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The Phantasmatic Subject of Technology

Slavoj Žižek, *Techné*, and the Abyss

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Friday, the 29th of August, 2008

Abstract

This critique of technology takes up the thought of Slavoj Žižek to engage in a psychoanalytic and philosophical exploration, critique, and redemption of the human subject under the sway of post-modernity's politic of technophilia. By first establishing the persistence of the subject as an *aporia* in the discourse of knowledge-production, this discussion unravels the philosophical, political, and psychoanalytic difficulties hidden by the fetishisation of technology and the globalised lie of its vulgar materialism that entraps the subject in a technological phantasia coordinated by the 'metaphysics' of technology: technicity. Interrogating this phantasia of technology, we will intervene in the over-determination of the ontology of the subject by the perverse social order of a mystical deadlock between the 'treatment' of the subject's existence by the perverse order of technical rationalisation through its annihilation and fabrication of the embodiment of the subject. This intervention aims to reveal the dark contingency at the core of the subject, and to develop this Cause as the site of a rupture and reordering of the symbolic universe maintained by the ideology of technological over-determination. This Cause will be shown through *techne*, the jettisoned ontological element of technology, and herein this demonstration will unveil the possibility for redeeming the subject from the over-determination of the technological through the ideology-critique of the phantasia of knowledge-production that covers over the importance of ontology to the self-conception of the human subject. The moment of redemption will be shown to begin from the subject who emerges in and through the university discourse of knowledge-production that Žižek has criticised as the epochal mode of post-modernity.

In attending to this thesis the dissertation engages with Žižek's critique against the tide of post-modern critique that paralyses the critical gaze of the subject, especially in the consideration of the critical role fantasy plays in maintaining the perverse psychosocial order of knowledge-production that leads to the structuring of the phantasmagoria of technicity. Here the critique with which this dissertation is engaged demonstrates that the fetishisation of knowledge maintaining the 'lie' of this phantasmagoria betrays its over-determination of the subject through the vulgar materialism and the repressed metaphysical mania of annihilation and fabrication that allows technicity to substitute its

raison d'être for the Cause at the core of the subject. By attending to the return of the repressed *techne* alongside the subject who has been substituted by technicity and excluded from the Symbolic and exiled to the Abyss of the Real, this dissertation will propose the rupture and rearrangement of the authorial order maintained through technicity's binary of annihilation and fabrication. And to this end the dissertation aims to show how the ontological emergence of the subject at the heart of the dialectical materialist tussle with philosophical idealism can serve to be given a voice in a *techne* phantasmagoria of open possibility that is not reduced to mere 'virtuality' by technicity's spurious presentism and anti-metaphysical prejudice.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Daniel Hourigan, 29th of August, 2008

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In the course of writing this dissertation several papers were presented and/or published that contained elements of the thesis. These papers are: ‘The Parallax Enjoyment’ presented at the Australian Centre for Italian Studies Biennial Conference 2007 held in Brisbane, Australia; ‘Biotech Fantasia’ in *Borderlands e-journal*, 6.1 (2007); ‘Knowing the Suspension’ delivered at the *Wandering with Spinoza* conference at the Victorian College of Arts, Australia, in 2006; ‘Žižek and Love’ presented at the Australasian Association of Philosophy Conference 2006 at the Australian National University, Australia; ‘O Sublime, Where Art Thou?’ in the conference proceedings of *Sites of Cosmopolitanism* (2005); and ‘Surveillance, Body, Democracy’ presented at the 12th Law and Literature Association of Australia Conference in Brisbane, Australia, in 2004.

Thesis Introduction

Technology is an important factor in many critical reflections on the human subject. Not only does technology enable the human subject to amplify and extend its embodiment, technology also holds out the promise of emancipation from the limitations of this corpus and the transformation of the material world itself. Herein technology provides an opportunity to articulate humanity through a metaphysics and politics of efficiency, producibility, and fabrication. The materialism of technology in relation to the human subject is therefore structured and promulgated by an abstract framework or discourse that hinges on the subject's imagining of herself/himself through the discourse of technology, which is predicated upon the metaphysics and politics already stated. A critical reflection on technology thus has the task of calling this 'subjectivisation' of the human animal to account because this subjectivisation is where technology enters humanity and humanity finds itself in the field of technical knowledge wherein it is codified to suit the 'legitimate' Symbolic Order. Yet what of the subject that pre-exists this symbolic over-writing and is 'voided' if it remains in the wake of subjectivisation by technological discourse? Although articulated in many different ways, this *problematique* is a common starting point for several key critiques of technology in the twentieth century that have set the scene for how we critically examine technology, including Heideggerian phenomenological ontology, Foucauldian critical historical genealogy, the 'critical theory' developed by successive generations of the Frankfurt School, Continental philosophy influenced by the insights of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, and Cartesianism. While each of these modes unfolds the problem of technology in a particular way, it is the understanding and revelation of the grounding of the subject and/with the 'order' (*technics*) instated by technology that has become the *petitio principii* of any critique of technology in post-modernity.

This conceptual relation between technology, the subject, and the place of technology rests at the core of this *petitio principii*. The basic coordinates of this relation situate the grounding of the human subject as that which anchors the subjectivisation of the subject by technological discourse and also resists this subjectivisation. Two things come of this

primacy of the grounding of the subject: the derivation of technology and the political genesis of technology. Firstly, technology is derivative of its being brought forth into existence in the fundamental sense that the Heideggerian understanding of 'bringing forth' (*techne*) entails: the apparition of technology is structured by the logic of meaning that distinguishes the empty place of technology into which the subjectivisation of the subject is thrown. Secondly, the grounding of the subject facilitates the resistance to technological over-determination in the precise sense that the void-subject who remains in the wake of the subjectivisation entailed by technology and a discursive form signals the limits of the conditions of possibility for the subject within the symbolic universe of technology. These limits form the contours of the radical materialist problem (Badiou and Žižek) of how the human animal becomes a subject devoted to a Cause, devoted to the impossible. The developmental misinterpretation of technology in modernity, so viciously attacked by several generations of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Marcuse and Habermas), was revealed as a highly political interpretation by critical theory's critique of the, at worst, supposed 'neutrality' of development. Where technology has facilitated the impossible, i.e. flight, the damming of the Rhine, and so forth, this has always retained a political coding that 'dupes' the subject into negotiating its symbolic subjectivisation of her/him. To critique technology then, one must go past the mere material apparitions of technology and ask after its grounding, the point of ontological disclosure that unveils the limits of the conditions of possibility for the subject in the empty place of technology: *techne*.

In more recent debates, several of these canonical traditions of critical thought intersect and compliment one another in addressing this *petitio principii*. The positions of the phenomenological ontology of Martin Heidegger, the critical theory of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, and the neo-Freudian psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, have offered much intellectual ammunition for the suspicious critical gaze. Yet Michel Foucault seems to have been the last in the line of thinkers with a penchant for 'gazing with suspicion' to attempt a thoroughgoing singular interrogation of technology's ontological disclosure. This post-Foucauldian silence appears to signal that yet another further impetus is required to disclose *techne*'s ontological concealment. Such an impetus

has been taken up by the timely intervention of the Slovenian School. This opening for critique is especially apparent in the work of Slavoj Žižek, wherein these different traditions coalesce with the grand metaphysics of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and offer the potential for a further interrogation of technology's ontological disclosure through *techne*.

The fruit of a critique of technology offered by these debates rests on the ability of these different positions to resolve the difficulties of the competing frameworks and also the *aporias* that emerge from the intersection of these positions. Heideggerian philosophy, for example, is very effective at critiquing the philosophical consequences of technology and the over-determination of technical or calculative rationality, but it does little to expand on the way the psychical interiority of the subject is politically situated within the plenitude of 'therapies' propounded by technological discourse. Similarly, while Lacanianism can elucidate the processes of subjectivisation within the field of technology-*qua*-Other, it cannot legitimately critique the 'philosophy' or *Weltanschauung* of technologised life in terms of its 'spirit' or *Geist* because psychoanalysis is an 'interminable' process and not a *Weltanschauung*, as per Freud's own comments.¹ Likewise, the *geistkritik* of Adorno and Benjamin is very effective in addressing the point where the concept of technology itself breaks down and impedes the consideration of technology. However, this mode of critiquing the ideological overtures of technology's conceptualisation is not particularly well placed to discuss the philosophical consequences of this fragmentation of technology, nor the psychical disposition of the subject inculcated by the modulation of this conceptualisation. In these briefly demonstrated ways, each mode of critical inquiry offers something to the others that can benefit the critique of technology as a whole.

Nevertheless, the critique of technology is not beholden to these traditions in a type of intellectual vacuum that is free from the politics of geography. In more recent decades we have seen thinkers emerge from without the mainstream of Continental academia who have been able to render these different traditions of thought into hard-hitting and

¹ For Freud's finessed account see 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' in Freud (1991a: 193-219)

insightful analyses. One of the most impressive intellectual cohorts to have emerged are the Slovenian School, whose particular blending of Continental traditions relies heavily on the psychoanalytic framework of Lacan and the philosophical masters of French and German thought, stretching from René Descartes to Hegel and Heidegger.² While no sustained ‘Slovenian’ critique of technology has emerged on the Anglophone intellectual scene as yet, the work of one of the Slovenian School’s intellectual heavyweights, Žižek, has attempted to engage with technology on a variety of occasions. Žižek’s intellectual style is a complex imbroglio of different interconnections of philosophy, psychoanalysis, politics, and popular culture. However, two features stand out in this imbroglio that gives it its Slovenian flavour. Firstly, Žižek’s thought treats Lacanian psychoanalysis as a privileged analytical tool. And, secondly, Žižek’s treatment of technology remains wanton for a sustained engagement with the vital intercession of the subject and/with technology derived from *techne*—the *petitio principii* noted earlier. While one may indeed locate a plethora of brief ‘interventions’ into technology across the expanse of Žižek’s thought, a sustained engagement with the *petitio principii* of the critique of technology that structures these small critical discussions has not been forthcoming as yet. The impending critique of technology therefore will address this lacuna in the meeting of Žižek’s Lacanianism with and beyond his use of Heideggerian philosophy and deployment of Adorno-esque *geistgekritik*. Yet by engaging in such a critical rereading of Žižek’s thought we will necessarily go beyond Žižek’s laconic critical discussions of technology to address *techne*, the *petitio principii* that belies his critique of technology.

The grounding of Žižek’s critical inquiries in the interstices of Heideggerian phenomenological ontology, Adorno-esque *geistgekritik*, and Lacanian psychoanalysis establishes Žižek’s politic of critique and therein the ways he can critically discuss technology. While as an intellectual figure Žižek has emerged into the Anglophony from Slovenia with amazing bombast, his thought is clearly engaged with and indebted to the Continental traditions of French thought and German philosophy. Žižek’s critical *oeuvre* is smattered with seminal figures from these traditions, including Alain Badiou and

² While the notion of a ‘Slovenian School’ is somewhat dubious it serves the purpose here of designating a loosely connected intellectual cohort who have emerged in the Anglophone intellectual world since the 1980s and in whose works there appears to be a strikingly similar critical *milieu*.

Friedrich von Schelling, alongside the already mentioned Hegel, Heidegger, Adorno, Benjamin, and Lacan. The key point to be taken away from Žižek's position between the French and German traditions of thought is that, although he tirelessly engages with them, he is from without. And this 'otherness' allows Žižek a certain intellectual freedom to roam around the terrain of philosophy without becoming trapped in, for example, his reading of Schelling and remaining a 'Schellingian' or his reading of Vladimir Lenin (Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov) and remain a 'Leninist.'

Nonetheless, Žižek has often maintained that Lacanian psychoanalysis is his intellectual ballast. Psychoanalysis serves to situate Žižek within these Continental traditions of thought in a critically reflexive manner. This reflexivity is highlighted by the intensity with which he delivers his discussions of the German Idealists, namely Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Particularly the reigniting of interest in Schelling in recent years owes a lot to Žižek's continued and sustained engagement with the thinker. But there is an even more subtle argument at play here when we examine Žižek's texts that engage with the thought of Schelling *The Indivisible Remainder* (1996) and *The Abyss of Freedom / Ages of the World* (1997). In these volumes we encounter a rereading of Schelling as a 'Freudian,' and, moreover, 'Schelling as a Freudian' as interpreted through the lens of Lacanianism. That is to say, Žižek's dogmatic deployment of a Lacanian framework is the key to his analyses of French and German thought. This is interesting because Lacan himself extricated psychoanalysis from what he saw as philosophy's tendency to invent 'totalities' and grand metaphysical systems.³ Žižek clearly challenges this separation of psychoanalysis and philosophy, and his challenge is to reveal the philosophical grounds on which psychoanalysis operates while (psycho)analysing philosophy's symptoms, fantasies, manias, and repressed thoughts—the return of Schelling to the stage of philosophical inquiry could be read as a return of philosophy's repressed theosophical impulse.

The lens of Lacanianism is a great boon to Žižek's critical *oeuvre*, and it gives him a locus from which to operate in his engagements with Continental thought. But what does

³ Lacan, 2006: 671

this boon bring to the critique of technology? The first major point for any Lacanian engagement with technology is Lacan's structuralist dictum from the 1950s: "the machine is the structure detached from the activity of the subject. The symbolic world is the world of the machine."⁴ This dictum places central importance upon the signifying chain of knowledge that constitutes the 'stuff' of the symbolic universe inhabited by the subject—this 'stuff' being technology broadly-defined. In the Lacanian understanding of discourse, this emphasis on knowledge (S₂) is the over-determining factor of the discourse of knowledge-production—the university discourse. One may herein think it prudent to anticipate the consideration of technology in Žižek's analyses to move in an identical direction given his reliance on Lacanian psychoanalysis. Yet what one encounters again and again in Žižek's analyses is not the realm of the Symbolic where knowledge-machines are the over-determining factor but the prevalence of the Real where knowledge can no longer be understood through the mundane 'everyday' commonsense of the symbolic universe. For example, according to quantum mechanics your missing car keys are everywhere but where you are looking. Žižek's Lacanianism is firmly anchored around a reading of Lacan as a theorist of the Real "who teaches that the Real which makes us what we are is not only traumatic and impenetrable but cruel, obscene, vacuous, meaningless and horrifically enjoyable."⁵ Any critique of technology emerging from Žižek's thought is therefore in a position to locate the dark necessity of the subject: *techne* as the remainder that threatens subjectivisation with traumatic rupture. But here there seems to be a shift to something 'greater,' more abyssal than what psychoanalysis alone can account for in the terms of its clinic. This is problematic because what Žižek's Lacanianism elucidates here with 'the Real' is a *Weltanschauung* based upon a traumatically impenetrable element that is ineffable to psychoanalysis itself because it is 'void,' beyond the scope of signification although affecting signification through its absence.

Here it is important to note that Žižek turns to philosophy, especially the philosophy of the German Idealists, to discuss this Real-Abyss in earnest. For all of Lacan's vilifying of

⁴ Lacan, 1988a: 47

⁵ Eagleton, 2003: 196-197

philosophy's supposed totalisations, philosophy's grasp of the 'void' in its abyssal dimension remains salient because philosophy critiques the limits of the conditioning of possibility whereby the human subject engages with her/his embodiment in a universe of symbolic objects. That is to say, ontology is dealt with by philosophical inquiry and not by psychoanalytic therapy. This delineation of philosophy and psychoanalysis is pertinent to the whole of Žižek's *oeuvre* because his Lacanianism is continually targeted at elucidating the Real as the sublime shining through the image of our mundane world, the meaninglessness of 'objects,' and/or the vortex of chaotic necessity. Žižek is here effectively inverting Lacan's extrication of philosophy and psychoanalysis by showing that psychoanalysis must be called to account for its grounding of the subject in the Real.

Yet the philosophical account of the Abyss is not without its qualifications. The central difficulty here is how philosophy can speak of that which is not, that which is excluded from discourse to allow the chain of signification to whirl about the symbolic universe. Žižek is a crucial figure in addressing this difficulty because he cuts away from post-modern deconstruction, pointing out that if philosophy is merely situated within the horizon of the 'flux of symbols, representations, and images' then it cannot properly be philosophy because it cannot critique the limits of the conditioning of possibility by the subject immersed in this post-modern flux. Thus the first cautionary point that should concern us in considering philosophy's account of the Abyss is that philosophy is not speaking by way of allegory and association. In addressing the Abyss philosophy—particularly the thought of Badiou and Schelling—is bringing to light that which has been excluded only to return as a spectre that haunts the possibility of the ontological disclosure of objects. This means that technology too is haunted by its meaninglessness and the threat of the non-disclosure of its future, epitomised by the feared turn-of-the-century 'Y2K' computer bug that threatened to bring the 'digital' world into chaos, crisis, and strife by foreclosing on the future of digital technology.

It is more than a little curious that the critique of ideology is Žižek's alternative path to the deconstruction of various post-moderns. One can note this distinctive shift quite clearly in *Tarrying with the Negative* (1993) and *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*

(2002b). At one point in the former Žižek takes up Benjamin's theory of fictions to show that the 'agency' of the subject immersed in representations is a mirage created by the recognition of the subject's 'identity' within the terms of the discourse (of knowledge). Similarly, in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* Žižek notes that the images of Hollywood that regularly stereotyped the 'terrorist' as an Arab militant extremist came to be a reality. In both instances the ideological underbelly of the discussion becomes visible: base and superstructure. With this critique of ideology, Žižek is able to position philosophy as way of unveiling the ontological disclosure of the world while utilising psychoanalysis to examine this disclosure in process in lieu of the demystification of an ideological over-determination (*Weltanschauung*) that uniformly explains the world, e.g. techno-scientific rationalism.

This sensitivity to ideology is carried throughout Žižek's analyses and it invites another necessary qualification of the position of a critique of ('disclosed') technology drawn within Žižek's thought at the intersection of Heideggerian philosophy, critical theory, and his Lacanianism. This qualification specifically relates to the different focus a critique of technology extending from this particular intersection has compared to the Foucauldian approach to 'technologies of the self.' In the Foucauldian reading of technology we find an accounting for technique and technical objects that is incredibly similar to the psychoanalytic lesson of the Symbolic realm as the world of machines. However, Foucault's position on technology—espoused late in his career—is a Nietzschean 'genealogical' approach that targets the historical emergence of the methods that understand and construct humanity and enable the subject's creative individualism. Herein we are not disputing Foucault's position, but rather signalling its comparatively different focus. Because of his Lacanianism and reference to Idealist philosophy, Žižek focuses on technology in a sceptical, anti-humanistic, and non-genealogical way. If we were to simplify this juxtaposition it would read: where Foucault suggests the ethics of self and creation, Žižek proposes crisis, persistence, and the fantasies of ideology. For Žižek the Real-kernel of our humanity is unbearable and traumatic, the fully human is altogether 'too human,' monstrous, and our individualism is merely another symbolic therapy to assuage its excessiveness.

This twist to Žižek’s analyses is a highly developed nuance and not merely a sentiment of his pessimism. Like Foucault, Žižek is negating an essentialist reduction of the human subject. The kernel of humanity is not humanity at its purest, but rather the point where the concept of humanity is out of joint with its object, thrown into the Abyss, and overflows ‘humanity’ in its abysmal fragmentation. One can recall here Žižek’s often quoted passage from a young Hegel:

“This night, the inner of nature, that exists here—pure self—in phantasmagorical presentations, is night all around it, here shoots a bloody head—there another white shape, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears.”⁶

In this quote from Hegel we dip behind the ‘positive principle of being’ that maintains the presence of the object and go into “the night of the world” where being is for itself.⁷ Hegel also shows us a horrifying abyss behind this façade of presence, an abyss that ‘grounds’ being. This fragmentation of the signification of humanity is encountered at the level of its conceptualisation, of its ideation. Therein the critique of the sufficiency of the Symbolic taken up by Žižek is remarkably close to the *geistgekritik* of Adorno. Adorno’s political ‘critique of ideas’ targets the non-identity that opens onto the Abyss from the limits of the conditions of possibility of technology, as it is situated within the politic of the Symbolic.

One must be careful to not confuse the politics of technology with the political genesis of technology. In the *geistgekritik* deployed by Žižek the limits of the conditions of possibility for the subject and/or with technology reveals the abstract framework of technological efficiency, fabrication, and producibility sustaining technology as a compensatory project for the ontological ‘abyss’ that structures the material apparition of technology. Politics merely remains within the horizon of technology’s appearances, and therein manifests a vulgar ‘presentism.’ On the other hand, the political is the delineation of a field of possibility for the subject’s identification with a Cause in the sense that the abyssal ground of technology opens the horizon of technology to its future because it

⁶ Hegel in Verene, 1985: 7-8

⁷ Hegel in Verene, 1985: 8

cannot be assimilated into the technological procedures of the symbolic universe due to its 'void' status. Technology is political because *techne* grounds the place of technology in the limits of the conditions of possibility.

So what then takes the place of technology when it is no longer conceivable as technology? Here Adorno's *geistgekritik* is instructive in demonstrating that the collapse of an object's identity unveils an alien object, liberated from the all too familiar thoughts of its conditions and politics of its historical emergence. Žižek, however, utilises the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé to take this argument further by asserting that 'nothing takes place but the place.' The weakness in *geistgekritik* is therefore to stop at the object, and Žižek implores us to go further and subtract the object altogether because, by Žižek's anti-descriptive accounting, an object is primordially disclosed through its conceptualisation. If we can speak of some 'primordially' of technology then, we would have to address the place of technology before it becomes the concept of 'technology.' This primordially is therefore not technology in its meaningless existence but in the Abyss that precedes its ontological disclosure, the abyss that re-emerges through the non-identity that constitutes the inherent limit to the concept of technology. In the non-identity of technology, however, we encounter a relation of the subject with technology that is deprived of its object. This relation is one of the subject with the (void) place of technology. The emphasis thus shifts from 'technology' to 'the subjective engagement' with the (Symbolic) place of technology, the ontological disclosure of technology in a non-object sense. Here the critique of technology involves its primordial assertion through *techne*, the ontological disclosure of the signification of technology.

Although the idea of *techne* as the progenitor of technology is nascent in Žižek's thought, it is not clearly developed. What we are driving at in Žižek's thought is the primordial assertion from which technology derives, *techne* being thought of herein as a 'bringing forth' that ontically appears to be the (un)making that is caught up with knowledge and allows the deconstruction of the object. However, this is merely its apparent operation and a ruse that conceals its ontological position. For *techne* to 'bring forth' the concept of technology, technology must first emerge from the Abyss that precedes the knowledge

signifying it within the symbolic universe. Thus *techne* is both the grounding of technology and its point of non-identity wherein the concept of technology becomes inconsistent, the point where it is ‘yet to be’ technology.

The *techne* invoked by the *geistgekritik* of technology is not conceptually alien to Heideggerian philosophy, but by entering into *techne* from the non-identity of technology the critique of technology departs from the Aristotelian meaning of the term resurrected by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1996) and later in *Mindfulness* (2006). As the non-identity of technology signalled by the *geistgekritik* of technology, *techne* is the disclosure of technology and its inherent ontological condition that limits possibility for technology and the subject therein. As for Heidegger, in this way *techne* stands for the ‘bringing forth’ of technology. Yet despite its primordial ontological importance, Heidegger leaves the political dimension of *techne* underdeveloped. Žižek is an important figure for redressing this fundamental lack because he is inclined toward ‘the political’ dimension revealed through critical theory rather than a Heideggerian position. Using Žižek as our guide herein allows us to avoid the wanton ‘politics of technology’ in the Heideggerian position and instead take up a singular interrogation of technology through its disclosure by *techne* in the ontological Abyss whilst remaining necessarily political because we are engaged in *geistgekritik*. Taken in this particular way, *techne* reveals a fundamental inconsistency in technology and even more powerfully it demands urgent discussion because it is a lacuna in the critique of technology that pertains to the fundament of technology itself. Thus without redressing this lacuna, the critique of technology within the Continental traditions of thought will remain bereft of a sufficient analysis of the grounding of the subject and/with technology.⁸ *Techne* must be engaged and explored if we are to go beyond the representationalism that entraps the subject within the over-determination of technology and knowledge-production.

The impending critique of technology to be developed in this dissertation is conceptually elaborated across seven chapters that are divided into three sections. Each section and the chapters therein will progressively build upon previous chapters and sections, as well as

⁸ Ontological subtraction and purification are constitutive of *techne* as a lacuna.

give reference to the discussion as a whole. These sections delineate the fundamental developments of the critique of technology that is being undertaken herein, and aim to guide the reader as to the shifts in the substantive structure of the argument.

Section A examines the critical disposition of Žižek, ferments a psychoanalytic conception of discourse and knowledge, and introduces the notion of *techne* in the register of the Lacanian Real. This first section seeks to ground the discussion of the dissertation in both the intellectual traditions being drawn upon and the conceptualisation of the problematic of the subject alongside *techne*. Chapter One of Section A (A.1) delves into the political, philosophical, and psychoanalytic contours of Žižek's position to elucidate the key sources and elements of his critical project. This 'sourcing' of Žižek's position aims to announce not only Žižek's particular position with regards to a critique of technology, but also the intellectual space inhabited by the subsequent discussion of *techne* in the later chapters.

Leading on from the establishment of these intellectual coordinates, Chapter Two within Section A (A.2) elaborates the constitutive dynamics of technology's over-determination in the discourse of knowledge. This chapter will expose the phantasmatic promise maintained by the Lacanian discourse of the university as it is made into the discourse of our contemporary epoch. It is important that we critically demonstrate this phantasmatic promise of knowledge before unveiling the conceptual coordinates of *techne* in the Real because this critique of knowledge's phantasmatic promise will unveil the position of the subject to be 'outside' the (symbolic) knowledge that is legitimated by the discourse of knowledge production and therein the 'know how' of technology.

Chapter Three in Section A (A.3) explores and critically assesses this subject outside knowledge. This assessment will demonstrate the excessiveness of such a subject and their displacement from the structure of the symbolic universe maintained by the phantasmatic promise of knowledge. It will also present us with the first earnest elaboration of *techne* with regards to the manifestation of the subject within and beyond the symbolic universe. The aim of this discussion is to forestall any confusion that the

critique of technology being espoused is especially ‘post-modern.’ The indelible excessiveness of the subject revealed through *techne* in the symbolic universe is never situated merely within the horizon of representation. Rather, it will be shown that the primordial presentation of the subject necessarily entails an ontological emergence that resists signification and therein representation by the symbolic universe. Herein the critique of technology promoted throughout this ongoing discussion will show the implications for accounts of technology that all too easily slip into representationalism without accounting for this primordial grounding of the Order of the symbolic universe.⁹

Section B carries the argument forward to explore the fantasisation of the subject coordinated by the Symbolic Order of the symbolic universe and the inherent insufficiency of reducing the subject to their imagined humanity that is situated within the symbolic universe. The purpose of this second section is to delineate the subtle logic that maintains the discourse of knowledge elaborated in Section A and to therein examine the psychical economy engendered by this logic of association, valuation, and discursive conceptualisation. Chapter One within Section B (B.1) embarks on a pointed critical assessment of the way the Order of the symbolic universe is constituted through Žižek’s reading of the three Freudian Fathers. This analysis will show the different ‘logics’ of symbolic relation forged by the paternal function that sustains the motility and circulation of the symbolic universe. Ultimately, this chapter suggests that, of the three Freudian Fathers, it is the anal Father—the *jouisseur*—that operates as the paternal metaphor of the functioning of the symbolic universe. This basic locus will then provide the grounding for a further interrogation of the phantasmatic promise of knowledge through the ‘authority’ of the symbolic universe.

Continuing with the insights drawn out by Section B.1, Chapter Two in Section B (B.2) seeks to reveal the Father of the Imaginary, the *jouisseur*, as the speculative authority of the symbolic universe that ordains the technological over-determination of the subject through the phantasmatic promise of knowledge. Our argument herein will explore the

⁹ ‘Representationalism’ is Žižek’s retort to post-modern critiques that remain within the horizon of deconstruction without recourse to transcendence.

jouisseur through the ontological structure that problematically constitutes the subject in the Order of the *jouisseur*: mysticism. This critique of the mystical relation will demonstrate the narrow space allocated to the subject in the discourse of knowledge through her/his self-imagining or fantasisation, held under the sway of the perverse Order of the *jouisseur*. This chapter is important because it maps the narrowing of the ontology of the subject within technological over-determination and highlights the indentured possibilities that the symbolic universe avails to the subject's ontological emergence: mysticism or psychosis.

Section C then takes up the discussion developed in Section A and Section B and furthers the investigation of the subject and *techne* through the ideology-critique of *techne* and a sophisticated reading of the ontological position of the subject. Section C serves the important function of tying together the already established threads of fantasisation, the symbolic universe, and the discourse of knowledge-production, and moving the dissertation to its culmination. Chapter One in Section C (C.1) addresses the question of whether the subject is able to resist and rupture this perverse Order of the *jouisseur* to the end of emancipating their ontological emergence. Through the method of *geistgekritik* this chapter unveils the fundamental antagonism that gives structure to this Order: the persistence of the subject. This persistence of the subject will be suggested to be on the side of the Abyss rather than Being because the excessiveness of the subject casts it as 'void.' This unusual arrangement is conceptually important because it will allow the subject to negotiate the symbolic universe through nihilistic resistance and transformative affirmation despite the mortifying touch of the Symbolic Order.

Section C.2 then presents the final and most essential part of our discussion. This chapter takes up a reading of this persistence of the subject as a symptom of the symbolic universe and critically rereads this persistence as a *techne*-sinthome that can intrude on the symbolic universe, disorganise its Order, and rearrange its structures and machines to the end of enlivening the spirit (*geist*) of the 'all too human' subject. Section C.2 presents the conceptual switch from thinking the subject as a *techne*-symptom to affirming the

subject as a *techne*-sinthome who embraces the ontological horizon opened by their persistence.

Section C is then followed by a sketch of 'life after' this rupture and rearrangement of the symbolic universe in the Thesis Conclusion. Enacting the summation and conclusion of the dissertation, this capstone of the discussion will draw on all the sections of the argument and distil them in the entirety of the argument given. In these final throes of the discussion it will be shown how the subject can persist and what can be anticipated from this new arrangement of the symbolic universe, and so draw the ongoing discussion to its open conclusion.

Section A: Žižek, Psychoanalytic Discourse, and the Real

A.1 Žižek's Conceptual Disposition

The Peculiarities of Žižek's Emergence – The Idealist Triad – Post-Althusserian Politics – Psychoanalysis, Žižek's 'Clinic' – Žižek's Placing of Technology – Conclusion

Žižek has emerged from a distinct group of Slovenian intellectuals engaged with critical theory in a style akin to but also distinct from the Frankfurt School in Germany. This distinction becomes quite apparent when we consider the topic of technology. For a number of Frankfurt School thinkers such as Adorno and Habermas, and the early philosophy of Heidegger, the critique of technology is adamantly sustained in a prominent role for critical discourse. For the Slovenian group however, the critique of technology remains indistinct. This indistinctness is especially noticeable in the catalogue of Žižek's work where he has yet to devote himself to a single sustained examination of technology. Therefore in this extended critical dissertation we are herein taking up this challenge to technology on behalf of the Slovenian group, specifically: Žižek. Unlike the post-structural and post-modern expropriations of Heidegger, the Slovenian critical mode does not use the representationalist path of Baudrillard and others to perpetually render the social context of technology as a visible interplay of nihilistic enframement and supposedly subversive transgression. The modality of Žižek and his Slovenian associates is a particular constellation of critical theory proximate to Adorno and other Frankfurtian scholars in the use of German Idealist philosophy but also separate in its heavy use of French political philosophy as influenced by Althusser and the psychoanalytic theory developed by Lacan. Where the post-structuralist discussions of technology have become mired in a vicious circle of representation, the Slovenian group have used German Idealist philosophy to move out of this loop. Hegel and Schelling provide Žižek and his cohort with a conceptual basis from which to appeal to an *a priori* excluded remainder which unexpectedly returns to disrupt the cycle of representation, identity politics, and so forth. Therefore the critique of technology in the Slovenian frame begins from ontology rather than representation. Thus it is clear that we are not engaged in an exegesis of Žižek and how often technology is taken up in his theorising, nor are we attempting to explain a

‘missed encounter’ in Žižek’s intellectual enterprise. Rather, in this extended discussion we are going beyond a merely Žižekian reading of technology to critique the fundamental encounter of the human subject and technology in its philosophical, political, and psychoanalytic dimensions.

In asking after the ontologies of the subject in Žižek’s philosophical and psychoanalytic analyses it becomes clear that for this discussion to take place within the contemporary conditions of technology and socio-political processes like capitalism and democracy we must trace the philosophical, psychoanalytic, and political threads of his thought in his three key volumes to date: *Tarrying With The Negative*, *The Ticklish Subject* (2000b), and *The Parallax View* (2006). This will provide an outline in which we can coordinate the movement of the critique to come in succeeding chapters. To begin we will examine Žižek’s historiographic basis, and then an outline of Žižek’s conceptual influences will be drawn. From this initial conceptualisation an explication of a web of interconnected fundamental concepts found in Žižek’s work will be unfolded in an attempt to provide a *dénouement* from which the further philosophical discussion of technology can return and depart from in later chapters. Preliminarily, however, we must first locate a point at which the philosophical, political, and psychoanalytic dimensions of Žižek’s thought intersect to form the conceptual matrix at the core of his critical project.

As some commentators have noted, a consistent point of such quilting in these philosophical, political, and psychoanalytic dimensions of Žižek is the *noir subject*.¹⁰ This is the subject of some dark lack, a blind spot that is covered over by processes as necessary to sustaining the fabric of society as identifying with one’s roles at work, at home, and elsewhere. In the context of locating a critique of technology and the ontologies of the subject in Žižek’s work, we must be careful to take account of this *noir subject* amongst the threads of Žižek’s critical discussions in his large and varied catalogue. This dark subject is the *a priori* condition of any formal discussion involving

¹⁰ Critical commentators on Žižek’s psychoanalytic purview, including Justin Clemens (in Boucher, *et al* (eds), 2005: 3-22) and Geoff Boucher (in Boucher, *et al* (eds), 2005: 23-44), have been greeted by a detailed response by Žižek (in Boucher, *et al* (eds), 2005: 219-231) on this point. It is also interesting to note both Clemens and Boucher reside with a critical mass of Australian intellectual activity targeted at Žižek.

