses may advocate. What occurs is that the search for an unequivocal definition and comprehensive account of fascism refuses to admit that the object of fascism keeps sliding away.

It is because of this void that we have the plethora of discursive arguments regarding the nature, the historical occurrence and the impact of fascism. The problem does not lie in the ongoing effort to comprehend the phenomenon (that would be a self-contradiction, considering the aims of the present study), but in the certainty of defining it, putting it into a ‘scientific’ frame that serves ideological purposes. For instance, the denunciation of fascism’s utopian profile endorses the current sweeping negativisation of all utopian politics that benefits the prevalent liberal consensus.<sup>34</sup>

The unfathomable core of fascism that impedes its scientific objectification is what brings the term to its psychoanalytic scrutiny. Moreover, the legitimacy of the persistent conception of fascism as a sexually deviant and decadent ideological formation in politics is the last focal point of my critique. The repetition of the mystifying link of fascism with perversion forms in itself a question for psychoanalytic research, since repetition suggests a certain unmasterable parameter. In *Lacan and the Political*, Stavrakakis conveys the relevance of Lacanian psychoanalysis to political analysis. In his words:

Lacan’s schema of socio-political life is that of a play, an unending circular play between possibility and impossibility, between construction and destruction, representation and failure, articulation and dislocation, reality and the real, *politics and the political*.<sup>35</sup>

Stavrakakis draws a fertile distinction between politics and the political.<sup>36</sup> The first concerns political reality, as we know it in its pragmatic institutional form and regulatory practices that organise its system, on a symbolic and fantasmatic basis, like any other reality. However, the political involves the real that eludes political reality, yet it is formative and constitutive of social relations. The field of the political discerns the

manifestations of our encounter with the real in socio-political relations. The moment of its painful occurrence and the failure to represent it mark the moment of the *political* which “proves our fantasmatic conception of the socio-political institution of society as a harmonious totality to be no more than a *mirage*.”<sup>37</sup> For Stavrakakis, any ideologico-political aspiration that envisages the reinstating of society’s harmony and order as a unified whole aims at the impossibility of the political, the real ungraspable object, reducing utopia to a fantasy that stages this object.<sup>38</sup>

In a thorough historical and psychoanalytic discussion, Stavrakakis delineates the intricate problems of all utopian politics, as far as they rely on the production of a dual fantasy. One fantasmatic axis evolves around a ‘beatific’ theme, whereas the second axis reflects a ‘horrific’ theme that recants the positive side of fantasy.<sup>39</sup> Utopian fantasies promise to turn “disorder into order,” by mastering the element that disturbs this vision of harmony, namely, the insistence of the real. Nevertheless, the real cannot be mastered, since it cannot be taken into symbolisation; it always inflicts a hindrance on the signifying process. But what is possible, according to Stavrakakis’ epistemological suggestion, is the encircling of this failure in our representation, as the encircling of the impossible:

Although it is impossible to touch the real, it is possible to encircle its impossibility, exactly because this impossibility is always emerging within a symbolisation.<sup>40</sup>

Despite or, better, *because* of the irreducible character of the real, we have to adhere to symbolisation, as Adorno has suggested.<sup>41</sup> But rather than forwarding a symbolisation that would conform to a fantasmatic logic of repressing the real and irrevocably eradicating its structural causality, another more compound symbolic route should be followed: the consummation of a symbolising act that endeavours to ‘institutionalise’ lack, by acknowledging first the limits, the gaps of the symbolic imposed by the real.<sup>42</sup>

Psychoanalysis endorses this type of symbolisation, by developing strategies for the impossible task of representing the real. We do not find this task performed by studies on the fascist phenomenon that reduce its traumatic unknowable component to the ambiguity of ‘perversion’, precisely what stands for the ‘anarchic’ factor that undermines all types

of knowledge. Rather than institutionalising lack, these studies further institutionalise existing systems of knowledge, keeping at bay the realisation of the gap that limits their narratives.

The main goal of psychoanalysis is to create channels that make it possible to ‘encircle the unknowable’, what lies beyond knowledge. A systematic effort to symbolise the fissure that impedes the completion of the symbolic and “traverse the closure of fantasy” is feasible.<sup>43</sup> Inasmuch as this real impediment occurs within the field of language and knowledge, it can be encircled through symbolic means. The task of psychoanalysis is to circumscribe and situate the manifestations of the real and the particular disruptive moment of its emergence within symbolisation.

The encounter with the real constitutes a traumatic moment *par excellence*, for what comes forth is the recognition of the impossibility of our symbolisation to become a closed system.<sup>44</sup> This is the starting point for what Žižek considers as an authentic ethical posture, namely, to “assume fully the impossible task of symbolising the real, inclusive of its necessary failure.”<sup>45</sup> So, the acknowledgement of the constitutive role and the irreducibility of the real, without neutralising the latter, supports rather than abandons the act of symbolisation. What is at stake is not to mask the gaps of the real with fantasies, because only then an authentic utopian gesture is possible. As Žižek put it recently:

In its essence, utopia has nothing to do with imagining an impossible ideal society; what characterizes utopia is literally the construction of a u-topic space, a space outside the existing parameters, the parameters of what appears to be ‘possible’ in the existing social universe. The ‘utopian’ gesture is the gesture that changes the co-ordinates of the possible.<sup>46</sup>

How propitious is the current anti-utopian aura for future political action? Sean Homer is sceptical of the implementation of Lacan’s ideas in the development of an anti-utopian political paradigm that accentuates the impossible of society as a harmonious unified totality.<sup>47</sup> Although he recognises the theoretical thrust of conceiving society as impossibility, Homer draws attention to the deadlock that such a Lacanian cogito stumbles upon. If society lies in impossibility, as Laclau and Mouffe argued,<sup>48</sup> the field of politics is also marked by the impossible. Failing to fabricate an ideological discourse and

incapable of historicising, psychoanalysis appears as 'politically impotent' and unable to encumber the way for other ideological narratives to breed the expectation of making the impossible possible, by promising to cover the fissure of the real in socio-political relations.<sup>49</sup> This means that psychoanalysis can interminably unveil the impossible, only for a recycling of ideologies (outside the psychoanalytic discourse) that attempt to veil it.

However, before one misreads this suggestion, it is proper to note that Homer's perspective does not advocate the reduction of psychoanalysis to an ideological discourse. In my view, he does not disregard the impossible, but rather calls for a novel ideological programme, which is aware of the structural limitations of the socio-symbolic order and actively encompasses the psychoanalytic ideas that can tackle this limitation through praxis.<sup>50</sup> For Stavrakakis, Homer's position can be characterised in 'quasi-utopian' terms, as it acknowledges the lacking status of the Other, while it puts forward the idea of covering it; thus, this position obeys the logic of traditional utopian politics, with the difference of being psychoanalytically informed.<sup>51</sup> Inasmuch as Homer's suggestion lingers on a fantasmatic political context, Stavrakakis argues, it ultimately 'defers' the psychoanalytic part of his argument; it challenges and catechises psychoanalysis for meeting certain fantasmatic utopian demands, while the essence of Lacanian critique is to keep at bay the seductive fantasmatic utopias in politics and reveal its relevance for the political, by contending traditional politics.<sup>52</sup> The problem I perceive with Stavrakakis' use of the 'quasi-utopian' designation is that it inevitably triggers associations about a quasi-impossible or quasi-possible political project, when Homer clearly recognises impossibility as a fundamental guiding principle for an ideological programme.

For Stavrakakis, to perceive psychoanalysis as devoid of an authentic character that could be the fulcrum for a progressive socio-political agenda is reductionist.<sup>53</sup> Rather he juxtaposes the possibility of a 'post-fantasmatic' or 'less-fantasmatic' politics that accepts the irreducible ambiguity of democracy and thus fosters the prospect of a radical democratic project.<sup>54</sup> Yet such a conception is not uncomplicated, given that one cannot totally go beyond fantasy and still maintain his/her subjectivity (even when one traverses it, another fantasy eventually grows), precisely because fantasy is required for the coherence of the subject and the upholding of her desire. Furthermore, fantasy is either



there or not; we cannot have 'more' or 'less' fantasy. As I argued earlier, we can have a totalising fantasy, but always in relation to the real. Fantasy in itself is absolute and totalising *par excellence*. It is the real and the symbolic that always make it 'less-fantasmatic', as they impose a limit in its operation.

So where does 'perversion' fit within this frame? The encounter with the *extra*-ordinary is an encounter with the real that reveals the contradiction that lies at the heart of the political. *Extra*-ordinariness suggests the embodiment of the real within the socio-political milieu; this is where the *extra*-ordinary subject incarnates the impossible object. Nonetheless, it suggests a fantasmatic strategy of incorporating the real in the symbolic, as an alternative to the encircling of the real through sublimation that Stavrakakis proposes.

In sublimation we still have an (artistic) object standing for the *object a*, so the lack in the subject is still there, whereas in *extra*-ordinariness the subject occupies the locus of the *object a*, in an ephemeral eradication of his/her lack. *Extra*-ordinariness may not be a condition that subverts or transforms socio-political relations, yet it can have a certain political significance. Rather than a direct confrontation with the impossible, it suggests a fantasmatic embracing of the impossible in its inexpressible totality, which can be perceived as a utopian aspiration.

Following Žižek or Badiou's contemporary views, the *extra*-ordinary gesture is not qualified as an authentic utopian act, because it does not traverse fantasy, it does not rewrite social conditions. Over the last fifteen years, there has been a strong anti-imaginary stance conveyed by Lacanian thinkers, underscoring the necessity of *real* pathways to radical political praxis. It is well-known that Žižek prioritises the negativeness of the real in his rhetoric, something that outstrips any positive imaginary or symbolic reflection in his work. But this entails the risk of neglecting the equal importance of all three registers for subjectivity. The imaginary constitutes an essential motive force, for any drastic action to take place, as long as the symbolic limit is not thwarted. It is also what keeps us humane and sustains our relation to the other. It is possible to touch the real, through imaginary means, without becoming a post-human figure (such as Antigone who remains the figurative conception of Žižek's traversing of the fantasy).<sup>55</sup> Fantasy (and therefore ideology) can be a source of optimism and

motivation and it should not be bound exclusively to the static character of compensatory utopia, according to Bloch's distinction.<sup>56</sup> Inasmuch as fantasy infuses the subject's effort to grasp the impossible, recognising it as such, rather breeding the futile expectation of turning the impossible into possible (regaining the object, meeting happiness), the imaginary can form the pedestal for an anticipatory utopia.

The imaginary does not operate only as a force that disavows difference, for the sake of an impossible unity and completeness. It also suggests an apparatus that soothes the realisation of the symbolic fissure, breeding hope and fascination, that is to say, it stirs up emotional states that encircle the lack of the subject. Moreover, it must be noted that the *object a*, apart from real properties, also has an imaginary hypostasis, as it is screened in fantasies that cover lack. If our image's coherence is an illusion, it is this illusion that motivates us as individual and social subjects and help us relate to each other (e.g. falling in love is an illusion, a fantasy).

The anti-imaginary undercurrent in psychoanalysis is also what accounts for Stavrakakis's renunciation of idealism in the democratic discourse. But any system of power, either fascist or democratic, cannot function without an ideal. The *point de capiton* is not just a common point of reference as Stavrakakis notes; it is a master signifier, which means it constitutes an ideal *par excellence*. As the unary signifier, the master signifier relies on fantasy and imaginary certainty about its supreme status. The ideal embodied by the master is what motivates action, not only in politics, but also in sciences, arts and so on (e.g. a dominant scientific paradigm or a leading art movement). Is there a democratic prospect for the prevalence of an ideal that does not promise impossible *jouissance*, but possible *jouissance*, without confining it to the phallus? Since it is possible to touch *jouissance*, but not to represent it, the encounter with *jouissance* could endorse an ideal of incompleteness, an ideal of confronting the limits of human experience *vis-à-vis* unutterable enjoyment.

This does not forward a good, since *jouissance* is beyond the realm of good, and it does not follow the route of the Sadean fantasy. Sade's heroes wish to capture *jouissance* in its totality; only for them, it constitutes a pleasurable yet evil 'good'. But *jouissance* defies the realm of pleasure, by inserting pain. Perhaps, *extra-ordinariness* is the condition that comes closer to the idea of touching possible *jouissance*. The difference is that the *extra-*

ordinary does not acknowledge his desire; rather he wants to eradicate it. Instead, a democratic ethos must recognise the centrality of desire and its perpetual movement around impossible *jouissance*, without crossing all the way to its fulfilment. For this reason, fantasy is essential for politics, as for the *extra-ordinary*, since it is what *fuels the hope to continue and persist*. After all, *jouissance* is not only pain, but both pleasure and pain and it is due to fantasy that pain is tolerable or enjoyable.

We need an *extra-ordinary* utopianism to the extent it provokes pre-fixed phallic and normative access to enjoyment. The *extra-ordinary* himself does not go so far as to demand another master signifier, but his act is sufficiently provocative in divulging the futility of the master's imaginary superiority. However, the limits of the *extra-ordinary* utopian logic is that its fantasy of embodying the impossible never stops in its embodiment (precisely, because it is still a fantasy) and instead it continues to make attempts to grasp it, without accepting that the impossible remains impossible.

An alternative utopia could probably maintain the fantasy of embodying the impossible, acknowledging it as such.<sup>57</sup> So any time fantasy collapses, violence does not emerge as a response, but we continue the effort to symbolically speculate and represent the impossible, precisely because in this effort resides hope that sustains our reason to live and desire. As some historians say, myths distort 'truth', yet we cannot live without them; myths can form the only tolerable approximation of 'truth'. One should see them as 'colourful' disguises of the achromatic core of his/her existence and the truth is we need more 'colour'.

### 11.2.1 *The Extra-Ordinary Against Political Aporia*

Stavrakakis points out the ongoing mistrust with which utopian politics have been perceived over the last decades.<sup>58</sup> Modern utopias promoted progressive ideals that cultivated the expectation of a final goal where the real would be mastered, giving rise to visions of secular bliss and human perfection. Assessing its devastating results, especially the catastrophe of the Second World War, current political reality has succumbed to what Stavrakakis calls the 'politics of aporia' that sanctions nihilistic and cynical beliefs,

derived from a new “appreciation of human finitude, together with a growing suspicion of all grandiose political projects and the meta-narratives associated with them.”<sup>59</sup>

It is true that in our contemporary world, traditional utopian models have withered, but today a new utopia of canonical majority has taken over the space of any action transformative of current social relations. Instead of radicalness, conformity has become the main expression of solidarity for the post-modern subject abandoned to her consecrated individuality. Where past utopias inscribed a collective vision to be fulfilled for future generations, the present utopia confiscates the future of the individual, unless she registers in a collective popularised expression of the norm that reaps culture, politics, morality and the like. The ideological outcome of the canonical utopia is the belief that the majority constitutes a safety net for individuality. If the future of the individual is bleak, at least there is some hope in saving his/her present.

This condition reiterates Bloch’s distinction between anticipatory and compensatory utopia, with the latter gaining ground today.<sup>60</sup> By discarding the myth of a better future for all, the subject succumbs to the immobilising myth of a safe present for herself (the ultimate transmutation of individuality to individualism). The world can surmount Difference, simply by taking away Its painful radicalness, replacing It with a non-violent, pluralistic and multi-cultural present, as Žižek harshly criticised it for its anti-rational status. In line with Badiou and Jameson, Žižek discerns behind the multitude of identities and lifestyles in our post-modern world the dominance of the One and the eradication of Difference (the void of antagonism).<sup>61</sup> It would have been ideal, if pluralism were not translated to populism and the non-violent to a sanctimonious respect of Otherness.