Žižek's work because it persistently reappears from the earliest books, *Le Plus Sublime des Hystériques – Hegel Passe* (1988) and *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), through to the more recent writings like *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (2002), *The Parallax View*, and *In Defence of Lost Causes* (2008).¹¹ An examination of this dark subject will thus be taken up in subsequent discussions of Žižek's recourse to German philosophical Idealism, post-Althusserian political philosophy, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. To begin however, let us examine Žižek's historiographic roots.

I – The Peculiarities of Žižek's Emergence

Since the publication of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* in 1989 Žižek has become an increasingly prominent voice in the philosophical, political, cultural, and theological debates of the English-speaking world. Part of Žižek's intellectual acclaim rests on its execution: a rambunctious and over-the-top speaking-style which can produce discourses replete with references as varied as Hegel, Hitchcock, *Fight Club*, and the European Union.¹² This amazing synthesis of material also manifests in the movement of his writing and speech, giving him the title: 'the wild man of theory.'¹³ Such stylistic issues aside, we are here interested in locating and expounding a critique of technology as a social and political phenomenon beginning with the constellations of ideas and concepts found in Žižek's ideology-critique. The aim of this extrapolation is to produce a consistent critical discussion of technology in its philosophical mode, principally using Žižek's work, as it impacts on the human subject and their way of life. Herein we are not seeking to produce a therapeutic reading of technology, nor is this extrapolation going to reveal a human subject morally corrupted by technical rationality. Rather, we will use Žižek's analysis of the fundamental inconsistency between ontological structures and ontic phenomena to show that technological over-determination cannot dominate the subject without revealing its own groundlessness and jettisoning of *techne*.

¹¹ It has been noted by Ernesto Laclau that prior to Žižek's appearance in the English-speaking world the Slovenian school of thought from which he emerged had published more than twenty volumes, many of which Žižek authored or co-authored. (Laclau in Žižek, 1989: xi)

¹² Butler, 2005: 2; Clemens in Boucher, *et al* (eds), 2005: 6

¹³ Boucher, *et al* (eds), 2005: xi-xviii

Žižek's work lends itself particularly well to this type of philosophical project because it has emerged from several traditions in tension with one another. Commenting on his native Slovenia prior to its secession from old Yugoslavia Žižek says

“There were two predominant philosophical approaches: Frankfurt School Marxism and Heideggerianism. Both were unacceptable to us Lacanians, not only generally, but in Slovenia the Communist Party was intelligent enough to adopt Frankfurt School Marxism as its official ideology. Heideggerianism was from the beginning linked to right-wing populism, and in other parts of Yugoslavia to the darkest Stalinist forces. For us, Althusser was crucial.”¹⁴

Althusser was crucial for Žižek and his Slovenian counterparts because Althusser's work highlights the incompleteness hidden by the political landscape of a system of totality such as Tito's rule over Yugoslavia.¹⁵ This geographic reference is also a cultural reference, and forewarns the Žižek reader where to locate similar discursive devices, not only from Žižek himself but also his Slovenian contemporaries such as Mladen Dolar, Renata Salecl, and Alenka Zupančič.¹⁶

Similar theoretical peculiarities also intrude at the level of nomenclature. As the philosophical critiques of perception have shown rendering the world understandable to oneself involves an interpretative framework.¹⁷ This particular group of dissident Slovenes working between “Frankfurt School Marxism and Heideggerianism” utilise the nexus of Althusserian ideology-critique and Lacanian psychoanalysis to interpret the perception of the world and thus constitute their world in the process of producing such critical work.¹⁸ In turn this process produces a discourse laden with psychoanalytic and philosophical terminology constellated in a way suited to the meeting of the philosophical, political, and psychoanalytic traditions of thought in the writing of Žižek and his fellow Slovenian intellectuals; for example, philosophical criticism worked to critique the political apparatus of ex-Yugoslav socialism while psychoanalysis revealed the wider ‘therapeutic’ effects of both philosophical reasoning and the political space

¹⁴ Žižek in Butler, 2005: 5-6

¹⁵ Žižek in Dews & Osborne, ‘Lacan in Slovenia,’ 1991: 30; Žižek in Wright & Wright (eds), 1999: 113

¹⁶ These particular figures also help to comprise the inner-circle of the Slovene Lacanian group.

¹⁷ Plato, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Freud, Merleau-Ponty, to name a few.

¹⁸ Žižek in Butler, 2005: 5; Žižek in Dews & Osborne, ‘Lacan in Slovenia,’ 1991: 25

itself. This type of intellectual investigation was supported elsewhere by the *Praxis* journal from 1965-1974 that discussed “the actual problems of Yugoslav socialism, the contemporary world and man.”¹⁹

Žižek developed his style of philosophising whilst attending university and later lecturing in the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana.²⁰ There he was associated with the *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK) art collective and in particular their adjunct punk music ensemble Laibach.²¹ Laibach’s critical ‘punk’ project ceded them as

“[The] established darlings of art-house culture... with their sledgehammer percussion, hunting horns, ranting lyrics, and khaki uniforms... the band’s style broached [taboo] questions about the unaccountable power of the [occupying Nazi] regime and the role of the armed forces in that regime... their militarism was thoroughly aesthetic: a matter of attitude and pastiche, not of commitment.”²²

During the 1980s Žižek, the NSK, and others created a critique of Yugoslav socialism interior to the structure of the then prevailing ‘self-management’ imposed by Tito.²³ This critique took aim at the form of politicisation imposed by self-management rather than its ideological content because “life under self-management was totally politicised.”²⁴ This totalisation of politics led to the “total non-transparency” of self-management wherein the division between public performance and private life had been lost.²⁵ The inherent ideological content of this conflation could not be successfully questioned because no private critical distance could be taken.²⁶ As Mark Thompson points out in his analysis of the break up of Yugoslavia, “[private life] was the sphere of civil society and no state that denied the autonomy of civil society was democratic. Citizens have the right to not be politicised.”²⁷ The problem for the old Yugoslavia’s embodiment of ‘socialism with a human face’ was that the old regime “did not appear to take its own ideology seriously,

¹⁹ Grlic and Vranicki, ‘Why Praxis,’ 1965

²⁰ Daly, ‘Slavoj Žižek,’ 2004

²¹ Ironically, ‘Laibach’ is the German word for ‘Ljubljana.’ (Dews & Osborne, ‘Lacan in Slovenia,’ 1991: 31n1)

²² Thompson, 1992: 43

²³ Thompson, 1992: 41

²⁴ Thompson, 1992: 41

²⁵ Žižek in Thompson, 1992: 42

²⁶ Thompson, 1992: 42

²⁷ Thompson, 1992: 42

and incorporated its own criticism in advance.”²⁸ Thus politicisation necessarily had to be the object of critical discussion for any serious opposition movement because the dissection of ideology and power claims was akin to partaking in a never-ending process of feeding self-management’s cynicism.

Ian Parker has attempted to use a historiographic account such as that presented by Thompson to map Žižek’s “Slovenian mixture” of various philosophies and philosophical styles.²⁹ This approach offers some interesting insights into the shape of Žižek’s dialectical materialism as it was borne out by the contradictory demands placed on subjects of the Yugoslav state “as they lived out the dialectical tensions of a supposedly ‘socialist’ society.”³⁰ This situation importantly reveals the dynamic of power at play in political discourses of Yugoslavia leading towards the secession of Slovenia:

“The place of Marx and Marxism is situated in relation to a state apparatus that employed Marxist rhetoric precisely in order to keep its worker and intellectuals in check.”³¹

Such a situation is indicative of the twist Žižek gives power relations in *The Ticklish Subject* wherein there is an obscene supplement at the heart of power that sustains its relations but can also “outgrow and explode it.”³² Parker claims that Žižek outgrew the intellectual environment of Slovenia.³³ If we take into account Thompson’s argument that the critique of self-management occurred from within the total politicisation of the human agent, and that this politicisation was the target of the critique taken up by Žižek and others, then it would seem that Žižek’s ‘outgrowing’ of the power relations in Slovenia was a movement toward a void non-politicised space if the conception of politics remains implicitly centralised. Within the context of a centralised socialist political totality such a plane appears ‘illegitimate’ precisely because the politicisation that took place under self-management was framed as a closed whole. And yet there was one who got away from this totalising function of political closure: Žižek.

²⁸ Butler, 2005: 6

²⁹ Parker, 2004: 6

³⁰ Parker, 2004: 6

³¹ Parker, 2004: 6

³² Žižek, 2000b: 256

³³ Parker, 2004: 26-27

II – The Idealist Triad

Žižek writes from a vantage point supported by a variety of critical traditions. In *Tarrying With The Negative*, *The Ticklish Subject*, and *The Parallax View* Žižek attempts to comprise an outline of his evolving philosophical project across the expanse of his intellectual career. This auto-critical outline provides fertile grounds from which to generate a critique of technology pertaining specifically to technology as a socio-political phenomenon bound up with the ontological structure of a subject's way of life. At a glance, three traditions of thought stand out as Žižek's main sources of intellectual activity: German philosophical Idealism (Hegel, Schelling, and Kant), post-Althusserian political philosophy (Badiou, Rancière, Balibar, and Laclau), and neo-Freudian psychoanalysis (Lacan and Miller). It is from a blending of these three traditions that Žižek is able to intervene in domains as varied as Anglo-American cultural studies,³⁴ political theology,³⁵ and consciousness studies.³⁶ Due to each of the three traditions having a complex genealogy in and of themselves, we will here focus on Žižek's engagements with those specific thinkers within these traditions whose influence appears to furnish his philosophical project and various critiques with a recursive structure. These preliminary analyses will identify the avenues that we will tread later to elucidate a Slovenian-inspired critique of technology from Žižek's work and to push this critique beyond the limits of Žižek's analysis.

Let us first turn to the tradition of thought that delivers Žižek to the grounding of his philosophy. In his dealings with German Idealism Žižek returns time and again to three particular thinkers whose philosophical systems form the basis of his conceptual thrust: Hegel, Schelling, and Immanuel Kant.³⁷ Žižek's reading of Hegel dominates a sizeable portion of his philosophical musings on the identity of the subject, negativity as it manifests in the choices and relations between people and the world around them, and the

³⁴ *Looking Awry* (1992), *The Art Of The Ridiculous Sublime* (2000), *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (2001), and *The Fright Of Real Tears* (2001b).

³⁵ *The Fragile Absolute* (2000a), *On Belief* (2001a), *The Puppet And The Dwarf* (2003), and *The Neighbour* (2005).

³⁶ *The Plague Of Fantasies* (1997), *Organs Without Bodies* (2004a), and *The Parallax View*.

³⁷ See Johnston (2008) for a broad engagement with these three figures in Žižek's thought.

universality that a variety of social and political notions attempt to achieve including democracy, capitalism, and totalitarianism.³⁸ These three ideas are simply a selection from the many other concepts which Žižek's discussions of Hegel elucidate. However, the concept of the 'vanishing-mediator' is one idea brought forward by these discussions that sheds light on the way Žižek writes, and recasts the 'blind spot' mentioned earlier.³⁹

This hidden part of the gaze appears particularly strongly in his early English volumes such as *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (1994) and *Tarrying with the Negative* where one finds Žižek's style of writing sets the authorial voice in a cache. In these early works prior to the first edition of *The Ticklish Subject* in 1999 we find the author disappears from view as the text extrapolates a reading of a particular thinker. This is especially apparent in his discussions of Hegel and Kant in *Tarrying with the Negative*. Žižek's vanishing presence herein occurs because his voice becomes entwined with the presentation of a particular thinker. Stylistically we may say that there is no space between Žižek and German Idealism. Rather, Žižek tends to move through the terrain of German Idealists such as Hegel as though their thought provided a filter for furthering more concentrated discussions.

This metaphor of filtration aptly points to the way the vanishing of Žižek's authorial first-person voice is marked by the return of his voice as a remainder. *The Metastases of Enjoyment* for example closes with a self-interview, and in *Tarrying with the Negative* we find an application of the discussions of identity, universality, and the "absolute unrest of becoming" applied to Žižek's native Slovenia.⁴⁰ Herein Žižek is embodying his own definition of the vanishing-mediator as

"The structure of an element which, although nowhere actually present and as such inaccessible to our experience, nonetheless has to be retroactively constructed, presupposed, if all other elements are to retain their consistency."⁴¹

³⁸ Žižek, 1993: 29-33, 120-124, & 130-134; 2000b: 72-77 & 90-103; 2006: 27-36, 43-47, & 234-237

³⁹ An article from Fredric Jameson ('The Vanishing Mediator,' 1974: 52-89) seems to prompt Žižek's discussions of the vanishing-mediator.

⁴⁰ Hegel in Žižek, 1993: 153; Žižek, 1994: 167-217; 1993: 200-237

⁴¹ Žižek, 1993: 33

To obtain philosophical consistency Žižek sacrifices himself in the very motion of taking up the discourse of German Idealism. What then does German Idealism give Žižek to drive him to such self-abnegation?

While his discussions of Hegel serve to furnish the conceptual space of Žižek's work with an unfolding that is dialectical in the utmost, as it negotiates a path between opposed views only to arrive at a new thesis which has been excluded from the synthesis of the previously opposed views, Hegel also provides Žižek with an understanding of philosophy more generally.⁴² It would be incorrect to say that Žižek's understanding of philosophy is Hegelian. Rather, it is far more precise to suggest that Žižek's reading of Hegel filters his access to philosophy, and thus he treats philosophy as an attempt to totally systematise existence by embracing possibility *tout court*.⁴³ Interestingly, this purview on philosophy is synonymous with the Lacanian view of philosophical contemplation:

“The thesis that being a philosopher means being interested in what everyone is interested in without knowing it has the interesting peculiarity that its relevance does not imply that it can be settled either way. For it can only be settled if everyone becomes a philosopher.”⁴⁴

Žižek is well aware of this philosophical naïveté as it appears in Hegel where “the subject knows what he wants,” which is in stark contrast to the neo-Freudian position of Lacan who begins from “science's abolished subject.”⁴⁵ These exclusive positions are synthesised in Žižek's work where it is the subject who vanishes, only to reappear in the subjectivisation (the activity of the subject being a subject as such) that marks the subject as missing.⁴⁶ Herein Žižek is acknowledging that Hegel's philosophical naïveté provides the minimal difference which posits the basis for an abolished subject of science to be abolished in the first place.

⁴² See Dews (1995: 236-258) for a useful critical account of Žižek's reading of Hegel.

⁴³ Žižek, 1993: 2-4

⁴⁴ Lacan, 2006: 671

⁴⁵ Lacan, 2006: 679 & 676

⁴⁶ Dews, 1995: 249-250; Žižek, 2000b: 158-159

Another way Hegel concerns Žižek can be discerned in Žižek's acquiescing to the promise that the structure of being is open and opens through the processes of change. In the philosophical language of critique this becomes: ontology is open and remains forced open by its constant becoming, the technological supplementation and amplification of human capacities is an activity that takes place under this open condition which at the same time drives technological prowess toward the domination incurred by totality. A world of technical knowledge and technological objects combines the subject who knows their desires and the scientific subject/observer deprived of her/his subjectivity. This obfuscation operates under the condition that the subject vanishes in the determinate mediation of these different positions toward an outcome, i.e. within science the production of neutral scientific knowledge.⁴⁷ Hegel thus gives Žižek the problem that knowing oneself in the domain of thought is a position that cannot abide the open structure of being. In philosophical terms, ontology has no proper objects and yet reason and rationality do, and therefore reason must take place in ontology only as its excluded term which returns time and again to interrupt the open structure of being with the threat of closure by fulfilling the processes of production.⁴⁸

In *The Ticklish Subject* Žižek locates this open structure of being in Kant. Kant's anti-cosmological insight that reality is not fully constituted at the ontological level requires that the subject, whose vanishing renders them contingent, be present "to obtain a semblance of ontological consistency."⁴⁹ Žižek phrases this critical point in the following way:

"What looks like an *epistemological limitation* of our capacity to grasp reality (the fact that we are forever perceiving reality from our finite temporal standpoint) is the positive *ontological condition* of reality itself."⁵⁰

Kant thus presents Žižek with the structure of reality as non-all, which we shall see is entirely consistent with his Lacanian position. As reality is non-all *a priori*, it is the subject in their self-presentation/subjectivisation that provides reality with the semblance

⁴⁷ Kolb, 1986: 36-37

⁴⁸ Kolb, 1986: 46-49

⁴⁹ Žižek, 2000b: 158; in a way Žižek is saying that Kant foresees the problem of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in particle physics, specifically quantum field theory. (Žižek, 1996: 211-12)

⁵⁰ Žižek, 2000b: 158

of consistency. In this way Žižek accommodates the impracticality of solipsism in the very heart of the ontology of the subject. Where ontology affords some sense of rational order solipsism reverses the process of reducing being to its structure—it is merely the subject in their being-there that affords any ontological structure at all. The solipsist does not attempt to understand the structure of being, and ontological consistency is of little consequence to the solipsistic agent. This is the ‘loss of world’ symptomatic of readings that take Kant’s philosophy too far beyond what Kant suggests, particularly as regards ‘Reason’ in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1998). To offset the solipsism of the subject wherein our fleeting sense impressions are equal in value—rendering the subject strictly an object of experience—Žižek follows Kant in placing the subject-in-itself outside thought as the empty, purely formal function of the ‘transcendental I.’⁵¹ That is to say, rather than provide a positive solution to enlist ontological closure, Kant takes his ‘transcendental turn’ and asserts a non-noumenal and non-phenomenal transcendental subject.⁵² This is the subject at the heart of Žižek’s philosophical project.

In *The Parallax View* Žižek is quick to highlight that, while similarly void, the subject-in-itself and the object-in-itself comport this emptiness in different ways. The transcendental object (*Ding-an-Sich*, or, Thing-in-itself) “is the void *beyond* phenomenal appearances,”⁵³ the domain of experience is herein contained by its own energy because what is beyond the experience of phenomena is void to experience itself as it is hidden from experience in the phenomena experienced.⁵⁴ An example of this definition is the way one cannot know another person’s thoughts directly and how we must therefore speculate if we are to interact with another’s thoughts at all. The gulf between subjects is evoked by the transcendental subject (what psychoanalysis calls ‘the split subject of desire’) who “*already appears as void.*”⁵⁵ To continue with our banal materialist example, if there were some link allowing us direct access to the thoughts of another person it would be a substantial object. Yet in the absence of this substantial link we must attempt to bridge the gap between ourselves and the Other through some contingent

⁵¹ Žižek, 2006: 20

⁵² Žižek, 2006: 21

⁵³ Žižek, 2006: 21

⁵⁴ Žižek, 2006: 21

⁵⁵ Žižek, 2006: 21

gesture like speech. Further than this, Žižek contends that the contingency of our gestures suggests that the disruption in the field of experience which conditions the plenitude of phenomena is due to there being a fundamental absence in the subject themselves.⁵⁶ If ontology is not closed by the presence of the subject, then the presence of the subject is not a substantial link between the ontological and the experiential but instead an emptiness which takes place in the abyss between the ontological and the experiential with no substantial being whatsoever.⁵⁷ Kant's contribution to Žižek's German Idealist influence is therefore the non-all structure of reality that affords the subject a presence but only insofar as the subject makes their contingent gesture—their being, ontologically—in the empty abyss of reality's inconsistency.

For the purposes of a critique of technology this ontological argument is important because it situates the subject of technologically mediated interactions in an intermediary position between technology, the variety of products produced through interacting with technology, and the meaningful ontology into which these things are embedded. The problem for Žižek is thus how to explain the grounding of ontology if, as per Kant, these objects are embedded in it; and if, as per Hegel, ontology unfolds dialectically. It is not a question of infinite regress ('What is the ground of the ground?') but rather how the forced decision of the subject *to be* creates a ground for their presence. Here Žižek turns to the third figure of his German Idealist interest: Schelling.

The work of Schelling provides Žižek with a sense of how something is produced. In *The Ticklish Subject* Žižek quotes the following line from Schelling, encapsulating this sense of production: "The beginning is the negation of that which begins it."⁵⁸ Incidentally, this quote appears at the opening of the section wherein Žižek outlines his post-Althusserian political influences.⁵⁹ While Schelling attempts to resolve the irreducible split between things-in-themselves and the 'transcendental I' arrived at by Kant by claiming Kant lapses from the original unity found at the starting point of philosophy, it is unclear

⁵⁶ Kolb, 1986: 87

⁵⁷ Žižek, 2006: 21

⁵⁸ Schelling in Žižek, 2000b: 127

⁵⁹ Žižek, 2000b: 127

whether Žižek's reading of Schelling takes Schelling at his word.⁶⁰ It seems far more likely that Žižek treats this unity as a negative and spectral dimension that precedes ontology rather than thinking this original unity of philosophy as a positive solution to reality's inconsistency as does Fichte or Schelling.⁶¹ As Žižek states in *The Ticklish Subject*:

“It was the great break through of German Idealism to outline the precise contours of this pre-ontological dimension of the spectral Real, which precedes and eludes the ontological constitution of reality.”⁶²

The use of the term ‘spectral’ here emphasises that to glimpse this pre-ontological realm of Schellingian divine madness where ‘God is not yet God’ is merely to note its withdrawal, nothing more.⁶³

A pre-ontological realm is not at hand either in the epistemological knowledge of science or the ontological function of being. It holds the status of what the poet Mallarmé calls ‘*futur antérieur*’—future perfect—a realm that is constructed retroactively from the moment consciousness interrupts itself, by coming up against an ontological fault or epistemological limitation and using this limit as a mark of totality.⁶⁴ The transposition of this interruption from the epistemological to the ontological by Hegel is applauded by Žižek, but in both Hegel and Schelling we find the subject is forced to assume that “the insufficiency of his knowledge with regard to reality signals the more radical insufficiency of reality itself.”⁶⁵ Schelling thus provides Žižek with a sense of production that is always retroactive, working in reverse from the objects of perception. This draws the comment from Laclau in his preface to Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that Žižek follows an anti-descriptivist tact wherein the ‘primal baptism of naming’ allows “the name [to continue] to refer to that *object* even if all the descriptive features of the object at the time of its baptism have disappeared.”⁶⁶ Žižek adds a Lacanian-Schellingian twist to this by arguing that the guarantee of a named object retaining its name even in

⁶⁰ Schelling in Schelling & Žižek, 1997: 123-127; Schelling, 1978: 99; Žižek, 1993: 39

⁶¹ Žižek, 2000b: 54-55; 1996: 13-16; Žižek in Schelling & Žižek, 1997: 4

⁶² Žižek, 2000b: 54

⁶³ Žižek, 2000b: 55

⁶⁴ Žižek, 2000b: 54

⁶⁵ Žižek, 2000b: 55

⁶⁶ Laclau in Žižek, 1989: xiii

the event of all the descriptive features changing is the “*retroactive effect of naming itself.*”⁶⁷

Because it is such a primordial place that is signalled by Žižek’s anti-descriptivism any critique of technology to be derived from Žižek’s philosophical project should not focus on the empirical instances of technologies. Instead, our focus must be directed to this surplus of epistemology and ontology, that surplus in the object “which stays the same in all possible worlds... the Lacanian *objet petit a.*”⁶⁸ We glimpse this surplus remainder of objects in positive (epistemological) reality as ‘the excess of subjectivisation in an objective shared universe.’ It is important to note however that throughout Žižek’s works the *objet petit a* stands for “the positivisation of a void,” the rupture in the ontological edifice of reality as it is brought to the fore by the subject’s existence.⁶⁹

The influence of the German Idealists on Žižek’s work has a powerful and mitigating effect. It forces Žižek to recognise that the ontology in which a subject participates is open but yet also threatened with closure by the very presence of the subject. This ontological danger of the subject is circumvented by the subject’s forced choice to be a vanishing-mediator because they participate both in epistemological and ontological realms—thought and being—simultaneously. And yet because of this dual interaction the subject can be interrupted by the overlaying of some problem of thought onto the structure of being, i.e. Žižek takes the example of Bertrand Russell’s declaration of his love for Lady Ottoline Morrell after which Russell realised that he *did* love Lady Ottoline—“I did not know I loved you till I heard myself telling you so.”⁷⁰ Russell’s speech suddenly no longer had a gap between its enunciation and its meaning. For Žižek this subsumption of the epistemological into the ontological domain gestures to the pre-ontological unity found in Schelling. This primordial realm of divine madness where ‘God is not yet God’ facilitates Žižek’s anti-descriptivist position. Interestingly, this facilitation also binds Žižek to the work of Martin Heidegger in the way ontology finds

⁶⁷ Laclau in Žižek, 1989: xiii

⁶⁸ Laclau in Žižek, 1989: xiii-xiv

⁶⁹ Laclau in Žižek, 1989: xiv ; Daly in Carver & Martin (eds), 2006: 312

⁷⁰ Russell in Žižek, 2000b: 54

its ground in itself.⁷¹ It is from this grounding that all epistemological and contingent objects come to be as they are named. This is the well-spring for the critique of technology to be presented herein; the line of thought that traces the very consideration of technology as technological to its primordial inscription in the structure of being (*Sein*).

III – Post-Althusserian Politics

With the grounding of his philosophical project defined through the work of the German Idealists, Žižek takes up the work of several post-Althusserian political philosophers to sporadically examine and critique technology as it manifests in social and political constellations, events, and institutions. Four thinkers stand out in Žižek's thought as taking precedence in this field: Alain Badiou, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière, and Laclau.⁷² These thinkers “began as Althusserians and then elaborated their own distinctive positions by distancing themselves from their starting point.”⁷³ As mentioned previously, Althusser was crucial for Žižek and his Slovenian colleagues in the secession of Slovenia from old Yugoslavia. By taking up these post-Althusserian thinkers Žižek is merely following the logic of his programme to critique politicisation, though now this critique is taking place on a more international stage and varies its tact with the ideology-critique made pertinent by these four political philosophers.⁷⁴ The distinctive positions of Badiou, Balibar, Rancière, and Laclau are deployed by Žižek in a consistent fashion throughout his catalogue of works to articulate matters woven with universality such as the ‘passion of the Real’ (Badiou), *égaliberté* (Balibar), human rights (Rancière), and antagonism (Laclau). These thinkers also serve to fuel Žižek's understanding of technology in its social and political dimensions where, “as Engels already put it, the ‘administration of people’ will vanish in the ‘administration of things’.”⁷⁵ As we shall see, in his engagement with these four post-Althusserian thinkers Žižek appropriates their

⁷¹ Heidegger, 2006: 78-79; Žižek, 1993: 269n42; 2000b: 23; 2006: 194-195

⁷² Žižek, 2000b: 127-128 & 172

⁷³ Žižek, 2000b: 127

⁷⁴ See *Welcome to the Desert of the Real, Iraq* (2004), *Revolution at the Gates* (2002), and *In Defence of Lost Causes*.

⁷⁵ Žižek in Rancière, 2006: 75

project of theorising the political against “the reduction of the sphere of economy (material production) to an ‘ontic’ sphere deprived of ‘ontological dignity’.”⁷⁶

Žižek mentions Badiou when he focuses on the impossibility of universality in the practicality of party politics; for example “how can a human animal forsake its animality and put its life in the service of a transcendent Truth?”⁷⁷ Badiou is given reference in this way throughout both *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Parallax View*.⁷⁸ In an essay on Badiou included in the edited volume *Think Again* (2004) Žižek focuses on the way this impossible universality is marked by a ‘passion of the Real;’ “in contrast to the nineteenth century of the utopian or ‘scientific’ projects and ideals, plans about the future, the twentieth century aimed at delivering the thing itself.”⁷⁹ Žižek herein considers Badiou to be presenting a Platonic sense of the political “grounded in the universal form-of-thought.”⁸⁰ Whereas as Žižek’s German Idealist influences, especially Kant, distanced the subject from confrontation with the thing-in-itself, Badiou brings Žižek into close proximity with the Thing by comporting it as an extreme violence that tears away the symbolic layers of social reality, exposing the ‘authentic’ social relation.⁸¹ Badiou (and Rancière) lead the Žižekian reading to treat this violently exposed core as a supernumerary element “which belongs to the set [of social reality] but has no distinctive place in it.”⁸² But it is Badiou that gives the twist to this supernumerary element or ‘empty set’ which draws Žižek’s reading further toward the Real.

According to Žižek, Badiou proposes that the violent exposition of the passion of the Real occurs through two diverging logics: purification and subtraction. In purification the Thing is unearthed in the raw moment of an encounter. Žižek takes the example of Ernst

⁷⁶ Žižek in Rancière, 2006: 75

⁷⁷ Žižek, 2006: 166; no particular volumes authored by Badiou stand out as points of return for Žižek, but he does draw on the variety of Badiou’s catalogue that has been translated into English including *Ethics* (2001), *Saint Paul* (2003), *Infinite Thought* (2005), and *Being and Event* (2005a). Badiou’s companion volume for *Being and Event* in French, *Logiques des Mondes* (2005), is referred to by Žižek in *Traversing the Fantasy* (2005).

⁷⁸ Žižek, 2000b: 127-245; 2006: 318-328

⁷⁹ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 165

⁸⁰ Žižek in Rancière, 2006: 74; Badiou, 2005: 52-59

⁸¹ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 165

⁸² Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 165-166

Jünger's celebration of "face-to-face combat as the model of an authentic intersubjective encounter" to demonstrate this process of purification.⁸³ In contrast, the process of subtraction begins from the Thing and removes all determinate/descriptive features, then attempts to establish a minimal difference between this gap (Abyss) devoid of features and the object functioning as its stand-in—the supernumerary element or 'empty set.'⁸⁴ Here Žižek draws on the example of the Christian experience, "it is the very radical separation of man from God which unites us with God, since, in the figure of Christ, God is thoroughly separated *from himself*."⁸⁵ Badiou thus charges Žižek with a fidelity to opening up ontology as measured against a background of confronting the Real-Thing as an impasse or traversing through this supernumerary element and rendering the empty set socially visible.⁸⁶ This comportment of Badiou in Žižek aptly captures how the 'politicisation of' and 'meeting with' technology as a social encounter demands a confrontation with the technological at the point where it is deprived of its determinate characteristics such as usefulness, where it moves from being a mere contingent tool to a primordially inscribed element in the surface of social reality.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, Žižek's encounter with Badiou constrains any seeking for the Real of technology within a fluctuation of passion: "it is Badiou who is unable to expand the encounter of the Real into a *discourse*."⁸⁸ This confines the truth of technology to the outside of any structure where such truth would have its proper place. Badiou thus wishes to sublimate "the exploding negativity"⁸⁹ of truth into a new order of universality where the truth stands in for this violent negativity of the Real and domesticates it, dignifying it as "*an indifference that tolerates differences*."⁹⁰

Žižek also appears to support discussions of universality in Balibar's work. For instance, in *Tarrying with the Negative* Balibar's highlighting of the reflected form of postmodern

⁸³ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 165

⁸⁴ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 165

⁸⁵ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 168

⁸⁶ Badiou, 2005a: 232-239; Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 171

⁸⁷ Žižek in Hallward, 2003: xi

⁸⁸ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 177

⁸⁹ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 177

⁹⁰ Badiou, 2003: 99; Badiou, 2005: 46; Hallward, 2003: 155-156; Noys, 'The Provocations of Alain Badiou' 2003: 123-125

'meta-racism' is discussed to highlight the dangers of the "cosmopolitan universalists."⁹¹ And in *The Ticklish Subject* we find a discussion of three modes of universality leading toward *égaliberté*: the abstract processes of globalisation and its internal exclusions, the imagined communities giving the subject a (negative) distance from their immediate social group, and "the revolutionary demand for *égaliberté*, which remains an unconditional excess... and can thus never be 'gentrified,' included in the existing order."⁹² In these three modes of universality, abstraction-negation-ideation, Balibar delivers Žižek to the problematic return to local and subnational modes of identification wherein traditional ethnic identity is expressed in an insubstantial series of lifestyle choices, in contrast to the previous violent impositions of 'authentic' national identification.⁹³ Within this field of identification Žižek holds that universality is the ultimate horizon of politics that nonetheless threatens politics proper.⁹⁴ This threat is, analytically speaking, the tension between the empty set of universality and the symbolic constellation of 'everything in its right place' in politics proper. The upheaval of such a universalisation appears as a non-functional cruelty:

"A cruelty whose manifestations range from 'fundamentalist' racist and/or religious slaughter to the 'senseless' outbursts of violence by adolescents and the homeless in our megalopolises... Violence grounded in no utilitarian or ideological reason."⁹⁵

This codification frames the excessive violence of Real-passion in Žižek's work as the price we pay for elevating an ideal universality like *égaliberté* where all must be equal and stand for the whole.⁹⁶ Žižek notes that such senseless, excessive violence is a necessary constituent of keeping the structure of being open. This is in consonance with what Heidegger noted as the danger of modern technology: it is not that it will go awry and cause some excessive violence, but rather that it will function as intended and "nothing will go wrong."⁹⁷ Such smooth operation closes the gap between ontology and

⁹¹ Žižek, 1993: 226

⁹² Žižek, 2000b: 213

⁹³ Žižek, 2000b: 214

⁹⁴ This threat of discontinuity and disruption also plays a role in Žižek's musings on Christianity. (Hewitt-Horsman, 'Žižek on Christianity,' 2006: 108-109)

⁹⁵ Žižek, 2000b: 201

⁹⁶ Balibar, 'The Subject,' 2003: 18-21; Žižek, 2000b: 235

⁹⁷ Žižek, 2006: 195

epistemology, in the process reducing the subject to yet another object of science. Through Žižek's reading of Heidegger in *The Parallax View* the concerns of Balibar drawn out in *The Ticklish Subject* are thus further distilled: it is in the very fascination with technology—the promise to cure all known genetic diseases for example—that we find the greatest danger of technology, that it will stand-in for the universal and subsume humanity under its banner.⁹⁸

The work of Rancière is taken up by Žižek to further articulate the problem of these universalist claims. In *The Parallax View* we find Žižek speaking through Rancière to emphasise the dilemmas of human rights, “when they are of no use, you do the same as charitable persons do with their old clothes. You give them to the poor... They become humanitarian rights.”⁹⁹ Žižek is pointing to the way human rights are depoliticised in the way they allow Western powers to intervene in Third World nations by treating them as victims of human rights abuse.¹⁰⁰ The target of Rancière's critique in Žižek's eyes is thus the litigious plight of the “part of no-part” to become socially visible and stand for the whole.¹⁰¹ An understanding of the rampant process of obsolescence undergone by technology may benefit from this particular part of Rancière's philosophy, particularly as it appears in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2006), as it offers the opportunity to think the marginalised socio-political/aesthetic dimension of technology. In this marginalised socio-political and aesthetic dimension, technology is deprived of its usefulness and rationality to become visible and stand for the totality of technology in place of the tyranny of technical mastery.¹⁰² Such a situation debunks the abhorrent ontological closure instigated by the conception of technology bound up with the domination of the natural world which so concerned Heidegger and continues to haunt other French thinkers outside Žižek's post-Althusserian influences such as Paul Virilio.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Žižek, 2006: 194-195

⁹⁹ Rancière in Žižek, 2006: 341

¹⁰⁰ Žižek, 2006: 341

¹⁰¹ Žižek, 2000b: 232; Žižek in Rancière, 2006: 79

¹⁰² For a further discussion of ‘technical mastery’ see Section A.2 and Section C.2.

¹⁰³ See in particular Heidegger's essay ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ (Heidegger in Krell (ed), 1993: 307-341) and Virilio's *Art and Fear* (2004) and *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*. (1991)

In the work of Badiou, Balibar, and Rancière it is the subjectivisation of the subject that is at stake, caught between the ontic logic of everyday objects where ‘the administration of people’ becomes ‘the administration of things’ and the structure of being where the subject manifests itself as an intervention that might open ontology or draw in closure upon it.¹⁰⁴ In both cases it is clearly the claim to universality that is at issue. And herein, the universalising of the subject as a ‘person’ or a ‘thing’ is problematic, neither being reducible to the other yet the subject necessarily has the possibility of functioning as both. This instability antagonises the fundamental ontological function of the subject because it is this ontology of the subject that facilitates the possibility of both the ontic phenomenal ‘person’ and the administrative ‘thing.’

Žižek turns to Laclau’s post-Marxist project of radical democracy to provide a backdrop to his predominantly Lacanian accounting for antagonism.¹⁰⁵ Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001) provides an accounting for antagonism as “the presence of the ‘Other’ prevents me from being totally myself... Antagonism is the failure of difference... [Antagonisms] constitute the limits of society.”¹⁰⁶ In this way antagonism defines the limits of the ontic and ontological categories, the very limits of the gap in which the subjectivisation of the subject takes place. Antagonism underlies Žižek’s sense of how universality interrupts ontology. The debate between Judith Butler, Laclau, and Žižek in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000) captures Žižek’s shift from Laclau and Mouffe’s definition of antagonism in the presence of the Other:

“Alienation *in* the big Other is followed by separation *from* the big Other. Separation takes place when the subject realizes how the big Other is in itself inconsistent, purely virtual, ‘barred’, deprived of the Thing.”¹⁰⁷

While Žižek shares Laclau’s comportment of antagonism in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* as “the ‘reflective’ overlapping of internal and external difference” he also

¹⁰⁴ In the same way German Idealism pinpoints the position of the subject in the gap between the ontological and the epistemological for Žižek.

¹⁰⁵ Parker, 2004: 82-83; Žižek’s first English-language book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, and its companion volume *For They Know Not What They Do* were published in the Verso *Phronesis* series edited by Laclau & Mouffe—Parker (2004: 3) alludes to the possibility that Laclau was trying to recruit Žižek to the ‘radical democracy’ project, as suggested by the preface to *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

¹⁰⁶ Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 125

¹⁰⁷ Žižek in Butler, *et al*, 2000: 253

takes this a step further in marking the confrontation with the Thing on the side of the subject and not the Other.¹⁰⁸ For Žižek, the big Other is the domain of symbolic fictions and it is here that he reads society through Laclau and Mouffe's thesis that 'society does not exist' as a proper epistemological object.¹⁰⁹ However, Laclau has taken issue with the way Žižek mobilises Lacanian psychoanalysis to read the cultural objects produced by social processes.¹¹⁰

Žižek's path to technology therefore brings it under the auspices of the social and this makes its ontological embedding far from a simplistic matter. It is in Žižek's very definition of universality that we find an allegory for technology:

“Universality becomes ‘actual’ precisely and only by rendering thematic the exclusions on which it is grounded, by continuously questioning, renegotiating, displacing them, that is, by assuming the gap between its own form and content, by conceiving itself as unaccomplished in its very notion.”¹¹¹

In the frame of the critique to be conducted herein, technology as a universal notion (i.e. we recognise technology as technological, not art (*techne*), and so on) assumes the position of the subject insofar as the subject's subjectivisation takes place in the gap between the ontological form and the ontic content. This argument allows Žižek to critique technology as problematic when it operates smoothly and without interruption because *the task of the subject is to intervene*, as was previously demonstrated through Žižek's ties to the Heideggerian critique of technology.¹¹²

IV – Psychoanalysis, Žižek's ‘Clinic’

In Žižek's various psychoanalytic engagements this political and philosophical formulation of ‘intervention’ as the *raison d'être* of the subject acquires a specific nuance. The work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan forms the bulk of Žižek's psychoanalytic interpretative framework. Indeed, Parker has noted Žižek treats Lacan's

¹⁰⁸ Žižek in Butler, *et al*, 2000: 215

¹⁰⁹ Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 126 ; Žižek, 2000b: 174

¹¹⁰ Laclau in Butler, *et al*, 2000: 203-205; Parker, 2004: 111

¹¹¹ Žižek in Butler, *et al*, 2000: 102

¹¹² Žižek, ‘What Can Psychoanalysis Tell Us About Cyberspace?’ 2004: 805-809

work as a toolkit for interpreting many things from Hegel to popular culture. Parker uses the phrase “Lacan-machine” to characterise Žižek’s particular style of deploying Lacanian theory.¹¹³ This ‘Lacan-machine’ is in effect a modification of Lacanian theory with the replacement of clinical elements with philosophical and abstract formulations that speak to “the nature of the subject.”¹¹⁴

It is this nature of the subject that provides the impetus for intervention to be the *raison d’être* of the subject. Where Hegel, Kant, and Schelling present an understanding of why the subject is always-already broken, Lacan’s theory of the subject is a subject of lack which rests on the background of absolute negativity invoked by these German Idealists.¹¹⁵ In *The Ticklish Subject* Žižek binds Lacan to German Idealism in the following way:

“Lacan’s point is not that the subject is inscribed into the very ontological structure of the universe as its constitutive void, but that ‘subject’ designates the contingency of an Act that sustains the very ontological order of being.”¹¹⁶

This Lacanian subject is the subject found in the later works of Lacan produced during the 1970s such as *Seminar XI: The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (1998) and *Seminar XX (Encore): On feminine sexuality, the limits of love and knowledge* (1998a).¹¹⁷ And such a subject is also bound to the post-Althusserian tradition by Žižek: “‘Subject’ does not open up a hole in the full order of Being: ‘subject’ is the contingent-excessive gesture that constitutes the very universal order of Being.”¹¹⁸ Notice here the interplay between the universal and contingency, how they appear on the same side of an asymmetrical relation between being and thought. Thought is sustained by being insofar as it is a contingent gesture that sustains “the universal order of Being.”¹¹⁹ When the contingency of this gesture is overthrown—as with the threat of ontological closure presented by technology’s supplementing the position of the subject—there is a horrendous loss of structure that endangers ‘the universal order of Being.’

¹¹³ Parker, 2004: 117 & 121

¹¹⁴ Parker, 2004: 117

¹¹⁵ Parker, 2004: 107-110

¹¹⁶ Žižek, 2000b: 160

¹¹⁷ Parker, 2004: 117

¹¹⁸ Žižek, 2000b: 160

¹¹⁹ Žižek, 2000b: 160

Lacan is used by Žižek to register ontology in three modes: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. These modalities form the basic coordinates of Žižek's psychoanalytic understanding of existence. The Imaginary is the theatre of fantasy where enjoyment is pre-empted through a process of binary-opposition between the way things are and the contingency of the subject. Three relations appear to define the Imaginary space: the 'imaginary image' which functions as a decoy that diverts us from reality, the 'imaginary symbol' that appears as a Jungian symbol or New Age archetype, and the 'real fantasy' which occupies the abyssal void of the Thing.¹²⁰ The Symbolic is the domain of separation where signs and language more generally codify being in a way that is anathema to imaginary fantasisation. The Symbolic overwrites the Imaginary with structure, effectively intervening in the 'wild' flow of imagination between the subject's ego and their fetish objects.¹²¹ The relations of the Symbolic are: the 'imaginary symbol' as stated above, the 'symbolic speech' manifest as meaningful language, and the 'real signifier' which is a senseless formula displaced from the network of signifiers that give reference to it.¹²² Where the Imaginary and the Symbolic consumed Lacan's work in the earlier periods from the 1950s and through the 1960s, it is the mode of the Real that characterises much of his later work. The Real is the mark of a limit internal to being where being is traversed by something exceeding the gentrification of the Symbolic or the mysticism of the Imaginary as with 'the universal order of Being.' Like the other modes the Real comes in three variations: the 'Imaginary-Real' where some sublime dimension shines through an ordinary object, the 'Symbolic-Real' where a chain of signifiers is reduced to a senseless formula no longer able to be assimilated into our everyday experience—as with the Heisenberg uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics—and the 'Real-Real' which is the primordial Thing and its acerbic presence that seems to monstrously consume symbolic reality.¹²³ It is of crucial note that we do not consider these variations of the modes as separate instances; they are co-extensive with one another. As Terry Eagleton has commented this coextension of modes coupled with a

¹²⁰ Žižek, 2002a: xii

¹²¹ Lacan, 2006: 231

¹²² Žižek, 2002a: xii

¹²³ Žižek, 2002a: xii

comprehension of dialectics has led much of Žižek's writing to unfold in a tripartite structure where what is first posited (Imaginary) is then argued through (Symbolic) and arrives at the reverse of the initial position (Real).¹²⁴ We can note this structure exists across much of Žižek's literature, and even in his spoken word in such films as Sophie Fiennes' documentary *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006). But let us turn back to Lacan.

The "Holy Trinity of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic" forms a guide to the way a critique of technology can be derived from Žižek's Lacanian overtures.¹²⁵ Our route is to be one riven with the Real. Because Žižek's key focus is the Real, his appropriation of Lacan reveals a visage of the psychoanalyst who is an

"Alarming, uncanny sort of theorist... Who teaches that the Real which makes us what we are is not only traumatic and impenetrable but cruel, obscene, vacuous, meaningless and horrifically enjoyable."¹²⁶

If we dare to take technology into the realm of the Real then it is to be understood within this unabashedly alarming frame, not merely the insidious caricature presented by Heidegger and various contemporary accounts relying on the Heideggerian analysis.¹²⁷ The Lacan that appears in Žižek is thus not the fashionable post-structuralist Lacan we might find elsewhere, but a figure who names us as the inhuman monster who is permanently pregnant with 'desire.'¹²⁸ As Žižek states at the opening of Fiennes' documentary:

"The problem for us is not how [our] desires are satisfied or not. The problem is how do we know what we desire? There is nothing spontaneous, nothing natural about human desires. Our desires are artificial; we have to be 'taught' to desire."¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Eagleton, 2003: 196-206

¹²⁵ Eagleton, 2003: 196

¹²⁶ Eagleton, 2003: 196-197

¹²⁷ Such accounts tend to succumb to the self-referentiality of representation as with Cooper (2002), be impenetrably aporetic like Kroker (1992), or polemical as Virilio (2004). Flieger (2005: 51-65) provides a useful analysis of Žižek's arguments around cyberspace, but in pointing to simplifications in Žižek's account the specific mechanics of Žižek's Lacanian analysis seem to be overlooked.

¹²⁸ Eagleton, 2003: 196

¹²⁹ Žižek in Fiennes, 2006

Such a constellation of desire arrives in Lacan's middle and later seminars, particularly *Seminar XI*.¹³⁰ As Parker has noted, this later region of Lacan's teaching has the distinct lineage of being taken up by Jacques-Alain Miller in the 1980s.¹³¹ Indeed, Žižek has a "faithful filiation" with Miller and this becomes crucial if we are to understand the nuances of Žižek's reading of Lacan.¹³²

The later Lacan in Žižek's work has distinct tones of its formalisation by Miller. The Millerian Lacan "is a version of late Lacan distilled by [Miller] in the 1980s."¹³³ However, this does not account for the way Žižek creates a 'Lacan-machine' to read Hegel, Schelling, and so forth. Miller appears in Žižek as a militant Lacanian-in-arms, where the International Psychoanalytic Association is a church of sorts:

"What I claim is that this opposition is actual even today in the field where I'm active, for example, in the relationship between [the] International Psychoanalytic Association, the orthodox one and the Lacanian movement. The IPA is the psychoanalytic church, excommunicating people from its ranks only when it feels effectively threatened, prone to endless debates, compromises, and so on and so on. I claim that we Lacanians are, on the contrary, the psychoanalytic army, a combative group working towards an aggressive re-conquest defined by the antagonism between us and them, avoiding, rejecting even the tolerant olive branch of the IPA: Come back, we accept you only if you also make a compromise and change slightly the form of your activity."¹³⁴

Thus it is important to note the influence of Miller on Žižek is one that codifies his appropriation of Lacan.¹³⁵ As Miller is a self-identified disciple of Lacan however, for the purposes of this dissertation we shall refer to Lacan only.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Lacan, 1998: 29-41

¹³¹ Parker, 2004: 117

¹³² Parker, 2004: 94

¹³³ Parker, 2004: 117

¹³⁴ Žižek, 'Human Rights and its Discontents,' 1999

¹³⁵ For a neatly written example of this comportment of Lacan see Žižek's 'Concesso non Dato' in *Traversing the Fantasy* (2005: 219-220).

¹³⁶ Miller, 'Response to the Anti-Freudians' 2005

The neo-Freudian thought of Lacan-with-Miller furnishes Žižek's theoretical edifice with a fundamental matrix through which to consider the aforementioned traditions influencing Žižek: German philosophical Idealism and post-Althusserian political philosophy. In turn this means that the Real undergoes a process of filtration and condensation in these other traditions as they appear in Žižek's analyses. From *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* to *Revolution at the Gates* we can see particular attention being paid to the impossibility of universality; in *Tarrying with the Negative*, *The Ticklish Subject*, and *The Parallax View* we can observe points of resistance, lack, and the concealment of horror in the very conceptual apparatus of Žižek himself. With these traditions of thought thus outlined let us now turn to the fundamental concepts of taken up by Žižek from which a critique of technology and the ontologies of the subject begin through *techné*.

V – Žižek's Placing of Technology

The above survey of Žižek's work has elucidated three strong streams of thought entwined in Žižek's critical project. However, when we turn our gaze to Žižek's treatment of technology within this tripartite framing of his analyses several key features emerge for consideration. Firstly, technology is often used as an example in Žižek's analyses to further a critical argument, and herein technology is essentially conceived in its 'everyday' understanding as a man-made artifice. The second point to note is that Žižek's abundant use of Lacanian concepts necessarily requires him to engage in a conceptualising of technology in its totality of significance, otherwise understood as the Symbolic register constituted by the chain of signification that is represented by the same algebraic matheme, S_2 , which Lacan uses to designate knowledge. This second point is crucial to understanding how—as raised in the first point above—Žižek is able to reveal a 'logic' at work in the structure of technology as a phenomenon. Herein constructing a list of all of Žižek's usages of technology as grist to his analytical mill would miss the significance of how Žižek places these examples in such a specific way so as to further develop his critical discussions.¹³⁷ Rather, we are here better served by sceptically

¹³⁷ Žižek in Bowman & Stamp (eds), 2007: 233-235

examining if there is anything else contributing to Žižek's *a priori* conceptualisation of technology.

Situated as he is between Idealist philosophy, post-Althusserian politics, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Žižek has a tendency to use examples of technology to further what he is attempting to show through these modalities. However, this does not leave technology at the merely naïve understanding of a man-made artifice. From Žižek's discussions of cyberspace in *The Plague of Fantasies* and *On Belief* to artificial life in *In Defense of Lost Causes*, what first appears as a man-made artifice is reconstituted by the critical interrogation in which it appears. Indeed, because Žižek's critical project is able to elucidate and demystify the ideological and fantasised content of technology we are able to confront technology in a far more primordial sense which one can call 'crafting' or *techne*.

This critical understanding of technology as '*techne*' intimately connects Žižek's conceptual coordinates of technology to Heidegger's critique of technology in *Being and Time*, *Mindfulness*, and the seminal essay *The Question Concerning Technology*.¹³⁸ As the etymological root of technology, the Greek term *techne* directs attention to the process of inscribing the structure of ontology on the ontic realm of phenomenal appearances. Herein, discussions of technology that attempt to define particular technological phenomena remains mired in the lustful gadgetry of usefulness because it does not go beyond the quotidian of the mundane ontic manifestation of 'the technical object.' Like Heidegger's analyses, Žižek's discussions are able to move beyond the ontic manifestation of technologies to question the fundamental assumptions that contribute to the idea of technology, its limits, and its possibilities. This becomes very clear when Žižek, like Heidegger, reads forms of industrialised production as perverse expressions of *techne* that abrogate the grounding of the totality of technology in the structure of existential ontology.¹³⁹ Thus Žižek is able to address the spirit of expressivity that is lost when technology is usually treated merely as instrumentation.

¹³⁸ Heidegger in Krell (ed), 1993: 307-341

¹³⁹ Žižek, 2008: 447-452

In summary, Žižek's treatment of *techne* therefore forms a focal point for subsequent discussions in succeeding chapters. These later chapters will not be seeking particularities of technical objects. Rather, our discussion will be critically examining the grounding of technology revealed through Žižek's emerging body of work for the purpose of distilling a philosophically and psychoanalytically informed account of how the human being can negotiate their co-existence with the totality of technology in symbolic social reality.

VI – Conclusion

In this chapter we have succinctly examined the emergence of Žižek from the historiographic environment of ex-Yugoslavia, the entwining of German Idealist philosophy, post-Althusserian political thought, and Lacanian psychoanalysis in his body of work, and distilled a preliminary sketch of where we will be taking Žižek's thought in the later chapters. We began with the crucial point that there is always a dark contingency, a blind spot, at work in his writing and analyses. It was shown that this dark contingency formed the basis for Žižek's elaborations of the subject as a *noir subject*. Our discussion of Žižek's deployment of Hegel, Kant, and Schelling further drew out the contours of this subject as a reflexive negativity that vanishes in the mediation between the ontic and the ontological. This was subsequently recast in our discussion of post-Althusserian political thought with the important recognition of the mysterious emergence of a political subject devoted to a Cause from the forsaken animality of the human being. This rereading of the subject emphasised the importance of considering the 'impossibility' of totalisation, of reducing the subject to merely animality or politicisation alone. Leading into our discussion of Žižek's use of Rancière we noted the way this impossibility served a vital function of disrupting the quotidian of our everyday lives wherein the real danger of technology was that it would be totalised, that nothing would go wrong. From here we elucidated the mandate carried through by Žižek's critical project: the task of the subject is to intervene. This overture of intervention was then given further emphasis in our brief discussion of Lacan's theory of the subject of lack. Herein we noted that Žižek binds Lacan to the tradition of German Idealism through understanding the subject as the contingent designation of an "Act that sustains the very

ontological order of being.”¹⁴⁰ Were this contingency to be normalised then the subject necessarily confronts the threat of ontological closure.

With this danger of ontological closure thus delineated we then moved on to a brief accounting for Žižek’s conception of technology. This discussion demonstrated the focal point of the future chapters and the thesis as a whole: the primordial grounding of *techne*. In closing, in this chapter we have examined the major philosophical and theoretical traditions that have influenced Žižek’s work to the end of locating the grounds for a critique of technology. And herein it became clear that a critical discussion of technology requires that we engage with the ontological structure of the technological, that is, with *techne*.

¹⁴⁰ Žižek, 2000b: 160

A.2 The Impossibility of the Phantasmatic Promise after Nihilism

Self-Knowledge for Itself – A Gap Filled by Fantasy – The Transparent Cogito – The Fetishist’s Lie – The Concomitant Betrayal of Possibility in the Disappearance of Fantasy – Conclusion

In this chapter our discussion of the ontological problematic of technology will focus on how the epoch of the twenty-first century is marked by a structural triumph of imagination over order in Žižek’s analyses. It is vital that we engage this critique of overdetermination by Žižek if we are to understand the primordial grounding of technology as *techne* unveiled in the previous chapter because it is a problem that directly involves the ontology of the subject and, therein, their ‘existential’ extension through *techne*. Herein this chapter will unveil the necessary conceptual machinery that underlies the critique of technology and the critical re-evaluation of *techne* to be taken up in future chapters, and therein the thesis as a whole. So let us now turn to the problematic relation of the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

This chapter will demonstrate that this triumph of the Imaginary is not singularly ideological, and that it is Žižek’s sensitivity to the ideological underpinnings of contemporary cultural production and political action that make his critical perspective valuable to the examination of this important shift. The de-emphasis of the socio-political and symbolic orders by the embellishments of imagination will be revealed as an outgrowth of what Žižek perceives to be an expressly ‘discursive’ development in how we register what is real and of importance in the world around us. Like Badiou, Žižek considers the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to be defined by a passion for the Real. This passion for the Real stands in distinction to the fascination with the Imaginary during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Real and the Imaginary are stated here with all the Lacanian weighting that Žižek infers in his discussion. This weight reveals the Real as the register of the undetermined object, things such as abstract formulae, sublime beauty, and the monstrous—and even *techne* itself. On the other hand the Imaginary is accorded the role of registering binary significations, things such as

Jungian archetypes, scenarios we imagine in our daydreams, and the disquieting magnitudes of raw passion and horrific terror. As we shall see, it is this psychoanalytic theoretical underpinning that provides much of the critical structure for Žižek's ideology-critique and his negotiation of the conceptual registers of the Real and the Imaginary.

It will also be shown that given Žižek's profuse Lacanian dogmatics the master's and university discourses prefigured by Lacan are critical to recognising this structural/discursive shift from the Imaginary to the Real. We shall see how each discourse constructs a different subject while adhering to the matrix at the heart of Lacanian psychoanalysis: the barred subject of desire, the empty vessel of the master-signifier for which there is no correlative meaning, the quasi-transcendental object-cause of desire, and knowledge. These four aspects are structured in such a way that the subject is always in some relation to their object-cause of desire, be it through the empty place of the master-signifier or the endlessly referential structure of knowledge. Likewise, the master-signifier is empty because there is no direct relation between it and knowledge; there is always a mediation of knowledge by the subject or the object-cause of desire. Thus the master's discourse and the university discourse will be shown to favour the master-signifier and knowledge respectively.

Another critical point to be raised is that the sites of negotiation for each discourse manifest at the point where the over-determining factor comes up against a point of resistance. It will be shown how this resistance is embodied by the other term of the discourse, that which is diametrically opposed to the over-determining factor within the context of the Lacanian matrix. In the instance of this discussion we will discuss this resistance in the master's and the university discourses by deploying the following qualifications. In both these discourses the subject appears in the midst of mastering their desires and the objects of desire that hold out a promise of providing something otherwise unattainable. Like his liege Lacan, Žižek links philosophy with the discourse of the master.¹⁴¹ Herein we find an understanding of philosophy as a process of developing grand systems that produce totalising explanations. Against this over-determination of

¹⁴¹ Evans, 1996: 144

total explanation the discourse of the master locates the constantly desiring subject as the one able to escape from the awe of the master's "pure prestige."¹⁴² This contrary subject is Cartesian to the extent that they do not believe in the grandeur of the master, that they persistently find themselves doubting their own doubts about the prestige of the master. Herein every attempt at totalisation by the master results in failure because the subject 'doing the dirty work' constitutes the remainder of the discourse. What the master wants done—their *objet petit a*—is obtained by their loyal subjects. Dylan Evans refers to such a framing as "the reverse of psychoanalysis," and this may well suggest one of the tensions inherent in the work of Žižek given his engagement with both philosophy and psychoanalysis.¹⁴³

The university discourse is derivative of the master's discourse, using identical terms but in a different rotation. In the university discourse knowledge is the over-determining factor, present in modernity as "the hegemony of science" and the technological.¹⁴⁴ This over-determination in the language of technology finds a point of resistance in the argument for mastery itself. As Evans notes, behind each attempt to impart neutral knowledge we can locate some effort at the "mastery of knowledge, and domination of the other to whom this knowledge is imparted."¹⁴⁵ In the same way, Žižek speaks of the ideological shibboleth of modern science; that the purported neutrality of scientific knowledge is in fact ideologically loaded.¹⁴⁶ The effect of the presence of such an incongruous element is the definition of the constitutive elements in a given discourse. And Žižek's analyses revolve on this disjunction and its effects, whether the examination is of the films of Hitchcock or the 'War on Terror.' It is this university discourse of knowledge production that is the focus of this chapter, in the context of the passion for the Real and the repositioning of the Imaginary. Thus this chapter will also chart the contours of the resistance at the heart of the 'language of technology' as it is instantiated by the university discourse.

¹⁴² Kojève in Evans, 1996: 105

¹⁴³ Evans, 1996: 144

¹⁴⁴ Evans, 1996: 46

¹⁴⁵ Evans, 1996: 46

¹⁴⁶ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1998: 3

I – Self-Knowledge for Itself

Žižek utilises the master's and university discourses in his attempt to distinguish the current historical situation, the *fin-de-siècle* of the twentieth century, from Freud's analysis of what was then a contemporaneous Victorian culture at the turning of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century.¹⁴⁷ In this way Žižek is able to designate Freud's analysis of civilisation in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (2002) a discussion of the master's discourse, the era when capitalism firmly entrenched itself and spawned a series of social alternatives including socialism under Lenin and Stalin.¹⁴⁸ It has been noted by Yannis Stavrakakis, Geoffery Harpham, Parker, and others that Žižek does not produce an alternative to today's advanced capitalism because he is not interested in historicising Freud.¹⁴⁹ This refusal of historicism alludes to the thrust of Žižek's foray into critical social, political, and cultural analysis to change the very framing of the way we think about society, science, politics, and culture. And it is in this sense that Žižek finds himself engaged in the discourse of the university where one can shift endlessly between perspectives between science, politics, and so forth as domains of knowledge unto themselves.

If the master's discourse marks the era of Freud for Žižek it is the discourse of the university that distinguishes the twenty-first century.¹⁵⁰ Knowledge mitigates the university discourse in opposition to desire, promising itself as neutral knowledge that is free of vested ideological agendas or pathological interests.¹⁵¹ This in turn produces a subject barred from knowledge in its totality. Such a totality of knowledge is even hidden from knowledge itself as it constantly works to discover more. Here we find Žižek's reading of Lacan with modern science: it is impossible to explain everything but knowledge is prized above all else and so everything must be revealed.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Žižek, 1992: 136 & 140-143

¹⁴⁸ Freud, 2002: 39-41; Žižek, 2006: 311; 2001a: 2-3; Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1994: 8-9

¹⁴⁹ Stavrakakis, 'The Lure of Antigone,' 2003: 117-129; Harpham, 'Doing the Impossible,' 2003: 453-485; Parker, 2004: 107-114; Glynos, 'Radical Democratic Ethos,' 2003: 199-201; Boucher, *et al* (eds), 2005; Foster, 2005: 92

¹⁵⁰ Žižek, 2004: 7

¹⁵¹ Žižek, 2004: 14

¹⁵² Žižek, 1997: 160

Both the master's discourse and the discourse of the university have four places to be filled by the terms of the matrix at the heart of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The foremost position is that of the agent; the contingent mitigating factor that disrupts homeostasis through bringing a sense of 'reality' to impinge on one's pleasurable solipsistic fantasies.¹⁵³ This agent is defined in juxtaposition to its other, that which it cannot directly access in the matrix set. The other juxtaposed to the agent of the discourse is enumerated by the product of the discourse, i.e. knowledge multiplies the facets of reality accessible to the subject. However, this product of discourse has its truth hidden by the agent inasmuch as it gestures toward the impossible, i.e. the emergence of the small totalitarianisms in liberal democratic societies with the advent of biogenetics.¹⁵⁴ If we turn to the master's discourse for a moment we find the master signifier holds sway and is opposed to knowledge. A master must have his subjects, his others, believe he is a master—his believability sustaining him as the big Other. As soon as the master's position is questioned belief is lost and the master's authority undermined, so it is necessary for the master to maintain the ideal image of himself as a kind of decoy. The master believes the position he imagines for himself, realises the constitutive exception that affords him supreme authority. The god-given right for a king to rule is thus an impossible relation between the empty place produced by a grand ineffable Other (God) and the king's symbolic duty to be king. The rationale sustaining a position of privilege is thus cast as a mystery which the unprivileged cannot resolve because they believe this mystery to be self-evident—the king is king because he is king. Without belief one may choose to obey the king because he is wise and just, but to do so is “the crime of *lèse-majesté*.”¹⁵⁵

At this juncture of belief and knowledge it is clearly apparent how powerful knowledge is in relation to symbolic authority. The production of scientific knowledge and its technologies (discussed in later chapters as 'technicity') progresses in its ideology-free state insofar as it remains unaware of its inherent knowledge bias, which effectively ostracises those who do not know to the realm of the *un*-conscious. Those who are

¹⁵³ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1998: 78-79; Žižek, 'From Politics to Biopolitics,' 2004: 505-506

¹⁵⁴ Fukuyama, 2002; Žižek, 2004a: 130

¹⁵⁵ Žižek, 2002a: 235

conscious of knowledge, who know, are welcomed into the fold of the discourse where one can become a vessel of sharing knowledge but only inasmuch as they know only what they can and not the totality of ‘knowledges.’ Therein the privilege of the university discourse is to be expendable to the discourse; the mastery of knowledge always slips away from the subject, allowing the constant space to learn.¹⁵⁶ Mastery and forgetfulness are here revealed as the impossible truth of the discourse, its promise of power in the form of mastery and its danger of never knowing all knowledge while simultaneously recognising the condition of the subject whereby they are always in process and not a fixed reservoir of knowledge. This culminates in the ethical construction of duty, where the revelation of everything must continue despite any desires to the contrary—desire being created at the very moment we are confronted with an injunction to obey the obligation of ‘knowing.’

According to Stavrakakis, Žižek’s analyses show the conceptual effects of this transition from the fascination with the image of the master to the quest for scientific truth or ‘knowledge of the real’ in the university in a socio-political way.¹⁵⁷ By ‘conceptual effects’ we are here inferring the task of philosophy to be the shifting of the frame of interpretation itself. Thus “what is at stake in Žižek’s argument is not only the possibility of resisting, but also of undermining or displacing the existing socio-symbolic network.”¹⁵⁸ Žižek does not wish to return to the imaginary master, but rather sets the scene for another transition co-ordinated by the conditions of the university discourse. Because the phantasmatic promise of the master-as-Other is formally barred in the university discourse, the master loses the mystique inculcated by this promise of being believable as a master as such. Žižek thus looks to move through a formal negativity of sorts wherein no mystery can abide because scientific truth is undetermined by ideological fantasies to a frame where concrete experience is contingently symbolised and/or evaluated.¹⁵⁹ In his response to Stavrakakis Žižek qualifies this latter movement as one borne out by “*an ‘impossible’ gesture of pure expenditure [that] can change the very*

¹⁵⁶ Butler, 2005: 142

¹⁵⁷ Stavrakakis, ‘The Lure of Antigone,’ 2003: 117

¹⁵⁸ Stavrakakis, ‘The Lure of Antigone,’ 2003: 117

¹⁵⁹ Stavrakakis, ‘The Lure of Antigone,’ 2003: 123

coordinates of what is strategically possible within a historical constellation.”¹⁶⁰ It follows from this qualification that the indeterminateness of the university discourse and herein the production of knowledge is a negative space which can be transformed by an excessive redefining of “the rules and contours of the existing order” rather than an intervention into the prevailing order of knowledge production.¹⁶¹

Harpham notes that this motion of overcoming the university discourse posits knowledge production contrary to fantasy as a kind of ‘epochal frame’ that serves to condition the ethos of civilisation.¹⁶² In Žižek’s Marxist language this is the speculative economy of capitalism wherein “all things solid melt into thin air.”¹⁶³ Following Harpham we might read the negativity of the university discourse as the space in which identity is constituted, and that our alienation is consistent with all forms of identity proper to the cultural milieu of modern science.¹⁶⁴ Responding to Harpham’s discussion Žižek takes this point further by suggesting alienation is “followed by what Lacan called separation.”¹⁶⁵ This separation is part of the space Žižek is driving towards with his critique of the university discourse. Separation herein follows the alienation experienced in the indeterminateness of knowledge as such. We go from experiencing ourselves in alienation through knowledge production to being for ourselves in the contingent distinction to knowledge as such.