As we saw in the previous part, Badiou also points to the nihilism that permeates modern ethicology that puts forward the ‘recognition of the other’, the respect of ‘differences’ and ‘multiculturalism’.<sup>62</sup> Such ethics is supposed to protect the subject from discriminatory behaviours on the basis of sex, race, culture, religion and so on, as one must display ‘tolerance’ towards others who maintain different thinking and behaviour patterns. For Badiou, this ethical discourse is far from effective and truthful, as it is revealed by the competing axes it forges (e.g. opposition between ‘tolerance’ and ‘fanaticism’, ‘recognition of the other’ and ‘identitarian fixity’).<sup>63</sup>

Badiou denounces the decomposed religiosity of current ethical discourse, in the face of the pharisaic advocates of the right to difference who are “clearly *horrified by any vigorously sustained difference*.”<sup>64</sup> The pharisaism of this respect for difference lies in the fact that it suggests the acceptance of the other, insofar as s/he is a “*good other*,” in other words, insofar as s/he is the same as everyone else.<sup>65</sup> Such an ethical attitude ironically affirms the hegemonic identity of those who opt for integration of the different other, which is to say, the other is requested to suppress his/her difference, so that he partakes in the ‘Western identity’.

Rather than equating being with the One, the law of being is the multiple ‘without-one’, that is, every multiple being is a multiple of multiples, stretching alterity into infinity; alterity is simply “what there is” and our experience is “the infinite deployment of infinite differences.”<sup>66</sup> Only the void can discontinue this multiplicity of being, through the event that ‘breaks’ with the existing order and calls for a “*new way of being*.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, a radical utopian gesture needs to emerge from the perspective of the event, initiating a truth-process.

Today’s self-negating differences are focused on a present that has ‘spoken’ already and turned a deaf ear to voices that open up the uncertainty of temporality in discourse, the voices that demand a *different* utopian future. This static condition is reflected in the growing obsession with maintaining a peacock physique that never withers, as long as health products and cosmetics – always with the seal and warrantee of scientific knowledge – are used.<sup>68</sup> Sade’s perverse narratives form an ironic commentary on the vanity of utopian aspirations of eternal beauty. In his writings, beauty is accomplished and maintained through disintegration, fragmentation and destruction. Neither fascism nor any other system of domination envisioned beauty in such a self-destructive manner. Rather they followed the tradition of the idealisation of beauty as a harmonious and cohesive state, repercussive of the ideal of social unity and order.

So between the two poles, imaginary unity and real Difference, Stavrakakis articulates an alternative pathway that opens up certain optimism for democratic politics. Following Laclau and Mouffe, he points not only to the totalitarian threat for democracy that promises to eradicate difference, but also to the threat of losing any reference to democratic unity. Stavrakakis argues, “This is the danger of particularism and of the

fragmentation of the social fabric into segments that deny the possibility of any meaningful articulation between them.”<sup>69</sup> Unity and difference can be seen as the two poles of a genuine democratic scheme that always re-articulates the relation between the two, keeping at bay the prevailing nihilism. As Stavrakakis notes:

[...] this gap [between the universal and the particular] should be viewed as opening the optimistic possibility of democracy as opposed to totalitarianism or radical fragmentation; a possibility that rests on the recognition of the constitutive character of this gap, this division, the inherent disharmony between universalism and particularism, community and the individual, the government and the governed, etc. [...] The *demos* is at the same time the name of a community and of its division.<sup>70</sup>

The *extra*-ordinary initiates a game with the two poles: the fantasy of unification and the dividing real. Instead of solidifying a normative seclusion of the *extra*-ordinary, the encounter with the real the latter embodies can be perceived as an encounter with the inherent contradiction of our socio-symbolic order and the arbitrary hegemony of the master signifier. He is the ordinary other of a unified social whole who brings an *extra*-ordinary element that divides this unity.

The perverse act is a sarcastic comment on the hebetudinous ambitions of power (the accomplishment of a sovereign Good), while authority’s response to this ‘offensive’ act is the perverse label. Even though Sade had little in common with the perverse and cruel libertinage of his fiction, he embodied the archetype of perverse sexuality. Consequently, each pervert duplicates a depraved and brutal Sadean figure, regardless of his dissymmetry with the ideal personification of the torturer. Deleuze draws attention to the incompatibility of the discursive contexts that relate Sade to Nazism, by referring to a drastic proposition in Bataille’s *Eroticism* regarding the linguistic difference between the sadist and the torturer; that is, the language of the victim and that of the authority.<sup>71</sup> I am quoting from the translation of Bataille’s original:

As a general rule the torturer does not use the language of the violence exerted by him in the name of an established authority; he uses the language of the authority, and that gives him what looks like an excuse, a lofty justification [...] Thus de Sade’s attitude is diametrically opposed to that of the torturer. When Sade writes he refuses to cheat, but he

attributes his own attitude to people who in real life could only have been silent and uses them to make self-contradictory statements to other people. In complete contrast with the torturer's hypocritical utterances, de Sade's language is that of a victim. He invented it in the Bastille when he wrote the *Cent Vingt Journees*.<sup>72</sup>

So, why this enduring Sadean lining of fascism? Leaving aside the question of whether the pervert is victimised by the authoritarian practices of power or not, my argument will focus on Bataille's view here. The pervert must be disengaged from the profile of the torturer. Yet the factors that sustain such a profile are more likely to inform us about the misinterpretation of what is commonly designated as perversion. A banal, though accurate, observation is that where meaning cannot be attached to the object, the term perversion commonly is used as a disfigurative label. Knowledge, inherently negated by its very impossibility to represent all, invents labels and taxonomies in order to disguise its own limitations.

There is always a hard kernel that etches a real space beyond any possible symbolic or visual representation, as Žižek and other Lacanian theorists have been demonstrating. Whenever something comes to occupy this space, the symbolic-imaginary continuity of the subject is disturbed. If the subject does not thwart this real *some-thing*, but rather enjoys it, she is likely to be included within a perverse frame. This is because the failure of representation is too painful to bear and lets the ultimate void come forth, the real of death.

The perverse act has nothing to do with causing death (the pervert is not a killer), since the latter marks a line the pervert does not cross, like most other 'ordinary' subjects. Nonetheless, when death as the ultimate void and trauma is incarnated in an object (sexualised or not) that stirs up desire, this embodiment of the void receives the perverse epithet, precisely because it lets some of the deadly *jouissance* surface. Taking as an example the Holocaust, the absurdity and the unrepresentable nature of this mass carnage was ascribed to the operations of a perverse mechanism that Nazism manoeuvred.<sup>73</sup> During the occurrence of the Holocaust, nobody could incorporate in the symbolic the obnoxious executions conducted in the concentration camps, which were first described as 're-education' camps and then as places intended for *Schutzhaft* (protective custody).<sup>74</sup>

The lack of a sufficient account of those real events in politics, due to the inability to find the right signifier to denote the size of the catastrophe, brings the subject head to head with the experience of the splitting she tries so hard to repair. Even retroactively, the symbolic fails to attach some meaning. It is a moment of realisation of the authentic alterity that characterises human relations and cannot be overcome by fictional constructs. The encounter with the lack of meaning is what sanctions perversion as a category, especially when this lack is considered to be the source of illicit enjoyment. For example, the encounter with the exhibitionist, who occupies the space of the gaze, marks an encounter with the excluded real (under no circumstances one must show his genitals in public).

### 11.3 The Gaze of the Holocaust

In the present study, it has been already argued that systems of power produce symbolic narratives and images that serve their domination. Propagandistic strategies in politics typically sway from acerbic images that disturb the comfort of the subject to images that placate her, something that reflects, I believe, the dualistic structure of fantasy, i.e. its 'beatific' and its 'horrific' side.<sup>75</sup> In National Socialism, parallel to the images representing the supreme natural beauty of the Aryan ideal that Leni Riefenstahl's films, such as *The Triumph of Will* (1935),<sup>76</sup> attempted to denote visually, fascist politics disturbed the safety and serenity of these images by promoting antagonistic images of non-Aryan threats (Jews, people with disabilities and so on). The greater the dichotomy became, the more the emptiness of the ideal came forth.

The difference of Nazism from other horrific consequences brought by the collapsing of an ideological fantasy was that there was a real object, a left-over that occupied this empty space. To comprehend this, suffice it to recall once more the Holocaust carnage, as it was visually captured by the cameras of the Allied armies. The recorded images divulged the *real* size of the catastrophe that took place in the concentration camps. In this filming, one confronts the real gaze of the Holocaust (something we cannot have



with the Stalinist gulags). The images are organised around a gaze too difficult for one's eye to tackle. This is because we do not see the Nazi fantasy being unfolded around lack, but the very failing of this fantasy, its real remainder. The death panorama of the Holocaust is such an unbearable spectacle that the gaze, as the object, eventually falls, letting anxiety to spring out of it and enfold the subject. In this context, the viewer is likely to call this agonising spectacle (the desiring circuit between the subject and the image)<sup>77</sup> perverse, implying that the Nazi who were responsible for this spectacle (the killing and the mass burying of the ossified corpses) and not the allies who captured it, enjoyed its gaze. If the excess of fascist narratives is considered as 'perverse', then images associated with fascist atrocities also suggest an excessive spectacle that can receive the same 'perverse' epithet. But this is inaccurate, precisely because this spectacle is the real remainder of the Nazi fantasy, namely the impossibility to enjoy, the lack of lack.

This is why the Nazis never recorded the images of the Holocaust; these images were too 'painful' for them.<sup>78</sup> The absence of meaning leaves the subject exposed to the nudity of law and desire, which more than anything makes anxiety appear, as this absence insinuates the presence of a real Other who enjoys (of course, there is no real Other of enjoyment; it is an artefact of the fantasy of the primordial Thing's return). The *perverse* image would be the image that discloses the truth of the Other: Its locus does not hold the object, the gaze that ensnares the desire of the viewer. The latter is caught up in a circuit of *jouissance* without his/her will, without desire being acknowledged.

The images of the fascist atrocities of the Second World War elicit anxiety, as they appear to abolish the link with the Other and adhere to the real Other. To be gazed at by the mass of disintegrated bodies leaves the subject lost for words; the signifier does not operate anymore. The gaze of the Holocaust does not simply mark the ultimate division of the subject, the splitting between the eye and the gaze, but also strips subjectivity from its locus, the Other. The subject is bereft of her symbolic safety and unable to be recognised as a speaking subject, since the signifier is rendered ineffective, feels nude and nothing more than a body, nothing more than biology. This is because the gaze does not belong to the symbolic Other anymore, but to the real arcane Other that recognises the subject as a fragile body exposed to fatality and dissolution.

The viewer is absorbed by the boundless *jouissance* unleashed by the falling object. The images of the Holocaust have no particular viewing angle, no subjective point of identification; what one sees is an endless mass of deformed bodies. Skin is not anymore the wrapping of the viewer's specular image, but exactly what eradicates otherness. Inevitably, silence is the only meaningful approach to these images.<sup>79</sup> It is not a sign of respect, but more the phenomenology of experiencing the absence of the correct lexis, the signifier, and yet not being speechless. This means that the Other is still there, but mute. Its locus becomes impotent, unable to hold desire's lacking status. Therefore, the subject confronts the limits of the signifying chain. She reaches the edge, admitting '*I don't know*', the lack of knowledge that fills her with anxiety, turning her elocution into an '*I don't want to know*'. The subject has to bear the Other of *jouissance*, the Other of vulgarity who can only be 'perverse', not because one is dealing with perverse sexuality, but because lack and, concomitantly, desire are excluded.

The 'perverse' circuit that the image initiates, offers a spectacle that the Other cannot master and put into words. This suggests a traumatic encounter, as the ego is faced with the realisation that words do not arise from it, but from an-Other place; yet the Other is unable to provide the subject with the symbolic means to adequately deal with a traumatic experience. The Other is mute in front of the real. It is not the same with the Other being absent. It is there, but Its locus is rendered inactive, the signifiers are ineffective and do not form a safety net anymore for the subject who, consequently, rolls down to *jouissance*.

What follows is that the subject realises that her ego is unreliable. As a reflection of the other, the ego cannot identify with the *extra-ordinary* subject reduced to an object (*a*). Incapable of functioning as a specular image and playing the game of interchange with the ego, the image of the 'pervert *qua* object' raises the threat of fragmentation, since one can derive no pleasure from it, but plain *jouissance*. When the subject is called to identify with the *object a*, the object falls and thus raises the threat of losing subjective coherence. The subject got so close to the object that desire fades away, giving its place to the real, this is the realm of the drive. In line with Zupančič and Žižek, the subject who proceeds to a genuine act, more than traversing her fantasy, needs to traverse its very 'perverse' core.

The mythical Other, from whom each subject anticipates completeness, does not exist. Instead of a complete Other, there is a barred Other unable to recant this division. There is no signifier having absolute meaning by itself, without relying on other signifiers, and eliminating the barred status of the signifying chain. This signifier is missing (given as  $-1$  algebraically) introducing lack in the Other, what the symbol  $S (\emptyset)$  stands for. The *extra-ordinary* subject attempts to compensate for this lack by offering himself as the object. But eventually this accentuates lack, since the supposed perverse action aims to bring the Other to the limits of the signifying sequence, an aim that goes through the surprise of the other, who confronts the exhibitionist or the voyeur, the scream of the sadist's torture, the shame of being commanded by the masochist and so on. What is more, all constitute moments of anxiety, emerging from the splitting of the subject that embodies the very essence of the Other, Its incomplete status.

The *extra-ordinary* renders the Other mute, not because he wants to dethrone the supremacy of Its locus. Rather than demoralising the superiority of the Other, mutism unveils the paradox of the desire of the Other, namely a desire for *jouissance*, whose thrust breaks the limits of the symbolic law. The law does not prohibit *jouissance*; on the contrary, it sets the conditions for its emergence, by denaturalising the space of the body, attaching it to representation. At the same time, the law introduces lack, its structural impossibility to say all. By turning the impossibility to a possibility, the *extra-ordinary* subject embodies the very 'malfunction' of the law, the *object a*, the object of anxiety *par excellence*, the traumatic object that remains outside symbolisation. Therefore, no less than the ordinary subject, the so-called pervert conventionally imagines a social body of unity, where the 'corruptible' and the 'incorruptible' co-exist. This is law and *jouissance* in an ideal equipoise.<sup>80</sup>

Excessive *jouissance* is constitutively related with the law and the pervert tries to affirm that. In other words, he does not aim at the subversion of the law of the Other, but rather the opposite: the affirmation of Its power. Of course, it is nothing but a paradoxical fantasy to see a desiring Other beyond language. Being mute is not the same as being silent. Here the Other is still in the symbolic, It encounters the limit of language and decides to remain silent, whereas mutism suggests that the Other has been conquered by the real, namely, the *jouissance* embodied by the *extra-ordinary*. The desire of the Other

Apart from its real dimension, anxiety has imaginary features as well. This constitutes a point of demarcation from guilt (which is linked to the symbolic as a debt) with which anxiety is often confused. As it was previously elaborated, in the present study guilt is seen as the realisation of the erroneous status of the law, whereas anxiety is more the reaction to the absence of the law's lack. It is not a reaction to the emptiness lack suggests, but more to the real object that fills the void, that makes lack lacking, namely the *object a*.

In *Seminar X*, Lacan repeatedly notes that anxiety is not without an object (*n'est pas sans objet*).<sup>11</sup> This means that the moment of the real, where the subject comes close to the object, marks the momentary confrontation with the absence of lack, the real fullness. But, as Stavrakakis notes, the lack of lack of the real does not mean that the latter is always full; it is more apt to regard the space of the real as being 'full of holes'. The entrenchment of the symbolic is what produces the real, as what is lost forever and reappears always as lack, as an insurmountable 'black hole'. It is in this real hole, where the object is plugged in, breeding the anxiety of lacking lack.

Insofar as the *extra-ordinary* posits his reduction to the object that occupies lack as his main goal, the encounter with the *extra-ordinary* suggests a confrontation with the object of anxiety, the lack of lack. The locus, where desire operates, is not empty but occupied. This condition of real fullness breaks down the imaginary and symbolic upholding of desire, precisely by revealing its inability to cover lack. The overflowing of "inexpressible enjoyment" (*jouissance*) that the *extra-ordinary* position releases, marks a real presence that reveals the insufficiency of the imaginary and the symbolic to represent it; death and *jouissance* always elude and undermine representation, exposing its lacking status.<sup>12</sup> The *extra-ordinary* does not want what he does not have (lack), but to share what he *is*: the object.

But does not 'perverse' identification with the object mean also identification with anxiety? If the neurotic experiences anxiety as the dominant symptom, then, for the *extra-ordinary* subject, anxiety is his *raison d'être*, the indivisible component of 'perverse' erotica. The *extra-ordinary* becomes the object for the Other to enjoy, to enjoy anxiety, which is always ruptured by the intervention of desire too soon. Desire tames the anxiety of *jouissance* and introduces castration, which in the case of neurosis is what

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<sup>22</sup> This is in line with Žižek's notion of "traversing the fantasy" and which Stavrakakis relates to the identification with the void, the symptom. See Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 134.

<sup>23</sup> I mean the fact that all of us need to *repress* maternal *jouissance* in order to effectively emerge as subjects of desire.

<sup>24</sup> Kirsten Hyldgaard in her article "The Conformity of Perversion" fathoms the topic. See "The Conformity of Perversion," in *The Symptom: Online Journal for Lacan.com*, Issue 5 (Winter, 2004). Available from: < <http://www.lacan.com/conformperf.htm> > [accessed 23 January 2005].

<sup>25</sup> Here, the Other has the sense of the subject-agent who particularises the locus of the signifiers. See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 132-133.

<sup>26</sup> As I will be arguing in the following chapters, anxiety is the response to this possibility of completion; biblical myths, such as 'judgement day' or scientific myths, such as the fading of sun's energy, convey this anxiety.

<sup>27</sup> One must note here the ticklish character of the term 'novelty', as I actually conceptualise it as another reflection of the repetitive circulation of desire around its constitutive gap. Such an idea of novelty is an imaginary-symbolic fiction. Only a real pathway can radically introduce something new or else the *event*, as Badiou suggested.

<sup>28</sup> This is an allusion to Lacan's witticism about the '*jouissance* of the idiot'. See Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 81.

<sup>29</sup> Lacan, "Kant with Sade," p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VIII: Le Transfert, 1960-1961*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> That is a reversing of the process of castration. Instead of a symbolic act (castration) confronting an imaginary object and marking its absence, the imaginary defies this lack and covers it with the object; it does not 'let it go'.

<sup>32</sup> The definition of fascism given by Roger Griffin in the introduction delineates the heterogeneity of the meanings associated with the term. More about this puzzling character of fascism and the lack of a singular definition in Roger Griffin, *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> According to that view, Nazism occupies one side of the same coin, while the other side often includes communist regimes, like those of Stalin or Mao Zedong.

<sup>34</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2002 [2001]).

<sup>35</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 74.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100. Stavrakakis refers to Žižek's example about the structure of the Nazi utopian fantasy, which has been presented in the first part of the present study.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>41</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment" (1962) in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1990 [1978]), pp. 300-318.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>45</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 199-200, cited in Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 85.

<sup>46</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London: Verso, 2005 [2004]), p. 123. Here, Žižek discusses Leninist utopia, juxtaposing it with the current utopia of the end of utopia, the end of history.

<sup>47</sup> See Sean Homer, "Psychoanalysis, Representation, Politics: On the (Im)possibility of a Psychoanalytic Theory of Ideology?" *The Letter: Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis* no. 7 (Summer, 1996): 97-109, cited in Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, pp. 112-113. Stavrakakis extensively discusses Homer's critical ideas on psychoanalysis and politics in the fourth chapter of his work.

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<sup>48</sup> See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 114.

<sup>49</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 119.

<sup>50</sup> Homer, "Psychoanalysis, Representation, Politics: On the (Im)possibility of a Psychoanalytic Theory of Ideology?" *The Letter: Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis*, pp. 97-109, as cited in Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, pp. 113-114. I should note here that my understanding of Homer's ideas is based on Stavrakakis' account and not the original.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120, p. 126.

<sup>55</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, "The Lure of Antigone: Aporias of an Ethics of the Political," in *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek*, ed. by Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos and Matthew Sharpe (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), pp. 171-182.

<sup>56</sup> See Ruth Levitas, "Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia," in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, ed. by Jamie Owen Daniel, Tom Moylan (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 65-79. See also the prologue of the present study for a discussion of Bloch's conception of utopia.

<sup>57</sup> Perhaps, this would come close to Homer's 'quasi-utopian' view.

<sup>58</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 99.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>60</sup> Levitas, "Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia," in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, pp. 65-79.

<sup>61</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "The Real of Sexual Difference," *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 57-75 (p. 73).

<sup>62</sup> Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25..

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41. Badiou says, "Only a truth is, as such, indifferent to differences [...] a truth is the same for all." *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>68</sup> The present of self-negating differences can be condensed to an image that comes from the past, yet illustrates its future at best. Now that the mega-stardom of Michael Jackson is on the wane, more and more documentaries about his life and his face have been released. The caustic satire and repulsion that accompanies the gaze of the transformations of the formerly respected and worshipped Jackson is actually self-sarcasm. The sarcasm is addressed to the aspirations of the (post) modern individual, summed up in one image: an asexual, a-temporal being, with no sign of biological decline, leading an a-social life in a fairground ranch, sleeping with children as the ultimate irony for securing a lifeless present in the vivacity of childhood. In spite of the verdict of his recent trial, society has already labelled Jackson as a pervert.

<sup>69</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 125.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126 (my emphasis).

<sup>71</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

<sup>72</sup> See George Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars, 1987), pp. 187-189.

<sup>73</sup> See Arendt in the first chapter and the references to her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: George and Unwin, 1967 [1951]).

<sup>74</sup> The population in *Schutzhaft* was heterogeneous including Jews, trade unionists, communists, gypsies, homosexuals, moral deviants, criminals, Protestants, Catholics and any one else considered as dissident.

<sup>75</sup> Stavrakakis makes this distinction, following Žižek. See Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 100. For Žižek's elaboration of the two dimensions of fantasy, see Slavoj Žižek, "The Seven Veils of Fantasy," in *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Dany Nobus (London: Rebus Press, 1998), pp. 190-218 (p.192).

<sup>76</sup> Documentary film about the NSDAP's sixth Reich Party Congress in Nuremberg from September 4th until September 10th 1934.

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<sup>77</sup> See Parveen Adams, "Father, Can't You See I'm Filming?" in *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 90-107.

<sup>78</sup> This is why Pasolini's representation of the fascists as *Peeping Toms* of the atrocities does not work. This is the moment I believe where Pasolini's film moves closer to the Sadean real aesthetics, at the expense of its ideological resonance.

<sup>79</sup> What Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) and Pasolini's *Salò* (1975) have in common is exactly the silence that occupies the real space during the scenes of the fascist atrocities.

<sup>80</sup> In that sense, the world today has reached this stage of perverse utopia, where the transgressive character of the perverse action has no liberating effects, but rather serves the law. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), especially chapter 3.

## 12. *Extra-Ordinary Anxiety*

### 12.1 The Perverse Object of Anxiety

The status of perversion in psychoanalysis constitutes more a conundrum than a lucid category of firm theoretical suggestions. Indicative of this mystification is the almost exclusive reference to perversion in terms of *structure* rather than *symptom*, which is rarely encountered in the psychoanalytic discourse on perversion, given the predominantly neurotic implications of the term.

But if the neurotic structure is not to be equated just with the symptom, then why should the perverse ritual be equated with the structure of perversion? Let us put forward some ideas for re-examining the category of perversion in psychoanalysis and society, by returning to Freud's view of perversion as the negative of the neurotic condition:

Thus [neurotic] symptoms are formed in part at the cost of *abnormal* sexuality; *neuroses* are, so to say, the negative of perversions.<sup>1</sup>

Despite its problematic intricacies, Freud's early theorisation seems to be more accurate about the perverse condition than it was thought later. The Other still operates in perversion. However, it is not so much desire, as the *jouissance* of the Other that determines the position and the symptom of the pervert or whom I call the *extra-ordinary* subject.

The desire of the *extra-ordinary* is the Other's *jouissance*. Placing himself in the position of the object (the quintessence of 'perverse' symptomatology probably) is the key strategy to unlock and derive *jouissance*. Contrary to what may seem to be the case, this position is not marked by passivity. Even reduced to an object, the *extra-ordinary* is not disinterested and apathetic, because he implements an active fantasy, which means that the *extra-ordinary*'s desire is still present, dynamically involved in the 'perverse' ritual.

The fantasmatic support of this ritual screens the desire of the *extra-ordinary* subject formalised in a scenario of turning himself into an object to be infinitely enjoyed by the



Other, to be carried away by the *jouissance* of the Other, acquiring a somehow autonomous status. Under the aegis of this enjoyable autonomy, the *extra*-ordinary becomes an organ that serves *jouissance*, an organ without a body, as Žižek elaborated the Deleuzian term.<sup>2</sup> Lacan notes that in Sade, as well as in masochism, desire manifests itself as a will to *jouissance*. Yet this will and the enjoying automaton the *extra*-ordinary wishes to become, in the service of the Other, constitute basically the staging of his own desire, which always fails to find satisfaction at the end.

The will to *jouissance* in the pervert as in anyone else, is a will which fails, which encounters its own limit, its own restraint, in the very exercise as such of the perverse desire.<sup>3</sup>

By taking the position of the *object a*, the object-cause of desire, the *extra*-ordinary approximates the real. So, how does he abide the anxiety that stems from this approximation? It is the fantasy of becoming a sexual automaton that eroticises anxiety. In this bordering with the real, anxiety shifts from being an unbearable condition, as it is for the neurotic, to something that waxes the essence of the pervert's *jouissance*. My suggestion is that the *extra*-ordinary ritual posits one *sine qua non*: the eroticisation of the anxiety raised by the *extra*-ordinary subject's incarnation of the real object. Anxiety is a residue of subjective splitting (or better the residue of the possibility of recanting this splitting), which even in 'perversion' is not entirely eliminated. Even if one identifies with the object, this is an incomplete illusory process, as long as it is regulated by the imaginary.

Fantasy is responsible for the fascination and the eroticisation of anxiety that always implies a certain secure remoteness from the object. 'Perverse' identification is thereby part of a fantasmatic game with the borders separating the symbolic from the real. One gets close to the real, but never too close, otherwise subjectivity is abolished. The remaining terms of the ritual involve the Other who is inundated with anxiety for drawing close to the *object a* and the other who experiences guilt, by confronting the limits of the law. But the moment guilt (the realisation of the gap in the law) appears in the other, desire also emerges and puts a full stop to the desire of the pervert. Castration in the *extra*-ordinary comes from the resurfacing of desire in the Other.

The obscene *jouissance* that the *extra-ordinary* channels, intimidates the other, who is not there as the specular image to interchange with the *extra-ordinary* subject's ego, but as the division caused by the *object a*. We can go as far as to say that the other treats the supposed pervert, similarly to the way the obsessional treats *jouissance*. In his successful disguise as the object, the *extra-ordinary* captures the desire of the Other, as it is revealed by mainstream fantasies or even practices that have an *extra-ordinary* quality.<sup>4</sup> However, the *jouissance* of *extra-ordinary* desire must remain as something impenetrable, forbidden.

Sade, whose posthumous notoriety is indebted to Krafft-Ebing's introduction of the term 'sadism', could form an interesting obsessive couple with his 'benefactor', given their common preoccupation with the aim to list all possible types of perversion that was the aim of both *The 120 Days of Sodom* and *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Such a list is impossible to complete, given the infinite possibilities of desire's metonymy. Both are engrossed with impossibility, but by following different pathways, Sade wanted to capture *jouissance* in its rudimentary form without severing it from the signifier, whereas Krafft-Ebing's effort was the opposite: to implement the signifiers of the prevalent medical discourse so that the coarse *jouissance* experienced in perversion is isolated and pathologised. But in any case, both take a safe distance from *jouissance*. This is why Sade himself was not a pervert. The naming and the numerical abundance with which he treats the perverse scenarios of his writings reveal a certain detachment from their *jouissance*, which is probably what makes them bearable to read. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, one reads more abhorrent crimes than those Pasolini's filmic transposition portrays.<sup>5</sup> However, it is Sade's writings that have been charged for boredom and apathy.

The *extra-ordinary*'s desire is to desire *jouissance*. The neurotic fantasises about it, but in his interplay with the *extra-ordinary*, he steps back for fear of being overtaken by *jouissance* and the concomitant loss of consistency, as provided by desire. One must not get too close to the *object a*, no matter how fascinated s/he becomes with it. The *object a* is the cause of desire and the cause of anxiety. Whenever something comes to occupy the locus of this object, anxiety emerges, because the subject encounters the desire of the Other, without the knowledge (the donor of imaginary certainty) of what sort of object she constitutes for the desire of the Other, when the object is lacking. Anxiety plays the

essential role of safety valve for the desire of the subject. It accounts for the maintenance of the desiring status of the subject when the object is missing, whereas desire can play the role of the antidote for anxiety. Desire is a burden not as unbearable as anxiety is.<sup>6</sup>

As early as in *Seminar II*, Lacan associates anxiety with real properties. In his reading of Freud's renowned dream of Irma's injection (a female patient of Freud), Lacan notes:

The phenomenology of the dream of Irma's injection led us to distinguish two parts. The first leads to the apparition of the terrifying anxiety-provoking image, to this real Medusa's head, to the revelation of this something which properly speaking is unnameable, the back of this throat, the complex, unlocatable form, which also makes it into the primitive object *par excellence*, the abyss of the feminine organ from which all life emerges, in which everything is swallowed up, and no less the image of death in which everything comes to its end [...]<sup>7</sup>

The real is unlocatable; it remains outside symbolisation. It is what fails the paternal function and sustains the traumatic kernel of subjectivity. The real is not an object *per se*, but it becomes the object of anxiety *par excellence*, through the apparition of the *object a*. In *Seminar X*, Lacan's central discussion on anxiety conceives the latter as the signal for the appearance of the *object a*.<sup>8</sup> Primarily, it is the role of the object that Lacan speculates on, mapping out its diverse character; the object is linked with the lack of lack, the horror of the Thing, as well as the *jouissance* and the demand of the Other.