II – A Gap Filled by Fantasy

The critical value of Žižek’s ongoing ideology-critique shows that the shift from a discourse creating a majestic master of all to a discourse crafting an expendable subject supposed-to-know is a triumph of the mystifying force of imagination that scientific knowledge is supposed to overcome.¹⁶⁶ While in the master’s discourse we abide a ‘master’ (Other) whose existence legitimates our social existence, the discourse of the

¹⁶⁰ Žižek, ‘What Some Would Call...’ 2003: 133

¹⁶¹ Žižek, ‘What Some Would Call...’ 2003: 133

¹⁶² Harpham, ‘Doing the Impossible,’ 2003: 461

¹⁶³ Marx in Žižek, 2000a: 17

¹⁶⁴ Harpham, ‘Doing the Impossible,’ 2003: 462

¹⁶⁵ Žižek, ‘A Symptom—of what?’ 2003: 488

¹⁶⁶ Žižek, ‘Jews, Christians, and Other Monsters,’ 2004: 90-92

university gives us no such assurance that the social order is justifiable in itself.¹⁶⁷ Here Žižek is in agreement with Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse: the desublimation of objects invested with suprasensible value into neutral knowledge to be known by all is effectively a repressive mechanism.¹⁶⁸ Rather than bringing us closer to a more fulfilling life flourishing in a development borne of self-knowledge, the claimed neutrality of knowledge removes the limit of civil sociality/engagement and opens us to ferocious insatiable desires for ever more knowledge which we will obtain at any price.¹⁶⁹ This casting of post-modern hedonism as the cultural milieu of the developed world is typical of the social, political, and cultural critiques to have emerged from other Slovenian intellectuals besides Žižek in recent decades such as Mladen Dolar, Renata Salecl, and Alenka Zupančič.¹⁷⁰

Following this Slovenian school of thought Žižek is associated with, it is the discord created by this contradiction of enjoying our freedom only to be free to enjoy in less satiating and, paradoxically, increasingly intense ways that is the key to unlocking the prevailing strictures for the domain of the Imaginary.¹⁷¹ The psychoanalytic Imaginary extends through Žižek's critical discourse in three distinct modes. Firstly as an imaginary image or fantasy decoy keeping the subject from the truth; in the instance of the university discourse, where the knowledge of the subject supposed to know (the 'subject' situated within the legitimate bounds of knowledge production in the university discourse) is reduced to a subjective shadow of vested interests, e.g. telecommunications services are controlled by companies for profit rather than for the purposes of communication which are relegated to a secondary position.¹⁷² Secondly as an imaginary symbol or archetype that conditions all possibilities for the subject to share their knowledge or know anything, i.e. talent.¹⁷³ And thirdly as a real fantasy staging an

¹⁶⁷ Žižek, 'What Can Psychoanalysis Tell Us About Cyberspace?' 2004: 802

¹⁶⁸ Adorno in Buck-Morss, 1979: 103; Horkheimer in Buck-Morss, 1979: 173; Marcuse, 1972: 72

¹⁶⁹ Žižek, 'The Politics of *Jouissance*,' 2005: 130; Zupančič, 2000: 70-71

¹⁷⁰ See in particular Dolar and Žižek's *Opera's Second Death* (2002), Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006), Salecl's *The Spoils of Freedom* (1994) and *On Anxiety* (2004), and Zupančič's *The Shortest Shadow* (2003) and *The Odd One In* (2008).

¹⁷¹ Dews & Osborne, 'Lacan in Slovenia' 1991: 31

¹⁷² Žižek, 1993: 89-90

¹⁷³ Žižek, 1989: 105-107

imaginary scenario in the place of the horrifying truth constructing the impermeable neutrality of knowledge in the place of subjective destitution so the subject languishes in their enjoyment of knowing and alienates themselves from human engagement.¹⁷⁴ Herein the production of ever more intensive ways of enjoying ourselves logically proceeds from the tyranny of knowledge. But this intensity is absurd, typified by objects that attempt to give us something that is actually nothing, things devoid of all pathological content. Žižek uses the example of the *Kinder Surprise* to show the toy inside the chocolate egg functions as a ‘more’ “to fill the lack of a “less,” to compensate for the fact that, by definition, a product never delivers on its (fantasmatic) promise.”¹⁷⁵ Without the phantasmatic promise the object is objectively destitute; the rule of fantasy whereby the object we desire seems to enlist our fascination by promising something a little bit extra, beyond its mere objective characteristics, is constitutive of our sense of reality. The objects of perception can only exist insofar as it conforms to our fantasy-frame, “the subject can never occupy the neutral place which would allow him or her to exclude completely the hallucinatory fantasmatic reality” because fantasy offers reality a cogency and therein a placement of the subject.¹⁷⁶ This primordial position of fantasy facilitates the dialectic of presence and absence, a game in which existence-as-*Dasein* (being-there) is always-already presupposed. Thus fantasy serves to cover any gaps that appear due to the uncritical nature of existence by virtue of its being a presupposition as such.

These three modes of the Imaginary work to freeze the university discourse in a temporal loop, extracting it from the passage of time. This has led Francis Fukuyama to coin the phrase “end of history” to describe the historical condition of twenty-first century liberal democratic societies.¹⁷⁷ However, Žižek raises the disturbing point that this non-historical abstraction threatens the minimal difference separating ‘the empty place of power,’ i.e. the ceding of power-relations within modern liberal democracies, from the phantasmatic element filling it in.¹⁷⁸ Fantasy now shifts from being a promise of sublime or divine

¹⁷⁴ Žižek, ‘Hitchcock’s Organs Without Bodies,’ 2003: 129

¹⁷⁵ Žižek, 2003: 146

¹⁷⁶ Žižek, 1993: 89

¹⁷⁷ Fukuyama in Žižek, 2004a: 132

¹⁷⁸ Žižek, 2000a: 39

mystery to a warning of danger, i.e. the dangerous naïveté of denying the presence of vested interests in representational democracy.

If we examine this entrapment of the Imaginary closely we find the minimal difference separating this gap from the phantasmatic element filling it in appears to dissipate the decoy (fantasised object), and yet this coincides with the real fantasy scenario. The scene is thus set for the epistemological status of the subject—as a rational intellectual being—to detain them from the ontological dimension containing the true object-cause of their desire. Herein we are trapped in an ontic sphere of ordinary objects bereft of ‘rhyme or reason.’ Without recourse to an ontological ordering of the world a manic nihilism permeates our sense of awe, restricting our capacity to enjoy the Imaginary as a theatre for fantasising.¹⁷⁹ To keep awe at bay nihilism elevates axioms of technological progress to challenge the world of fervent production, instant gratification, and immediate contact. At base, the fecundity of a world of ordinary ‘technical’ objects is its immediacy; it is a world ready to attend our beckoning, not an alternative social vision.¹⁸⁰ A return to the Imaginary from our passion for the Real is a regression in the eyes of Žižek because we lose the ability to differentiate ourselves amongst a cosmos of technical objects.

This ontological crisis provides Žižek’s discussions of scientific-technological innovation and politics with a bastion of critical insight. Advances in biogenetics, particularly the mapping of the human genome, affirm the presence of this dangerous nihilism; “by reducing man to just another natural object whose properties can be manipulated” we lose the very situation of nature which biogenetic research investigates.¹⁸¹ To Žižek’s mind this brings us closer to an understanding of Fukuyama’s thesis. If humanity gives history its enduring value, history ends when scientific innovation and technical rationality have refigured human nature as a transparent object of inquiry reduced to an ordinary ontic object. Human nature must be an opaque “impenetrable dimension in/of ourselves into which we are born/thrown” to sustain the enigma of each individual’s humanity.¹⁸² In this

¹⁷⁹ Žižek, 1993: 196-197; Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 348

¹⁸⁰ Heidegger, 1982: 165-166; Heidegger in Krell (ed), 1993: 320-321

¹⁸¹ Žižek, 2004a: 124

¹⁸² Žižek, 2004a: 124 & 128-129

way human nature is more than the ground of desires which can be reduced solely to chemical processes in the brain. By refiguring human nature as a manipulable technical object it becomes merely another object to be subjected to a scientific regime that cannot perceive its own ideological investment in treating all things as mere undignified objects.¹⁸³

This process of ‘covering over’ the enigmatic impenetrability of the individual subject’s humanity is the fundamental problem addressed by Žižek’s critique of technology. In the subsequent chapters we will trace the contours of this ideological over-determination of the subject and examine its overcoming through redressing the importance of *techne*, but for now it is vital that we clearly establish that this problematic over-determination functions as a nihilistic reductionism inherent to technology in the ontic domain of phenomenal appearances that are discursively arranged by the rampant production of knowledge. Ontologically speaking this nihilism erupts with moments of crises for every technical object because, as we saw in the instance of biogenetics, in the production of knowledge about any object in particular the consistency of the object becomes reliant on its interpretation through the regiment of scientific knowledge. Yet because this scientific regime refuses its inherent ideological content, i.e. the covering over of the subjectivity of the subject, the understanding of any particular technical object is subsumed into a kind of spurious ‘ontic transparency’ wherein it is precisely this ontic appearance of the technical object that resists the interpretation of the subject due to its necessary positing independent to, and indeed precedent of, the interpretation of the subject. Here we encounter the dilemma of technology in its fundamental positing by the university discourse: can knowledge of the object remain independent from the object? Clearly we must refuse this independence of the object given its positing by scientific knowledge, yet it is precisely such a refusal that remains cached within knowledge to produce the nihilistic reduction of the ontic object to a transparent phenomenon. Therefore, our task in these chapters and the thesis as a whole is to elucidate and critique this problematic founding assumption of technology (technical objects) to the end of redressing the primordial grounding of technology hidden by this transparency: *techne*.

¹⁸³ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1998: 78-79

Such a process perpetuates the annihilation of the metaphysical subspecies of human nature such as civil sociality, love, and care. Herein it becomes clear that metaphysics as ‘meta’ relies on the ineffability of its object, that something is always beyond our grasp.¹⁸⁴ The decline of the ontological consistency of ‘humanity’ and its ethico-political sub-spheres in this fashion, coupled with the promulgation of a totalising epistemological ideological framework, can lead into an intellectual barbarism. An example of this is Richard Wolin’s accusation that Žižek suggests the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on the 11th of September, 2001, gave the United States of America (U.S.) what it deserved.¹⁸⁵ Where Žižek states in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, his response to 9/11, “America got what it fantasised about” Wolin suggests Žižek is insinuating “America got what it had coming.”¹⁸⁶ Žižek quotes himself at length to show that he explicitly denies the “leftist *Schadenfreude*” Wolin accuses him of.¹⁸⁷

Specifically, Wolin has confused Žižek’s discussion of what the U.S. fantasised about with an ethical plea. Elsewhere in this volume Žižek makes his ethical plea to defuse the “moralising mathematics of guilt and horror” invoked by Wolin’s criticism, stating: “the only appropriate stance is unconditional solidarity with *all* victims.”¹⁸⁸ This sparring between Žižek and Wolin shows how the collapsing of the real fantasy scenario and the fantasy decoy aspects of the Imaginary blinds the critical gaze from seeing the folly of its critique. Were Wolin to read the notion of fantasy invoked by Žižek in its Lacanian dimension as the access to reality and not an invitation for epistemological realism about *the way things really are*, as well as observe the coincidence of the real fantasy scenario and objective circumstances produce a nightmare which Žižek ethically marshals against, then Žižek’s position would cease to be as easily manipulated and Wolin may need to find a fresh rationale for his criticism—short of reneging it altogether.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Žižek, 1994: 94

¹⁸⁵ Žižek, 2004: 307; hereafter referred to as ‘9/11’

¹⁸⁶ Wolin in Žižek, ‘A Plea for a Return to Différance,’ 2006: 230

¹⁸⁷ Žižek, ‘A Plea for a Return to Différance,’ 2006: 230

¹⁸⁸ Žižek, 2002b: 51

¹⁸⁹ Žižek, ‘A Plea for a Return to Différance,’ 2006: 230-231

The fundamental problem with Wolin's criticism is that the phantasmatic object itself is lost. Žižek's argument disappears in the misrecognition of the functionality of the argument as its dignity—in Heideggerian terms Žižek's essay has been enframed by the advance of Wolin's ontological forgetfulness or nihilism. This disappearing act situates Žižek's discussion of 9/11 in standing-reserve or, to use Heidegger's term, *Bestand*. By enframing Žižek's discussion within *Bestand* Wolin sacrifices critical cogency for the opportunity to "bombastically" read Žižek.¹⁹⁰ Heidegger observes this condition of *Bestand* to be a sense of objectlessness overriding the distinction between objects, gradually levering them all into the category of standing-reserve.¹⁹¹ In standing-reserve objects are framed in a passive mode so that they may be ready-to-hand without being present as such. A critical problem arises at this point because *Bestand* is a process of challenging existence, the world as it is, with nihilistic annihilation. Therein *Bestand* affects both interpretations and interactions with the objects around us. It is conceptual as well as pragmatic. Seen through Žižek's critical gaze this destructive nihilism attempts to cut off the self from investment in a world of objects where we externalise our identity and organise our lives.¹⁹² This is the forgetfulness that so concerned Heidegger when he examined questions of technological progress, and Wolin's critique appears to succumb to this regression.¹⁹³

III – The Transparent Cogito

In its philosophical dimension Žižek's theorising of science and technology explicitly relies on a Heideggerian analysis.¹⁹⁴ In this spirit of critique his analyses attend to the division of the everyday ontic world of objects and the ontological horizon of meaning, divided by the very existence of the subject.¹⁹⁵ While the phenomenology of Heidegger and the psychoanalysis of Lacan do display an agreement that the subject is split and creates this split, simply by being a subject, each attends to this in quite different ways.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ Žižek, 'A Plea for a Return to Différance,' 2006: 229

¹⁹¹ Heidegger in Krell (ed), 1993: 324

¹⁹² Žižek, 2004: 32-36

¹⁹³ Heidegger in Krell (ed), 1993: 331

¹⁹⁴ Žižek, 2000b: 12-13

¹⁹⁵ Žižek, 2000b: 13-16

¹⁹⁶ Heidegger, 1982: 47-49; Lacan, 2006: 201-205

Žižek treads a jagged path between these two figures, favouring Lacanian psychoanalysis (mingled with an overt use of Hegel). This can be observed in his discussions of the modern scientific subject as the pure thinking substance of the Cartesian cogito and, simultaneously, the Lacanian split-subject.¹⁹⁷

For Žižek the Cartesian cogito emerges in psychoanalysis as the barred subject of desire in so much as the cogito is a transparent self that always has something as its object.¹⁹⁸ Yet the cogito itself appears as a stain on the perception of its object so that we can imagine seeing ourselves through the gaze of the object. When the ontic world is eroded it becomes apparent that the cogito is still there even though it is deprived of all its positive content, appearing as “the I of pure self-consciousness.”¹⁹⁹ We may say then that at a zero level the self is a minimal difference, a negative weight. In terms of consciousness Žižek sets forth this unknown known as the Lacanian subject of desire.²⁰⁰

For Žižek the subject (as cogito) may only manifest itself at the point where the support of the symbolic universe is suspended, where the world we relate to disappears.²⁰¹ With such subjective destitution reducing the subject to a zero-point, knowledge disappears. If the subject did attempt to fill their lack with knowledge they achieve what Lacan calls “knowledge in the Real.”²⁰² Conceiving knowledge in this way problematically reads the real fantasy of neutral knowledge as the truth of knowledge, as its excess. This totalisation freezes the mists of the impermeable kernel of knowledge that exceed what can be known, the very desire to learn that postpones a totalitarianism of knowledge. Such a filling out of the cogito in the university discourse destroys the discourse itself because the empty place of which knowledge can be shared by many is filled by one. But this constituting of unity, a unified knowledge, represses the presence of contingency in the symbolic universe constituted by knowledge. Thus we move from learning to indoctrination, from the process of constant corroboration to blinding ourselves to the

¹⁹⁷ Žižek, 1997: 12

¹⁹⁸ Žižek, 1993: 38-39

¹⁹⁹ Žižek, 1993: 38; Lacan, 1988: 78-80

²⁰⁰ Žižek, 1993: 42; 2003: 20-23

²⁰¹ Žižek, 1993: 42

²⁰² Lacan in Žižek, 1993: 42

reality that it is knowledge's indeterminacy that sustains its validity.²⁰³ Even more importantly, by repressing this indeterminacy in the Symbolic we find its return in the Real where we no longer have the reign of a Symbolic Order and therein no verification of knowledge, only belief.

IV – The Fetishist's Lie

Without the 'slippage' of knowledge through indeterminacy the university discourse is frozen through the totalisation of knowledge. Importantly, however, this totalisation points us toward the role of the Imaginary in Žižek's critical thought. The Imaginary creates this 'freeze,' a temporal loop that repeats over and over again.²⁰⁴ When knowledge phantasmatically fills out the split in the subject, the tension with mortality dissipates into a myth of eternity. And it is here that Žižek can enter into a psychoanalytic discussion of the human condition precisely because this eternity carries the symptom of being a subject. To put it another way, the knowledge the subject uses to fill out their subjective destitution is a cipher that abstracts the subject from the domain of enjoyment, reducing the self to an egotistic manipulator.²⁰⁵ By placing the world at hand into a passive mode, 'standing-reserve' succeeds in endowing the subject with a fetishist's delight for further technological domination because it promises fulfilment.

Žižek follows Benjamin and Freud in presenting the fetishist appeal of technology as "the sex-appeal of the inorganic."²⁰⁶ But Žižek's critical gaze delineates this reading into two strands: the Marxist modernism of Benjamin, and the psychoanalytic criticism of Freud.²⁰⁷ In both modes the fetish is covering over a gap, in the process globalising this suture (the fetishist's lie) in the dominant category of the mode of critique, i.e. a social critique categorically over-determines the category of 'the social' thus reducing all phenomena to their manifestation in the conceptualised realm of the Social. This follows

²⁰³ Žižek, 1993: 36

²⁰⁴ Žižek, 1989: 55

²⁰⁵ Miller, 'Introduction to the Erotics of Time,' 2005: 23; Žižek in Wright & Wright (eds), 1999: 312-315

²⁰⁶ Benjamin, 1983: 166

²⁰⁷ Žižek, 1989: 49; Foster, 2005: 92-93

Žižek's suggestion that modernism is fascinated with the Imaginary.²⁰⁸ Herein Benjamin's critique of technological prosthesis, in the case of nineteenth-century Parisian fashion, considers the outward significance of artificiality played upon by fashion-as-commodity hides the positive social relations that go into the production of the fashion objects, allowing the fashion commodities to appear to exist independently.²⁰⁹ On the other hand, psychoanalytic criticism focuses on the hard kernel of the Real resisting integration into the Imaginary cosmos of commodities. It is important to note that Žižek articulates the Real in this instance as that which "always returns to the same place."²¹⁰ Thus in the psychoanalytic framework fetishism hides the lack around which the symbolic universe circulates. But further than this, in the case of modernism the Imaginary register is still structurally sound, a symbolic universe (of commodities) is in full swing. In the psychoanalytic critique we find comparatively far less efficient symbolic work, the compulsion to repeat the covering-over of the Real-kernel is explained away by the fetishist acting out their fetish—s/he repeats without being aware that they are repeating and thus feel unencumbered by this repetition.²¹¹

Fetishism also persists in the university discourse where the Real is fetishised as an object of knowledge. While we fearlessly revel in the revealing of the Unknown where 'X really is X' the very method of modern scientific discovery compels us to constantly validate X, lest it cave into a sort of scientific nominalism.²¹² To move from the Cartesian subject of modern science to a nominal positive cosmos of New Age archetypes is what Freud observed as the regression into hallucination, not solipsism.²¹³ Although similarly engaged in instating an imagined reality in the place of the Real, hallucination connects the subject to the world beyond their conscious reasoning while solipsism reduces the world to mere consciousness. The nominalist regression inversely separates from fetishism by tending toward a *sensory* end where the acting out of the fetish is a *motor-*

²⁰⁸ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1992: 120-121

²⁰⁹ Benjamin, 1983: 164-166; Foster, 2005: 92

²¹⁰ Žižek, 1993: 49

²¹¹ Freud, 2003: 37

²¹² Žižek, 'Hitchcock's Organs Without Bodies,' 2003: 133

²¹³ Freud, 1991: 692

repetition.²¹⁴ The repetition of the fetishist is ‘beyond the pleasure principle,’ “it is striving for a homeostatic balance, and the symbolic order in its blind automatism is always troubling this homeostasis.”²¹⁵ Regression is the disintegration of the Symbolic Order, our assurance of access to some shared universe of communication. Hallucination returns the subject to the sensory emphasis of a nominal modernism, foreclosing on the cut of the Symbolic Order that castrates the subject thus stealing their homeostasis. Within the structure of the university discourse this is a regression away from the elevated passion for knowledge (in the Real).

The path of regression is often part of Žižek’s ideology-critique because both the subject and the Other of the Symbolic are impinged by regression. This is so because a regressive understanding misses that the Other of the symbolic universe is itself lacking through its dialectical emergence with the symbolic castration of the subject. Without this inconsistency of the Other the only path open to the subject “would be his radical alienation in the Other.”²¹⁶ The inconsistency of the big Other offsets alienating oneself in the known, “the Other itself ‘hasn’t got it,’ hasn’t got the final answer – that is to say is in itself blocked, desiring; that there is also desire of the Other.”²¹⁷ The lack in the Other gives the subject a kind of space to breath, where they can identify their lack with the lack in the Other. Fetishism coordinates this lack, points our desires toward the fetishised object alienated from the ordinary world of objects and alienating the subject from the Other—jealously I assume the Other’s desire is my desire, inverting the process of identification where my desire is the desire of the Other.²¹⁸

The globalised lie of fetishism is that such domination over desirable objects is the task of the subject, to beat the Other to the object. For example, without the extensive artifice of technology the subject can only dominate nature through brute force alone, a force that brings mortality to the forefront of the relation with the world.²¹⁹ Faced with such ‘Real-

²¹⁴ Žižek, 1989: 132; Freud, 1991: 692

²¹⁵ Žižek, 1989: 132

²¹⁶ Žižek, 1989: 122

²¹⁷ Žižek, 1989: 122

²¹⁸ Žižek, 1989: 110-112

²¹⁹ Foster, 2005: 92

finitude' the subject faces a dissolution that is not merely physical but corporeal, with the very embodiment of pleasure threatened by something beyond our control in a moment of tragic realisation. Fetishism takes away this tragic pathos with its intense fascination with a particular object which stands in for raw life. Thus the ideology-critique of Žižek diagnoses the threat drawn out by human tragedies such as train wrecks, avalanches, earthquakes, and so forth, as the rescuers who go into the fray are risking their own lives to save others'.²²⁰ The tragedy of the actual loss of life is supplemented by the potential loss of life, its spectre. Rather than helping us to interpret tragic scenarios, such valorisation of the spectral dimension inflates the trauma of tragedy by desubjectivising our experience of pathos. Such a move is contrary to Benjamin's suggestion that low-level anxieties 'toughen' us to the experience of trauma and tragedy. The Žižekian contention is that we risk losing ourselves in the fantasising of tragedy only to find ourselves too near the inexplicable horror of trauma—Real-trauma.

Such risk is central to Chuck Palahniuk's short portrait *Bodhisattvas* (2004) that tells the tale of Michelle Keating and the dogs that she took with her on volunteer aid missions to hurricane wrecked Honduras in 1998. Talking about another search-and-rescue volunteer she says:

“Harry said, ‘These people are hungry and they might want to eat your dog.’ And I was driving home from a meeting with him, I was going, ‘I don’t want to die!’—but I knew I wanted to go.”²²¹

Keating's knowledge of her own desire to go and help in Honduras brushes up against the ethical limit of political action in the symbolic universe. Her position is one of universal exception, Keating sends herself despite her conflicted desires and the obvious political option to keep one's distance and send aid (someone else).²²² It is the immediacy of this situation that draws out the ethic of desire from Keating, that she should not give way on her desire. Herein is the lesson of the university discourse: although we may strive for the mastery of knowledge and be thwarted by the frailty of our own human condition in its exploration of ontic and ontological objects, we must not give in to our desire to either

²²⁰ Young, 2005: 118-119

²²¹ Palahniuk, 2004: 161

²²² Žižek, 2002a: 224

learn no more or fill in the empty place of mastery we strive for. In short, the ethical injunction for the human condition in a post-modernity discursively engaged with knowledge production and unaware of the fetishist's lie sustaining this production is 'do not stop!'

The critical value of knowledge is rendered absurd within this fetishisation of knowledge wherein mastery is cast as a Pyrrhic victory and forgetfulness becomes an inescapable aspect of our being human. Yet such absurdity is ideological *par excellence* because knowledge is now itself ineffable and yet reality is rendered 'straight,' without the stains of distortion that are the ideological over-determinations identified by the critique undertaken by the university discourse. The agony of never knowing enough and the absurdity of pursuing the process itself *ad infinitum* indicate two facets we have so far left unaddressed. When Žižek frames mastery as the substantialisation of knowledge in the Real the human condition reveals its obsession with possibility.²²³ Yet to take up knowledge in the register of the Real is to shun the possibility afforded to the subject in fantasy.

Today, more and more we find the fantasy space overtaken. Žižek cites one such example as a recent study conducted by Duke University's Center for Neuroengineering. In 2004, researchers at the center implanted electrodes

"Into the brains of volunteers; the volunteers then played videogames while the electrodes recorded their brain signals—the scientists trained a computer to recognise the brain activity corresponding to different movements of the joystick."²²⁴

Eventually the game can be played by thought alone. What we lose here is precisely the space for imagining how we might interact with objects, for fantasy, because the volunteers must control their movements in the game directly. As Žižek shows, *a propos* of Kant and Freud, the gap created by our finitude is the resource of our creativity while

²²³ Žižek, 2002a: 242

²²⁴ Žižek, 'The Politics of *Jouissance*,' 2005: 134

this “direct short-circuit between mind and reality implies the prospect of a radical closure.”²²⁵

In this radical closure we have the deferral of fantasy in the transition from a subject supposed-to-know to an impossible knowing subject. The knowing subject is impossible precisely because to know anything requires we corroborate our knowledge with others’, and yet this corroboration entails a gap between the subject and the other. In this sense the subject does not know directly but knows through the slippage of knowledge as one idea refers to another—the conceptual space between objects in an ontic anti-descriptive space.²²⁶ However, this neurological example highlights how the subject can be deprived of precisely this slippage sustaining the ontic sphere and therein the facility to corroborate their knowledge with the wider hermeneutic space of the symbolic universe.

V – The Concomitant Betrayal of Possibility in the Disappearance of Fantasy

In his critique of postmodernism Žižek sets the triumph of everyday ontic objects in two positions. On the one hand we have the objects of our daily lives placed into standing-reserve so they are constantly at hand.²²⁷ The prevalence of multipurpose handheld technologies in urban environments like mobile phones that can store appointments, emails, and music, as well as compose and store video, pictures, and phone calls reinstates this haste of everyday living. It is curious how the more compact and functional our everyday objects become the faster our way of living becomes. Complementing this pace is the inescapable forgetfulness of the human condition contained in the very structure of knowledge; new technologies perpetually overturn old systems, old technologies return with new uses, and so on.²²⁸ This situation is functional without having a political cause or *raison d’être* as such.²²⁹ Although this functioning within a field of energies is reminiscent of the Nietzschean overcoming of mystical idols, it holds a course that is the underbelly of this overcoming. Žižek distinguishes his critique from

²²⁵ Žižek, ‘The Politics of *Jouissance*,’ 2005: 135

²²⁶ Laclau in Žižek, 1989: xiii

²²⁷ Žižek, 2004: 32-36

²²⁸ Žižek, 2000b: 221-222

²²⁹ Žižek, 2000b: 156-157

an Heideggerian analysis at this point by identifying this underbelly as a plentiful domain of imaginary decoys, scenarios, and archetypes in an effort to compensate for the loss of symbolic structure *à la* Adorno.²³⁰ However, without the efficacy of the Symbolic Order this nihilism cannot grasp the world anew, and indeed the Imaginary modes themselves are reduced to whatever enjoyment they can bring to the subject—their functionality rather than addressing the subject’s ontological emergence through *techne*. In this way communications technologies intervene in the absence of human contact, ecological crisis is considered manageable but advanced market capitalism unending, and the human condition reducible to genetic code.²³¹ Žižek alludes to such examples to indicate an Imaginary register running riot without sufficient symbolic efficacy.²³² And herein the subject is without a reflexive auto-critique to constrain the fantasising mania of such nihilistic narcissism.

A wild Imaginary overruns the place of the Real, the unimaginable and traumatising register of forces beyond the normal run of things. To try and locate this impossibility let us return to the title of Palahniuk’s *Bodhisattvas*. Žižek takes up an analysis of the namesake bodhisattva to demonstrate the way dwelling in the realm of fantasy, the Imaginary, postpones leaving the fantasy scenario which appears as reality.²³³ In Žižek’s discussion the bodhisattva of Mahayana Buddhism is defined as an enlightened being of compassion that can enter Nirvana because they are a bodhisattva and yet they simultaneously cannot enter because this movement displays a selfishness which a bodhisattva does not have.²³⁴ The bodhisattva is in a deadlock. Danto’s *Mysticism And Morality* (1972) is quoted by Žižek to bring this point to greater effect: “no one can reach Nirvana: we cannot because we are not *bodhisattvas* and the *bodhisattva* cannot because he is a *bodhisattva*.”²³⁵ The bodhisattva’s resolution of their deadlock highlights the “*impossibility* of such an immediate withdrawal of the individual from the world of illusions,” by postponing their own bliss until all human beings have reached the same

²³⁰ Žižek, 2000: 41

²³¹ Žižek, ‘The Politics of *Jouissance*,’ 2005: 134; 2004a: 133; Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 59-86

²³² Žižek, 2003: 125

²³³ Žižek, 2002a: 25-26

²³⁴ Žižek, 2002a: 25

²³⁵ Danto in Žižek, 2002a: 25

level the bodhisattva makes the ultimate sacrifice for the salvation of humankind.²³⁶ For the rest of humankind the bodhisattva presents as a reflective element embodying the impossibility of immediate liberation from the veil of illusions, the fantastic functionality of everyday objects.

In the discourse of the university reality similarly functions as a reflective element promising truth. Herein 'reality' is a limiting principle that disrupts our daydreaming and introduces a gritty verisimilitude from which we can distinguish the smooth running of fantasy. The epochal turn of the university discourse distorts reality, making the gritty verisimilitude appear to be the natural state. In lieu of this Žižek raises the critical point that the human condition is comprised of a sense of being alien to our existence; strangeness inheres in the fundamental structure of experiencing oneself as a subject with an identity that is an authentic presentation of who we are yet is in a constant state of fluidity.²³⁷

Co-substantially, in the university discourse the promise of discovering truth stains the neutral scene of the observer with the possibility of what remains to be known.²³⁸ Žižek refers to the function of medical discourse to demonstrate this ambiguity at the heart of knowledge:

“At the surface level, we are dealing with pure objective knowledge that desubjectivizes the subject-patient, reducing him to an object of research, of diagnosis and treatment; however, beneath it, one can easily discern a worried hystericized subject, obsessed with anxiety, addressing the doctor as his master and asking for reassurance from him.”²³⁹

The pure possibility offered by fantasy gives us some clue as to how Žižek surveys this promised reassurance as problematic. The role of fantasy is to co-ordinate the desire of the subject, and in the case of this pure possibility it must be postponed indefinitely because our fantasies are always about *something* quasi-transcendental not

²³⁶ Žižek, 2002a: 26

²³⁷ Žižek, 2006: 213

²³⁸ Rose in Mitchell & Rose (ed), 1985: 50-51

²³⁹ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1998: 78-79

transcendent—the *objet petit a*. Fantasy keeps the pure possibility at a distance with desire, placing our desire as a screen between us and possibility in-itself, i.e. in Palahniuk's short portrait Keating's desire to help people functions as a necessity that helps her deal with the traumatic cost of life in the natural disasters she confronts.²⁴⁰ According to Žižek, we gain purchase on a quasi-transcendental mundane possibility ('quasi' to the extent that it is *a priori* and necessary but at the same time able to be overcome) because this pure possibility is lost in the postponement, and herein rendered impossible to attain.²⁴¹ Moreover, the fantasised object circles around this place of purity and imbues the world-at-hand, co-ordinated by our fantasies, with the unrealistic expectation of pure satisfaction.²⁴² Here we have returned to the destruction wrought by the abstract Universal that manifests the concrete object in the wake of nihilism. For instance, we may follow Keating's example of human sacrifice as soon as we remove what impedes us from doing so—our self-interest. Yet by removing our self-interested 'pathological' fantasies the world-at-hand takes on a different configuration and the subjective status of human sacrifice becomes the non-pathological normative value. This is an ontological change because we cannot distinguish between self-interest and disinterest without our fantasies informing us of what we desire: 'how we know what we know.'

VI – Conclusion

To close, in this chapter we have examined this ontological shift in the production of knowledge by the university discourse. Throughout this outline and examination it was shown that the process of producing knowledge was sustained through a phantasmatic promise that extends from the subject's access to reality facilitated by fantasy. Furthermore, this phantasmatic promise takes on especial importance for the fetishist of the knowledge economy propagated by the university discourse. This condition of fetishism helped us to distinguish Žižek's position from that of Benjamin and the criticisms levelled at Žižek by Wolin. This discussion also highlighted how close Žižek

²⁴⁰ Palahniuk, 2004: 160-170; Žižek, 2004a: 99-101

²⁴¹ Žižek, 1993: 173-174

²⁴² Žižek, 1997: 32

comes to Adorno in the way he points to the new place of the Imaginary in an era defined by its passion for the Real. Inasmuch as this Real is neither the symbolic representation or the imagined semblance, Žižek suggests to us that this new place of the Imaginary is the sublation of the 'impossibility' of the Real. The figure of the *bodhisattva* herein emphasises the inherent deadlock of a 'post-modernity' caught up in representation and fantasisation. In conclusion we may therefore state that the phantasmatic promise is impossible in an era defined by the clearing of representation and the fantasisation to try and access the kernel of the Real.