Anxiety is a signal, but not a signal that alerts the subject about an internal danger against the ego. Lacan's outlook is different from that of Freud, as far as he links this signal to a particular "manifestation of the desire of the Other, as such."<sup>9</sup> The place of the ego is the locus of anxiety, where the latter appears in its signalling function. Anxiety signals the falling down of "all points of identificatory reference."<sup>10</sup> The ego always involves someone else (the other) and the signal notifies the subject about something that puts her being into question, in so far as it addresses a demand that does not have to do with need, but with the very lack of the subject, her loss. This *something* is desire and requests the disappearance of the subject, so that the Other is enabled to be constituted and take up Its interrogative role, the non-stop enunciation of the question: *Che vuoi?*

Apart from its real dimension, anxiety has imaginary features as well. This constitutes a point of demarcation from guilt (which is linked to the symbolic as a debt) with which anxiety is often confused. As it was previously elaborated, in the present study guilt is seen as the realisation of the erroneous status of the law, whereas anxiety is more the reaction to the absence of the law's lack. It is not a reaction to the emptiness lack suggests, but more to the real object that fills the void, that makes lack lacking, namely the *object a*.

In *Seminar X*, Lacan repeatedly notes that anxiety is not without an object (*n'est pas sans objet*).<sup>11</sup> This means that the moment of the real, where the subject comes close to the object, marks the momentary confrontation with the absence of lack, the real fullness. But, as Stavrakakis notes, the lack of lack of the real does not mean that the latter is always full; it is more apt to regard the space of the real as being 'full of holes'. The entrenchment of the symbolic is what produces the real, as what is lost forever and reappears always as lack, as an insurmountable 'black hole'. It is in this real hole, where the object is plugged in, breeding the anxiety of lacking lack.

Insofar as the *extra-ordinary* posits his reduction to the object that occupies lack as his main goal, the encounter with the *extra-ordinary* suggests a confrontation with the object of anxiety, the lack of lack. The locus, where desire operates, is not empty but occupied. This condition of real fullness breaks down the imaginary and symbolic upholding of desire, precisely by revealing its inability to cover lack. The overflowing of "inexpressible enjoyment" (*jouissance*) that the *extra-ordinary* position releases, marks a real presence that reveals the insufficiency of the imaginary and the symbolic to represent it; death and *jouissance* always elude and undermine representation, exposing its lacking status.<sup>12</sup> The *extra-ordinary* does not want what he does not have (lack), but to share what he *is*: the object.

But does not 'perverse' identification with the object mean also identification with anxiety? If the neurotic experiences anxiety as the dominant symptom, then, for the *extra-ordinary* subject, anxiety is his *raison d'être*, the indivisible component of 'perverse' erotica. The *extra-ordinary* becomes the object for the Other to enjoy, to enjoy anxiety, which is always ruptured by the intervention of desire too soon. Desire tames the anxiety of *jouissance* and introduces castration, which in the case of neurosis is what

unleashes and mitigates the anxiety of the subject, precisely because lack is re-introduced. The subject does not possess the phallus, so therefore she has to seek it, becoming a desiring subject with continuous alternating episodes of anxiety and desire. It is impossible to approach the object of desire and anxiety and still desire it. The law has to impose a certain safe distance from it, with fantasy being the golden thread that links the two: desire and object-cause of desire.<sup>13</sup>

According to contemporary psychoanalytic suggestions, the efforts of the pervert aim at the restaging of castration. Judith Feher-Gurewich writes:

Thus perverts' desire does not have the opportunity to be organized around finding a fantasmatic solution to the real of sexual difference. The classical scenario of Oedipal dynamics, with its share of lies, make believe, and sexual theories, is not accessible to them. This is why they will search desperately to access symbolic castration that could bring solace to their misery.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, it is contradictory to see the *extra-ordinary's* goal as the re-insertion of castration, when in fact there is nothing in his perverse scenarios that incarcerates him in misery. It is more a fantasmatic solution to the deciphering of the enigma of sexual difference, precisely by veiling difference. The *extra-ordinary* wishes to maintain this veiling, inasmuch as his *jouissance* is derived this way. Even if the *extra-ordinary* efforts to infinitise *jouissance* are eventually sealed by castration, this is more a side effect of the 'perverse' act. At the end, desire always re-inscribes itself. Symbolic guilt is inserted in the *extra-ordinary's* world through castration, not because the latter relieves him, but because his fantasy has failed. This failure is what creates the misery of the pervert, as in any other subject.

His main target is centred in filling the Other with *jouissance*. However, it is not something he produces, but more something he unlocks. The pervert unleashes a *jouissance*, already present in the Other, by eradicating the primacy of the phallic signifier and revealing the Other *jouissance* (the emptiness, the feminine). The neurotic's anxiety concerns the preservation of desire through the duplication of castration, whereas the pervert's anxiety emerges from the reverse condition. This is the question of how to extract *jouissance* from the object without itself falling. He does not want to let the object

fall, not for fear of castration, but for the wish to retain *jouissance*. Inexorably, the nagging question of how to obstruct desire from returning to its initial place grips the pervert. Because together with desire, the lack in the Other returns, restoring and maintaining Its desiring status, instead of Its enjoying status.<sup>15</sup> Without doubt, these are fantasmatic relations which sustain 'perverse' desire for *jouissance* and, at the same time, impose a safe distance from the horror of the Thing's return.

Anxiety intervenes as the mediating term between desire and *jouissance*. The desiring subject seeks *jouissance*, but not in its pure form. *Jouissance* has to be related to the Other, to occupy a *space* within the Other of signification, to be put into words. This is what phallic *jouissance*, the *jouissance* of the idiot, aims at.<sup>16</sup> The idiocy of it lies in its vain and limited character, since *jouissance* always fails signification and only a residue is left behind. The remainder is the *object a* that perpetuates the desire of the subject. But the object is desired as absent. Coming too close to it, one finds this absence occupied by a *real* presence. In that case, the object has to fall, like the phallus in its exhausted stage, in order to maintain the desiring status of the subject. The moment desire returns, the object falls, or better the moment the object falls, desire returns.

While the subject is engaged in an impossible task (that of inscribing *jouissance* in the place of the Other) she draws closer to the object. The closer she gets, the more anxiety surfaces, alerting the subject about the presence of a real Other, a primitive pre-symbolic being. In the case of the pervert, things are somehow different. It is not so much the inscription of *jouissance* in the Other that troubles him, but more the erasure of desire from the field of the Other and Its return to a state of unconstrained enjoyment. So, for the pervert it is essential that the object maintains its potency, not in the service of desire but in the service of *jouissance*. The anxiety of the *extra-ordinary* becomes an erotic signal that calls the Other to abandon the locus of desire and indulge in *jouissance*. But eventually desire puts an end to it.

It is not the *extra-ordinary* that aims at castration, so that he lets loose some of his anxiety. As an integral part of sexual *jouissance*, the *extra-ordinary* does not want to give up anxiety which is what the neurotic does with his symptom, in the reverse way. The Other's anxiety, the exposition of Its truth, requests the confinement of the *jouissance* operating in perversion. Castration has to be imposed, because of the contaminating

nature of the object's *jouissance*. The more it maintains its omnipotent character, the more it threatens the Other's consistency, as provided by desire. The *extra-ordinary* dramatises the staging of castration. It is not an actual event, as the phallus does not belong to the order of the cosmic world. Nonetheless, politics and power locate the phallus in the imaginary realm. Emblems of patriarchal power (objects such as sceptres) are handed from one authority figure to the next, propelling the replication of the same power mechanism and concealing the absence of the phallus.

The social and the political world needs the 'pervert' in order to redefine and re-inscribe the imaginary boundaries of its morality and hence, since the patriarchal orientation of the majority is taken as a gnomon, enhance the existing moral code. This reflects the underlying imaginary dynamics of what social constructionism and Foucault has long now described: the exception of the pervert makes the rule for the 'normality' of the present moral, social, political and cultural organisation of the world. As long as the pervert remains outside of this world, the safety from the perilous obscenity and odiousness of real *jouissance* is ensured. Concomitantly, this is translated to further distance from desire and its permanent endurance, something that nourishes guilt, as was previously argued. As if guilt suggested a privileged moral state, power uses it as an essential demagogic tool, in order to secure its good and further vilify the 'pervert', who also experiences guilt for 'betraying' desire, not in the sense of staying away from *jouissance*, but failing to fully consummate it.<sup>17</sup>

## 12.2 The Analytic Point of Ignorance

The subject's lack is the cynosure of the analytic process. The psychoanalytic discourse places the *object a*, the marker of lack, in the dominant position. The analyst embroiders the transferential relationship with the analysand, by centralising the constitutive lack of the object, as a precondition for desire, which brings the subject to the locus of the Other. As well as lack, the specular image that takes over it and marks its boundaries, namely the ego, is the other focal point of analysis. The image has its borders, this is the frame of the mirror. Around the limits of the image is where anxiety will make its appearance, as

what signals the momentary disruption of all points of identification.<sup>18</sup> The limits of the mirror are symbolised by Lacan's 'little diamond' ( $\langle \rangle$ ), the sign which indicates the relation between the subject and the object in the matheme of fantasy ( $\$ \langle \rangle a$ ). This relation is mediated by desire. The role of the specular image, functioning as a sort of filter, is to protect the subject from anxiety, by covering lack, but also marking it. The reflection in the mirror functions like a window frame that demarcates the illusory world of recognition (imaginary) from what Lacan calls 'stage' (symbolic reality).<sup>19</sup> In this stage, we find the desire of the masochist and the sadist. The *extra*-ordinary and the ordinary subject stage their desire in the same arena, playing the same part, with diametrically different techniques.

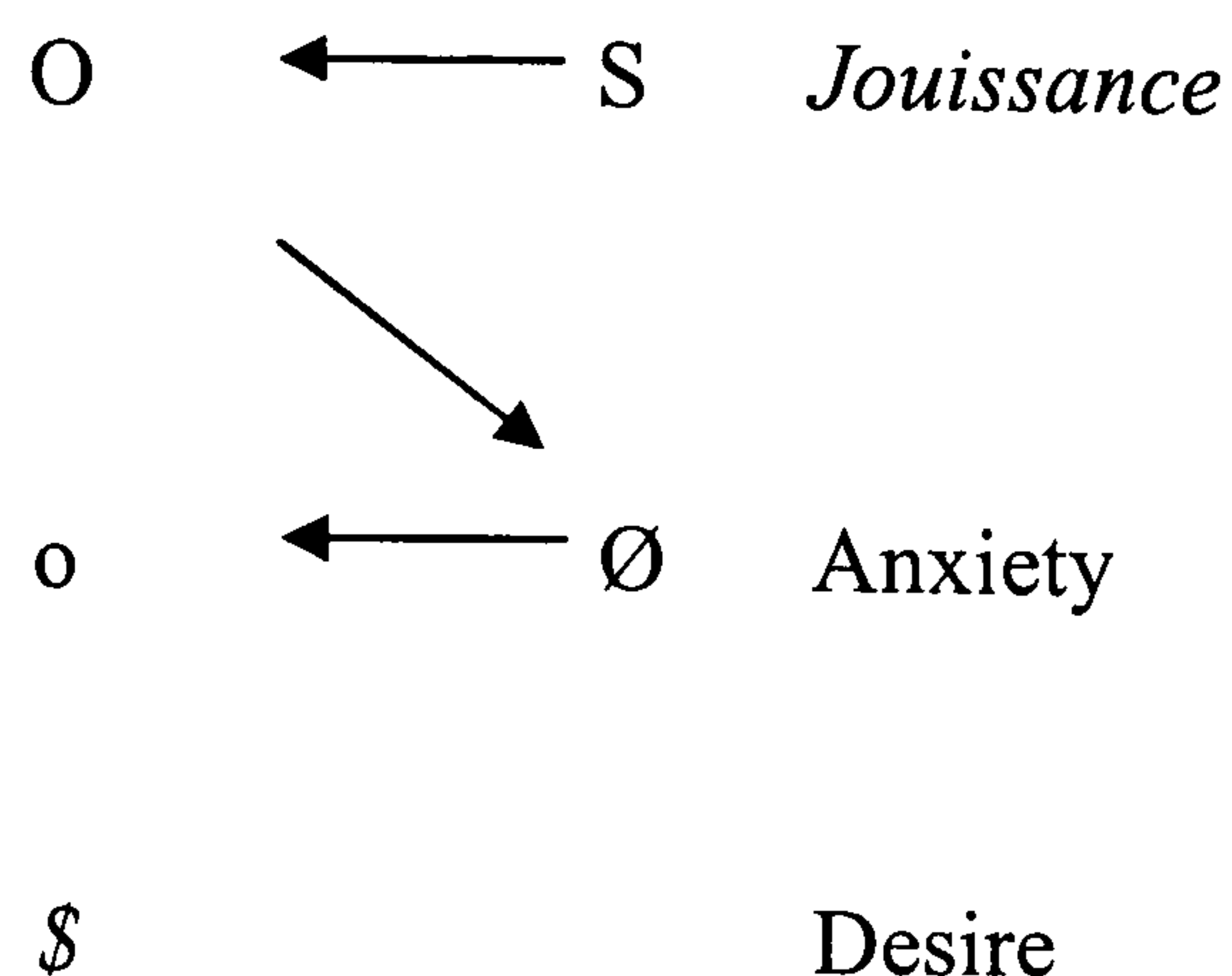
The scenarios of 'perverse' desire do not just linger in a fantasmatic frame (as happens with neurosis); the *extra*-ordinary cross the window, taking fantasy on stage, that is, acting it out in the symbolic. The vacillation between desire and *jouissance* is absent from the *extra*-ordinary, because he is certain about what he wants. Contrary to the neurotic, whose desire always remains in doubt (this is the desire of the Other), the pervert does not have the doubt, but the knowledge of what he desires. The enduring question of '*what the Other wants from me*' is absent; the 'pervert' takes the game in his hands, he knows and applies the rules. The desire of the 'pervert' is to be passively enjoyed by the Other, as it is best manifested in masochism. Lacan notes that the masochist is supposed to know how to enjoy the Other.<sup>20</sup> The masochist is the one who gives the orders, the commands, the knowledge to the Other who has to tackle Its limits.

The masochist is aiming at the *jouissance* of the Other [...] the final term he is aiming at is anxiety of the Other.<sup>21</sup>

The connection between *jouissance* and anxiety in the case of the masochist and any other *extra*-ordinary position, I believe, reflects the relation between the real and the lack in the Other that fosters desire. Table 2 (p. 297) illustrates the relationship between *jouissance*, anxiety and desire, as adumbrated by Lacan in *Seminar X*.<sup>22</sup>



**Table 2: The Relationship between *Jouissance*, Anxiety and Desire.**



*Jouissance* is the real substance related with the primitive Other, the unrepresentable devouring Thing that elicits anxiety as a signal for the obliteration of the subject. Taking a safe distance from the Other of *jouissance*, due to the intervention of the signifier that divides the Other, a left-over of the primordial *jouissance* remains, namely the *object a* that supports the desire of the subject and maintains her division. Now, once a real object (*a*) occupies the place of desire (lack), like in the case of *extra-ordinariness*, anxiety emanates together with *jouissance* (the real dimension of the object), as the signal for the occupation of the locus of desire, which recants its lacking status. This raises the threat of regressing to the devouring status of absolute and primitive *jouissance*.

The *extra-ordinary* subject disparages the limit of desire. The Other is not there as desiring, but brought to a ‘perverse’ scenery only to experience *jouissance*. The so-called pervert claims to derive no pleasure from the act he performs and brings the other to the edge of his/her fantasy. There, pleasure stoops to *jouissance* and anxiety comes forth. In the staging of the object, the pervert plays the role of the ‘instructor’, making sure that the *Will-to-jouir* of the Other is being served. By this, it should not be assumed that there is any crafty or creative aptness of the *extra-ordinary*, as Chasseuget-Smirgel has argued in her linking of perversion to creativity.<sup>23</sup> There is a fixed knowledge of how to present the object to the Other; that is to say, it is presented in a certain ritualistic fashion. For that reason, perversion does not induce novelty in the socio-political edifice, although it plays

an essential role in motivating such fomentations that lead to novelty. In analogy with the hysteric (neurotic) position, the *extra-ordinary's* position questions the Other of knowledge. Both society and psychoanalysis need the *extra-ordinary* in order to progress and advance their views on subjectivity.