A.3 Into the Void: the Real and representation

Gomi, Desire's Failed Surplus – The Schema of Perversion – Excess of the Real – Chora and Techne – Conclusion

In the previous chapter it was noted that the Real and representation shaped the interpretation of knowledge with a phantasmatic promise. This is very important given that, from the Žižekian position, reality is a space of meaningless pieces of the Real, representation, and shared symbolic public rituals. Yet why is there the intrusion of an element of the Real that resists meaningful representation in the symbolic universe? In this chapter we will examine the role desire plays in this intrusion upon representational structure (discourse) by the Real. Beginning with the Lacanian insight that the object-cause of desire, the *objet petit a*, resists signification, we will first examine the abeyance of the *objet petit a* from the Symbolic. This initial discussion is qualified by the insight made by Lacan during a seminar on the 8th of December, 1954: “the machine is the structure detached from the activity of the subject. The symbolic world is the world of the machine.”²⁴³ Our initial discussion therefore analyses the problem of the *objet petit a*'s resistance to being assimilated into the detached structure of the Symbolic (what we will discuss as ‘technicity’ in later chapters), and the specific locus of this resistance in the ‘useful’ exchange of meaning, entertained as it is between the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. From here our discussion will then turn to the misrecognition of the limit between this abeyance of the *objet petit a* and the order of the Symbolic as the *objet petit a* itself. In this perverse scenario the order of the Symbolic is treated as the object of desire of the subject, the *a* in the *objet petit a*. Here we will examine Žižek's suggestion that the agent of symbolic authority, the Other, is no longer stable and thus lacks efficacy. This inefficiency of symbolic effects forces the subject to objectivate herself/himself to gain access to the economy of symbolic exchange. Such an objectivisation reduces the subjectivity of the subject to the subject's position in the deterministic symbolic universe. This self-objectivisation, then, forms the basis for discerning what remains if we suspend the framework of the Symbolic, which our discussion will unveil as the abeyance of the

²⁴³ Lacan, 1988a: 47

objet petit a. Herein the lapsing of the *objet petit a* when the Symbolic is suspended will reveal a fundamental condition of the interpretation of the subject: the Freudian term ‘*Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*.’ In this chapter we will venture toward a philosophical rereading of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* as an ontological function which grounds the subject as a Symbolic object through the endless repetition of its arbitrary instantiation on the plain of ‘meaningless’ material existence while paradoxically remaining premised on the ontogenetic emergence and elevation of the subject from this material existence.²⁴⁴ We will recapitulate this grounding of the Symbolic through the resistance of the *objet petit a*. In this part of our discussion we shall see that it is in the moment of the subject’s art of being, their *techne*, that reality gains its interpretability for the apprehension of the subject. However, it will also be shown that this condition of subjective apprehension rests on the indeterminacy of the abyss revealed by the abeyance of the *objet petit a* in the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*. Thus our aim in this chapter is to designate the proper grounding of the phantasmatic promise developed in the previous chapter to the end of locating the mysterious emergence of a subject from the ontological Abyss/Void into the *chora* of becoming that assures the ‘there-ness’ of the subject (or of being).

I – Gomi, Desire’s Failed Surplus

Symbolic reality sustains both the opposition of objects and the separation of objects, as exemplified by the simple notion of ‘causation’ where we may trace sequences of events and exclude irrelevant events according the principle of cause-and-effect. Within this frame the *objet petit a* remains undetermined by the symbolic codification or imaginary illusions of social existence because, as Lacan posits, “reality is *at the outset* marked by symbolic nihilation.”²⁴⁵ This nihilation takes place at a primordial level, changing the structure of reality (ontology) to accrue more value around the sites of the *objet petit a* and forms what a variety of theorists familiar with Lacan’s work, including Žižek and Fredric Jameson, refer to as a ‘cognitive mapping.’²⁴⁶ However, the *objet petit a* resists this symbolic nihilation by operating as the supposed ‘secret’ of the Other that entraps the

²⁴⁴ Johnston, 2008: 25

²⁴⁵ Lacan, 1997: 148-149

²⁴⁶ Lacan, 1997: 146-151

subject before identification takes place, the singling out of the subject by the signification and fantasisation that floods in behind this symbolic nihilation.²⁴⁷

Like Lacan, for Žižek the unified experience of reality is a misrecognition arrived at through the interplay of the symbolic denotation of the reality experienced as recognisably real and the connotation of an imaginary correlate which associates this recognition with the subjectivity of the subject.²⁴⁸ Between these two dimensions of symbolic denotation and imagined connotation intervenes a third undetermined dimension of pleasure and horror from which the lure of the *objet petit a* extends. The promise of the desired object to satisfy our wanton desire for it folds into the simultaneous realisation that our existence as autonomous agents is over-determined by something that exceeds our unified experience of reality.²⁴⁹ Here the *a* in the *objet petit a* is never directly accessed by the subject but mediated through knowledge or the Other and this mediation effectively hides the abeyance of the subject through the fantasy of their own absence. Yet if we are to break away from the vicious circle sustained by the narcissistic experience of unified subjective perception the machines of the Symbolic Other must appeal to an alternate Third to sustain some relation to the ontological status of the subject which is neither riven to mere creative individualism nor the objective field of recognition mediating access to the *objet petit a*.

The speculative fiction of William Gibson offers us an opportunity to observe an excellent demonstration of this Third that is between the individualism of the subject and the mediation of the *objet petit a*. In his short-story *The Winter Market* (1995) the waste of a post-industrial society is reincorporated into the margins of society helping to shape its activities of consumption. This waste/junk is called *gomi*:

“The boxes are filled with carefully sorted *gomi*: lithium batteries, tantalum capacitors, RF connectors, breadboards, barrier strips, ferroresonant transformers, spools of bus bar wire... One box is filled with the severed heads of hundreds of

²⁴⁷ Žižek, 1989: 44

²⁴⁸ Žižek, 2006: 81-85

²⁴⁹ Johnston, 2008: 37

Barbie dolls, another with armored industrial safety gauntlets that look like space-suit gloves.”²⁵⁰

For Gibson these cast-off goods return to a status of being undetermined, “the sea of cast-off goods our century floats on.”²⁵¹ *Gomi* herein function as the Third, the point of paradox where functionless objects that gave subjects access to the mediation of the *objet petit a* take on a ridiculous multiplicity while the structures of the epoch float atop this sea of disuse where the helplessness of this ‘oceanic feeling’ (Freud) extends to the horizon in all directions. This narrative of Gibson’s is permeated with a sense of unease about this sea of *gomi*, that something we have thrown off in the nihilistic clearing of the signification of reality sustains us by our very misrecognition of it as useless. In this light, while we are barred from directly accessing the *objet petit a* except by way of its ‘resistance’ to knowledge or the authority of the Other we nevertheless continue to ‘demand’ it. When the apparatus of mediation is removed, we no longer have the facility to make our wanton demands for *a*. This positioning of *gomi* suggests that when the object is stripped of its use-value it can define the existence of the subject more efficiently than the voluntary subjective assertion of agency, yet we fail to recognise it as such. Here we find an absence at the high point of agency where the subject discards what is of no use to their way of life. This discarding of objects deprived of their social place is an exercise in ontology, wherein the object disappears from epistemological reality only to reappear in the symbolic history of the present as a type of genealogical device for prescribing the ontological status of the subject.

In the middle of the 1950s Lacan also noted this absence of the subject from the symbolic world of representations, stating “the machine is the structure detached from the activity of the subject. The symbolic world is the world of the machine.”²⁵² Given his interest in the later Lacan of the 1970s and 1980s, the Lacan of the Real, Žižek reads this epistemological absence of subject without dominating the discussion with symbolic machines. Instead, Žižek’s name for what takes place in this absence at the apex of agency comes from a rereading of the Freudian term *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* as it

²⁵⁰ Gibson, 1995: 150

²⁵¹ Gibson, 1995: 141

²⁵² Lacan, 1988a: 47

makes reference to the Real. In the place of the absent object of desire/symbolic machine that returns to us in the Real we have a substitutive imaginary scenario where the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* is staged. In place of a symbolic authority/machine to verify knowledge with truth (*à la* Platonic realm of Ideas) we find ourselves alienated, being out-of-joint with no horizon set by an authorial superego. Freud's term '*Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*' condenses this extrapolation by reading this disjointedness as part of a binary signifier. In its psychoanalytic dimensions this binary is a hyphenated conflation of the Symbolic and Imaginary registers of social existence to shield the subject from the Real. Herein, this conflation is an attempt to reintegrate the surplus of signification that is at sea in the Third register, the Real.²⁵³ To present the world in terms of causation is a symbolic inscription onto the universe and an ideation of how the fragments of this universe are bound together in existence. It is this latter ideation that binds the separate significations of symbolic inscription, drawing many different objects in the semantic web to be under the same general meaning in the semiotic space. Symbolic signification introduces a lack at the same time that it allows a method of abundant relations to the universe, because despite the abundance of denotations for particular objects these denotations are in-themselves meaningless and without a 'logic' as such.²⁵⁴ When the imaginary correlates are introduced to associate signifiers to one another, symbolic reality gains some degree of cogency. That is also to say, the realm of the signifier, the Symbolic, is neither subjective nor objective as that distinction remains to be drawn in the Imaginary as the correlation of one term to its opposite. Yet in the presence of imaginary correlation, symbolic denotation can signify intersubjectivity proper; "the strange structure of the subject's relationship to the Other *qua* his symbolic Substance, the space in which he interacts with other subjects."²⁵⁵ Perhaps ironically this is the movement of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*, the reintroduction of the excess of empty symbolic gestures as fantasised substantial 'things' that attempt to fill in the empty signifier of intersubjectivity with the excessive remainder of the solipsistic symbolic universe: *objet petit a*.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1992: 239

²⁵⁴ Žižek, 1989: 123

²⁵⁵ Žižek, 2000b: 81

²⁵⁶ Zupančič, 2003: 128-129

We are thus presented with the Žižekian case against solipsism, which might also be rendered as the point of antagonism between psychoanalysis and philosophy. For psychoanalysis the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* presents the process of signification in compositely material gestures with the reintroduction of that which exceeds a merely physicalist conception of reality: consciousness. For Žižek consciousness is in its most pure form when all symbolic structures are swept away. Yet consciousness itself is a non-mechanical signifying structure attached to the subject that manifests at the point of the slippage between the letter of the Symbolic Order (the sign, the word) and the Imaginary meaning of the sign. Consciousness functions as the ontological place of the sign providing a signification that breathes into it some ‘sense’ or syntax of recognition.²⁵⁷ This directing of signification by consciousness is the ‘numeration’ of the denotation of the sign by the signified meaning: meaning is divided among particular symbolic inscriptions although meaning is not a defined object as such in the absence of this symbolic inscription/denotation. Following this, when Žižek enumerates the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* he formulates the task of analysis to be “separating what, in a social link, appears to belong together.”²⁵⁸

This task of separation translates into the psychoanalytic critique of philosophy. Psychoanalysis accuses philosophy of offering its explanations as an impossible totality, a worldview or *Weltanschauung* that ignores the nuanced fundamental process of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*. However, Freud famously points out that psychoanalysis is not a worldview which one can believe in and “feel secure in life, [knowing] what to strive for, and how [to] deal most expediently with one’s emotions and interests.”²⁵⁹ Although psychoanalysis is attached to “the scientific *Weltanschauung*”²⁶⁰ it does not invent grand conceptual systems as do religion or philosophy. These comments by Freud convey an important subtext for how the reinscriptive work done by the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* presents intersubjectivity as an empty signifier. If we grant that the

²⁵⁷ See the discussion of ‘*jouis-sens*’ in Section B.2 for a further elaboration of this ‘sense.’

²⁵⁸ Žižek, 2006: 299

²⁵⁹ Freud, 1991: 193

²⁶⁰ Freud, 1991: 219

symbolic universe has a structure, and as such can be considered both symbolic and universal (i.e. all 'subjects' are submitted to its functioning), we must also admit its tendency toward philosophical solipsism because the letters of the Symbolic Order enunciated by the Other have no reference point beyond the symbolic universe in which they appear. Meaningful speech is the Symbolic register registering its own movements. That is to say, the philosophical manoeuvre of inscribing the empty sign of the self-conscious subject as their own master into the (social) links of signs in the symbolic universe provides this universe with access to meaning because meaningful sense resides within the intersubjective moment on virtue of its symbolic indeterminacy, its emptiness.²⁶¹ This moment is the binding of the subject with another by way of a mitigating Third who verifies the messages passed between the subject and the other. When we address another person and feel we have been understood we experience oneself as another by 'having' the message without actually 'being' the addressee. We assume the position of the intermediary Other/Third, the remainder that intervenes in the binary signifier to provide some delimitation to the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*'s imagining of the constitution of the whole symbolic universe in its attempt to complete the associations the subject has imagined for themselves. Meaning thus attains the status of universality at the expense of the subject's separation from their self-involvement with their message.

On the side of 'having,' this opposition between having the message and being the Other/addressee involves the negation of metonymy. More specifically, in having the message the subject negates the substantialisation of the alter-ego to whom they address their message, maintaining an Ideal relation to them as the Symbolic Other who can receive their message. This negation indicates the absence of being for the symbolic object. Such a split between the symbolic object and the being of the object-in-itself is only visible through the side of the Symbolic, i.e. we must 'have' the message. Žižek reads this negation through the Freudian terminology of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*.

²⁶¹ This is also Wittgenstein's critique of Nietzsche's lapsing over the temporality of grammar. (Bond, 'Beyond Good and Evil (15),' 2006: 198)

The negation of *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* opens onto primordial repression, going to the heart of the subject's sense of selfhood.²⁶² Here the fullness of reality is exceeded by the presence of the 'I.' As Kant demonstrated, to give the self space to be in-itself as a self-conscious fantasising subject of desire means that our place in the determinate mechanics of external relations remains uncertain. To have an identity we must sacrifice ourselves to (Imaginary) representation by internalising it through signification (the integration of the subject into the Symbolic), which results in a symbolic nihilation of reality and therein access to the topology of external presentation is barred by our own self-perception. If the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* is suspended we come face-to-face with the incestuous maternal Thing, being in its raw there-ness, from which we separate ourselves *a priori* to accommodate self-consciousness as a symbolic effect, the 'empty rattling' of the subject as a symbolic object.²⁶³

The return of the excluded maternal Thing-from-Inner-Space thwarts the usual run of self-consciousness because the symbolic structure of representation becomes insufficient—in some cases leading to the psychoses.²⁶⁴ Such disruption changes the status of the *objet petit a*. The *objet petit a* is no longer a threat of possible disruption to be distanced by the framework of the Symbolic Order legitimated by the big Other, but the arrival of a disruptive absence where the symbolic processes of social reality persistently reinscribe the excess of the *objet petit a* only to find that the little piece of the real carried within the *objet petit a* evades the purely symbolic space. In effect we arrive at the impossible-real question 'what does the Other want?' because the subject has disavowed the separation of the symbolic universe from the register of the Real.²⁶⁵ Žižek's purchase on psychoanalytic theory tells us that conjoining these registers produces the real symbol, a meaningless formula that cannot be integrated into the shared/intersubjective public rituals sustaining the symbolic universe which also

²⁶² Žižek, 2000: 42-43

²⁶³ Lacan, 1997: 46; Žižek, 1993: 150

²⁶⁴ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1992: 238

²⁶⁵ Žižek, 2003: 60-61

functions as a stand-in for the void of the ‘excluded representation’ sought by the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*.²⁶⁶

The diagnostic criteria of psychoanalysis developed by Lacan can be helpful for elucidating the subject’s relation to this impossible-real question comported as a meaningless formula. In the case of neurosis, the neurotic is plagued by the ambiguity of this question and their neurotic structure as such is structured around the infinite deferral of this meaninglessness.²⁶⁷ In perversion, however, the pervert knows what they are for the Other and therein the question is internalised.²⁶⁸ The structure of perversion begins from reality as desolate and meaningless and brings forth excessive bursts of being that resist this meaninglessness, i.e. ‘it made me feel alive.’ Finally, in psychosis, as the famous Freudian case study of Judge Schreber demonstrates, this question mitigates the psychotic’s internal and external worlds, short-circuiting reality by linking the empty signifier of self-mastery to knowledge. In the instance of such a psychotic episode everything about the world becomes known, as exemplified by the favourite Hollywood line of the paranoid delusional subject: ‘they’re out to get me!’²⁶⁹ But does the pervert’s subversion of the enigma of the Other let them escape so easily?

II – The Schema of Perversion

The structure of perversion sets its focus on the Symbolic as *a* wherein the register of the Symbolic involves separation. In this sense, if the symbolic universe is the world of machines then the perverse subject’s place within this universe requires them to take up a position in relation to these machines. The elevation of perversion by the ‘ontic realism’ of various post-modernists and feminists as a mode to subvert prevailing Symbolic hierarchies is a misnomer according to Žižek’s analyses of the trauma of the Real. For Žižek, the dirty secret of the purportedly subversive perverse postmodern subject—constantly flitting between different subjective positions, never with one fixed identity,

²⁶⁶ Žižek, 2003: 61

²⁶⁷ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 303

²⁶⁸ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1992: 220

²⁶⁹ Lacan, 1997: 129

and so forth—is that it is not subversive at all.²⁷⁰ With the university discourse as a type of epochal ordering, Žižek makes the claim that perversion is becoming more and more the universal social relation for which the exception is the Buddhist bodhisattva.²⁷¹ As was already shown above, in perversion the transgression of the symbolic limit set by the Other/Third is the object-cause of desire. While the pervert seeks instances that will exceed the ‘respectable’ symbolic limit this very activity is grounded in a demand for this limit to prove its efficacy by negatively substantialising these instances, as with taboos.

Yet the pervert desires this symbolic efficacy precisely because they cannot have it, because as *objet petit a* it is an object lost through objectivisation and the loss itself, the gap in the Symbolic.²⁷² The pervert overcomes this by locating themselves in the place of the *objet petit a* as the object-instrument of the Other’s enjoyment. Here the pervert inverts the structure of fantasy so that their desire appears to come from without.²⁷³ Instead of the formula of fantasy where the subject is in some relation to their *objet petit a* we arrive at an inversion of this formula where the subject comports themselves as the *objet petit a* of the various limits set in the symbolic universe by the Law of the Other. ‘It wasn’t me the Other made me do it!’ is Žižek’s version of the perverse self-objectivisation inculcated by sadism and totalitarianism alike wherein the subject embodies ‘the ethics of the Good.’²⁷⁴

The power dynamic of the pervert’s position is not that of a unifying force. As Žižek outlines in his re-visioning of Lacanian social criticism, we must query, “that the dispersion of the unified subject into a multitude of subject-positions as it were automatically undermines the authority and exercise of Power.”²⁷⁵ Their self-objectivisation scatters the pervert across multiple instances of enjoyment because the Other persists in the relation between the symbolic universe and the imagining of the

²⁷⁰ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 286

²⁷¹ Žižek, 2002a: 271-272

²⁷² Žižek, 2002: 149-151

²⁷³ Žižek in Wright & Wright (eds), 1999: 117

²⁷⁴ Žižek, 2002: 102-108; Žižek in Wright & Wright (eds), 1999: 296

²⁷⁵ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 286

Other's enjoyment by the perverse subject.²⁷⁶ In this way the order of the symbolic universe remains beyond the grasp of the pervert at the same time that it constitutes the subject: "there is always a gap between public discourse and its fantasmatic support."²⁷⁷ This contentious gap means the pervert must sacrifice their polymorphous fantasy of acting-out the enjoyment of the Other to access enjoyment *tout court*.²⁷⁸ This stands out as Žižek's ideology-critique of the normalising of perversion by the struggle for intellectual hegemony by the 'Third Culture' ideologues of the West, e.g. Daniel Dennett's cognitivism, Stephen Hawking's cosmology, Benoit Mandelbrot's chaos theory, or Bruce Sterling's considerations of the digitisation of daily life.²⁷⁹

Only by overcoming the schematism of their perverse structure can the post-modern subject "directly constituted as an inconsistent bundle of multiple 'subject-positions',"²⁸⁰ and realise the Symbolic Order (as their object of desire) is lost prior to the realisation of desire. That is, to break from the vicious cycle of perversion the subject must traverse the inconsistencies of being "economically conservative but sexually 'enlightened', tolerant but racist, etc."²⁸¹ Subsequently the perverse self-objectivisation of the subject as an instrument of the Other's enjoyment is revealed to be a phantasmatic instrumentality supplementing the direct link to the socio-political engagement of subjectivity. In this way the perverse fetishising of the Order of the Other is inverted by a thoroughly post-modern subject who goes awry in the symbolic universe without the mediation between the subject and the *objet petit a*, mystically gleaned something of the One.²⁸²

In this inversion the subject remains ensnared in the hegemony of the Imaginary where the image is confused for the real object.²⁸³ This is the critical dilemma facing the self-objectivisation of the subject, by making oneself part of the symbolic automatism avenues of release are either folding into the naïve belief that every appearance is an

²⁷⁶ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 287

²⁷⁷ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 287

²⁷⁸ Žižek, 2000a: 125

²⁷⁹ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 88

²⁸⁰ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 287

²⁸¹ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 287

²⁸² Žižek herein takes us beyond Lacanianism, a move that will be further elaborated in later chapters.

²⁸³ Žižek, 2000a: 104

independent object (the commodity removed from its positive social relations of production) or the loss of symbolic structure altogether where the movement of signifiers is revealed as blind automation deprived of any innate value (as with the developmental destining that technology will always improve). Yet upon closer inspection we find these alternate options are two sides of the same coin. The folding into the naïve acceptance of commodities as paradoxically authentic fabrications reaches its zenith in the disappearance of the psycho-social structure of these commodities into the abyss of this paradox.²⁸⁴ It is here at this acme of self-objectivisation that post-modern irony legitimates an uncritical stupor as being-there, existence *nonsequitur* in its becoming. Examples of this abound in the critical analytical activity of the new millennium, i.e. play over engagement, language transgression by neologisms, and cultural relativism as a mode of political discourse. These examples serve to show how self-objectivisation becomes mired in the hegemony of the Imaginary. By turning the self into a symbolic machine of mere ‘discursive play’ we misrecognise the interpolation of our unified identity by various symbolic institutions as an authentic presentation of some substantial consciousness, i.e. you are your job. Such an abbreviation of the subject’s selfhood is what Žižek’s ideology-critique is attempting to uncover. Let us now take a further look at how value is imbued in the ornamental objects of self-objectivisation inculcated by the pervert, and how this elevation of symbolic machines works to cover over the contingency of the socio-political subject.

III – Excess of the Real

The exacerbation of self-objectivisation by the previously mentioned post-modern shift toward perverse transgression that fetishes symbolic limitation and separateness, e.g. the subject can be simultaneously tolerant and racist, hints at a primordial origin of the human condition under the discourse of knowledge. In Lacan’s theorising this discourse of knowledge is the known as the university discourse, and it is here that sacred icons (images staged in the Real) give way to technical vessels of manipulation (symbolic machines) thereby situating the subject in distinction to both these positions as a volatile and horrible Thing to be controlled through its own lust for excess. This is conceptually

²⁸⁴ We will return to this point during our discussion of mysticism in Section B.2.

validated by the process of reducing thinking to a kind of irrational rationalism, or, wild play in the Imaginary.²⁸⁵ Within the formal symbolic frame of epistemological reality this play of the Imaginary performs the function of fantasy. Fantasy is therefore intrinsically connected to the elaboration of technologies in the Symbolic, and both are constitutive of the human condition accounted for by Žižek. Herein, upon closer inspection, Žižek's philosophical endeavours show his indebtedness to a reading of the ancient Greeks infused with Heideggerian nuances.²⁸⁶

In the Platonic dialogue *Protagoras* (1976) the importance of technology to the human condition is revealed by human beings' poverty wrought by the forgetfulness of the god Epimetheus who was entrusted with the task of distributing powers of survival and well-being by his brother Prometheus.²⁸⁷ All seems to be going well until Epimetheus realises he has overlooked humans, leaving them naked and unshod. To amend Epimetheus' fault Prometheus decides to steal technical skill and the use of fire from Hephaestus and Athena to give to humankind, lifting them from their state of unshod nakedness.

This Platonic tale demonstrates the domain of the Imaginary as a speculative dimension which grounds the human condition co-extensive with the primordial domain of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*, which we have shown above to be the point of emergence for Žižek's fantasising subject.²⁸⁸ The myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus endows the characters in Plato's *Protagoras* with a pre-Symbolic *histoire* that is an excess from within the symbolic universe itself, as with the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*.²⁸⁹ Even though this myth is not reducible to fact, it feeds the desire of the subject with an allegory of necessity: we do not get what we want because we are always beginning on the back foot, in the negative, and the 'partial objects' of *techne* never quite seem to fit with the material existence from which the subject emerges ontogenetically.²⁹⁰ Hence the subject

²⁸⁵ Žižek, 'The Politics of *Jouissance*,' 2005: 128-129

²⁸⁶ Žižek, 2000b: 13; Butler, 2005: 3-12; Parker, 2004: 1-5; Sharpe, 2004: 1-19

²⁸⁷ Plato, 1976: 13-15

²⁸⁸ 1989: 158-161

²⁸⁹ Žižek, 1989: 160

²⁹⁰ Copjec in Žižek (ed), 2006: 95

fantasises as an attempt to amend this disjuncture between being and the lack instantiated by having symbolic knowledge.

Such an orientation appears in Žižek's work when he discusses the subject as an absolute negativity without end who is never past or forgotten. Considering the subject in this way coincides with "the void that remains after the framework of symbolic memory is suspended."²⁹¹ Within the confines of the university discourse this is the unconscious subject, the unassimilable excess that the discourse attempts to reintegrate through the operation of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*. In other words, the truth revealed by perversion is that the *objet petit a* appears to inhabit the same space as the (un)ground of being.

The processes of symbolisation and signification encased in the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* must confront the basic problem of relativism because the Symbolic is the register of relations between separate symbolic objects and the subject in their being. There is nothing behind the 'I' demarcating the subject in language because the subject as 'I' is constructed in its relative difference to other signifiers as speculation.²⁹² The abstract first-person 'I' is erected on the basis of its imminent negation by its own separateness/otherness in relation to the remainder of language/representation in which it enunciates itself. This specular negativity becomes pervasive up to the point of being absolute insofar as there is no support for the individual in "the network of tradition."²⁹³ Such a conception distances Žižek from the reductive readings of social constructivism where the subject is perceived as a social construct.²⁹⁴ An irreducible kernel defines the Žižekian reading of the subject as a precious *agalma* that disrupts the endlessly self-referential relativity of the symbolic universe.²⁹⁵ However, this reading also renders the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* partial to the otherness of the Symbolic without being totalised by the network of relations in the symbolic universe.

²⁹¹ Žižek, 1993, 42; 2000b, 16; Miller, 'Introduction to the Erotics of Time,' 2005: 20

²⁹² Žižek, 1994: 46

²⁹³ Žižek, 1993: 42; 2000b: 100-101

²⁹⁴ Parker, 2004: 49-52

²⁹⁵ Daly & Žižek, 2004: 80

Here we again find the Žižekian subject beginning from a necessary point of negativity. Žižek's framing of the subject creates a situation where the richness of symbolisation and fantasisation is at odds with the vortex of the Real.²⁹⁶ The significance constituted by fantasy to cover over the gap of the Real is persistently thwarted by the very modality of the subject's engagement with the Real. We can observe these failures in the three vectors of the Real: the Real-image is an unfathomable something appearing at the point where a sublime dimension shines through an ordinary scene thwarting the quotidian, the Real-symbol where symbolic structure is reduced to meaningless formulae as in the Beckett play *Waiting For Godot* (1990)²⁹⁷ where the persistent waiting continues indefinitely, and the Real-real that is a horrific object inciting terror as with the aliens of Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) where even the blood of the namesake vicious predator corrodes the world around it.²⁹⁸ Žižek places the self-consciousness of the subject in this vortex of the Real inasmuch as a subject is able to be critical of her/his own position as a remainder in the vortex or at least able to give themselves over to fantasising again and again without resolution.²⁹⁹

Freud similarly observes this recurrence of fantasy in the function of dreaming. In Freudian metapsychology the structure of dreaming can allow the return of a humiliation formed around a traumatic event many years prior thus allowing the subject to revisit the horrific Thing they were humiliated by.³⁰⁰ This analogous movement in Freud links Žižek's approach to the Freudian tradition of analysing the function of dreams. In Miller we find concurrence with the Žižekian reading of the fantasising subject in his review of the Freudian discourse on the function of dreams.³⁰¹ Following a similar line of argument Miller suggests the subject can make a decisive judgement as they take aim at the symbolic machine because temporality sheds the social fantasy in the acting out of the symbolic universe, leaving us with the procession of the process.³⁰² This clearing of symbolic relations places knowledge in a position of priority because the cut of a decision

²⁹⁶ Žižek, 2000a: 26-27

²⁹⁷ Beckett, 1990: 7-88

²⁹⁸ Žižek, 2000: 18-19

²⁹⁹ Žižek, 1993: 42; 2001a: 88; 2000b: 24

³⁰⁰ Freud, 1991a: 734

³⁰¹ Miller, 'Introduction to the Erotics of Time,' 2005: 20

³⁰² Miller, 'Introduction to the Erotics of Time,' 2005: 20

reveals its absurdity. As soon as the decision is made it is over and has become something else, as with the transformation of belief into knowledge.³⁰³ Within the bounds of the human condition the mythical origins of the ‘human, all too human’ condition are relegated to the realm of the Unconscious at the moment of judgement in the Freudian sense of these origins never being past or forgotten.³⁰⁴ We merely notice the withdrawal of the decision and its Unconscious underpinning. In this way the human condition can marshal its myths of origin and experience them in the present because they are part of an eternal Past, in contrast to the fluctuating process of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*.³⁰⁵ The experience of origins is therefore intimately bound with the question of possibility inasmuch as the experience of origins is part of enacting our subjectivity in such a way that it resists the totalisation of the university discourse. This resistance constitutes the source of Žižek’s ideology-critique in the Real.

IV – *Chora* and *Techne*

What then of the resistance in Žižek’s ideology-critique and the mythologisation of origins? In Plato’s *Protagoras* the pursuit of the horizon of possibility is grounded in the capability of the subject to live. The skills given by Prometheus are Platonic hallmarks of human civilisation and technological advancement.³⁰⁶ However, and all the more importantly, a delving into the *techne* of the Greeks marks this Platonic/Promethean emancipation of humankind.³⁰⁷ *Techne* is nuanced in Heidegger’s reading of Plato as the human drive or art toward knowledge and immortality.³⁰⁸ Thus the realm of symbolic machines is thoroughly bound to the way of life, or ontology, of the subject.

Critically speaking, Žižek’s ideology-critique reads *techne* both with and against another of the Platonic myths, the *chora*. The receptacle of becoming from the *Timaeus* (1977), the *chora*, has no character of its own as *techne* does. The *chora* is instead akin to a primordial slime that “continues to receive all things, and never itself takes a permanent

³⁰³ Miller, ‘Introduction to the Erotics of Time,’ 2005: 20; Žižek, 2001a: 88

³⁰⁴ Freud, 1991a: 733

³⁰⁵ Freud, 1991a: 733; Žižek, 2001a: 70-73

³⁰⁶ Taylor in Plato, 1976: 80-81

³⁰⁷ Heidegger in Krell (ed), 1993: 218

³⁰⁸ Heidegger, 1996: 266-272; Plato, 1994: 50-55

impress from any of the things that enter it.”³⁰⁹ Within Žižek’s theorising the *chora* pre-exists the subject constituted by knowledge and subjectivity as a formless all-encompassing receptacle for our acts, allowing our acts to emerge in the world.³¹⁰

This primal scene opens up the field of possibility to the status of nothing, which in turn negates the subject’s freedom to enact subjectivity because all existence is encompassed by the *chora*.³¹¹ In *The Indivisible Remainder* (1996) Žižek clearly suggests this pre-ontological status of the *chora* marks it as a lost foundation rendering freedom from nothing:

“This ultimate Ground [*Grund*] of reality... which sooner or later engulfs and destroys every determinate object, must be preceded by an unfathomable X... prior to *Grund*, there can be only an abyss [*Ungrund*].”³¹²

Plato admits the *chora* is intelligible yet “very hard to grasp,” and Žižek’s reasoning frames this as a kind of ‘Platonic surprise’ that X really is X, the abyss really is devoid of all determinate content because it really is an abyss.³¹³ To Žižek’s reasoning this is a type of knowledge in the Real where *techne* inscribes itself on the *chora* in an arbitrary moment of creating something from nothing, i.e. microscopy reveals a world that the human eye is unable to see unassisted.³¹⁴ Knowledge obtained through *techne* is herein not only compensatory in overcoming the material limitations of the human condition but also substitutive in the sense that what the body senses is now revealed through *techne* to be something the naïve organic senses alone cannot sense. Such a movement still retains the Platonic distinction (repeated by Bachelard) between truth and knowledge in the way *techne* substitutes sense-experience, yet this movement also needs to be verified through repeated scientific experimentation.³¹⁵ Here we encounter the repetitive motion of *techne* throwing our activity, *qua* human *praxis*, into the abyssal vortex of the Real and simultaneously this abyss offering itself as an excess preventing our knowledge from

³⁰⁹ Plato, 1977: 69§18

³¹⁰ Žižek, ‘Hitchcock’s Organs Without Bodies,’ 2003: 136; Plato, 1977: 70§18

³¹¹ Žižek, 1996: 14

³¹² Žižek, 1996: 14; Margaroni, ‘The Lost Foundation,’ 2005: 80

³¹³ Plato, 1977: 70§18; Žižek, ‘Hitchcock’s Organs Without Bodies,’ 2003: 133

³¹⁴ Žižek, 2001: 96-98

³¹⁵ Bosteels in Žižek (ed), 2006: 116-119

being total and homeostatic. As well as this preventative measure, this abyss promises some truth to be discovered and extracted from the indeterminate Real *chora*.

By way of demonstration let us return to the literary speculation of Gibson. In his early works Gibson provides us with an interesting example of how the *chora* is imprinted so space can ‘take place.’ In the acclaimed *Neuromancer* (1982), *Count Zero* (1984), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), Gibson develops a vision of cyberspace as an empty plane populated with geometrical objects that represent hordes of data. One enters cyberspace through electrodes placed about the head that are attached to a ‘deck,’ or interface, allowing access to and navigation around the matrix of cyberspace. The spatiality of Gibson’s cyberspace is itself empty, a kind of Void whose depth is characterised by the relative quality of the representations of geometrical data to one another and the user’s intellect. Embodiment remains a necessary evil of this technological interaction. For example, the subject can still experience vertigo but feels an uncanny absence of resistance when hastening through this Void.³¹⁶ Gibson’s cyberspace cowboys ‘feel’ the Void of cyberspace, the Void impresses sensations seemingly from within the ability to sense space.³¹⁷ ‘Sense’ is thus rendered categorical and formless in-itself, a type of *chora* in the way it opens the possibility for these sensations felt in the Void to be incommensurable with the disembodied rationale of navigating cyberspace.

Entering cyberspace a character will lose their sense of actual embodiment because the domain of virtual reality is far more replete with immediacy. The senses that help what materially exists intrude on the virtual field of possibility, the feel of using the deck to navigate cyberspace, for example, tend to only report sensations pertinent for the intentions in cyberspace. With immediacy on the side of the virtual the actual is overcome by the reality of the virtual.³¹⁸ That is to say, where there is no active subjectivity the Void remains in its virtuality to hide the actuality of the body. Something within Sense but greater than a sense itself informs the cowboys’ intelligence to navigate the space: fantasy. This is so because the Void is replete with an irrational immediacy

³¹⁶ Punter, 1998: 200

³¹⁷ Plato, 1987: 249-255; Punter, 1998: 205

³¹⁸ Capek, ‘Time and Eternity,’ 1967: 22

coextensive with the ‘effervescent punctuality’ of consciousness. The Void appears in the most fleeting of instances as it withdraws and fantasy sublates the ‘gap’ in its wake. In much the same way *gomi* disappears from view only to support the world at hand. And this raises the curious point whether the subject can transcend the *chora*’s paradoxically ‘empty’ permanence.

The *chora* is hidden by the possibility of thought (consciousness) because it is the receptacle for the flux of actual embodiment and virtual symbolisation. In Gibson’s narrative speculations on technology briefly explored above we only note the withdrawal of Sense. As in Žižek’s engagement with the philosophy of Deleuze it is the ‘reality of the virtual’ that is at stake in the Void, its “transcendental empiricism.”³¹⁹ This empiricism is transcendental in the sense of the “a priori conditions of possibility of our experience of constituted reality,” or, as Gibson accents with the presence of an electroencephalogram (EEG) on each deck to measure brain activity: you can really die in cyberspace.³²⁰ The *chora* is therefore the formless slime from which the subject-*qua*-being emerges, and is distinct from *gomi* insofar as it lacks the oceanic feeling of being amongst a multitude of like beings. The *chora* is not that which receives the existing thing in its death, but that which endows being with a self-assured and even narcissistic ‘there-ness.’³²¹ Herein the *chora* provides temporality only to make it recurrent, without end.

V – Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the complex grounding of the phantasmatic promise of the Symbolic Order and the ontological function of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* that facilitates the relation of this fantasy to the being of the subject located in the *chora*. We also noted that the ontological primacy of the *chora* and its inherent formlessness, and *gomi*’s interplay of redundancy and recognition, maintains a ‘slippage’ of temporality that grounds the appearance of symbolic objects/machines. This problem takes on a

³¹⁹ Žižek, 2004a: 4

³²⁰ Žižek, 2004a: 4

³²¹ Bataille, 1986: 117-128; Žižek, 2003: 3-10

special significance for the subject's recognition of themselves as an object through self-objectivisation because this self-objectivisation of the subject cannot assimilate the being of the subject. This inability to 'ground' the subject as a symbolic object in being occurs through the resistance of being to the Symbolic Order, it is 'void.' Thus this aspect becomes un-conscious and recedes into the *chora* because the subject's acquiescing to the order maintained by the authority of the Symbolic Other is held in check by the there-ness of consciousness. Situated in this way *techne* is given an ontological status; it integrates with our way of living but resists being domesticated by the various symbolic designations of it as an object. This resistance to the Symbolic register is one of the hallmarks of the Lacanian Real. And therefore this suggests there is a distinction to be made between the *techne*-real as *gomi* (a meaningless symbolic formula, etc) and the technological-representation that is bound up with human activity. With the withdrawal of the *techne*-real we are fed our own fantasies about technology as though they are raw, unadulterated, and universal truths. This state of affairs is the phantasmatic promise of technology founded in the specific moment of self-objectivisation. Such a comportment of the subject hinges on the point at which technology acquiesces to human activity, and yet simultaneously fulfils the role of presenting its own use-value as a natural state. This is exemplified when technical objects are deprived of their use-value status as *objet petit a* and become unwanted, valueless *gomi*. Hence, we may say that the fantasy of technology resides in the very designation of a symbolic object as useful. And it is this designation that is the phantasmatic mapping of technology in the symbolic universe.

Section B: Fantasising, Exposing the All Too Human

B.1 Three Freudian Fathers and a Fantasising Subject: Žižek's social critique

Modulations of the Paternal Function – ‘Homo Sucker’ – The Decline of Symbolic Efficacy – Passion Beyond Desire – The Father's Retrojective Death – Inversions and Diagnostic Structures – Conclusion

With the phantasmatic mapping of technology in the symbolic universe established in the previous section we can now move on to the ideological impetus of this phantasmagoria of technology. The conceptual structure of Žižek's critical *oeuvre* allows for an ideology-critique of technology focused on two specific dimensions of technology, the aesthetic and the instrumental. These two aspects of technology manifest within the fundamental position of technology in human activity. In this fundamental position technology appears as *techne*, servicing human ends as means of doing and making ‘the art of being.’ The role of aesthetics in Žižek's early work revolves around his Kantian critique of ideological judgement.³²² Here an ‘aestheticisation’ of ideology enters Žižek's works including *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *For They Know Not What They Do*, and *Tarrying with the Negative*.³²³ Herein the aestheticisation of ideology marks ideology-critique as an analysis of the series of sublime objects instated by the over-determining signifier for which no particular object can sufficiently stand-in for.³²⁴ To this end, the ideology-critique of technology treats technology through its relational form with human activity: *techne*. In this relational form of *techne*, technology over-determines the activities of the subject in such a way that human *praxis* is co-opted and what was once activities/practices independent of *techne* are now colonised by technology writ large in the symbolic universe as the Third/Other. To draw a broad example from intersubjective dealings, with *techne* mediating our voice/speech technological means of communication become a believable assurance that our message will arrive and be understood because the technical object comes to stand-in for the symbolic act of communication. In this scenario *techne* is simultaneously too weak because it is a decoy from the ideological

³²² Johnston, 2008: 13

³²³ Sharpe, ‘The Aesthetics of Ideology,’ 2006: 107-108

³²⁴ Sharpe, ‘The Aesthetics of Ideology,’ 2006: 109

mapping of technical communication (e.g. its ease, speed, and so forth becomes the 'natural' way of communicating) and too strong because it behaves as an agent of the Symbolic that guarantees our message will arrive and make sense within the confines of the symbolic universe. Technologically mediated communication thus becomes a kind of sublime object, paradoxically necessary to communication even though it is an all too human activity that takes place between human beings without being wholly technical.

This example highlights the need to examine the way in which Žižek locates over-determinations because they signify the potential for both human activity and *techne*. An important coextension to over-determination in Žižek's more recent work is the master-signifier. This Lacanian concept is an empty signifier. The master-signifier heralds the potential of the subject's fantasies (creative individualism) in the symbolic universe, but in order for these fantasies to function they must remain a possibility without ever coming to be. In this sense the intervention of fantasy in Žižek's ideology-critique is directed toward the emptiness of the master-signifier because this is the region of the symbolic field where potentiality can be consistently achieved.³²⁵ Thus the resolution of our fantasies is sublimated, the *objet petit a* inherent to these fantasies becoming sublime objects that enlist our further fascination.

Because of this Lacanian underpinning Žižek's more contemporaneous works including *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Parallax View* explicate the over-determining structure of the master-signifier through the relation of the subject to the prevailing symbolic universe in which they participate with language, practices, and so forth (the objects of discourse). In this chapter we will examine Žižek's turn to the Freudian myths of the Father to reveal the framework of the Other, the agent of the symbolic universe who elevates the master-signifier and consequently produces sublime objects. Approaching this question of consequences in the work of Žižek will require us to observe the subject relating to the Father/Other in the three registers established by Lacan: the undetermined Real, the binary oppositions of the Imaginary, and the separation of the Symbolic. This type of modal discussion will return us to the peculiar concern of Slovenian critical theory that

³²⁵ Žižek, 2006: 372

one of these registers can operate as a kind of ‘epochal modality’ integrated with a particular myth of symbolic authority embodied by an agent of the Symbolic. As we shall see, in *The Ticklish Subject* this agent of the Symbolic is the Other. But this discussion will go further than this to suggest that this Other is variegated by the various modes of the Freudian myths of the Father which concur with the particular Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic registers.³²⁶

I – Modulations of the Paternal Function

This overview of the modes of the authorial symbolic Other is qualified by the preliminary observation, made elsewhere by Parker, that Žižek grounds his ideology-critique in the role of the symbolic Other for contemporary society.³²⁷ This is the Other of psychoanalysis, Lacan’s *l’Autre* to whom we address our demands and who recognises us in return as beings answerable to responsibility.³²⁸ As such, the Other stands as the agent of the Order of the symbolic universe that simultaneously reveals and assures the efficacy of our symbolic universe. This symbolic efficacy is introduced through ‘the paternal function.’ In Žižek’s favoured Lacanese the paternal function is the “*name of the father*.”³²⁹ Hence the ordering of the symbolic universe is enacted, justified, and sustained in the name of the Other-*qua*-Father.

It is also important to note that this intercession of symbolic authority occurs where the order of the Symbolic attempts to overwrite the order of the Imaginary. In psychoanalysis this is the process through which the Oedipus complex is resolved. The child is separated from their binary relationship with the mother through the intervention of a third figure, the Father.³³⁰ At the level of metaphor this process refers to the way in which one is acculturated to the symbolic constellations of culture and society, the way one enters the Symbolic.

³²⁶ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 38-41; Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2006: 151

³²⁷ Parker, 2004: 62-64

³²⁸ Lacan, 2006: 693

³²⁹ Lacan, 2006: 230

³³⁰ Lacan, 2006: 230

During a seminar in New York on the subject of art in April, 2005, Badiou proposed we begin from the beginning “because that is what the Father tells us.”³³¹ But which Father does Badiou mean? Žižek offers an answer to this question in *The Fragile Absolute*, *The Ticklish Subject*, and *The Puppet and the Dwarf* through a return from his Lacanian position to Freud’s various permutations of the parricide myth in *Moses & Monotheism* (1990) and *Totem & Taboo* (1990).³³² Žižek takes three modalities of the Father from this reading of the parricide myth in Freud. The first is the Oedipal Father of symbolic injunction, the cruel superego who sets limits in the symbolic universe through an emphatic ‘No!’ The second mode of the Father is the anal Father of the primal horde, a *jouisseur* who has access to all enjoyment and enlists the pathological jealousy of the subject. The third and final mode reveals the figure of symbolic authority as a Father-*logos* of cosmic Order. In this third mode the Father is neither the agent imposing cruel symbolic injunctions, nor a *jouisseur* hoarding all pleasures. The Father-*logos* functions as a Real signifier that is the *dénouement* of symbolic unity in the abyss of the Real at the expense of the subjectivity of the subject.³³³ The framework of each Father supposes a constitution of the subject that predisposes them toward meaningful engagement with social reality and the symbolic universe therein.

We will begin with the Oedipal Father because his injunction provides the receptive *chora*-like infant with contours for their ego to emerge within.³³⁴ This Father is the agent of prohibition, the one whose mandate is to rigorously apply the restrictive ‘No!’ Simultaneously the Oedipal Father is the ego-ideal, the veiled point of ideal identification marred by obscenity. This ego-ideal is obscene because the Father’s power is arbitrary and non-negotiable, not something to be shared with the subject.³³⁵ Thus the cycle of identification is interwoven with desire because the subject is denied an object central to the ego’s gratification, the *gratis* of having her/his demands met. Desire, in this sense, follows its definition by Lacan as “neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the

³³¹ Badiou, ‘The Subject of Art,’ 2005

³³² One should note here that Žižek is following Lacan’s review of Freud and not rehearsing Freud.

³³³ Žižek, 2000b: 313-322

³³⁴ This follows from Lacan’s point that the ego is an illusion of unity. (Lacan, 2006: 75-81)

³³⁵ Žižek, 2000b: 316

second.”³³⁶ At the level of topography, this subtraction of satisfaction from the demand for love transmutes desire from ‘having’ the Father to ‘being like’ the Father. Furthermore, the Oedipal Father is unified by the meeting of the ego-ideal and the superego but distances itself from the dissolution of individuality in the Real.³³⁷ Herein Žižek understands the Real as a mitigating force against creative action (free will/identification) and as a space where the Father sets the psychical scene for the emergence of creative individualism from subjectivity.³³⁸

This basic tension culminating in the private subjectivity of the subject is played out in the film *Minority Report* (2002) where the chief of the Pre-Crime division, John Anderton (played by Tom Cruise), is accused and pursued for a chain of events *yet to happen* but are to occur *because of his creative individualism*. The finale comes when Anderton is assisted in his escape from his thought-prison. But the point is not that he escapes, it is that someone else assists him because he is immobilised and therefore cannot free himself. At the point where subjective decisions are often associated with freedom this film twists predetermination in a spectacularly Kantian way grounding the ethical duty of the subject in the open possibility of creative agency. To phrase this in another way, ‘You ought to so you must!’ Because you are free to choose you cannot but choose this path of action.³³⁹ This double negative indicates the absence of a totality that precludes the emergence of freedom and therein the openness of the field of possibility in which duty is asserted as an injunction on this freedom.³⁴⁰ Yet possibility remains open in light of ethical duty because the Other to whom I am ultimately responsible is able to intervene and disrupt the flow of events. The Oedipal Father is thus the Father of individualism and mobility that is beholden to the Real-Other, bringing attention to the autonomous response to the Other’s demands contrary to the rigorous determinism of the “moralizing mathematics of guilt.”³⁴¹

³³⁶ Lacan in Žižek, 1993: 121

³³⁷ Žižek, 2000b: 313

³³⁸ Žižek, 2000b: 313

³³⁹ Žižek, 2006: 42-49

³⁴⁰ MacNeil, 2007: 90

³⁴¹ Žižek, 2002b: 51

The inversion of contraries is a tactic Žižek deploys again and again, and his study of Freud's mythological Fathers bears this out. The Oedipal Father is inverted by the anal Father, and the anal Father by the Father-*logos*. Often in paranoid fantasy the anal Father is asserted as an agent pre-existing the injunction of some symbolic limit by the order/law of the symbolic universe.³⁴² An exposition of this is carried through in the film *The Recruit* (2003) starring Al Pacino and Colin Farrell, wherein the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) appears as the anal Father. Pacino's character Walter Burke 'recruits' James Clayton, played by Farrell, to find a mole within the CIA. To this end Walter assumes a position similar to that of Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone* (2004), it would seem that Walter's symbolic mandate is to guide James in a particular direction by denying him certain pleasures to the end of unearthing this mole staining their identification with the CIA. The CIA thus performs a symbolic injunction, or ideological interpellation, keeping the seemingly sordid activities of Walter and James legitimate within the confines of the symbolic order. The twist comes when James realises he is being manipulated by Walter, that in fact *James is the mole* and was made thus by Walter's own design. This twist reveals Walter possessing a secret enjoyment of ostensibly unlimited access to meaningful information, a 'boot camp' devoted specifically to breaking James' psyche, and a small army of black-clad mercenaries who pander to Walter's every whim. And maybe something a little bit more, *jouissance*, an excessive enjoyment that rules Walter like an external authority. Walter takes on the mantle of the anal Father, the *jouisseur* of the primal horde, not because he possesses a horde but because he is totally consumed by an unholy excess of pleasure, namely *jouissance* and *Schadenfreude*. As an anal Father Walter enjoys everything.³⁴³ Anything James touches is already, in some way, tainted by Walter's scheming.

To escape the grip of the *jouisseur* Žižek suggests inverting the anal Father to arrive at the Father-*logos*.³⁴⁴ The fundamental problem for all these myths of the Father is that the Father in each is ultimately deceased. They are myths of parricide where the subject comes to subjectively relate to the symbolic universe by overcoming the agent of the

³⁴² Žižek, 2000b: 324

³⁴³ Žižek, 2000b: 315

³⁴⁴ Žižek, 2000b: 328-329

Symbolic who is legitimated by the order of the symbolic universe. This is compounded by Žižek's post-Althusserian and Heideggerian promotion of the idea that we are riven by the empty place of the Father after the overcoming of each myth because subjectivity is founded on a lack. Thus a tension emerges between subjectivity and possibility, the symbolic designation/identification of a subject in social reality veers away from open possibility at the same time that it instates the promise of a subject being authentically subjective.³⁴⁵ The subject therefore appears to manifest within a crack in Being between the symbolic designation of the signifier and the signified promise of the designated object as sustaining a meaning. In this framing the subject-as-creative-individual attempts to sate the lack at the core of being a subject. A lack which is concomitant with the crack in Being that reduces the subject to an individual existent reified object, a being that is an unassimilable remainder in Being.

The Father-*logos* cracks the universal order of Being for us but this act is neither out of kindness nor malevolence, it just 'lets in some fresh air' precluding total predetermination, *a propos* of Irigaray's critique of Heidegger.³⁴⁶ The ego of the subject is thus the indicator of presence or, more precisely, the presence of a clearing in Being. Under the name of his commitment to idealist philosophy Žižek takes up this clearing through the eyes of Hegel as the 'absolute negativity' of the subject.³⁴⁷ This negativity is absolute insofar as the arbitrary cut of the symbolic designation is not relative but universal in its radical difference. In practical terms this is what defines the human from other creatures and one another for Žižek: the human subject is the living thing that can pretend to pretend.³⁴⁸

Žižek understands the Real operating in the *logos* of Being in two ways: pre-symbolic and symbolic proper. Implicit here is the Real as a thoroughly symbolic register. This is why Žižek reads *logos* with the *mythos* of the Father's autonomous origin, because it is the transition from the pre-symbolic *mythos* to the symbolic *logos* that renders the present

³⁴⁵ Žižek, 2000a: 69-82

³⁴⁶ Irigaray, 1999: 133-134

³⁴⁷ Žižek, 2002a: 36-37

³⁴⁸ This ethological point undergirds Lacan's 'mirror-stage' (Lacan, 2006: 75-81)

neither totally in our control nor hopelessly predestined.³⁴⁹ The Father-*logos* shows up the distinction between the God of philosophers *qua* the universal structure of the universe in its totality as pure becoming and the God of theologians *qua* the ‘dark God’ of capricious irrational Fate.³⁵⁰ In the myth of the Father-*logos* we kill the Father without realising His universality. We misrecognise the demand of our ethical duty to care for the Father/Other as the contrived manipulations of the *jouisseur* trying to steal our enjoyment.³⁵¹ Tragically we realise all too late that the Father we killed, the Father Nietzsche accosts us for killing, demanded our care because He was at once destitute of agency and excessive in structure. Here, the manifestation of ethics with care spares us the torment of being free to act without a reason.³⁵² With the eclipse of the Father-*logos* the symbolic universe sustaining social reality is cast adrift in the meaningless abyss of the Real where the ontological meaning assured by *logos* is now supplemented by the creative imagining of the subject that does not recognise the scission between their ‘Real’ body as a Cause and its psychical doubling by the designation of it as a ‘body’ by the Symbolic, only the binary pairing of the two.

Yet according to Žižek this tragic realisation dawns on us by virtue of reflection. Žižek presupposes reflection as the terrain of interpretation, the place where we connect the dots separating binary opposites into distinct signifiers. In reflection interpretation moves us from the Imaginary register to the Symbolic register. The dots need connecting because the Real always-already exists as the vortex in which our little bits of something float, teasing our desire. In the Imaginary register the *objet petit a* over-determines subjectivity in the form of a Jungian archetype. The shift to the register of the Symbolic transubstantiates this archetype as a series of meaningless symbolic objects which cannot be translated back into the shared symbolic universe of social reality because they remain a semblance of imagining in place of a signifier of signification. Herein the object marked by the signifier becomes an *objet petit a* by undergoing an ontological shift which

³⁴⁹ Žižek, 2000b: 317-319

³⁵⁰ Žižek, 2000b: 317-318

³⁵¹ Žižek, 2000b: 326

³⁵² As we shall see in the next chapter, the Lacanian treatment of the Lady’s alienation (as against the Freudian reading of the ideal in identification) further obscures this already troubled condensation of the subject’s world. (Lacan, 1992: 169-175)

is reflected in a corresponding shift in the epistemological status of the object. These shifts disrupt the intersubjective status of social reality because the subjectivity of the subject functions as a blind-spot in the symbolic universe: subjectivity is neither a signifier nor a signified. However, overcoming the Father-*logos* appears to draw the subject into the position of the master-signifier, the signifier for which there is no signified meaning. Thus the *objet petit a* seems to transcend the registers of Being (Imaginary, Symbolic, Real) when the subject takes up the position of determining their own subjective possibility and yet this is delusional.

II – ‘Homo Sucker’

This quasi-transcendence of the *objet petit a* is indicative of the *jouissance* that exceeds the threshold of homeostasis in a self-regulating world of universal order. Such *jouissance* appears as the ‘Imaginary-Real,’ the mysterious *je ne sais quoi* that allows the sublime dimension to shine through an ordinary object in the symbolic universe.³⁵³ Such a Real-image manifests itself in the imagined ‘us and them’ opposition between liberal democratic nation-states and other forms of government wherein the sublimation of ‘the art (*techne*) of democracy’ magically elevates the value of democracy as the only dignified procedure of governing even though democracy is still a form of government akin to those which it is imagined to be opposed against such as totalitarianism.

The shift from the Imaginary to the Symbolic reinterprets the nuances of the *objet petit a* as a ‘Symbolic-Real.’ Herein the consistency of the transcendence of the *objet petit a* is questioned to the extent that the multiplicity of *a* may be abstractions with no concrete relation to our everyday life-world where we engaged with social reality. Žižek’s preferred version of the Symbolic-Real is the senseless formulae of quantum mechanics, which resist integration into the commonsense observations of the life-world.³⁵⁴

This transition from the order of the Imaginary to the order of the Symbolic does not totalise the subject within an abstract homeostasis bound by the *objets petits a*. Where we

³⁵³ Žižek, 2000a: 30

³⁵⁴ Žižek often remarks that “modern science touches the Real” in this senseless way.

find a subject in their entirety as an abstract symbolic entity, a Master of their own Signifier, they are atrophied as an unassimilable remainder in the symbolic universe because their subjectivity—that allows them access to the quasi-transcendental *objet petit a*—exceeds the Symbolic register of experience. And yet in negotiating the symbolic universe, subjectivity doubly removes the subject from the object in-itself because the arbitrary self-designation of the subject in the subjective assertion of a self is compounded by the misrecognition of the symbolic designation of extant objects in the primal baptism of naming.³⁵⁵ This misrecognition occurs because symbolic designation does not give the object without first symbolically encoding it. Rather, the symbolic universe understands objects through its own system of signification, and perpetually attempts to assimilate objects into this process. Hence Lacan designates the symbolic world the world of machines and not of subjectivity, but the machines of the symbolic universe remain irreducible to the Order of the Symbolic.

In light of this one should also add that for Žižek's ideology-critique the symbolic universe is composed of constellations of *techne* without these constellations being necessarily ontological. For example, when Fate draws the character of a novel or play to their destiny should the character exceed the judgement of 'thou art that!' they no longer have reference to the separation of a name from its meaning. All meaning is thus inscribed too soon, therefore the ontological dimension loses its tension with everyday epistemological existence and the subject is reduced to an algebraic sign that is null. Because *techne* is given primacy by the Symbolic register which allows understanding to flourish and ontology to be reduced to material for symbolic inscription, *techne* differentiates itself from meaning on the one hand, and subjectivity on the other.

The differentiation of *techne* from subjectivity is given strong emphasis in the ancient Greek theatre of Sophocles. When Oedipus seals his destiny at Colonus, fulfils his fate, he reaches a senseless space where he is neither dead nor alive: dead to the Symbolic Order but still alive and breathing.³⁵⁶ In a way Sophocles' *Theban Plays* (1947) are the

³⁵⁵ Lacan, 2006: 6

³⁵⁶ Žižek, 2000b: 160-161

tale of a transition from ‘*homo sacer* to *homo sucker*,’ following Žižek’s crass observations on Giorgio Agamben in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*.³⁵⁷ Oedipus begins by fulfilling his destiny through the active assertion of his subjectivity/creative individualism in the field of the symbolic Other/Fate. He is duped by the Fates, marries his mother, murders his father, and so forth. Achieving these fateful acts Oedipus is then reduced to living with no destiny as an old man with a private eternal past of grotesque deeds and no hope for the future when death comes upon him at Colonus. Oedipus is deprived of the possibility of the master-signifier because his own subjective assertion of agency is revealed as a sham, its independence was merely an illusion produced by the symbolic fictions of the social reality in which he found himself. Abandoned by the symbolic universe, Oedipus is left with the unassimilable remainder of his subjectivity that the Symbolic could not reinscribe into itself. Yet, as the scene at Colonus displays, that which the Symbolic cannot overwrite is also that which resists the liberating power of *techné*. The fate of Oedipus thus draws our attention to the forced choice of being ‘to be,’ to become, rather than the regressive essentialism of being ‘having’ existence as a type of material quality. Herein, ‘being’ effectively predates materiality.

The revelation of the forced choice of existence by the predestination of Oedipus also shows that necessity pre-exists the being in its becoming. Against essentialism, necessity refers to a becoming without being. This becoming is revealed by the withdrawal of the symbolic universe and *techné*. We are confronted with that which resists symbolisation, a kind of ‘Real-Real.’ Taking this pre-existence to itself the Real-Real reveals the primordial Thing embodied by Ridley Scott’s alien in the film *Alien* (1979). This creature is a grotesque being solely devoted to the consumption of life whose very blood seems to corrode reality, supposing a constant cycle of decay. To this extent the primordial Thing and the abyssal vortex of Chaos in which Oedipus finds himself at Colonus coincide. We cannot know the being *qua* thing-in-itself without the register of the Symbolic. Yet the very existence of necessity hints at an eternal past, a *mythos*, from whence it emerged into the becoming of Being (*logos*). To elucidate this shift Žižek borrows a term from Schelling to encapsulate the transition from the pre-symbolic to the symbolic proper: *Ent-*

³⁵⁷ Žižek, 2002b: 83-111

Scheidung. This term encapsulates the passage from *mythos* to *logos* that posits *mythos* as an eternal past and the predestination of the future as impossible and yet necessary.³⁵⁸

III – The Decline of Symbolic Efficacy

Žižek finds the *Ent-Scheidung* when he follows Badiou's accounting of the twentieth century. Here post-modernity is marked as an era enamoured with a passion for the Real and eternity.³⁵⁹ Civilisation longed for the kernel of the Real: children threw away the edible chocolate of the Kinder Surprise to get at the toy inside, with Duchamp's *Fountain* modern art elevated a no longer functioning urinal to the dignity of a sublime Thing, the rise and rise of economic rationalism installed a regime of political regulation focused on societies' excesses where the administration of people was lost in the administration of things,³⁶⁰ and Coke-a-Cola Amatil released caffeine-free diet Coke, a drink that was no drink at all.³⁶¹

Each of these exemplar objects have undergone a process of purification and subtraction, lurching toward the empty universality of the master-signifier. The Kinder Surprise ceases to be an edible food product and is instead made attractive as a casing promising a void space in which a toy resides.³⁶² Although the just stated definition corresponds to the structure and functionality of the master-signifier such a definition of the toy as a little bit of something also offers a preliminary sense of the *objet petit a*. In the instance of the urinal the object is defunctionalised to the point of ridiculous sublimity.³⁶³ With expert administration without politics we find bureaucracy soliciting little bits of *jouissance* in an attempt to give people a national identity rather than let them choose their own *bricolage* of political representations.³⁶⁴ And in caffeine-free diet Coke we must ask what it is we are drinking? We are drinking the elusive X, *it*, the kernel of the Real that resists

³⁵⁸ Žižek, 2000a: 71

³⁵⁹ Žižek, 2000b: 133-134

³⁶⁰ Žižek in Rancière, 2006: 75

³⁶¹ Žižek, 2000a: 21-40

³⁶² Žižek, 2003: 145

³⁶³ Žižek, 2000a: 32

³⁶⁴ Žižek, 2000b: 198-199

symbolisation.³⁶⁵ In each case the object of the scene is purified to the limit of what can be represented in the Symbolic. This limit infers that we cannot entirely reinscribe an object unless we subtract the scene itself, the fantasy-frame we access the object through, is subtracted and leaves behind a quasi-transcendental remainder, the *objet petit a*.³⁶⁶

Purification and subtraction are operations of a culture crazed with desire, of wanting what it can never have. Purification is the process whereby the Real-Thing is isolated from other objects.³⁶⁷ An example of pure life in this framing would be Scott's alien, a living creature whose very blood corrodes reality itself. Herein the pure object/Thing appears alongside the quasi-transcendental *objet petit a* but remains independent of the subject, i.e. noumenal.³⁶⁸ The process of subtraction then attempts to establish a minimal difference between the determinate content of the Thing, i.e. the empirical attributes of its appearance, and the signifier that functions as its stand-in for the Symbolic Order.³⁶⁹ There is a gap between the empirical attributes of the Thing and the ontological overdetermination that makes the Thing mitigate the fantasies which attempt to fill the position of the master-signifier and reveal the potentials of the Thing for the symbolic universe.

This minimal difference refers to a surplus-element that sticks out from subtraction. The 'minimal difference' herein is the difference between the set and this surplus element or stand-in which belongs to the set but lacks any differential property that would specify its place within the edifice of the matrix set. That is to say, the surplus-element will decentre the Centre if it is included in the totality, i.e. anything multiplied by zero produces zero.³⁷⁰ In this vein the subjectivity of the subject is unable to be assimilated into the Order of the symbolic universe because creative individualism is nothing, it is not *techne*.

³⁶⁵ Žižek, 2000a: 22

³⁶⁶ 'Transcendental' because it remains after both representation and imagined reality are removed, 'quasi' because it only appears transcendental after the represented scene is staged.

³⁶⁷ Žižek, 2003: 64

³⁶⁸ Žižek, 2003: 66

³⁶⁹ Žižek, 2003: 67; 2000a: 105-106

³⁷⁰ Žižek, 2003: 67

Yet could such an ‘empty’ sign therein universalise the subtracted elements of the set? For Žižek, universality is an empty principle in which “Zero is counted as One,” the point where the minimal difference involves itself with the set.³⁷¹ Žižek announces universality as both abstract and concrete, not exclusively centralised around abstraction or actually existing political economy.³⁷² Universality is abstracted insofar as it mediates all particular content through negation, therein making it a destructive force rather than an all-encompassing container. No symbolic content is empty enough to fit with the Universal and must therefore be ‘mediated’ so as to link it with the Universal as such. The concretising moment of universality is when “Zero is counted as One,” when a negative split inside the Universal reduces it to one of its particular elements.³⁷³ This is a loss of abstraction where the Universal enters its own frame. Accordingly the concrete thus becomes the negative of abstraction, a *negation of the determinate negation*.

This type of universality, however, is miserably reliant on the efficiency of the Symbolic Order from which it takes its particular content. Žižek makes much of the decline of ‘symbolic efficacy’ today because he observes that the symbolic injunction of the superego/Father is no longer a prohibitive ‘No!’ but an incitement to ‘Enjoy!’³⁷⁴ Herein we move from the Oedipal Father’s cruel prohibition to the anal Father’s excessive permissiveness, from identifying with the Master to searching for the truth among the Master’s treasures of enjoyment and, more potently, his *jouissance*.

At the level of symbolic efficacy this is to be seen as a regression. The truth of the Oedipal Father

“Can ‘function normally’ and accomplish its job of the child’s integration into the socio-symbolic order only insofar as this identity remains concealed—the moment it is posited as such, the figure of paternal authority potentially turns into an obscene *jouisseur* (the German word is *Luder*) in whom impotence and

³⁷¹ Žižek, 2003: 65

³⁷² Žižek, 2003: 87

³⁷³ Žižek, 2003: 65

³⁷⁴ Žižek, 2006: 83 & 347

excessive rage coincide, a ‘humiliated father’ caught in an imaginary rivalry with his son.”³⁷⁵

In the Oedipal matrix the child is attempting to overthrow the Father but resolves this through asserting their individuality with the intervention of symbolic authority. Here we are substantially beginning from the child-*qua*-subject and using the paternal function as an ontological function rather than an argument deriving from genetic heritage (epistemology). The problem Žižek is suggesting occurs when the paternal authority is posited as a substantial entity, when the agent of prohibition seems to be attempting to prohibit for their own pleasure. Reminiscent of Kant, this self-interest sunders their claim to ethical universality. Žižek finds that such a substantialisation of the paternal authority, for example the inculcation of pathological self-interest displayed by America in its occupation of Iraq during 2003 where the liberation of the Iraqi people was co-extensive with the desire to control oil reserves, marks the decline of the Other.³⁷⁶ Here the Otherness *qua* difference of the particular ‘authority’ loses its symbolic efficacy because it exposes the *jouissance* of the subject as the site of the Other’s *jouissance*—enjoyment meant by the Other.