It is often reported by psychoanalysts that the 'pervert' is not prone to undergo analysis due to the lack of lack that characterises the perverse condition, the lack of the question about the knowledge of desire. The *extra-ordinary* knows what he desires and does not express any lacking point in this knowledge. If the certainty of the *extra-ordinary* is considered accountable for his exclusion from the analytic process, another certainty, that of the firm explanatory power of psychoanalytic knowledge, remains presumptuously intact. During the analysis of the *extra-ordinary*, the limits of psychoanalytic knowledge are put to the test, as the analyst strives to introduce him/herself as the object-cause of desire for the 'pervert', without being effective. The pervert has already turned himself into the object. So, he is not willing to speak about his lack, what he is missing, namely, the *agalma*, simply because he incarnates it; for this *agalma* is nothing but the *object a*.

By lacking lack, the pervert agonises the analyst, something that breaches the viability of transference. The *agalma* is to be found in the locus of the Other and psychoanalysis is in a constant quest for it. The analyst's challenge is to "make his desire sufficiently enter into this irreducible *object a* to offer to the question of the concept of anxiety a real guarantee," but the *extra-ordinary* as analysand refuses the other as a subject of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Even if there is a point of ignorance for the *extra-ordinary*, and there must be one, as far as the pervert desires too, this point must remain untouched. The analyst must not address it, which means that the very knowledge of the analyst is defied.

Confronting the difficulty of introducing the desire of desire to the pervert's universe breeds the analyst's anxiety, who has to endure again the everlasting question of how to be desired by the Other. The analyst finds it hard to come to grips with the excruciating anxiety generated by the encounter with the lack of lack of the pervert: no demand, no question and no doubt. Lack belongs to the order of the symbolic and sets the podium of the analytic process, upon which transference will be built. Its absence renders the analytic process infertile. Here, in the anxiety of the analyst, is probably where the

exclusion of the pervert from the psychoanalytic practice often lays, homologous with the social segregation of the pervert due to the anxiety he generates in the social other.

The *extra*-ordinary does not wish to abandon the stage where he gets hold of the missing object. He does not wish to recognise lack and search for the missing phallus. While he occupies the place of the object, the *extra*-ordinary is the imaginary phallus of the Other. More than a simple tactic, the 'pervert' deploys an analytic transaction. His adamant renunciation of a knowledgeable other targets any type of institutionalised knowledge. The pervert provokes the other by putting his/her desire to the test, not through demand, the expression of lack, but through exactly the opposite: the expression of no demand that underpins a condition that lacks lack. A certain space is needed for desire to emerge and demand to be addressed. Nonetheless, the pervert fills up this space, the absence of which provokes anxiety in the other.

But the total filling of a certain void, which should be preserved which has nothing to do with either the positive or negative content of the demand, this is where there arises the disturbance in which anxiety is manifested.<sup>25</sup>

The space between the subject and her desire is secured by the eye and its role in fantasy. Space, as Lacan says, is "something which has a certain relationship not with the mind but with the eye."<sup>26</sup> The eye is responsible for the elision of the object. Only what I can see I perceive as separate from me and thereby I desire it as the missing link to the complete state of existence. In other words, I desire the placenta as the missing object, once I am separated from it. But the essence of the object can never be reached, as it requires always a certain distance from the subject to appear as such. Once it is separated from the latter, it is never recovered, it just elides. The object always remains an elision, sustaining the desire for it. If the *extra*-ordinary embodies the object, then it means that he himself becomes an elision for the eye of the other and escapes full symbolisation. The status of the *extra*-ordinary in society is described by this elision. His presence resembles a syllable which is indispensable for the meaning of the word, but only if its pronunciation is omitted.

### 12.3 The Truth of Anxiety

The object affected by desire is affected by the “truth of the anxiety,” which means that anxiety is primarily an affect that only the desiring subject can experience.<sup>27</sup> The affect of anxiety is totalising and doubtless, but is also the cause of the doubtfulness of the subject, defied by the desire of the Other, as to what sort of object she constitutes for the Other.

Anxiety is no doubt; anxiety is the cause of doubt.<sup>28</sup> [...] you are only rediscovering here what an interrogation which was essential at the beginning, has already punctuated in my discourse, namely whether anxiety is not so absolute a mode of communication between the subject and the Other that to tell the truth one could ask oneself whether anxiety is not properly speaking what is common to the subject and to the Other.<sup>29</sup>

A painful truth permeates all encounters with the object. Anxiety marks several points in the subject’s formation. In her pre-subjective period, before the development of language, the subject constitutes an object. Once the Other sets in together with the catalytic formation of the unconscious, the subject emerges as well. At that moment, the subject is irreversibly marked by finiteness, namely desire and anxiety. The subject’s struggle and inability to be recognised by the desire of the Other form a route paved with anxiety, since its role as a signal informs the subject that the object does not exist. It cannot be located symbolically. The threat of returning to the pre-subjective archaic abyss tightens the noose around the subject, once the object-cause of desire disappears. Confronting truth requires the sacrifice of desire, the sacrifice of the *object a*. This is something that clashes with the efforts of the *extra-ordinary* who wishes to maintain the potency of the object. He, thereby, seeks the anxiety of the Other, the possibility of positivising the phallus (eradicating lack, -  $\varphi$ , so that it becomes a real presence, a full  $\varphi$ ), exposing the truth of Its (non)existence.<sup>30</sup>

As of now I want to emphasise that what escapes the masochist and what puts him in the same position as all the perverts, is that he believes of course that what he is looking for, is the *jouissance* of the Other; but precisely, since he believes it, that is not what he is looking for. What escapes him, even though it is a tangible truth, really lying about everywhere and within everybody’s reach, but for all that never seen at its true level of

functioning, is that he seeks the anxiety of the Other. Which does not mean that he is trying to annoy him.<sup>31</sup>

As a result, the *extra*-ordinary is associated with the peril of the real, which explains the marginalisation and pathologisation he is subjected to by the social body that constantly searches for the promising object, the one to be recognised by the desire of the Other. It is not the recognition of desire by the Other that puts the subject in a masochistic position, but the rejection of *jouissance* by the Other.<sup>32</sup>

To encapsulate the main points of this discussion, the *extra*-ordinary subject, typically classified as pervert, places himself in the position of the object in order not just to serve the Other's *jouissance*. Through this position the *extra*-ordinary gives vent to his desire, namely to be passively enjoyed by the Other. So, the Other's enjoyment is also the *extra*-ordinary subject's own enjoyment. In the locus of the object is where anxiety resides, on the side of the real. The worshipping of the object (the fetish) is for its real properties which remain resistant to any form of signification, to any type of lack.<sup>33</sup>

Suffice it to recall the characters of Sade's writings. Their potency remains unbending after the end of each orgasm, which is combined with the worst possible blasphemies against God, the Other, the guarantor of lack. Unless moralistic purposes are being served, it is futile to demand the *extra*-ordinary to compromise and inscribe himself in the signifying chain, by renouncing of *jouissance*. If he does not comply, he is punished with the labelling of a negative designation for social deviance. We should accept the pervert's desire to detach himself from signification, where the object drops, and see what he can edify a conformist majority about desire.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 7, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 135-243 (p. 165).

<sup>2</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequence* (London: Routledge, 2004). See also Žižek, "The Ambiguity of the Masochist Social Link," in *Perversion and the Social Relation*, Molly Anne Rothenberg, ed. by Dennis Foster and Slavoj Žižek (Durham [N.C.], London: Duke University Press, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety 1962-1963*, trans. by Cormac Gallagher from unedited French Manuscripts (Printed by Anthony Rowe Ltd, Eastbourne), XII (27/2/1963), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> The fact that S&M practices are somehow in vogue, portrayed by popular forms in the media: ads, music videos etc. This only reveals that the perverse desire is the desire of the Other.

<sup>5</sup> Probably, the reason for this is a perverse angle that Pasolini adopts for his film. He lets *jouissance* disturbingly overtake the viewer because it is always linked to the subject's desire. Even during the final scenes of the crimes the spectacle is the gaze that excites the four libertines. We could compare the dismemberment of the victims in *Salò* with the dismemberment that we see in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* Vol. 1. The spectacle is neither perverse nor unbearable to watch. The technique that the director adopts is to *cut* the object, by maintaining an obsessional view that takes a glance, instead of gazing at the object of *jouissance* (i.e. the dismemberment, the scattered limbs and the springing blood).

<sup>6</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VIII: Le Transfert, 1960-1961*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991), p. 430.

<sup>7</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 164.

<sup>8</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety 1962-1963*, XII (27/2/1963), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 138.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., VII (9/1/1963), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> In that sense, symbolic guilt as the pillar of the law is what keeps the subject far away from *jouissance*, but also away from desire, probably allowing only fantasy to screen the scenarios of his desire that the subject would feel guilty about it if he had acted them out.

<sup>14</sup> See Judith Feher-Gurewich, "A Lacanian Approach to the Logic of Perversion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 201-202. See also Bruce Fink, "Perversion," in *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 165-202.

<sup>15</sup> The difference from the anxiety that overflows the psychotic, for whom the locus of the Other is cancelled, is that anxiety lacks any eroticised function.

<sup>16</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> Obviously, based on its vassalage with patriarchy, this is what religion makes the subject believe.

<sup>18</sup> Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety 1962-1963*, IX (23/1/1963), pp. 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., XII (27/2/63), p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., XIV (13/3/63), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion*, (London: Free Association Books, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety 1962-1963*, XXV (3/7/1963), p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., V (12/12/1962), p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., XIX (22/5/1963), p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., II (21/11/1963), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., VII (9/1/1963), p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., IX (23/1/63), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the *extra-ordinary* does express a demand. To reveal the truth of the Other is a demand in its own sake.

<sup>31</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety 1962-1963*, XII (27/2/1963), p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Lacan states: "To recognise oneself as the object of one's desire, is always masochistic." Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety 1962-1963*, VIII (16/1/1963), p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> The *extra-ordinary* derives his sense of omnipotence only from the presence of the object. In the psychotic this omnipotence takes the form of delusion.

## 13. Negating Disavowal

### 13.1 Disavowing the Pervert

In his seminal 1927 paper on fetishism, Freud introduced the term *Verleugnung*, commonly translated as disavowal. Over the years, the term has turned out to become probably the most typical criterion and mechanism for the psychoanalytic interpretation of perversion. Not just the fetishist, but also the sadist, the masochist, the voyeur, the exhibitionist and every other subject of 'perverse' structure disavows castration. Freud wrote, when explaining the operation of disavowal:

It is not true that, after the child has made his observation of the woman, he has preserved unaltered his belief that women have a phallus. He has retained that belief, but he has also given it up. In the conflict between the weight of the unwelcome perception and the force of his counter-wish, a compromise has been reached, as is only possible under the dominance of the unconscious laws of thought- the primary processes. Yes, in his mind the woman *has* got the penis, in spite of everything.<sup>1</sup>

In its common psychoanalytic interpretation, disavowal is perceived in terms of a splitting of the ego, a splitting between the renunciation and the affirmation of external reality. This is the knowledge of the mother's lack of a penis, which contradicts the belief that she actually has one. In Lacanian terms, it concerns the lack (what holds the desiring status) in the Other. The m(O)ther's lack is what is disavowed, as a tactic that conceals and recognises the castration of the Other: the Other who enjoys without any limit and the Other as lacking. So, disavowal, by allowing a transition from knowledge to a belief that contradicts the former, plays a reconciliatory and reparatory role, as it defends the subject against castration. It helps the subject to be aware of what she disavows and maintains her desire in this way.

The pervert incarnates the *object a*, what compensates for the loss and positivises the phallus of the mother (according to the formula:  $a / -\phi$ ), as what causes and captures her desire. This is where the problem emerges, since the *extra-ordinary* will not search anywhere else for the object; instead he will offer himself as the object in order to fill the

lack in the Other. The *extra-ordinary* does not desire to know what his desire is about; instead, lack is overshadowed by the fantasy of completing the Other. He knows that lack determines the status of the Other. The knowledge is there, but it contradicts the belief that he is the object that can satiate desire.

The *extra-ordinary's* existence is marked by an imaginary condition where lack is lacking. Due to the disavowal of lack, doubt is considered to have deserted the perverse universe. Therefore, the uncertainty of desire, the question of how to be recognised by the desire of the Other, has gone astray. The 'perverse' subject resists in succumbing to the symbolic law (the phallic function) and accepting difference (castration) that regulates symbolic relations. He wants to complete the law, yet at the same time he enjoys the void, the incomplete staging of the law, by bringing back some of the lost *jouissance*. He wants to enjoy the symbolic, the Other.

Taking the notion of disavowal as something that strictly defines the boundaries of perversion is deceptive,<sup>2</sup> inasmuch as disavowal seals the fantasmatic processes of any subject; therefore, it is less emblematic of the perverse condition and more a fundamental characteristic of subjectivity. Lack (the mark of castration) is also disavowed in the fantasies of the ordinary neurotic subject, especially when it comes to politics, where the fantasy of power becomes the motive force for acting. In totalitarianism, with Nazism erroneously or not perceived as a cautionary case of totalitarian excess, the subject of power serves the concealment of the Other's lack by disavowing Its lack. Deriving his power from the absolute character of the phallic signifier, the master of a certain system of domination has to appear firm about holding the key to the knowledge about the object that fills the Other. Knowledge provides hypostasis to the fantasies of power, so that its void is materialised and attributed to an external factor.

Precisely because it functions at the level of a compromise, the 'perverse' act, unlike psychosis, does not abolish subjectivity. The psychotic is a kind of living dead, inasmuch as the relation with the Other has faded out. For the neurotic the question of death is something that torments his existence, whereas the pervert, who still relates to the Other, brings a part of death into living, without any question. Death is what can be sexualised and wrapped up in a ritualistic fantasy, which frames a real space. This frame, as in the ordinary subject, keeps anxiety at bay, but also makes it irrupt. The most important thing,



however, is that this fantasmatic frame operates in *extra-ordinariness*, maintaining subjectivity. This also suggests an incomplete identification of the *extra-ordinary* subject with the object.<sup>3</sup>

The paradoxical conformity of the *extra-ordinary* subject who shares more similarities than differences with the ordinary subject, can explain his negative and unfitting profile in the social order. The irony is that the current socio-political state asks the subject to implement a negative stratagem *par excellence* to conceal castration, so that the phallic hegemony and its substitutes, that is to say, the goods that power promotes, are secured. The stratagem for preserving the Other, as the benefactor of goods, involves both disavowal and negation, interlaced in such a way that the subject actually negates the fact that she disavows differences.

Therefore, xenophobia, discrimination and war are not practices against a threatening other who steals *jouissance* from me.<sup>4</sup> They are converted to their negative linguistic articulation: “*I am not a racist,*” “*I am not a moralist,*” “*I am not religious fundamentalist,*” “*I am not a fascist,*” “*I am not a homosexual,*” but there is always a ‘*but*’ that completes and contradicts these utterances. The supreme ideals of equal opportunities, universal democracy, peace and so on are ideally secured by the very denunciation of the opposite forces. When the everlasting question of (sexual) difference is confronted, power, unable to give any meaning to it, implements perversion as a category that disguises this meagreness. It simply means: avoid giving any answer, discard it as an anomaly, pathology or malfunction that needs reformation.

Political power will negate the fact that *power* as such embodies its desire. Currently, the profile of neo-fascist and far right groups is rather heterogeneous in the present political discourse in Europe. On the one hand, there are legal far-right parties operating in several countries, having parliamentary representation.<sup>5</sup> Probably, their populist language or their ‘damaged’ utopianism still confines their wide acceptance, yet their increasing percentages in national elections must be a point of concern. On the other hand, there are several extreme-right groups of Nazi nostalgia which illegally operate in many European countries, without, however, articulating a consistent political rhetoric or programme. Contrary to these extremist groups, legal neo-fascist parties renounce anti-

Semitism or their far-right profile in their programmatic guiding principles, as proof that totalitarian power is not what they aim at.

In his exegesis of the Nazi vilification of the Jew as the *object a* for fascism, Slavoj Žižek grounds his argument, to great extent, in the notion of disavowal. According to his view, the Nazi knows very well that the Jew is not the source of his discontent, but on the other hand he still believes the Jew engrosses evil.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, it seems to me that disavowal did not become Nazism's *modus operandi*, until the Nazi party came to power, which let its fantasmatic aspects (always regressive and narcissistic) prevail at the expense of symbolic Difference.

Likewise, this is what one should expect from legal neo-fascist groups, as only their rising in power would enact the hegemony of their master signifier, their totalising imaginary aspirations. When Nazism collapsed, Eichmann negated the disavowal of the Jew that Žižek bespoke, by stating his cordial predilection for the victims of the Holocaust that he himself conducted. At least, a real sadist or a masochist cannot be accused of negating his position towards *jouissance*. The pervert will negate desire, detaching himself from it, but never from *jouissance*. He will not say "I am not a sadist," but rather "I am a sadist, I inflict pain, not because I want to, but because it has to be so."

This peculiar 'non-perverse' negated disavowal in politics does not concern the failure of acknowledgement of the law of the Other, but the *jouissance* of the Other, which brings it closer to a typical 'neurotic' conceptualisation. For any ideologico-political system to work, *jouissance* must be excluded and affixed to the obscene and low opponent. Consequently, the *jouissance* derived from the act of marginalisation and vilification of the opponent is negated. Considering that *jouissance* is the essence of the real Thing, it is thus the negation of a *Vorstellungs Repräsentanz* that is the organising factor of each ideology. No less than the general ideologico-political arena, historical forms of fascism (Italian fascism, National Socialism) negated the knowledge that the Other is there also to *jouir*. This is why fascism was nothing but another pseudo-revolutionary movement, which negated the *jouissance* it wanted to put its finger on.

Negation reveals more a neurotic attitude towards *jouissance*, denounced as a perverse desire, that dominates both political and social life. Negation presupposes the acquisition of the meaning of 'No' and it suggests a vigorous and compromising attitude between an

idea remaining unconscious (repressed) and conscious at the same time.<sup>7</sup> Thus, to negate means to go against the law and succumb to *jouissance* in a concealed way. Negating castration releases a destructive force against the paternal function, a force fuelled with *jouissance*. It is not the symbolic reality, but the non-symbolic real as a threatening source that is being negated. This means that the real is actually expressed through symbolic means, but in a negative form.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the responsibility for extracting *jouissance* is also negated.

This makes the fascists remain adamant and pitiless in their discursive position, as masters. The real that the fascist ideological narrative, a fantasmatic construct, allows to emerge appears in a negated form. The real is kept in the unconscious, but, at the same time, negation lifts its repressed status.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of its totalitarian innuendos, historical fascism operated in a parallel axis to other systems of power, as far as ideology is concerned. Behind any ideology, the Thing lurks, the disavowal of which has as a result to transfer this internal perversity of ideology to an external source. Žižek notes on this externalisation:

What we are thus arguing is not simply that ideology permeates also the alleged extra-ideological strata of everyday life, but that this materialization of ideology in the external materiality renders visible inherent antagonisms that the explicit formulation of ideology cannot afford to acknowledge. It is as if an ideological edifice, in order to function “normally,” must obey a kind of “imp of perversity” and articulate its inherent antagonism in the externality of its material existence.<sup>10</sup>

In this fashion, Žižek recognises an element of perversity in all ideologies, as a prerequisite for their ‘normal’ functioning. This is because all ideologies disguise lack and thus desire through disavowal. They know that lack is there, but at the same time they believe it is eliminated. There is an object that takes over lack, that is to say the Good each ideology endorses, through imaginary means. If we generalise Žižek’s suggestion, we can either see all ideological relations mediated by a perverse liaison or perversion as a condition that simply helps the subjects relate to each other, when signification fails and they are confronted with the everlasting question of sexual difference, the non-representable dimension. Ideology then is just one solution that makes

use of the perverse strategy, when dealing with Difference. In any case, it is not pathological and cannot be determined mainly by relying on the role of disavowal. Instead of *père-vers*<sup>11</sup> sexuality, that searches not for absolute *jouissance*, but *jouissance* related to desire, the political question is more pertinent to the *père-versus*, so to say, anything that goes against the recognition of the desire of the Other. Any attempt to disguise lack for instrumental purposes is a *père-versus* tactic.

To the extent that this external materialisation of ideology is subjected to fantasmatic processes, it divulges nothing more than the perversity that organises all social and political relations far from the sexual pathology associated with the pervert. The Other of power, this fictional Other that any ideology fabricates, is the *One* who disavows the discontinuities of the normative chain of society. Expressed through the signifiers used by leadership, this Other knows very well the *cul-de-sac* of the fictional view of society as a unified body, but still believes that unity is possible, substantiating this ideal.

The ideological Other disregards the impossibility of bridging Difference; therefore It meets the perversion that It wants to associate with the *extra-ordinary*. Disengaging it from pathology, disavowal can be stated differently, as a prompt that says: '*let's pretend!*' Pretend as if a universal harmony, good and unity are feasible. Symbolic Difference is replaced with imaginary difference which nourishes antagonism and hostility, by fictionalising an external threat that jeopardises the unity of the social body. We can argue that the fantasy of the obscene *extra-ordinary*, who offends the conformist norm, is in itself a *perverse* fantasy. The Other knows very well that the pervert constitutes no threat, but still requires his punishment, moral reformation or treatment.

This ideological 'perversion' is a necessary component of the formulation of a political identity and, as with any type of identity (sexual, ethnic, etc.), something is affirmed and negated at the same time, which is precisely how disavowal operates. Around the subject's identity that always needs to be affirmed as being thoroughly efficient and superior *par excellence*, all imaginary antagonisms unfold. Developing an identity involves a process of narcissistic identification with an image moulded by symbolic and imaginary constituents. Nonetheless, the *extra-ordinary* is the blot, this ambiguous unlocatable point in the image of the social subject, the real stain in the so-called social identity of a certain group of subjects.<sup>12</sup>

Seen as an analogy with the process of identifying with the mirror image, lack is the stain in the self-image that the subject disavows in order to sustain the coherence of her image. A fixed image is cultivated and associated with the pervert or, to have a loan from the socio-psychological terminology, the configurative nucleus of the social representation of the pervert is so trite and rigid that the moment one articulates the word 'sadist', for instance, the whip and the leather attires comprise the routine visualisation of the sadist's image.

The difficulty in symbolically defining and differentiating the pervert from the ordinary subject is overcome by this firm image. This is a conservative, non-rational practice, which does not implement *logos*, rational cogito, but imaginary certainty. The reflection of one's body in the mirror proposes a dual confrontation: one with the image itself that calls for identification and a second with the limits that the frame of the mirror imposes. Yet this limit is erased, when the eidolon in the mirror is reflected upon another mirror. Then, the image is multiplied and stretched out to infinity, while space is transformed into something indefinite, without a beginning or an end, similar to the way universal space is conceived. In politics, the image is imprinted onto the identity of a nation that sees itself as peerless and stretched to immortality.<sup>13</sup> The perception of history as a coherent and progressive continuum functions as a metaphoric mirror that infinitises the eidolon of a nation. Like a series of images, history is also perceived as a linear series of events that fosters the illusion of 'history repeating itself'.

The *extra-ordinary* subject is not described by this ideological perversion. Quite the opposite, the *extra-ordinary* tips over the 'perversion' of the ideology by developing an identity well adjusted to the group he belongs to. But he also sexualises and embodies lack instead of desexualising it and attributing it to an external source belonging to the out-group. This process of desexualisation and resexualisation is the result of the defusion of the drive, an obscure and rare term in Freud that denotes the separation of libidinal drive components from the death drive with which they normally mingle. Nonetheless, Deleuze splendidly draws on the notion of defusion in *Coldness and Cruelty*, where he writes:

As for the anchoring of sadism and masochism in pain, this cannot really be understood so long as it is considered in isolation: pain in this case has no sexual significance at all; on the contrary it represents a desexualisation which makes repetition autonomous and gives it instantaneous sway over the pleasures of resexualisation. Eros is desexualised and humiliated for the sake of resexualised Thanatos.<sup>14</sup>

I interpret this process as the result of bringing an extra component of *jouissance* (pain) into the ordinary (the homeostatic regulation of pleasure), as the supposed pervert embodies it and whom I call the *extra-ordinary* subject. By identifying with the object, the subject desexualises ego. He reduces it to the partiality of the object linked to the erotogenic zones of the body and the repetitive character of their excitation. Contrary to egotistic pleasure that constitutes no threat for the coherence of the ego,<sup>15</sup> to derive *extra-pleasure* from the repetitiveness in partiality (fragmentation) suggests the humiliation of egotistic *Eros* and the embracing of death in a re-sexualised form, in a kind of *painful Eros*. This experience of suffering in sexual gratification (specifically, *jouissance*) is the *raison d'être* of the *extra-ordinary* subject.

### 13.2 The Immoral Agent of Ideological Power

The network of ideologies have to deal with the malice and the omnipresence of the *object a*. The impossibility to erase its circulation is refuted by the fantasy of power. The master's failure to eliminate the surfeit of *jouissance* is disguised under its externalisation and embodiment by the so-called pervert.

So, is mastery perverse? Not quite. The fantasy of omnipotent mastery promises the satisfaction of desire through the actualisation of a certain ideal. This forms an imaginary virile circuit, a system of domination, as we conceived it in previous chapters of the present study, that has to do less with pathology and more with a common fantasmatic condition. The 'perverse' factor seems to form the essence of the fantasy's function and its very 'normality'.

In this way, 'perversion' (excessive enjoyment) in fantasy is the immoral agent of power, through which morality and the 'neuroticism' of the subject are maintained. It

allows one to imagine the feasibility of excess in terms of *jouissance* through both sexual and non-sexual scenarios. The idea of paradise, for example is a religious fantasmatic 'perversion' that promises an excessive pleasure, precluding pain, since desire would not operate anymore, once you reached the kingdom of heaven. Liberal democracy on the other hand envisages a secular globalised heaven in which the capitalist industry is the non-lacking 'perverse' structure that produces excess; it promises all individuals the prospect of turning society into an 'omni-bourgeois' heaven where everyone fits.

Through a fantasy of excess that power cultivates as its vision, it pledges the satiation of desire. Of course, this is paradoxical and nothing but a 'perverse' strategy, in the sense of exploitation and instrumentalisation of desire by political power – the kind of 'perversion' we do not find in the *extra*-ordinary subject. It is more appropriate to dissect this fantasy of excess that resists signification and is found in all ideologies, before one renounces excess and ascribes it to *extra*-ordinariness. It is the very essence of subjectivity, the fundamental fantasy that insists in all structures and which is always 'perverse.' Freud and Lacan illustrate this point:

The contents of the clearly conscious phantasies of perverts (which in favourable circumstances can be transformed into manifest behaviour), of the delusional fears of paranoics (which are projected in a hostile sense on to other people) and of the unconscious phantasies of hysterics (which psychoanalysis reveals behind their symptoms) – all of these coincide with one another even down to their details.<sup>16</sup>

Neurosis consists in dreaming, not perverse acts. Neurotics have none of the characteristics of perverts. They simply dream of being perverts, which is quite natural, for how else could they attain their partner?<sup>17</sup>

This 'perverse' content offers fantasmatic support to the subject's relation to her partner; not necessarily her romantic partner. By disavowing the emptiness of the image in fantasy, one can relate to the other. S/he can be seduced by, fascinated or identified with the image of the other, which is fantasmatically represented as diaphanous, varnished and coherent. This infatuation is precisely due to the disavowal of the lack of the image. The other as non-lacking can fill my own lack.

The master espouses and cultivates a similar heroic image of himself. A non-lacking ego is his fantasmatic panoply. Mastery produces excess, the surfeit embodied by the *object a*. The master usurps this surplus, but of course he has to present himself as if no enjoyment is derived from this surplus, in order to defend his masterful non-lacking position, i.e. a position of imaginary certainty concerning the existence of a complete Other. In the name of this potentiality of the complete Other, the usurped surplus is disavowed and attributed to the one who embodies it, the so-called pervert. Eventually, the *extra-ordinary* is also disavowed in turn, for occupying a space of excess. Everyone knows he is not a threat, yet they believe he destabilises the ethical basis of society.

Regardless of power's various ideological masks, the vilification of the *extra-ordinary* serves the concealment of the real hard core, in the heart of ideology (its excess or lack). In that case, the main imaginary goal of power envisages a complete non-desiring Other, who appears to be untarnished (the Other of paradise, the Other of Brahma, the Other of equality or, currently, multiculturalism etc.). Disavowing the *extra-ordinary* is a tactic that stirs up animosity against the latter, only because his act provokes the ordinary socio-political continuum.<sup>18</sup> The idolisation of the Aryan image by the Nazis was the culmination of this ideological disavowal that sanctioned fascist domination. This is why the imaginary machinery of fantasies and images cannot have a liberating function and it will always be associated to types of dominance in politics.

The Nazi renunciation of the Jew was not simply a matter of failing to acknowledge symbolic Difference. Nazism associated it with a moral criterion that had the Aryan ideal as its guiding ethical principle. Is the disavowal of the Jew to blame for the anti-morality of Nazism? Inasmuch as *extra-ordinariness* does not make a stand for an alternative morality, it is difficult to answer the question affirmatively and insert an *extra-ordinary* quality to anti-Semitism. The *extra-ordinary* subject's primary concern does not entail morality. If the latter is implicated in perversion, this is seen as a repercussion of the mechanism of disavowal, but not its aim, which is entering and maintaining transgressive *jouissance*.

Disavowal does not target the subversion of prevalent moral principles. If there is a provocation of existing morals, this is more the outcome of the belief that the object is present (the mother's penis), which contradicts the knowledge of its absence. Once more,



disavowal functions as a compromise between the predominant moral code and its transgression. Obviously, this attitude does not fit current morality, but an *extra*-ordinary attitude would not fit into any institutionalised moral scheme, at any rate. The normative savoir-faire and conformism will always be incongruous with the perverse symptom, namely fleshing out the *object a*. The *object a* is there to obscure all moral schemata with its ungraspable, obscene and omnipresent character – exactly what describes perverse sexuality. This is something that Lacan bespeaks, linking sexuality with *âmorality*:

People then began to meet perverts –they’re the ones Aristotle didn’t want to see at all costs. There is in them a subversion of behaviour based on savoir-faire, which is linked to knowledge (savoir), knowledge of the nature of things –there is a direct connection between sexual behaviour and its truth, namely its amorality. Put some soul at the beginning of that – âmorality...<sup>19</sup>

Perversion is beyond morality, which is an attitude that originates in the real: “Morality is to be sought on the side of the real and more especially in politics.”<sup>20</sup> Nazism developed an anti-moral law that had nothing to do with perversion, but with the real in politics. The occurrence of the Holocaust was not charged with any *extra*-ordinary enjoyment. It was a moralistic attitude, common in politics, when the real is confronted, that originated in the anti-liberal pseudo-ethos of the fascist. Jews as representatives of a patriarchal moral system of liberalism were the targets of Nazism, in order for the latter to maintain the mastery of its own morality. The annihilation of the Jew can be understood as the punishment of a closed and strict traditional patriarchal system of conventional morality, a rival symbolic system (a fictional anti-Other), rather than the elimination of the object.