The decline of symbolic efficacy is a movement from the negativity of cruel prohibition to the speculative pathologising of the Other’s enjoyment. Žižek understands this shift as an ideological manoeuvre to justify the invasion and occupation of Iraq, “a sincere ideological belief that [America] was bringing democracy and prosperity to another nation.”³⁷⁷ America here is situated as the Other, a symbolic authority. As an agent of the Symbolic America exposed itself to excessive enjoyment, the perverse pleasure of purporting democracy needed to and could find roots in another nation in order to take on a life of its own, to become what Žižek calls “*jouissance*.”³⁷⁸ That is to say, the occupation of Iraq reveals a passion for the Real that voids the ethical injunction to obey by reducing the status of the Other (America) to whom I am ethically responsible to a

³⁷⁵ Žižek, 2000b: 313

³⁷⁶ Žižek, 2004: 4; 2002b: 58-60

³⁷⁷ Žižek, 2004: 4

³⁷⁸ Žižek, 2002b: 96-97

mere other alter-ego whose situation we may better with our own.³⁷⁹ A decline in symbolic efficacy is a decline in the status of the Other, denuding it of its superego strength.

IV – Passion Beyond Desire

What then of the interpretation interior to this competing with the *jouisseur*? Žižek theorises that the invention of rules and regulations has become the never-ending task of today, “even for sacred texts we must decide how it speaks to us *now*.”³⁸⁰ Of course, with the certainty achieved by the Symbolic undermined, any interpretation cannot be conclusive, and Žižek goes so far as to suggest that it remains absurd in-itself.³⁸¹ Interpreting the world thus becomes a most ‘useless art’ (*techne*) yet one we are doomed to partake in, hence the Father/Other manifests as the Master of the symbolic signification of this interpretation.

The uselessness of interpretation finds its redemption in practice by unhinging what Žižek, following Judith Butler, calls our “passionate attachments.”³⁸² In the myth of the Oedipal Father, where the Father is the cruel agent of superego prohibition, passionate attachments function as the price we pay to enter socio-symbolic space. We pay the price for the social link by betraying our little bits of *jouissance* (*objets petites a*). These kernels of the Real belong to the subject as an organism engaged in the symbolic universe of ethics, aesthetics, and so forth. More precisely, this is the subject in their subjective assertion as a ‘me’ and not as an ‘I’ designated by the Symbolic Order.³⁸³ What makes the Oedipal Father cruel is not that he invokes some ‘irrational guilt’ but that, as the superego, he manipulates the subjectivity of the subject to betray the fundamental passionate attachment to the pre-Symbolic Real where the incestuous maternal Thing resides.³⁸⁴ The maturity of the subject developed by the transition through the Oedipal matrix thus comes at the price of desire for/of the mother who belongs to the Father. The

³⁷⁹ Žižek, 2000b: 330

³⁸⁰ Žižek, 2000b: 333

³⁸¹ Žižek, 2000b: 61-62

³⁸² Žižek, 2000b: 265-269

³⁸³ Žižek, 2000b: 266

³⁸⁴ Žižek, 2000b: 268

mother is inscribed into the symbolic universe by the paternal function, and is therefore held apart from the subjectivity of the subject.³⁸⁵

Because maturity is a mark of symbolic integration, it cannot wholly succeed lest the subject become a symbolic machine emaciated of subjectivity and herein incapable of interpretation. Interpretation intercedes in experience to allow what Aristotle's *Poetics* (1996) discusses as *catharsis*: we can observe a fantastic scenario in a piece of theatre, a narrative, or some music and release our pain and anguish, enacting and resolving our *pathos* in our imagination. Žižek would probably point out however that at the level of material ontic reality *catharsis* becomes *cathexis*: the attachment of passion we give to one or many of 'our objects' to release unbearable frustration, anxiety, infatuation, or love.³⁸⁶ The point is that the target of the superego is drive rather than desire, the subjectless *moi* that instils a sense of 'need' and not the desires coordinated by our fantasising that have us issuing demands.³⁸⁷ For example, one might read because we like the feel of a book in our hands in distinction to the desire to enjoy something in the book: the fragmented corporeal experience of the hands themselves in distinction to the cerebral interest. The paternal function thus opens onto fulfilling our fantasies by approving our desire. As per the supremacy of recognition in Lacan, in the absence of guilt we are left with the recognition from the agent of the Symbolic that binds us ever tighter to the authority of the Father/Other.

V – The Father's Retrojective Death

Žižek's examination of the Other through the modes of the Father reveals the swerve around the Real which our recognition of symbolic authority undertakes. Such a swerve suggests errancy is older than truth because we do not realise how much we need prohibitive symbolic authority until it is gone. This is the structure of the truth-event. For the subject to be 'human' and not merely an animal possessed of reason (*zoon logon*

³⁸⁵ The promise 'to have' the mother is transmuted to the Father who functions as an abstract/symbolic stand-in for the subject, thus the subject is alienated from the relation. This decentration gives the subject their lack so that the subject can be jealous of the theft of their enjoyment by a symbolic authority instated to supposedly allow them compensation in place of the incest taboo.

³⁸⁶ Žižek, 2000b: 268-269

³⁸⁷ Žižek in Rothenberg, Foster & Žižek (eds), 2003: 115

ekon) Žižek follows Lacan insofar as he relies on the ethological presupposition that we have the capacity to pretend to pretend. At the same time this indicates that Žižek is not free of the ancient Greeks and their Promethean myth of human technological independence which at the same time carries this cycle of falsifying error. It is the comparative similarities and differences between Žižek and these ancient Greek philosophical forbears that reveal how the locus of one's creative individuality is enmeshed with our relation to symbolic authority in their very separation.

The gap between Žižek and the sense of singularity prevalent in pre-Socratic cosmology and epic poetry, Hesiod's *Theogony* (1953) for example, becomes apparent when we look more closely at the three Fathers.³⁸⁸ To overthrow the Oedipal Father is to create an empty place where the symbolic efficacy of the Symbolic Order is invoked by the superego, the master-signifier. This allows the agent of symbolic prohibition to be polymorphous, embodied by a variety of things and not merely another speaking being. The art of overthrowing the agent of the paternal function is not without its difficulties however. The very *techne* that overthrows the Oedipal Father can herein also embody the paternal function as an agent of the Symbolic. When the subject of this agent's prohibitive cut attempts to assume the empty point where the Symbolic legitimates itself they find they cannot wholly subsume it and become the Oedipal Father anew because they desire. This is so because for the subject to be a subject engaged in a symbolic universe they must already be marked by the cut of the Symbolic. The game of prohibition is wrecked because when I take up the mantel of the master-signifier and assume the position of the Other, I shed the ideal purity of this position, reducing the position to that of the small other, an alter-ego with the same propensity for desire as the subject. As the small other, the agent of prohibition is a sadist who takes delight in my pain because the symbolic authority has been substantialised/subjectivised.

This point is also retroactive. We realise in retrospect that we were duped all along, that the Other was always out to hurt us. Žižek's idealist philosophical reading of this consists of the Universal entering its own set of particular conditions *a propos* of the violent force

³⁸⁸ Barnes, 1987: xxxviii-xl; Hesiod, 1953: 123-186

of abstraction tearing apart every particular condition and subsequently sundering universality from within.³⁸⁹ The polymorphous aspect of the Other becomes universalised, domesticating symbolic authority in the fantasised form of some substantial entity. To Žižek's reasoning this is the process whereby the Universal is made concrete (in *techne*), but the situation can also operate as an analytic of the transition from the mysterious agent of prohibition, the Other as Oedipal Father, to the polymorphous agent of limitation, my imaginary rival.

According to Žižek, this analytic shift is revealed by the function of Ferrero's *Kinder Surprise*. The allure of the chocolate-cased toy is brought about by our inability to access it. Once we make do with the chocolate casing and have access to the object (toy) at its core, the toy it is no longer endowed with the same magical kind of allure because we come to focus on the empirical object rather than the enigma of what it might be: we know the Other *qua* Ferrero knew all along what type of toy was to be had, and now we know too.³⁹⁰ The subject realises their fate to have the particular empirical object was predetermined all along by a capricious, irrational Fate. This is Ferrero as the *jouisseur*, an imaginary rival we cannot defeat because free-action is circumspect, all is predetermined.

In the case of the *jouisseur*, the Father becomes our imaginary rival for control of the primal horde.³⁹¹ When we overthrow this anal Father however we again find we cannot fully assume his symbolic mandate because the rivalry took place along the axis of Imaginary-Symbolic, the anal Father as a kind of Jungian archetype.³⁹² To kill the anal Father then is to destroy an origin of us. Where the demise of the Oedipal Father promises emancipation but delivers enslavement to our raw drive, the ruin of the anal Father deprives us of our *jouissance*.³⁹³

³⁸⁹ Žižek, 2003: 87

³⁹⁰ Žižek, 2003: 145-151

³⁹¹ Žižek, 2000b: 313

³⁹² Žižek, 2000b: 313

³⁹³ As in a scene from the film *Fight Club* where Jack loses control of his hand, it takes on a life of its own beating him incessantly. Yet by the end of the film this excess activity is gone.

We can observe this consequence in today's post-political societies. To exist in these societies without *jouissance* is to become a mere *zoon logon ekon*, or perhaps a sociopath. And yet Žižek's Lacanian disposition means we are never free of *jouissance* as it is contained by the subject's own self-image or *imago*. This vital point suggests an image of a follow up film to *The Recruit* after Pacino's character Walter is captured by the CIA and Farrell's character James has the lie of his existence up to that point legitimated by the CIA itself whereby he is devoted to serving them.³⁹⁴

Most disturbing of all is the funeral of the Father-*logos*. Here we have killed the Father under the assumption he was the *jouisseur*, our rival, the one who did not want us, who hated us. What we realise after the fact is that he was the Real-Thing. He was the insubstantial 'it' to caffeine-free diet-Coke, the men's bathroom to Duchamp's *Fountain*. The myth of the Father-*logos* shows up the veil of misrecognition included with the ego-ideal: we misrecognise what the Other desires as a substance, as a theft of our substantial enjoyment.³⁹⁵ However, what the Other wants is an enigma because it is the existence of the Other that is questionable *a priori* as an enigma proper. Thus the 'substantial enjoyment' imputed to the Other covers over the lack in the Other, their questionable status as the beginning of 'being' in its recognition. This misrecognition herein produces revenge as the beyond of the loss or mourning of the Father-*logos*, *techne* becomes a type of 'revenge' for our symbolic castration by the *logos*. What the model of the Father-*logos* therefore shows us is that we begin from the undifferentiated Real and not our particular fantasies and desires entertained in the field of the Other.

VI – Inversions and Diagnostic Structures

Saying the Other is enigmatic is tantamount to suggesting the Other does not exist. But it is this very non-existence of the Other that is under threat by the decline in symbolic efficacy and the successive atheistic and fundamentalist attempts to assume the authority of the Other. For Žižek this means when he discusses the Real his examples appeal to

³⁹⁴ The cinematic obverse of this would be a film like *Taxi Driver* where Travis—Robert de Niro—is the sociopathic vigilante *par excellence* adhering to his own schizoid order.

³⁹⁵ Žižek, 2003: 79-80

regions of world history where the symbolic efficacy of the Other still pertains. In *The Puppet and the Dwarf* for example he takes up Lévi-Strauss' analysis of Great Lakes tribes to demonstrate the Real as neither objective nor subjective but "the traumatic core of the social antagonism that distorts the tribe members' view of the actual antagonism."³⁹⁶ Žižek's Real is a disavowed force of anamorphic distortion, a kind of 'iréel-Real' at the margins of the Symbolic Order and the illusions of the Imaginary. Truth becomes a measure of the Symbolic, the Real resists symbolisation, in due course then the truth of the Real is revealed in the erring of the Symbolic as the return of the repressed Real-Thing.³⁹⁷ Without the counterpoint of symbolic efficacy the non-existence of the Other that allows the subject bursts of spontaneity in the symbolic universe is reduced to a small other/alter-ego whose very presence antagonises the subject's spontaneity, typecasting narcissism as the default ontology of social reality. Narcissism in this light is fidelity to the maternal Thing which disrupts the symbolic universe, it aligns the use-value of *techné* to fit the demands of the ego. Although the Thing is in the register of the Real the domestication of the Other to the level of the small other results in the subject's disavowal of prohibition. Such a shift away from symbolic efficacy is an attempt to take up the place of the *jouisseur*, but lacks any structuring principle (symbolic castration) which could bind the subject to the symbolic universe.

The Real intrudes on all three mythical Freudian Fathers, serving to emphasise why we cannot rationally posit wholly cruel agents of prohibition, perverse imaginary rivals, or ultimately rational beings without destroying our own position in the symbolic universe as well. The Real decentred the Oedipal Father in the twentieth century with the emergence of a *jouissance*-like passion for the Real. This passion for the Real was *jouissance* turning back on itself. Inverting this passion the anal Father flees the 'Real-Real' and attempts to find excessive enjoyment in every fragment of the symbolic universe. Another inversion later and the Father-*logos* addresses the Real. Here we find, as with Nietzsche, that if you stare into the abyss for long enough the abyss stares back. This return of the gaze in the abyss means we can achieve 'knowledge in the Real' but

³⁹⁶ Žižek, 2003: 75

³⁹⁷ Žižek, 2003: 63

this knowledge itself will require constant interpretation and corroboration because it is not a pattern wrought by *techne* so much as a ‘dot,’ a kernel of *jouissance* disrupting the normal flow of *techne* and its causes and effects. In Žižek’s theorising of the Real he is theorising about an unrepresentable Thing which resists symbolisation by *techne*, and therein lays the paradox of much of his work.³⁹⁸

Each model of the Father brings with it the cut of representation. This scission allows the subject to distinguish between the concrete and the abstract, for example between concrete history of raw biological life and the names and processes of abstract representation that accord this life a sense of appearance. In all three Freudian myths of the Father described above the ordering of the Symbolic facilitates the negotiation constituting representation. This positioning of the Symbolic Order gives the efficiency of symbolic prohibition a fundamental role in the constitution of the psyche. Throughout the interpellated subject of ideology critique, the human condition of idealist philosophy, and the analysand of the psychoanalytic clinic, Žižek’s analyses of the subject understands the presence of symbolic structure as being mediated through the three diagnostic criteria of Lacan: neurosis, psychosis, and perversion.³⁹⁹ Neurosis here confers the successful work of the Symbolic Order; we may doubt it as a hysteric, we may idealise it as an obsessive, we may make use of it as a phobic, but we are always necessarily engaged in and with a successful psychical structure as such. Unlike neurosis, psychosis is the mark of a failure in the instantiation of a successful symbolic structure through which the subject can thus negotiate representations such as legality, social etiquette, morality, and so forth.⁴⁰⁰ As flagged by Lacan in his discussion of Judge Schreber, there is an absence of sufficient symbolic integration in the psychoses and thus psychotics’ foreclosure reorders their relation to the fundamental principle of interpretation.⁴⁰¹ In the instance of perversion the conditions under which the subject operates invert the neurotic’s opportunity to fantasise. The pervert lives life in the fantasy

³⁹⁸ Žižek, 2003: 63 & 73

³⁹⁹ Fink, 1997: 76

⁴⁰⁰ Psychotics cannot be effectively treated in the Lacanian clinic because this foreclosure is pre-linguistic and the therapist cannot ‘bring back’ the dark primordial moment of foreclosure, the Schellingian *Ungrund*. (Žižek, 1996: 53) This is also reinforced by Fink’s comments guiding the treatment of psychotics. (Fink, 1997: 272)

⁴⁰¹ Lacan, 2006: 465 & 479

itself, taking any opportunity to be the subject of the Symbolic Order's prohibition/castration. A pervert recognises the Father as the agent of prohibition all too soon, conflating the Oedipal Father, the anal Father, and the Father-*logos* into an undead necessity that twists the Kantian formulation of ethical duty from 'You should so you must!' into 'You can so you must!'

All the more importantly, these three diagnostic criteria involve three variations of negation.⁴⁰² It is these shifts that provide clues to the mechanisms a subject invokes to escape the determination foisted upon them by the paternal function which instates the Other as the agent of the Symbolic.⁴⁰³ Under the Oedipal Father repression emerges to avoid the painful process of realisation and self-formation (*Bildung*) or what we often call self-identity. Here the symbolic universe is too efficient at structuring our lives and we neurotically repeat the reduction of our place in the nexus of socio-symbolic relations to the object of the Other's desire, the maternal Thing. Such a position is frustratingly thwarted by our reductive suspicion of the Other's motives.⁴⁰⁴ We are both drawn to and repelled by the Oedipal Father.⁴⁰⁵

To circumvent the anal Father we might engage in a perverse disavowal in an attempt to open up a space for our own activity that is not tainted by the enjoyment of this *jouisseur*.⁴⁰⁶ Žižek cites here the example of giving money to charity in such an apathetic way so as "to enjoy life without impunity."⁴⁰⁷ Subsequently our mores and tolerance coincide with their underbelly, our prejudice and will-to-power (Nietzsche).⁴⁰⁸

In psychosis the Father-*logos* is negated, rendering the agent of universal structure undead and able to permeate the history and future of our self-development as subjects of

⁴⁰² Fink, 1997: 76

⁴⁰³ Fink in Lacan, 1998a: 74n6

⁴⁰⁴ Fink, 1997: 84

⁴⁰⁵ This state of ambivalence is already central to the Freudian schema which Lacan draws on. Subsequently, Žižek's analyses also carry this ambivalence in the conceptualising of the subject. (Žižek in Reinhard, *et al*, 2005: 146-148)

⁴⁰⁶ Žižek, 2002a: 135

⁴⁰⁷ Žižek, 2003: 49

⁴⁰⁸ Žižek, 2000b: 367

‘spontaneous free-will.’ All these negations are negations of the myth of the Father’s death, hence why the Father-*logos* is ‘undead’ as such. In both psychosis and mysticism the cost of understanding the Father-*logos* as undead is interpretation. For the psychoses the distance of representation that grounds the subject in a symbolic universe has its open horizon of becoming (master-signifier) over-determined by an Other in whom we do not believe.⁴⁰⁹ Symbolic efficacy fails for a psychotic.

VII – Conclusion

In this chapter it has been shown that the variety of psychical economies in relation to the agent of the Symbolic the subject is able to assume makes the designation of an epochal modality very peculiar in Žižek’s work. Neurosis, psychosis, and perversion are names for the way the space of the symbolic universe is negotiated by the subject. That is to say, it is not the case that particular objects or symptoms inform us that the relation to symbolic authority is neurotic, obsessive, or so forth. However, Žižek’s method has been revealed to be far more theoretically precise than this. For the ideology-critique of Žižek a subject is neurotic, perverted, or psychotic because of the way the whole economy of value/relationships that constitute social reality for a subject retains a particular functional structure enabling the ontology of the subject to flourish neurotically, perversely, or psychotically. This flourishing relies on the instantiation and justification of the symbolic universe, and this instantiation and justification is the symbolic efficacy of the Other as it is grounded by a myth of authority. We might then conclude that of the three myths of the Father considered by Žižek it would appear that the anal Father, the *jouisseur*, is the most likely candidate for a myth of authority grounding post-modernity. The *jouisseur* offers the passion for the Real that defined the twentieth century, and also presents a further inversion in the form of the Father-*logos*. It is this alighting toward the dead figure of the Father-*logos*, universal structure which is ruined by the misrecognition of the subject, that performs the important task of breaking out of the vicious circle of representation and relativism instantiated by post-modernity. In post-modernity it is the *jouisseur* who grounds power and authority. But for Žižek this is not the whole story because the *jouisseur* is destined to be overcome by the self-consciousness of the subject,

⁴⁰⁹ Žižek, 2002a: 151

the critical awareness of ontology and its differentiation from the *techné* supporting the symbolic universe of social reality.

B.2 Mysticism, Nihilism, and Beyond

The Withdrawal from the *Jouisseur* – Exposing *Jouissance* – The Destiny of the One – Departing from Mysticism – *Jouissance: Jouis-Sans, Jouis-Sens, and J’Ouis-Sens* – Conclusion

In this chapter we will explore how *techne* can redeem the subject under the sway of the authority of the *jouisseur* through the reconstitution of the *logos* of the symbolic universe. As the previous chapter concluded, the model of the *jouisseur* is that of the anal Father and is understood by Žižek to be the manifest ‘epochal mode of authority’ for post-modernity. Also indicated in the previous chapter was the pathway opened by Freud for the shifts from the Oedipal Father to the anal Father and beyond to the Father-*logos*. This discussion will thus explore the consequences of the subject’s attempt to escape this perverse order of the *jouissance* of the *jouisseur* towards reconstituting the point where the symbolic universe is quilted together, the principle of *logos*. All the while, however, we must bear in mind that this shift from the order of the *jouisseur* to the order of the Father-*logos* also entails overcoming the preclusion of subjectivity by the cosmic Order of the Father-*logos*. Hence we hope to propose the desublimation of *techne* as the philosophical ploy that can guide the subject toward reconstituting the quilting point of the symbolic universe by disenchanting *logos* through the transformative affirmation of nihilism and therein enacting a structural change to enjoyment for the subject.

The core problem driving this analysis rests on a premise that was suggested in the preceding discussion of the *jouisseur*: all enjoyment is already enjoyed by the symbolic authority when the symbolic universe is conditioned by the rule of the *jouisseur*, suffocating the subject who is ‘meant to enjoy’ with endless calls to consume pleasure according to the ‘Yes!’ of this permissive post-modern authority. The enjoyment of the subject can be read as ‘enjoy-meant’ by this permissivity of the *jouisseur*. Yet, paradoxically, this becomes enjoyment without enjoyment, *jouis-sans*, as the subject is confronted with no pleasure of their own, i.e. even enjoying the most agonising of discomforts are ordained by the *jouisseur*’s perverse order of *jouissance* that tries to draw

out *jouissance* from ‘desolate’ reality.⁴¹⁰ Further than this, the substitutive power of the Imaginary shields the subject from this desolate reality, giving the ‘post-modern’ ego an excess of pleasure, *j’ouïs-sens*. Thus the obedience to the rule of the *jouisseur* drives the subject ever closer to what resists their demands for satisfaction. Indeed within this framing ‘socialisation’ means that reality is ideated under the sway of the *jouisseur* as the subject courts a speculative Ideal that negates *jouissance* because the *jouisseur* enjoys everything. The Symbolic Order of the *jouisseur* therefore drives the subject into the imagined relation between their ego that negotiates their narcissistic self-interest with the demands of the *jouisseur*-as-Other and ‘their objects’ in which they define their own self-image or *imago*. This imagined relation becomes the axis of *j’ouïs-sens* because it substitutes the symbolic universe that is over-flowing with pathological pleasures perverted by the touch of the *jouisseur*’s ‘enjoy-meant.’ Herein the subject engages in a sublimation of *logos* because of the conditioning axiology of the *jouisseur*’s anality: *logos* becomes the speculative Ideal that ‘binds’ reality, the pre-Symbolic unity of the One.

This oblique Ideal asserted by the imagined relation of the subject stands as an anamorphic distortion on the scene of the *jouisseur*, which is not the *jouissance* of the Other and yet is beyond the mere mechanics of the discourses evoked by the symbolic universe. Properly speaking, it is here that we encounter the mystical relation where the subject seeks ‘something of the One’ beyond the heteronomy of discourse ordained by the *jouisseur*. The subject is therefore composed of a certain ‘*techne*’ in the sense that the mystical relation must be crafted. Yet because the subject has regressed from the exchange and negotiation of their *imago* with the Other to merely the jealous possession of their *imago* this *techne* is not a type of vitalistic self-making. Rather, the subject seeks an authority at one remove from themselves in the shying away from the *jouisseur* because they are no longer ‘in’ discourse through their foreclosure. The subject herein follows the demands of a radical Otherness instead of obeying the commands of the Other, and the command to ‘Enjoy!’ is effectively emptied of its meaning. *Techne* thus

⁴¹⁰ Freud, 1991b: 80-82

manifests as the adherence to the Otherness of the imaginary relation that spares the subject from the Other.

This figure of radical Otherness is announced by Lacan in *The Ethics Of Psychoanalysis* (1992) as “the Lady” of courtly love.⁴¹¹ It is more than curious that we may observe the structural similarities between the subjective relation inculcated by the logic of the perverse order of the *jouisseur* and the mystic courting the beloved Lady whom s/he can never have but through service to the Lady.⁴¹² The Lady, according to Lacan, “is never characterized for any of her real, concrete virtues,” and her negation goes further still, “if she is described as wise, it is not because she embodies an immaterial wisdom or because she represents its functions more than she exercises them.”⁴¹³ Lacan states that the Lady is “as arbitrary as possible in the tests she imposes on her servant,” which has been revised by Žižek in his *The Metastases Of Enjoyment* to read:

“The Lady is thus as far as possible from any kind of purified spirituality: she functions as an inhuman partner in the sense of a radical Otherness which is wholly incommensurate with our needs and desires; as such she is simultaneously a kind of automaton, a machine which utters meaningless demands at random.”⁴¹⁴

It is significant to our discussion that Žižek here turns to the term ‘automaton’ where there is the *techne* of the subject involved because both allude to the manifestly sublime nature of technology in post-modernity. As we shall see, the escape from a retreat to mysticism is also an escape from the sublime technologies of the *jouisseur* that are structured akin to the Lady: ‘I experience her demands, but I know nothing about them,’ or ‘I experience the prompts of the interface, but I know nothing of the material existence behind it.’ *Inter-alia*, those that do know something of the material existence behind the interface seem bent on its fetish-like worship, as with the proliferation of Internet forums for techno-culture ‘enthusiasts’ such as *BoingBoing.net*. What is of the essence here is

⁴¹¹ Lacan, 1992: 152

⁴¹² Lacan, 1992: 152-153

⁴¹³ Lacan, 1992: 150

⁴¹⁴ Žižek, 1994: 90

that the Lady beloved by the mystic is not one of the Freudian Fathers, as in the case of the *jouisseur*, and hence retains a different structure.⁴¹⁵

To escape mysticism, the perverse social relation constituted under the *jouisseur* must be cleared. The structure of this departure from the social relation was established in the previous chapter's discussion of the symbolic authority that legitimates the symbolic universe sustaining the social relation, hence this chapter will propose that the subject must undergo (Symbolic) nihilism to redeem *techne* from its sublimation because it offers an illegitimate *jouis-sens*, enjoy-meant without the enjoyment of the Other. *Techne* opens the possibility of restructuring the paternal function maintained by the *jouisseur* and negates both the over-determination of this paternal function as an archetype and the potential psychotic collapse in the Real.⁴¹⁶ Nihilism thus becomes a moment of redemptive affirmation alongside *techne* as the art of making and unmaking. The nihilist realises that the worship of the Lady in the theatre of the Imaginary is tainted by her manifestation as a terrifying Thing that can ultimately destroy the subject, wherein the duty to the Ideal becomes the farcical acquittal of the ideation of the subject:

“Lacan quotes a poem about a Lady who demanded that her servant literally lick her arse: the poem consists of the poet's complaints about the bad smells that await him down there, about the imminent danger that, as he is fulfilling his duty, the Lady will urinate on his head.”⁴¹⁷

As our further discussion of the nihilist will illuminate, here we encounter the three levels of *techne*: Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. And it is through these three Lacanian registers that we can observe the structural change of enjoyment for the subject in the redemption of *techne*: *j'ouïs-sens*, *jouis-sens*, and *jouis-sans*.

⁴¹⁵ Žižek vouches for the Lady when he reads Lacan's 'the father or worse' and takes up the worse. In this sense the Lady is a worse alternative to the Other/Father. (Žižek in Reinhard, *et al*, 2005: 167)

⁴¹⁶ See Lorenzo Chiesa's essay 'Lacan with Artaud' (in Žižek (ed), 2006: 336-364) for a demonstration of the structural similarities between mysticism and psychosis in the later period of Lacan's work.

⁴¹⁷ Žižek, 1994: 90

I – The Withdrawal from the *Jouisseur*

As we established above, the relation of the mystic to the automaton of Otherness as manifested by the Lady's visage is founded in the withdrawal from the authority of the *jouisseur*.⁴¹⁸ Underlying this relationship between mysticism and the *techne* involved in escaping from the *jouisseur* is the supposition made by Lacan in his *Écrits* (2006) that the Symbolic has primacy over the Imaginary but fails to overwrite it completely.⁴¹⁹ This is observed in the way the wild play of the Imaginary is overwritten with the logic of the Symbolic, only to find that the abstract symbolic universe needs to be grounded in the concrete relation epitomised by (the hysterical) imagining of what the Other wants. Herein a two-fold problem arises in the fundamental relation of the subject to the Other of the symbolic universe. Firstly, the unity of the subject brought together by the inscription of the symbolic universe is predicated upon a *méconnaissance*: the dispersal of self-images are mistaken for having only the effects recognisable in the field of the Other (symbolic universe).⁴²⁰ When I receive the approval or disapproval of the Other my *imago* enters into a process of hierarchical structuring, an overwriting where previously libidinally charged relations are given a new locus at the price of my naïve innocence.⁴²¹ Lacan gives us an example of this overwriting from early childhood, the enjoyment obtained by sucking the thumb is transferred to the genital organs in a negation described as 'taboo.'⁴²² This is articulated by Lacan in his Rome report (1953) as follows:

“Symbols in fact envelop the life of man with a network so total that they join together those who are going to engender him “by bone and flesh” before he comes into the world; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny; so total that they provide the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and beyond his very death; and so total that through him his end finds its meaning in the last

⁴¹⁸ Žižek in Reinhard, *et al*, 2005: 167

⁴¹⁹ Lacan, 2006: 17, 39-40, & 79

⁴²⁰ Lacan, 2006: 80

⁴²¹ Lacan, 1998a: 46-50

⁴²² Lacan, 2006: 231

judgment, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it—unless he reaches the subjective realization of being-toward-death...»⁴²³

That is to say, we enter cultural and social relations by taking on the belief in the paternal function where this authority pre-figures, codifies, and ultimately exceeds our own existence.⁴²⁴ Hence the emphasis on the *jouisseur* performing the paternal function for post-modernity is not merely social but also eminently hermeneutical for the ‘ontology’ of the subject because of the human being’s mysterious emergence through symbols. Herein we are set on the path toward alienation because the self-interest of the ego is invested in the precious imaginary libidinal objects that have been reinscribed into a symbolic hierarchy of doing, making, and/or crafting access to these objects.

The second prong of this problem is that the preciousness of these objects relies on the ability of the Other to demand they be taken away, and for this to be enacted by *techné* in a desubjectivised form. Taking this logic of the instantiation of the subject in the symbolic universe to its end, even life itself may be stripped from the subject, the subject’s ‘being’ is deprived of any capacity to exist.⁴²⁵ While such mortification is a clear danger, this logic is particularly problematic for the mystical relation inculcated by the order of the *jouisseur*. Given the way the symbolic universe ‘authenticates’ the *imago* of the subject, the very vestige of their self-experience, by over-writing the imaginary relation the mystic finds that this symbolic knowledge of their mystical experience will overwrite the mysticism of the experience. This over-writing is an attempt to reinscribe the mystical experience into a symbolic universe accessible by other alter-egos rather than being held in its imagined speculative position wherein the subject does not know but only experiences something of a pre-Symbolic unity.⁴²⁶ It is precisely this inaccessibility of mystical experience for the symbolic universe that elevates its value for the subject under the rule of the *jouisseur*.⁴²⁷ Moreover, this signals that the mystic holds tightly to the theatre of the Imaginary and, in doing so, impedes their interpellation by the Symbolic order of the *jouisseur*.

⁴²³ Lacan, 2006: 231

⁴²⁴ Lacan, 2006: 76; Fink, 1997: 88

⁴²⁵ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 2002: 191-198

⁴²⁶ Lacan, 1992: 150

⁴²⁷ Lacan, 1998a: 76

It is also important to note that this immersion of the mystic in the imaginary realm of experience works to displace the Lady as an object of desire. Because the Lady is devoid of any particular content on the virtue of which she becomes an Ideal the Lady contains her 'becoming' rather than the flux of her appearance in the chain of signification determining the ideation of her as an Ideal. The Lady's perfection thus has the peculiar twist that her position as an Ideal is inhabited by the *jouissance* of the mystic because it is 'beyond' the Symbolic Order of the *jouisseur*. Herein the mystic affirms their enjoyment, *j'ouïs-sens*, in the very ideation of the Lady as an Ideal that negates the heteronomy of the symbolic universe regulated by the order of the *jouisseur*.

We may therefore contend that the ideation of the Lady is the mystic's art, their craft or *techne*. Herein the speculative construction of the Lady as an automaton purifies her of the formalities of the symbolic universe, and yet she still remains differentiated from the subject as an Otherness. This can be noted in the way a mystic takes their joy from ephemera instead of phenomena. Yet it is the fantasmatic quality of these imaginary objects that displaces the Lady from the regular positive order of ontic objects and shifts her to the domain of ontological meaning.⁴²⁸

Such a displacement of the Lady suggests that it is the descriptive content of the Lady that is immanent, wherein this immanence reveals her functionality more than her embodiment of a particular description. As we saw above, in *The Ethics Of Psychoanalysis* Lacan states this as: "if she is described as wise, it is not because she embodies an immaterial wisdom or because she represents its functions more than she exercises them."⁴²⁹ Yet herein the foreclosed rule of the *jouisseur* remains in the bowels of the Imaginary theatre as a speculative order coordinating the Lady's visage because it is only by the refusal of the *jouisseur*'s command to 'Enjoy!' that the ideation of the Lady becomes possible. Take the common example of courtly love for instance: a knight is fulfilled by fulfilling the Lady's demands in such a way that it exceeds regular

⁴²⁸ Žižek raises a similar criticism of the Thing in the ethics of Derrida and Habermas. (2002: 152-160)

⁴²⁹ Lacan, 1992: 150

abstract/polite pleasure, the hallmark of the pervasiveness of the *jouisseur*. In the Arthurian romance cycle we find incredible objects such as Arthur's sword "Escalibore" legitimated by the dignity of the Lady (of the Lake) and made into a fantastic semblance of the ordinary sword which gives Arthur the extraordinary 'divine' right to rule but which he then refutes by choosing a round table so that no one of his knights (including he) may be greater than another.⁴³⁰ This point is crucial in understanding mysticism because it flags that the mystic is always minimally technical in their ideation of the Lady. From the twelfth and thirteenth century German poets of the *Minnesang*, the French *troubadours* to Italo Calvino's *The Nonexistent Knight* (1963), it is the '*techne*' of imagining the Lady's functions that facilitates the courtly relation. And one may go further to suggest that this technical locus is at the heart of the Lady's codification as an automaton, and therein she is not an automaton because of ideation *per se* but of the *techne* that grounds her ideation.