In her work, emphatic of the idealisation of the partial-drive, Chasseguet-Smirgel argued that fascism served a pre-genital anal ideal, exemplified by the reduction of the Jew at the level of shit.<sup>21</sup> Fascism needs the Oedipal law, but first it has to be degraded to the level of shit, to be reduced “to the law of intestinal functioning.”<sup>22</sup> Shit is the medium to take control over the external world, but, no matter how commensurate it is with the phallus, shit is not lacking; it does not confront the fear of castration as it always returns to where it was cut from the body. Explaining fascism in this vein is then an anxiety

response to the fantasy of the phallus preserving its supremacy in a scatological fashion, impossible to be castrated.

But instead of including fascism into a frame of scatological discourse, it is better to understand the anal qualities of fascist totalitarianism or any other transfiguration of the latter, by looking at the very function of the shit, as the first object of exchange. Shit is the first *object a* the subject produces and the first object to spur ambivalence. So, the anal argument conveys nothing but the essence of the 'neurotic' dimension of the subject: her ambivalent position regarding authority.

Along the lines of Chasseguet-Smirgel's argument, the Nazi, similarly to Sade, abrogates the pre-existing moral (symbolic) equilibrium and replaces it with Chaos.<sup>23</sup> The creator, the father, is dethroned. Nonetheless, if the Sadean creator wishes to establish a chaotic universe, the fascist wishes to ensconce a new *order*. What is more, Sade developed a well-organised philosophical system (or a fantasy) of *jouissance* with its own anti-moral principles. It would be inaccurate to confuse this system with Chaos and anarchy.

As it was argued in the second part, the Sadean system is regulated by *jouissance* that, despite its decomposing nature, becomes the impossible thread that stitches the consistency of the system. Repetition, as exemplified by the Sadean tortures and crimes, forms a paradoxical rigid circle of eternity and infinity. The paradox lies in the excess of repetition, which is nothing but the expression of *jouissance* or the death drive in Freudian terms. Deleuze writes in *Coldness and Cruelty*:

Evil as defined by Sade is indistinguishable from the perpetual movement of raging molecules; the crimes imagined by Clairwil are so intended as to ensure perpetual repercussions and liberate repetition from all constraints. Also in Saint-Fond's system, the value of punishment lies solely in its capacity for infinite reproduction through the agency of destructive molecules [...] *pain only acquires significance in relation to the form of repetition which conditions its use.*<sup>24</sup>

Repetition is a way of binding but also unleashing evil from its restraints and the name for this evil is *jouissance*. The formalism of the Sadean system is organised by repetition which is reflective of Sade's mechanistic system and reveals proximity with Spinoza's

mathematical thought. This formalistic, mechanistic and repetitive pattern reveals the Sadean sadist's need of institution. This is understood, if we consider the Sadean sadist more as a master and less as an *extra-ordinary* subject. The master of Sade's system needs to establish a paradoxical institution of *jouissance*, whereas the *extra-ordinary* needs normative institutions in order to transgress them perpetually through *jouissance*, something that challenges the power and the authority of these institutions.<sup>25</sup>

Following the argument of this final part that opts for the term *extra-ordinariness* instead of perversion, my view is that anal and generally perverse references to fascism reveal and maintain an obstinate conservatism. They are conservative responses to the anxiety caused by the realisation of the emptiness of the phallic signifier, the hollowness of its primacy, when a real object (embodied by the *extra-ordinary* subject) comes to occupy this empty space. The *extra-ordinary* subject exposes this emptiness and offers it to the Other in a sexualised form, namely in the form of *jouissance*; he offers a real object, which is the source of anxiety for the Other.

Revolutionary movements do not originate in a perverse structure, neither perversion aims at abolishing an established morality and ideology. Such a perception preconceives any innovation in the ideologico-political terrain as perversion, which is erroneous. How can one associate political innovation with the outcome of a perverse fomentation, when the mechanism of disavowal is far from fostering any socio-political changes or abolishing the law in order to replace it with a different one? The use of disavowal becomes in itself a conservative concept, a compromise, when it overshadows any challenging behaviour of subjects who are otherwise well adjusted to social order. What epitomises the sterile efforts of the *extra-ordinary* subject is rendering the law invalid, just for the sake of re-creating and empowering the same fractional law, namely filling the Other with *jouissance* only for desire to return at the end.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Freud, S., "Fetishism" (1927), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 21, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), pp. 152-57 (p. 154).

<sup>2</sup> In psychoanalysis, apart from disavowal, three more mechanisms isolate the traumatic real from the subject's symbolic reality: repression, negation and foreclosure, each taking a linguistic form that discards a piece of information (related to the unconscious trauma) and indicating either a neurotic or a psychotic structure. The casual implementation of these terms draws only a thin line of demarcation between the psychic functions that each term denotes. It would be naïve to see them as singular determinants of a psychic structure, as they do not constitute self-referential explanatory concepts, but linguistic manifestations of the subject's discursive position in relation to an unconscious content.

<sup>3</sup> A full identification with the object would render the subject psychotic.

<sup>4</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), especially chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> Indicatively, see France (Le Pen's National Front Party), Austria (Joerg Haider's Freedom Party), Italy (Northern League) and Greece (Karatzafaris' Popular Orthodox Rally Party).

<sup>6</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "Traits de Perversion dans les Structures Politiques" in *Traits de Perversion dans les Structures Cliniques*, Fondation du Champ Freudien (Navarin Editeur, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Lacan sees negation as a neurotic process following an initial affirmation (*Bejahung*). See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> Disavowal, as I perceive it, involves a sexualisation of the object precluding the threat of castration as punishment. But the threat is still there in the unconscious, whereas negation means that castration is negated even in the unconscious. Negation does not suggest a compromise (in the form of a splitting of the ego) between the denial of something and its acceptance, as disavowal does. Rather it maintains the repressed status of castration, by allowing the latter to be unconsciously expressed in its negated status. So, I perceive negation more as a hostile and aggressive attitude (originating in the death drive) towards castration, whereas disavowal originates in *Eros*. Disavowal does not go against castration, but keeps it a bay, by not acknowledging it, which is different from negating it. In this way, the sexualisation of the object (the mother's penis) remains intact.

<sup>9</sup> I am aligned with Stavrakakis' use of the term 'negation', when fantasy's relation to the real is contemplated, rather than the term 'disavowal' which obeys a perverse logic that Žižek ascribes to fantasy. See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "Fantasy as a Political Category: A Lacanian Approach," *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 1, no. 2, (1996): 77-85 (p. 77).

<sup>11</sup> This is a Lacanian neologism that denotes the meanings of 'perversion' and '*vers le père*', referring to the search for *jouissance* that does not abolish the division of the subject, her desire. In this respect, the *père-vers* is typical of both neurosis and perversion, where the Name-of-the-Father is not foreclosed and thereby complete *jouissance* remains unobtainable. See Diana Rabinovitch, "What Is a Lacanian Clinic?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. by Jean Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 208-220.

<sup>12</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London, New York: Verso, 2001[1991]).

<sup>13</sup> Each nation together with its values, beliefs, traditions, also possesses a certain image through which is commonly represented. For example, Mediterranean countries cultivate a stereotypical image of dark bronze sunburnt features in their representation, whereas Northern European countries associate fair characteristics with their representative image.

<sup>14</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> Insofar as it follows the homeostatic principle.

<sup>16</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," (1905), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 7, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1974), p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 87.

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, this continuum is a mythical construct. Society is far from being a coherent unit that follows a linear development.

<sup>19</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety, 1962-1963*, trans. by Cormac Gallagher from unedited French Manuscripts (Printed by Anthony Rowe Ltd, Eastbourne), XII (27/2/63), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> See Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, "Reflexions on the Connexions between Perversion and Sadism," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 59 (1978): 27-37.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> See Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion*, (London: Free Association Books, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, p. 119 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>25</sup> That was the reason for incorporating the *extra-ordinary* subject into the discourse of the Hysteric in the second part. As the hysteric, the *extra-ordinary* needs a master, in order to provoke and dispute him. While the hysteric questions the master, by inserting the uncertainty of desire, the *extra-ordinary* questions him, by injecting the certainty of a supreme and destabilising *jouissance*.

## Part IV: Conclusion

To sum up the efforts of the final part, far from dispersing the notion of perversion around all ideological frames, the argument, which I forwarded here, is that the politicisation of the notion of perversion benefits the masking of the very 'perverse' structure of mastery in politics. What I call perverse is not a moralistic view of particular and unusual sexual practices, but the faltering of the subject over the gap of the symbolic, where the so-called pervert is encountered as the very material embodiment of the enjoyment that stems from this gap. So, fitting both to the socio-symbolic continuum and its fissure, where he identifies with the *object a*, the so-called pervert hypostatizes less a pathological subversion of the existing system of domination and more a required provocation of any institutionalised and dominant establishment. Based on this paradoxical conformity of the so-called pervert, I implemented a different designation, less negative, moralistic and pathological, for alluding to the subject that embodies the real in the symbolic.

I coined the term *extra-ordinary* subject, in contradistinction with the ordinary (neurotic) subject, who supposedly conforms harmoniously to the dominant socio-political dynamics. Considering that the ordinary subject's conformity also relies on 'perverse' fantasising, while mastery makes use of disavowal in order to protect the supremacy of the ideal and the power it promotes, it is pharisaic to pathologise the *extra-ordinary* subject just for taking his fantasy to the symbolic stage, generating and sexualising anxiety, in this way. The role of disavowal is less to demarcate a deviant perverse structure and more to segregate the enjoyment hoarded in the non-representable real core of subjectivity.

But the non-representable factor must not be equated with the non-speculative, the silence of the unutterable. Silence is not a sign of respect for the real, otherwise the limit of the symbolic is inevitably associated with a moralistic attitude that cultivates guilt, not as recognition of a symbolic debt, but as the pedestal for an imaginary law, which is not lacking. There is nothing to be respectful for in the encounter with the real, since the latter is beyond any moral encoding, beyond any symbolic definition. There is no moral obligation for the subject to remain silent, it is the limit of the symbolic itself that

imposes this muteness as necessity. Having said this, signifiers and representations endlessly encircle the real void, unable to fill it, but because of their failing there is always something *more* to be grasped. Above all, the void must be recognised as the failure of the lexis, the incomplete status of the symbolic law. Following Stavrakakis, the real always remains ungraspable by symbolic reality and similarly, the political is always something that eludes, yet determines politics. This is why the void is necessary to be recognised in politics and not to be perversified or de-politicised, thrown to the social margins for the sake of imaginary fullness. On the contrary, the void must remain the essence of symbolic dialectics in the field of the political. The task of a psychoanalytic research would be to circumscribe and track down the manifestations of the real. A symbolising act that will acknowledge “the real limits of the symbolic and will attempt to symbolically ‘institutionalise’ real lack” is the only way to approximate the void without turning it into the motive force behind the antagonisms that dwell in ideological fantasies.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 86.

## **Thesis Conclusion:** *Love the Object of Your Anxiety*

The objective of the present study was to expose the theoretical, practical and ideological obfuscation that stems from the association of fascism with the category of perversion. As a recurrent theme in cultural, sociological, and psychoanalytic narratives, this link sustains the enigmatic status of fascism in the collective imaginary mind as a decadent ideological amalgam, without recognising its elusive character. Along with this effect, the category of perversion falls into a moralistic or criminological frame.

By critically revisiting this discursive link, I argued that the interpretation of fascism that takes perversion as the pedestal for its suggestions is in itself an ideological strategy. It aims to secure the power of a political system of domination, by isolating the pervert as a hazardous subject for the moral, political and social edifice. My critique pointed out the insufficiency of such exegetical schemata, even when they belong to the psychoanalytic discourse. In concluding, I proceed in a final synopsis that emphatically re-articulates the central implications of the study for the further advancement of psychoanalytic theory, inasmuch as research on perversion is concerned.

The first aim of the study was to bring into the spotlight the discursive infiltration of fascism with perverse designations, by chronologically recounting theoretical and filmic texts that forge it. The collection of diverse texts aimed to comprise a solid background literature, regarding the connection of fascism to perversion, that extends from academic disciplines to popular forms of culture. Nonetheless, this effort entails the risk of reducing these heterogeneous texts to a singular discourse. Notwithstanding the common spirit of modernity that imbues them, the selected texts belong to different discourses, ranging from social theory and philosophy, to psychoanalysis.

But my aim was not to evaluate the structural and representational aspects of the films or to assess their narrative in isolation. My review was epigrammatic, omitting the difference and the importance of the role of the discursive medium in enfolding a message (e.g. the role of the image in films). Aware of this limitation, my aim was to evaluate the validity and functionality of the textual message regarding fascism's affiliation with perversion. Another important point of my critique was to explore the role of psychoanalysis in the narrativisation of this theme. Insofar as psychoanalysis wove the



argumentative core of most of the texts included in my retrospective account, its suggestions on perversion were the epicentre of my discussion, which, rather than taking them for granted, questioned their relation to traditional psychoanalytic ideas and narratives. Despite the ostensible contradiction, I still maintain the belief that psychoanalysis is a flexible approach of great explanatory power, as long as it keeps at bay the risk of turning itself into an institutionalised body of knowledge.

In this context and following chronological criteria, the first part of my discussion drew on Horkheimer and Adorno's work, as two prominent representatives of the Frankfurt School. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written between 1941 and 1944, the two authors prioritised critical reason as the quintessential premise for the modernisation of socio-political relations. Subjection of critical reason to the utilitarian purposes of Western capitalism perverts its dynamics. This 'perversion' of critical reason stirs up fascism, as the culmination of capitalist domination, which is also translated to a perversion of the sexual instinct.

In my analysis, Horkheimer and Adorno's view on domination's underlying perverse character, similar to that of Sade, was considered as pivotal for the emergence of the motif of the socially unfitting and psychologically dysfunctional pervert who favours autarchic means of both sexual and political control. Furthermore, Freudo-Marxist versions, such as that of Marcuse and Reich, espoused and expanded this cogito in ways that lead to mystification. If authoritarian aspects of Western society are due to perverted natural desires, then the utopian ideal of sexual liberation would fulfil a world from which perversion will be absent; simply because there will be no oppression which has been erroneously likened to repression. But the 'pervert' as an unproblematic individual, I argued, is an idea rejected both by authoritarian and anti-authoritarian systems. Perversion as a term is always negative.

Even in psychoanalysis, the conceptualisation of perversion is not based on more affirmative ground. If Freud's legacy in the theory of the perversion was a limited, yet an inventive and revolutionary body of work, for many of his successors it turned to become a rigid set of principles. The psychoanalytic theory of perversion was reduced to a self-referential system of knowledge, typically defined as the failure of the Oedipus complex. It is not surprising, thence, to see that, when orthodox psychoanalysis is applied to

politics, the common exegesis evolves around the Oedipal paradigm. An essay by Ernest Jones, originally written in the early 1940s, but not as influential as the *Dialectic* was at that time, illustrated this point. Furthermore, Jones' Oedipalisation of Nazism was dissected in relation to the objectives of my study. The dreadfulness of Hitler, as a sadistic paternal imago, explains the passivity displayed towards him by German people and other leaders, as a sign of unconscious homosexuality. Commonly, for orthodox psychoanalysis, whatever breaks the Oedipal logic, patriarchal and conservative in its conception, is considered as an indication of perversion. This suggests that even in psychoanalysis perverse terminology conveys conservatism.

Expanding the scope of the study to the analysis of other discursive contexts, in the 1960s and 1970s, we find the cinematic edifice becoming increasingly political. Suffice it to recall the films of adept directors, such as Pasolini, Cavani and Visconti, who, in the course of their intriguing and uncompromised career, re-inscribed historical fascism into radical filmic narratives, deeply influenced by modernist thought (for instance, the influence of psychoanalysis and Marxism is crystallised in their filmic narratives). My discussion focused on three films: *Salò*, *The Night Porter* and *The Damned*, as illustrative of a representation of fascism that projects the latter onto images of perverse eroticism. The fascist is portrayed as a sadist, a masochist, a transvestite, a paedophile, etc.

Since the making of these films, the image of the fascist's sexual libertinage has been regularly recreated, not only in cinema, but also in other popular mediums. In our contemporary era of dominant televised images and messages, there is an ongoing fascination with the sexual indecorum of fascism. Music videos by rock stars, such as Marilyn Manson, documentaries, regarding Hitler's sexual life or Thor Kunkel's recent book on Nazism's porn industry are a few examples. As I argued, such erotic representations of fascism amount to the misunderstanding of its totalising ideological character, as well as increase the mystification of the category of perversion.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the work of Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel marks the trajectory from orthodox psychoanalysis to Neo-Freudianism. Her theoretical suggestions decentre psychoanalytic interpretation from the Oedipal creed, focusing more on the omnipresence of pre-Oedipal traits in the human condition. Chasseguet-Smirgel de-pathologises the notion of perversion, linking it to creativity and the promotion of socio-political changes.

However, she re-mystifies and re-pathologises the term, inasmuch as perversion results in sexual con(fusion), illusion and paranoia. This is also the frame where Nazism is placed. In the same line, Klaus Theweleit assumes a frame of archaic pre-Oedipal relations, for exploring the male fantasies of Nazi militia. Despite their innovative narratives, the perverse lining that Chasseguet-Smirgel and Theweleit discern in psychic reality has an equivocal status, still perceived as the failure of the Oedipus complex.

What I argued was that Neo-Freudianism, notwithstanding its novel insights, regarding the category of perversion, still operates within an Oedipalising logic, even when it takes a pre-Oedipal cognomen. What is at stake is the risk for psychoanalysis becoming an inflexible and recycled hermeneutical model. Although the focus on the sinuous archaic processes and their ubiquitous manifestation in various aspects of subjectivity must remain part of the portfolio of future psychoanalytic research, the insistence to associate these processes with the negative term of 'perversion' is the foothold that I believe prevents psychoanalysis from moving forward, abandoning the hegemony of the Oedipal paradigm. The Lacanian scope this study espoused opens a field of research possibilities which transcends perverse dialectics. Dealing with loss, the formation of the image and the anchoring in the field of symbolic exchange are common factors that determine subjective experience, regardless of any clinical classification.

Putting forward these new possibilities was also the main goal of my critique of Lacanian thinkers, such as Juliet Flower MacCannell and Slavoj Žižek, who indubitably endorsed contemporary psychoanalytic discourse and divulged its explanatory power in understanding ethical, social and political issues. But, when it comes to the implementation of psychoanalytic ideas explaining perverse relations, MacCannell and Žižek treat them as if they were unproblematic and canonical schemata.

Despite their inventive critique, I argued that the two thinkers do not promote the disentanglement and the de-ideologisation of the notion of perversion. Their interpretations greatly rely on pre-fixed vocabularies that rigidify traditional conceptions rather than ratifying new psychoanalytic horizons, beyond the equivocation of perversion, as a category. Indicatively, MacCannell treated the case of Eichmann, following Lacan's inversion of the *matheme* of fantasy that appears in "Kant with Sade." Nevertheless, the inverted *matheme* only sporadically appears in the Lacanian corpus and always in

relation to the Sadean fantasy; this means that it is never considered explicitly as indicative of a perverse structure. Eichmann's alleged Kantian ethics that Hannah Arendt connected to the notion of the 'banality of evil, is interpreted by MacCannell as perversion. Eichmann's position coincides with Sade's perverse accomplishment of Kantian ethics through his anti-moral, evil-didactic philosophy.

What I objected to the verdict on Eichmann was that the implementation of this argument may ostensibly appear to be a great explanatory tool for dissecting conditions, where the ethical duty meets evil in its banal form, yet this does not suggest any perverse ethics; it is still Kantian ethics *qua* Sade. In any case, Eichmann was Kant, with or without Sade, which does not make him a pervert. Rather than a set of ideas of unreserved credence, Lacan's ethical speculation should be the pedestal for an ongoing ethical debate. The ethics of desire is not uncomplicated, since it encloses the risk of particularisation of a universal will-to-desire by the alienated desires of a specific subject.

As far as Slavoj Žižek's theorisation about fascism is concerned, disavowal, as the cliché mechanism for defining perversion, constitutes a central aspect of his argument. It is not just the discursive position of the fascist that Žižek describes here, but also the whole structure of fascism's ideological fantasy, which disavows the Jew, similarly to the pervert's disavowal of the lack of the mother's penis. When ideology itself, for Žižek, resides in a perverse organisation, since it materialises and externalises its inherent gap (its division), by projecting it to others, the emphatic use of disavowal, as distinctive trait of fascism, remains a question. Disavowal describes more the ideologisation of social relations. Nonetheless, ideology is not perversion; otherwise, politics are 'perversified'. My argument views perversion as a de-politicised condition – as what brings into the social the extra element of *jouissance* that 'normally' has to be excluded – which acquires its perverse label after it has been ideologised. This means that 'perverse' is a term that serves delineating normative reality, precisely by digressing from it.

In my analysis, the first step was to elaborate the discursive position that the fascist occupies in relation to the position of the pervert. By implementing the structure of Lacan's four discourses, I put forward a distinct reading of the discursive position of the pervert, which is absent from Lacan's work. Inasmuch as the pervert is also related to the Other, he communicates his desire from a certain place in discourse. I drew a point of

demarcation between fascism and perversion, by placing the pervert in the discourse of the Hysteric, since both the pervert (at least, the subject commonly designated, as such) and the hysteric reject the knowledge about their desire, as fabricated by the Other. Both provoke the Other, but for different reasons. The hysteric wishes to maintain the lack in the Other, by constantly demanding knowledge, because the hysteric's existence depends exactly on this lack. The pervert wishes to maintain certainty, by rejecting any other type of knowledge about what the Other desires in him. His certainty adumbrates a singular *modus operandi* for meeting the desire of the Other, that is satiating desire with *jouissance*.

For the pervert, lack means *jouissance*, whereas for the hysteric it means law. Fascism, as well as any other type of ideology, is better described by the discourse of mastery. Its fantasy is organised upon the basis of master signifier(s), the emptiness of which is concealed by a fantasy of power (the perversity that Žižek discerns in it). Therefore, I put forward the following original suggestion: as far as fantasies (of power) are always regressive to an early stage of omnipotence, seeking unification with the primordial Thing, they strive to fulfil a 'perverse' goal, but only in the discourse of the Master fantasy is linked to domination. Only the master places the signifier in the dominant position assisted by fantasies of power. The pervert, like the hysteric, is dominated by the split signifier, which means that all his fantasmatic efforts to fill up the lack in the Other lead to its reproduction.

Another distinction that I formulated, based on the notion of Lacanian discourse, was between different systems, which take mastery as the central core of their organisation. Since only in the discourse of the Master is the signifier in the dominant position, only there can we talk about the formation of a representational system of domination, which tries to represent Truth through an ideal (signifier). The master ideal is thought to be the key to the satisfaction of the Other's desire. For this reason, it is supported by a fantasy of power which dramatises in an absolute fashion this satisfaction.

Having different ideals and different fantasmatic scenarios that stage the satisfaction of desire, convalescing the early loss, I distinguished between three systems of domination that try to come to terms with the loss, namely the real. Alluding to Žižek's recent conceptualisation of the real, as manifested through a triadic form, namely imaginary

Real, symbolic Real and real Real, I postulated the formation of three systems, respectively: an Oedipal system, a Totalitarian system and a Sadean system. There were two reasons for this distinction in accordance with the objectives of my study: first to separate Sade from totalitarianism(s). Even though Sade did produce a system of domination, his master signifier(s) and fantasy were self-subversive, self-destructive and contradictory *par excellence*, contesting any idealised conception of unity and rebirth that grounds a totalitarian system. The second reason was to demonstrate that the so-called pervert as a subject fits to any of these systems, like any other 'ordinary' subject, yet the pervert fits always as a marginalised figure.

If Sade is not a proto-fascist figure, then this has implications for the ethical debate that sees in the Nazi atrocities the fulfilment of a Kantian ethical edict, capable of generating evil. It is a paradox that Sade first exemplified in his anti-moral philosophy. The paradoxical relation of Sade's philosophy to Kant's ethics was narrativised, originally, by Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where Sade is seen as the archetypal of the instrumentalisation of the reason of Enlightenment. In the 20th century, this instrumentalisation was highly epitomised by the capitalist model of organisation of Western society that culminated in the Second World War fascism. Years later, Lacan would draw the same link and argue that the Sadean fantasy embodies the truth of Kant.

Given the moral implications of Lacan's suggestion for the category of perversion, I tried to illustrate some of the problematic aspects of the Sadean infiltration of Kant's moral philosophy. An imaginary law of limitless *jouissance*, such as the one that organises the fantasies of Sade cannot acquire a universal status, inasmuch as the pathological interests of the executioner are not eradicated. Sadean heroes are less instruments of the Other's *jouissance* and more the ones that instrumentalise the latter, when the victim comes to occupy this locus. The locus of the impersonal categorical imperative is taken over by a discernable source.

The particularisation of the categorical imperative is also the case for fascism, since the will behind the law is no other than the will of Hitler. What is more, Nazi officers, such as Eichmann and Goebbels, zealous proponents of Hitler, were driven by the fantasy of a rejuvenated Germany and the ascendance of the Aryan race. They served an imaginary law, which means they were interested in the evil they committed. Their evil was radical.

Finally, the critique of this study broached the systematic 'fascist' tactic of (ab)using a vague term, such as perversion, in order to protect a certain ideological hegemony, supported by a normative majority. The marginalisation and the demonisation of the so-called pervert serve a dual ideologico-political purpose: to maintain a pre-fixed political *status quo*, by letting novelty to be linked with moralistic incivility and pathology, as well as to give a name and isolate the subject that brings some of the forbidden deadly *jouissance* in the terrain of symbolic reality.

The real void in the socio-symbolic universe must remain intact as a strategy miserly employed by mechanisms of power that consistently try to ascribe the miscreant real to external sources and turn it into an ideological affair, when it is not. Reaching the core of my critical inquiry, I pointed out that this 'fascist' strategy is not bound to fascist ideology only, but to all political ideologies. Because the problem with the so-called perverse subject is that he does not sufficiently meet the reasoning for his exclusion. He is still a member of a certain social group, conforming to its basic organising moral or legal principles, yet he breaks off a normative cycle that builds an insulation shield, 'protecting' the social edifice from the streams of real enjoyment which are not controlled by the law. The law allows a minimum level of enjoyment, so that it lets desire flow.

Therefore, any excess of this enjoyment beyond the permitted symbolic echelon must be amputated. Just as the painful confrontation with the cadaver demands its rapid burial, any possible fascination with such spectacle must also be buried, otherwise it is perverse. It is this extra element to pain, the extra *jouissance*, that determines the label of the pervert. He comes to incarnate, to pass into what I called *corpo*-reality, this extra bodily enjoyment, from which he is deterred, by being classified as a pathological case.

This incarnation of the surplus object is a source of anxiety. The subject who embodies this *extra* element is not bound to any criminological act. It may be essentially provocative for a subject to be aroused by the spectacle of a dead body, but he will not demand to change the burial customs. This would only be an aftermath of the subject's allure by the spectacle. Similarly, for the sadist, the last thing in his mind would be to normalise the infliction of pain. Because his *jouissance* is enfolded precisely in the voice of pain.

As shown from my postulation, it is a great misconception to characterise institutionalised forms of torture as perversion. One has to go only so far, as to recall the tortures practised with captives in the war in Iraq, either by US forces or by ‘terrorists’, as well as the obsolescent policy of ‘ethnic cleansing’ that over the last decade has been revived in former Yugoslavia and African countries. Bureaucratic evil is incongruent with the so-called pervert’s aspirations, even though from the readings of Arendt and the Frankfurt School to the mis-applications of Lacan’s arguments, one finds this enduring problematic narrative, which I adumbrated and reappraised in this study.

Of course, a study that deals with two rather thorny concepts, fascism and perversion, has to confront the criticism of not intruding into more specific relations, between particular types of fascism and particular types of ‘perverse’ sexuality. Without doubt, fascism has many other faces, than the ones chronicled in the first half of the previous century. This entails the risk of reduction and overgeneralization in my study, despite the fact that National Socialism remained the primary fascist paradigm for this study, considering its associated atrocities.

Yet my study had to confront the problem of dealing with the equivocal generality of perversion, without resting in general theorisations. It is true that under the caption of perversion, the most contradictory and diverse sexual practices are put together. But, inasmuch as I tried to evaluate the logic behind the category of perversion, in terms of structure and ethical implications, this study, hopefully, succeeded in overcoming the general and forwarding some particular suggestions for the reconsideration of the category of perversion.

My suggestion is that the subject, who incarnates the *extra* enjoyment in socio-political relations, must be re-approached through a different prism, abandoning the misleading term ‘perversion’. We could de-pathologise this category, by simply referring to an *extra*-ordinary subject, who still adapts himself well in the social order, but not so well as to be accepted by the ordinary, so to say, by the normative ethos. One should not demand the expiation of the *extra*-ordinary subject. My belief is that *extra*-ordinariness can be a prosperous basis for resourceful dialectics for future psychoanalytic speculations and initiate original research in the field of ethics and socio-political relations, as long as it is



not exploited by ideological purposes and in a 'proto-fascist' fashion attributed to fascism.

If until now ethics, clinical categories and subjective structures have been determined by the relation to the Other and the missing signifier, namely the phallus, I tried to blaze a novel psychoanalytic direction that focuses on a *presence* rather than an *absence*. This means, apart from the missing phallus, the real presence of the *object a*, the object-cause of the desire of the Other can be the thread for an embroidery of new psychoanalytic ideas and introduction of new concepts. In the real and anxiety-provoking presence of the object is where the *extra-ordinary* subject is to be found, as the embodiment of this object.

The object of course does not exist; it is elusive. Nevertheless, what about the so-called pervert who 'exists' (in the sense that is he is inscribed in the symbolic, he has a desire), by taking the place of the non-existent? If we abdicate our own 'fascist' standpoint, loving the pervert can be the source for meeting the main goal of psychoanalysis, i.e. tolerating and coping with anxiety and ambiguity, not through the uncertainty of desire, but through the terrifying certainty of *jouissance* that breaks moral and normative limits, demanding their constant re-inscription. Loving the 'perverse' is another option for enjoying anxiety, alternative to the enjoyment of the symptom.

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