This minimum of technical crafting in the ideation of the Lady also invites the observation that the subject's escape from the *jouisseur* rests on a fundamental relation with *techne* through the automaton, the Lady. The mystical subject's transition from the Symbolic to the Imaginary through foreclosure therefore rests on the withdrawal from the authority of the *jouisseur* and the art of ideating the Lady. Yet this transition also points us to the way that the pre-Symbolic Ideal that the mystic seeks necessarily relies on the refutation of the Symbolic Order of the symbolic universe. This refusal therefore bespeaks the conditioning of the mystical relation and therein its inconsistency: despite the mystic's best efforts to escape the *jouisseur* they are still plagued by the mortifying touch of the 'dead' Symbolic Order in the formalism (*techne*) of their ideation.

II – Exposing *Jouissance*

The concomitant betrayal of imagination by mysticism brings forward the important question of whether there is an escape for the mystic when they cannot bear the 'ordering' of their ideation of the Lady by the refusal of the perverse order of the *jouisseur*? The problem with this question is that it overlooks that the mystical relation is

⁴³⁰ Bulfinch in Martin (ed), 1991: 347-348

also a resignation to anamorphosis. Initially this would seem to suggest that we should locate the transition of this formlessness to a structured form because such a recognition can bring the *imago* of the mystical subject back into ‘discursive’ focus. Yet, as we have already noted above, the oblique anamorphosis of mysticism is constitutive of the Order of the symbolic universe and this opens it to the repetition of the symbolic universe that attempts to ‘domesticate’ this excess. Such symbolic domestication is, of course, anathema to the properly mystical relation because it threatens the wilful ideation of the Lady with the symbolic injunction of the *jouisseur* to enjoy. Nevertheless, it would appear that returning to the symbolic universe (merely resuscitating the law of the *jouisseur*) is one way that the subject can sustain their *imago*, as Lacan shows above in his Rome report: “Symbols [are] so total that through him his end finds its meaning in the last judgment, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it.”⁴³¹ Yet this initial path that returns the mystic to the perverted logic of the *jouisseur* clearly carries the danger of psychosis for the mystic’s ideation. This endangerment of the mystic occurs because the perverse Order of the *jouisseur* can absolve or condemn the mystic to ideation because this is the point where the mystic is anamorphically ‘inscribed’ in the symbolic universe which is ‘economised’ by the *jouisseur*. The return to the Order of the *jouisseur* thus suggests a rejection wherein ideation becomes wild (ungrounded) and rules the subject with hallucinations and delusions. Our discussion will now turn to this danger of psychosis as it is an important condition of how the subject may relieve themselves from the mystical over-determination of ideation.

The fountainhead of this danger of psychosis is the appearance of the *jouisseur* in the theatre of the Imaginary rather than being excluded by the foreclosure of the mystic and therein returning to the imaginary relation between the subject’s ego and their ‘objects’ as its speculative ground.⁴³² As Grigg points out, “any practice that does not rupture with the big Other will be condemned to repeat one or other of the practices made possible by the

⁴³¹ Lacan, 2006: 231

⁴³² Note that if the subject does not overcome the initial reliance on the imaginary other in the Lacanian ‘mirror-stage,’ the (m)other’s bond of blood, then there is a structural likelihood for psychosis. This means psychosis is not an organic deficiency but a possibility for every human subject.

Other itself.”⁴³³ In this nightmarish scene the *jouissance* of the *jouisseur*-as-Other condemns the subject to the ideation of the Lady, the Other desires the condemnation of the subject and this is sustained by the dynamic of the *imago* wherein the subject’s desire is the desire of the Other. In this condemned imaginary relation to the Lady the *jouisseur* stands as our jealous rival for the blessing of the Lady’s demands. The relation is speculative on the side of the mystical subject because s/he worships the beloved Lady without the ‘sense’ (*jouis-sans*) endowed by linking the imaginary effects of experience to some symbolic chain that “binds and orients them.”⁴³⁴

The rule of the cruel *jouisseur* reveals that in the instance of psychosis, as in mysticism, the Lady is radically alienated. Not only is she separated from the mystical lover *ad infinitum* but she is also reduced to an abstract entity with no substantial content, an embodiment of function rather than a personality. In short, she is an automaton, *techne* deprived of the ontological horizon of meaning because she is meaning itself. In this framing as an automaton the Lady is a purely formal appearance in the theatre of the Imaginary, the bare image of her ideation that paradoxically arbitrates over the subject in lieu of the condemnation of the *jouisseur*.

This fantasised reduction to a ‘pure’ representation brings the paternal function of the anal Father (*jouisseur*) to bear on the mystic in a distinctive way. As the meaningful relation to the world is construed through the binding orientation the Symbolic Order affects on the wild play of the Imaginary, when the Lady is secluded within the Symbolic alone she becomes a vessel of radical Otherness. With the symbolic universe now centralised around the imaginary locus of the ineffable Lady, the agent of the Symbolic that promulgates the paternal function is reduced to an alter-ego. This reduction begets the anality of the Father/Other. That is to say, this anality is both a sign of rivalry with the *jouisseur* and an attempt to paper over the desolation of reality with the imagining of a pre-Symbolic Beyond.

⁴³³ Grigg in Boucher, *et al.*, (eds), 2005: 193

⁴³⁴ Lacan, 2006: 6

This reduction of the *jouisseur* to a small other is a metonymic displacement of the paternal function onto another ‘person’ to whom the mystic is bound through a discursive social link. This link remains because, as we noted above, here we are discussing the mystic’s attempt to return to the symbolic universe, the unifying space of social etiquette and morality. However, as we have also already shown, the Lady is without this social link because of her ideation in some pre-Symbolic Beyond. Were the mystic to come face to face with their beloved Lady they would not know them as the Lady because they cannot access a discourse that would ‘corroborate’ their knowledge of the Lady and through this would also orient each as an alter-ego in some type of symbolic relation.⁴³⁵

In this condemnation of the mystic to the imaginary relation, however, we encounter a founding judgement that binds it to enjoyment. This judgement conditions the imaginary relation in the manner of an ‘*Ent-Scheidung*’ (primal decision), to borrow a term from Schelling, that mythologises the overcoming of the *jouisseur* of the primal horde through the belief that there is some *jouissance* beyond the Other, untouched by the anal Father.⁴³⁶ This mythological ground of the imaginary relation is curious for its portent of *jouissance* beyond the heteronomy of discourse that is modulated by the paternal function. As was noted above, the ideation of the mystic relies on the foreclosure of the Order of the *jouisseur*, and that this refusal instated the *jouisseur* as a kind of ‘speculative identity’ of the Lady because it necessarily grounded her ideation by the mystic without being present as such. Yet because this grounding is founded on a refusal of the *jouisseur*, the radical Otherness of the Lady stands in for the abyss opened up by the subject’s foreclosure on the Other. This speculative relation is therefore bound up with the revelation of a pre-Symbolic unity through the visage of the Lady. Here, on the other hand, we are dealing with the condition that binds the subject to *jouissance* in the imaginary relation itself. Such a fine distinction is important to make because we must avoid confusing the *jouissance* of the *jouisseur*-as-Other with this *jouissance* produced through the condemnation of the subject to ideation of a decidedly speculative kind.

⁴³⁵ Lacan, 2006: 356

⁴³⁶ Lacan, 1998a: 76; 2006: 40

The *jouissance* beyond the Other is condensed in the mystic's ideation of the Lady. Yet this suggests that the Lady's ideation by the mystical subject becomes abstract because the *techne* of the mystic's ideation has been condemned by the *jouisseur*, and therein *techne* is desublimated. A gap therefore emerges between the Lady as an abstraction and as a subject because the *techne* that bound the mystic to the Lady in a relation has become accessible to the *jouisseur* where it was previously marked by the absence of the *jouisseur*. Such an absence hid the taint of the *jouisseur's* excessive enjoyment. The mysticism of the subject thus encounters another impasse: for the imagined relation to facilitate the ideation of the Lady it must rest on the structural point of a disavowal of the phallic *jouissance* conditioned by the paternal function of the *jouisseur*, i.e. the perverse *jouissance* of enjoying 'desolate' reality.⁴³⁷

This breakdown of mysticism offers a precise hint at the crux of Žižek's attempts to shift away from the contemporary post-modern hedonism invoked by the paternal function of the *jouisseur*, the acephalous command to enjoy all.⁴³⁸ If the subject attempts to overcome the perverse injunction of polymorphous enjoyment by the *jouisseur* they may fall into the role of a Dostoyevskian idiot, plagued by moments of mystical experience when enjoyment evaporates in the confrontation with 'desolate' reality. Staying within the process of all-consuming enjoyment, however, also exposes the subject to a situation reminiscent of a recalcitrant Dostoyevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1900) often quoted by Žižek: "If God doesn't exist, then everything is permitted: nothing at all is permitted—not even the most innocent pleasures of eating, drinking, and smoking."⁴³⁹ Such a concomitant betrayal of reason suggests a nihilistic gap in the imagined relation between the subject and the Lady. A question therefore arises as to whether the subject can overcome their condemnation by the *jouisseur*? Furthermore, if such a gap does exist would its effects remain confined to the imaginary relation or is this rupture the nihilistic infiltration of some excluded piece of the Real on the orders of the Imaginary and Symbolic that the subject misrecognised as *jouissance* beyond the Other?

⁴³⁷ Heidegger in Dolar, 2006: 97

⁴³⁸ Lacan, 1998a: 7

⁴³⁹ Žižek, 2000: 65n27

III – The Destiny of the One

Thus far it has come to light that the mystic's beloved Lady is the result of an antagonistic crafting by the mystic that ideates her as an automaton, wherein this *techne* of her ideation is an excessive remainder of the comportment of the mystic themselves that puts the mystic anamorphically 'out of joint' with the symbolic universe by severing the social link. Throughout this discussion of the Lady and the mystic it has become apparent that 'mysticism' means that the subject follows the beloved Lady (the Ideal) into the Real through a fissure in the symbolic universe. Upon a closer examination of Žižek's writings on Lacan and politics it may appear that we have arrived at the totalitarianism of the mystic, given that the Lady "who, herself not bound by any Law, charges her knight-servant with arbitrary and outrageous ordeals."⁴⁴⁰ However, this construction of the Lady bespeaks the critical point that Žižek tends to treat the Lady as a masculine fantasy *par excellence* by situating her within the (Imaginary) libidinal economy of needs which the *jouisseur* is predicated upon.⁴⁴¹ The Lady as the automaton of the mystic thus involves a shift in the understanding of *techne*, a leap from Lacan's ethics of pure desire to Žižek's ideology-critique which allows the critical gaze to locate the fragmentation of mysticism's construction of a messianic Beyond and, additionally, to account for nihilism.

As a beautified feminine Master, the Lady's specular position situates her as seeing through the 'ether' of the mystic's worship which construes an Other of the Other, a 'Beyond' insomuch as she is an idealisation of the regulation of difference in the symbolic universe. This regulating principle is the negation of the abstract signifiers around a fundamental antagonism that refuses to be domesticated by the symbolic universe. Here we again encounter the triad of ideation, negation, and abstraction, this time constituting the activity of *techne* in the symbolic universe: the image of the Lady is idealised while negating her contingent material features, and her imaginary status is further abstracted to remove her from the wild play of phantasmatic object-decoys while still regulating the minimum of difference dividing these phantasmatic objects.⁴⁴² This

⁴⁴⁰ Žižek, 'Woman is one of the Names-of-the-Father,' 1995

⁴⁴¹ Žižek, 1994: 108-109

⁴⁴² Žižek, 2000b: 214

suggests that the mystical Beyond is an imaginary semblance of this symbolic universe (Other) because, as Lacan tells us:

“The Other, that is, the locus in which everything that can be articulated on the basis of the signifier comes to be inscribed, is, in its foundation, the Other in the most radical sense.”⁴⁴³

In the interpellation as a particular alter-ego/person the Lady is not the Lady proper because this would entail a shared realisation on the basis of a social link between the mystic and their beloved. Such a link is missing in the mystical relation because the mystical relation lacks a symbolic inscription, one ‘experiences’ rather than ‘knows.’ Instead, we find here an emasculated world of regular living beings reduced to bare life (*homo sacer*) and an ontological realm of the Ideal where the excess that stands out is simultaneously *techne* and a Lacanian *objet petit a*, a quasi-transcendental remainder that enlists our desire by virtue of an opaque *je ne sais quoi*.

If *techne* is presented with this feature of opacity then it is also interminable and indeterminable because it is not bare life and yet it is Real and spared definitive epistemological articulation. Herein *techne* is disproportionate to *homo sacer*. This disproportional relation reveals *techne* as activity without purpose, only a semblance of (Aristotelian) artistic practice. In this mode *techne* fascinates the subject through the inculcation of mysticism prevalent in its comportment of semblance (in post-modernity). Moreover, as such an abstract semblance *techne* reveals the Lady in her speculative identity. This formulation is identical to that of post-modernity as a problematic epoch faced with technical objects arranged under the authority of the *jouisseur*: the so-called ‘digital revolution’ cannot authoritatively control the use of *techne* due to its opacity, even though the structure of symbolic authority demands an assertion of subjective autonomy which it itself cannot immediately access. That is to say, ‘technological simulacra’ are therefore an effect of the Imaginary order that antagonises the subject. To frame this in a Žižekian-Spinozist way, ‘everything is permitted, but...’⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ Lacan, 1998a: 81

⁴⁴⁴ Žižek in Ayerza, 2006

This ‘but’ is a stutter or gap that stands between the mystic’s *imago* and the speculative identity of the Lady forming a type of speculative relation. Following Lacan this is the formulation of the fetishist’s object, the excess of *a* is correlative to the gap left by symbolic castration, the gap between my *imago* and my abstract identity in the symbolic universe. The mystic’s courtly love of the Lady as both *techne* and *objet petit a* is problematic because, as an automaton, the Lady is formulated as a fetish object. It is not that the mystic is a fetishist *in toto*, but rather that the courtly relation to the automaton is fetishised. As a fetish object, the Lady bears witness to the mystic’s foreclosure on symbolic castration.⁴⁴⁵ The foreclosure on the castration imposed by the order of the *jouisseur* means that *jouissance* becomes spectral, a kind of floating organ with no place.⁴⁴⁶ Akira Kurosawa’s retelling of Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*, *Hakuchi* (2006), provides a good demonstration of the mystic’s relation to castration. Here we find the doe-eyed Kinji Kameda, played by Masayuki Mori, enraptured with mystical experience at moments where social reality threatens him. Kameda’s life-world appears to be commensurate with the symbolic universe in which he finds himself, but as the story unfolds we find that his excessive passivity and rapture are at once too much for the symbolic universe to integrate and too minimal for the register of the Symbolic to overwrite. Kameda’s passivity is ridiculed as a mark of shame by others, something irreducible in himself, and at the same time his mystical episodes of rapture silence these alter-egos by thwarting the regular run of (cynical) reason by the raptures’ transcendental-ontological excessiveness.

What we have in *Hakuchi* is the understanding of mysticism as something in the register of the Imaginary encountering the Real, something that the Symbolic Order of the Other/Father fails to overwrite. Thus Kameda enters the throws of a mystical rapture whether the rapturous experience is triggered by a picture in a window, a knife being thrust at his chest, or a memory of these things because his passivity and rapture constitute his relation to the One as an ideation and not an ‘abstract’ association.

⁴⁴⁵ Žižek in Reinhard, *et al*, 2005: 174

⁴⁴⁶ One is reminded here of the old treatment for women suffering hysteria from the time of Hippocrates to Freud’s teacher Jean-Martin Charcot: the hysterectomy. (Borossa, 2001: 4; Gay, 1998: 49)

Kameda's beloved Lady is his 'Y'a de l'Un,' something of the One.⁴⁴⁷ However, this resistance also seems to bespeak a regression of the triad of ideation-negation-abstraction merely to the point of ideation, e.g. the concrete becomes phantasmatic and everything becomes part of a primal unity (the One). That the Lady presents the mystic with something of the One and not the Other is to say that the imaginary semblance involved in mysticism proposes an original unity which remains beyond what the Other can authoritatively reconstitute under the guise of the 'discursive logic' of the symbolic universe.⁴⁴⁸ But we should avoid thinking this Beyond to be outside the symbolic universe. As Žižek goes to great pains to demonstrate, particularly in his discussions of Saint Paul and Schelling, this sense of a 'Beyond' is the lack of the Other around which the symbolic universe circulates and therein does not enter into the vicious circle of the symbolic law where prohibition solicits its transgression.⁴⁴⁹ For the mystic, however, the Beyond is an imaginary scenario staged in the Real because the law of the Symbolic Order invokes a symbolic/abstract horizon where mysticism involves a speculative messianic horizon. This imaginary semblance in the Real reduces *techne* to meaningless activity, a mere semblance of *techne* as it manifests in the symbolic universe. Encountering such a semblance leaves the mystic wanton for the arrival of the One to clear away useless *techne* and its 'junk' objects (*gomi*).

With *techne* annihilated, the mystic clings to the Lady through the strict bounds of courtly love because this structure appeals to speculative predestination. While the mystic forecloses on the principle of universality (symbolic law), they retain a sense of singular destiny to which the entire of the Lady's demands acquiesce at the same moment that they are wiped from the particular concrete historical frame in which these demands are made. The paradox here is that mysticism becomes the search for the Other at one remove, the Other as some pre-symbolic unity; the One.⁴⁵⁰ So while the mystical relation appears to seek something of the One, it remains within a cycle of seeking to experience the speculation on archetypes (imaginary others) as the preconditions of historical

⁴⁴⁷ Lacan in Mitchell & Rose (eds), 1985: 166-170

⁴⁴⁸ For more on this notion of primordial unity in an idealist philosophical context see Žižek's engagements with Schelling, *The Indivisible Remainder* and *The Abyss of Freedom / Ages of the World*.

⁴⁴⁹ Žižek, 2003: 110-113; 2001a: 143-144; 1996: 42-46

⁴⁵⁰ Žižek, 2000a: 23

development (endless iterations of dealing with this antagonism) in the concrete sense of *logos* as an unfolding of the One *qua* Being. This typifies the mystic's timeless encounter with *techne* as a repressed antagonism of reality, an eternal struggle to resolve this antagonism. Moreover, this speculative ideation of the mystic is necessitated by the unfolding of *logos* through the preconditions set by the series of archetypes.⁴⁵¹ The Lady is thus a conflation of two different guises of the Other-in-the-Real: the Symbolic Real-Other as the ordering of meaningless *techne* into a 'natural system' and the Imaginary (pre-Symbolic) Real-Other as a stand-in for the archetypes of all possible ordering, the conclave of imaginary others. The mysticism of the mystic therefore confronts the Lady as a nascent Third always on the verge of becoming the incestuous maternal Thing and throwing the mystic into a psychotic break.

Herein the Lady can suddenly become that remainder of the (real) Real excluded in the overwriting of the Symbolic by the mystical disavowal, as with the close of Kurosawa's *Hakuchi* where Kameda refuses to marry his beloved so she can give him the loving maternal care his socially debilitating passivity and rapture demands at the level of symbolic-ethical commitment. Kameda's refusal bespeaks the mystic's choice to persist in mysticism because he apprehends all too well that his beloved will ruin him. Kameda cannot bear such ethical care because it is a symbolic simulacra which will mortify his imaginary scenario where his beloved promises something of the One. Alternately, the figure of the Lady unveils the archetypes (structuring principles) as merely the wild play of the Imaginary in an abyssal vortex. Here the Lady reveals the series of sublime imaginary others as merely perverse totalitarian agents set on the profane enjoyment of the subjugation and suffering of the subject through the constructed belief in the coming of the One; the 'band of brothers' who seek to usurp the position of the anal Father.⁴⁵²

This betrayal of the mystical relation recalls the rivalry with the *jouisseur*. However, here the subject has already lost and encountered an undead *jouisseur* who uses *techne* to elicit the mystic's *jouissance* for their own pleasure. Literally, the *jouissance* of the mystic's

⁴⁵¹ Various best-selling 'civilisational/cosmic analyses' accede to this mystical comportment such as Jared Diamond's *Collapse* (2004) and Paul Davies' *The Fifth Miracle* (1999).

⁴⁵² One might consider this the underbelly of political economy of the trilogy of *Matrix* films.

pains makes the *jouisseur* come for the mystic. The *jouisseur* arrives, the mystic believes, to recognise the activity of the mystic because they have access to all *jouissance* ‘beyond the pleasure principle.’ But, instead, the monstrous *jouisseur* evacuates and profanely consumes mystic’s sacred *jouissance*, in the process annihilating the cycle of the relation/recognition with the One. What Žižek notes as the ‘anticapitalist edge’ of the *Alien* films succinctly demonstrates this monstrous leap from the sacred to the profane:

“What ultimately endangers the lone group on a spaceship is not the aliens as such but the way the group is used by the anonymous earthly Corporation, which wants to exploit the alien form of life.”⁴⁵³

The anonymity of the ‘earthly Corporation’ is here more than a coincidence: it is required for the exploitation of the subject, as demonstrated above in the structure of the relation of the mystic to the Lady. Thus the mystic’s relation to the Lady, and therein the One, is always threatened by a subreption from within the bounds of the beloved object itself, and this subreption owes to the performative contradiction that marks the mystical Lady. Which is to say that the antipathy of the ‘anticapitalist edge’ of the *Alien* films is not ‘to go against’ the prevailing order and propose a new order, but to reveal the Other and its beholden loyalists as mystics who are merely beholden by an Ideal image rather than having ‘a,’ that little bit of something extra.

IV – Departing from Mysticism

The dynamics of betrayal and subreption discussed above rest on a fundamental principle that ‘posits’ being. Yet, if we take a moment to examine this grounding principle it becomes clear that while both this betrayal and subreption seem to radically alter the coordinates of the mystical relation to the Lady, this reformulation finds its terminus in a psychotic collapse of this relation. This is so because both betrayal and subreption are predicated on the conservative principle of being held within the categories of positivism: the betrayal of the mystic belies the totalising consumption of the *jouisseur* wherein there is no untainted *jouissance*, all the subject enjoys is enjoyment directed by the *jouisseur* (enjoy-meant), and the subreption from within the very bounds of the Lady’s ideation by the mystic points to the anonymous exploitation of the subject in there very ‘positive

⁴⁵³ Žižek in Reinhard, *et al*, 2005: 169

principle' of being—they exist to be exploited. Moreover, this problem suggests that the erection of the symbolic universe grounds itself in being and yet the laying bare of being by the decay of the anamorphic relation of the mystic to the Lady must refer us to existence in some way that is not 'posited' by the symbolic universe given that its over-determination is clearly dubious in both the instances of betrayal and subreption. If being is not to be treated within some type of positivity then let us turn to its negation: that which persists in spite of the thwarting of the positing of being by the Symbolic Order.

As was elsewhere indicated above, *techne* is the precondition for the ideation of the Lady. Yet here *techne* also functions as the extra-Symbolic element that fills out the space of the subject in the symbolic universe, i.e. my subjective negotiating of the Symbolic Order. We are therefore presented with the opportunity to consider *techne* as the basic element of the 'negation' of the symbolic universe insofar as this negotiation requires something beyond the over-determination of the positive principle of being that accompanies, although is not reducible to, the being of the subject. Thus it will be argued that, while it is differentiated, *techne*'s crafting of being retains a formal character of negativity.

We can observe the 'swerve' of *techne* through the way *techne*, in its negativity, confronts the theatre of the Imaginary with its clearing and overwriting by the Symbolic to the end of constituting a symbolic universe and therein a social relation. The psychoanalytic lesson that this overwriting teaches is that in its negative mode *techne* excludes the subject by evacuating subjectivity in the guise of desire. Following Lacan, this evacuation of subjectivity-as-desire (in the Imaginary) situates the return of subjectivity proper as the illegitimate product of barred subjectivisation (in the Symbolic).⁴⁵⁴ This is why the split in the subject engendered by symbolic prohibition persists, even when the *jouisseur* is resurrected by the failure of the mystical relation in its overdependence on the imaginary scenario of courtly love: it is because the Other does not exist that the subject comes to be. To put it another way, the subject crafts their

⁴⁵⁴ Lacan, 1998: 214, 235-236, & 275

ontological existence through *techne* while they are embedded in the symbolic universe of social reality.

The resurrection of the *jouisseur* means the reality principle sustaining the minimum of structure needed to function in social reality is reintegrated into the pleasure principle as excessive, undead, life. It is not enough to say the subject is human insofar as their humanity resists total symbolic transparency.⁴⁵⁵ We must go further than this and argue that the assertion of life as a supreme value in the perverse order of the *jouisseur* is excessive and awry because living subjectivity becomes disconnected from subjectivisation (*jouis-sans*). In the imaginary scenario of confronting this anal Father, the subject is thrown into the categorical abyss outside the symbolic universe where the *objet petit a* resides. This builds on a nascent point contained in the betrayal of the mystic's ideation that the last line of symbolic relation sustaining a defence against the fall into this psychotic non-space is mysticism because it is a regression to libidinal ideation. But what if, as suggested by the point of subreption, the abyss is already present in the relation to the Lady because the Lady's function as a stand-in for the Other opens the Ideal to the inconsistency of the Other? On the one hand, in mysticism *techne* appears as the imaginary lure of the automaton that hides this inconsistency. In this instance *techne* negates this gap in the Other by covering it over with the semblance of the One. On the other hand, we should note that this negation of lack does not redress this antagonistic element and this clearly contributes to the difficulties of betrayal by the *jouisseur* or the subreption of the Ideal because the mystic's attempt to return to the symbolic universe is a regression to ideation that cannot negate the abstract effects of the symbolic universe, i.e. they become akin to the protagonist of the aforementioned *Hakuchi* whose moments of rapture incapacitate him. Herein *techne* brings out the destitution of the subject, the nihilistic gap that separates the symbolic universe from their libidinal ideation.

It is therefore curious to note that Žižek's treatment of nihilism is contained within the Lacanian accounting for the signifier and the Symbolic. The effective point here is that

⁴⁵⁵ Žižek, 2004a: 124

the order of the Symbolic contains a founding moment of nihilism, a symbolic nihilation. When the Symbolic attempts to overwrite the (libidinal) order of the Imaginary there is a moment of rupture followed by a disavowed puppeteer. In his Rome report Lacan refers to the ancient Greek ‘*danai*’ to demonstrate the promise and danger of the signifier.⁴⁵⁶ As Žižek explains in his reading of this particular passage of the *Écrits*, ‘*danai*’ is Homer’s term “for the Greeks who laid siege to Troy. The gift was the Trojan horse, which enabled the Greeks to penetrate Troy and destroy it.”⁴⁵⁷ We may therefore extrapolate the suggestion that the portent of the Symbolic is at once attractive to the libidinal theatre of the Imaginary and also its mortification.

Upon accepting the formalisation of the imaginary relation established under the guise of the ego, as in the ‘demystification’ of mysticism by the symbolic universe, the imaginary scenario finds itself being overwritten by this formalisation. This overwriting displaces the appearance of objects, or as Lacan puts it:

“It is still not saying enough to say that the concept is the thing itself, which a child can demonstrate against the Scholastics. It is the world of words that creates the world of things.”⁴⁵⁸

The subject’s entry into the Symbolic bestows on them the gift (*danai*) of language, but this gift allows the Other, as an agent of the Symbolic, to intervene in the imaginary relation between the fantasising ego and the appetitive body. In its founding moment mysticism attempts to disavow this intercession of the Other by introducing the Lady as an imaginary stand-in for the Other. A semblance of the One is produced in this mystical movement because the process is fielded within the Imaginary where ideation takes priority over function/purpose.⁴⁵⁹ Another very subtle point thus emerges that if the mystic does not succumb to psychosis by resurrecting the *jouisseur* but is still to depart mysticism then the Other must be cleansed of the One of archetypal meaning because this One is merely a stand-in for the Other.⁴⁶⁰ Thus if the subject is to achieve some kind of symbolic reintegration then it is this cleansing that opens the subject to nihilism in the

⁴⁵⁶ Lacan, 2006: 225

⁴⁵⁷ Žižek, 2006a: 7n

⁴⁵⁸ Lacan, 2006: 229

⁴⁵⁹ Žižek, 2002: 156

⁴⁶⁰ Žižek, 2006: 182-187

transition from the non-discourse of mysticism to the discourse of knowledge in the field of the Other.

A propos this ‘cleansing’ nihilism presents the subject with an inverted mysticism because the subject is emerging from the conditions under which mysticism operates. Here the permeation of the One in *logos* is short-circuited to shift focus toward the effects of *logos* on the Other. This is qualified by the crucial point that we do not have to ‘believe’ in the Other for the symbolic universe to still perform its formalising function. In Žižek this presence or absence of belief permits two resolutely distinct relations: ideology and nihilism. On the one hand the ideological disposition is to cynically assume some (false) distance to the Other, for example giving money to charity makes us appear outwardly charitable but we simultaneously claim the charitable donation as a tax expense, that is, we play by the rules of the symbolic universe established by the Other.⁴⁶¹ Nihilism, on the other hand, fully assumes the function of the signifier but refuses its arbitrary self-designation of differentiation (the heteronomy of discourse).⁴⁶² The passive operation of nihilism thus casts aside symbolic hierarchy and ideological beliefs by disclosing the ‘covering over’ of this meaningless by *techne* and revealing the bare Abyss.

In the opening revealed by this clearing nihilism begins to achieve a reactive status when it attempts to reconstitute the field of the Other by reconstituting a new master-signifier for the subject.⁴⁶³ Herein the two-fold movement of nihilism contains the clearing away of the Order of the Symbolic and entry into the Real because (Imaginary) appearances have been dismissed as illusory by the overwriting of the Symbolic in the ‘reality’ of its meaninglessness. In the Real the nihilistic subject must pay attention to the drifting of drive to reconstitute the master-signifier that quilts together the field of the Other because the register of the Real, of drive, reveals the constellations wrought by *techne* in the symbolic universe as meaningless. For example, my words are not my own despite the phenomenological immediacy of my voice because language itself must be part of a

⁴⁶¹ Žižek, ‘Nobody has to be Vile,’ 2006

⁴⁶² Zupančič, 2003: 66-67

⁴⁶³ Žižek, 2006: 83-85

shared hermeneutic community to sustain any level of meaning and yet I am nevertheless required to participate within this ‘community belief’ for my words to have any meaning otherwise they become meaningless.⁴⁶⁴ It is nihilism that aims at cultivating this meaninglessness through the suspension of the ‘conservative’ hermeneutic community and revealing the arbitrary designation of meaning that antagonises the ‘egalitarian’ sharing of language. In the formalisation imposed by the function of the signifier (the bond of the hermeneutic community) this meaninglessness manifests as an impenetrable antagonism that nevertheless threatens its formal bonds with annihilation and reformulation through the cultivation of this meaninglessness.

We are therefore presented with two avenues of departure from mysticism: either the mystic nihilistically moves toward constituting a social bond or they risk the (self-) knowledge provided by the discourse of modernity becoming a Thing that plagues their life-world with the threat of their annihilation as a speaking being, *aphanisis*.⁴⁶⁵ The entry into nihilism therefore presents the mystic with the minimum of structure necessary for reconstituting the master-signifier and entering the discourse of knowledge. That is to say, nihilism holds out the promise of fully assuming the consequences of *techne* as a sense of enjoyment, *jouis-sens*.

The alternative to nihilism is to confront the agent of the Symbolic as it appears in the Imaginary: the *jouisseur*. The confrontation with the *jouisseur* presents the mystic with the Thing invading their imaginary scenario as it is formalised by the overwriting of the Symbolic. Here the subject is forced to confront the fantasmatic stuff of their subjectivity, the ‘*étoffe du moi*,’ as the Thing which Lacan tells us leads to *aphanisis*, the loss of self.⁴⁶⁶ This may lead into a psychotic break where the ontology of the subject is fragmented as they are cast off in the wild play of the ideation, e.g. paranoid delusion.⁴⁶⁷ In this break the subject becomes the excess that eludes signification, which the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* attempts to reinscribe into *logos* through the *techne* of the

⁴⁶⁴ Dolar, 2006: 107

⁴⁶⁵ Žižek, 2006a: 55

⁴⁶⁶ Lacan, 1998: 218

⁴⁶⁷ Freud, 1991a: 44

symbolic universe.⁴⁶⁸ Psychosis herein means that the subject no longer has a grip on the motility of the symbolic universe afforded to it by *techne*, and thus the confrontation with the *jouisseur* is not necessarily an alternative to nihilism so much as the counterpoint that gives nihilism a sense of danger.

V – *Jouissance: Jouis-Sans, Jouis-Sens, and J'Ouis-Sens*

As Žižek demonstrates, while the nihilistic gap between the symbolic universe and the ideation of the subject is partial to the symbolic universe, the onset of nihilism in the field of the Other is through a kind of fissure where pure life (being) refuses to be assimilated by signification or the contrived imaginings of ideation.⁴⁶⁹ The threat of the *jouisseur* consuming the minimum of bare life that binds the subject to being is reformulated by this encounter, and the undead *jouisseur* is no longer held up as the Other/Father who can consume this kernel of the subject's existence. However, this desublimation of the lewd imaginary rival does not take away pure life. In *Seminar XX* Lacan clearly demonstrates that this excess of the Real that sticks out as pure life in the Symbolic and Imaginary is *jouissance*, pleasure in pain.⁴⁷⁰ For Žižek *a propos* Lacan,

“The lesson of drive is that *we are condemned to jouissance*: whatever we do *jouissance* will stick to it; we shall never get rid of it; even in our most thorough endeavour to renounce it, it will contaminate the very effort to get rid of it.”⁴⁷¹

Obviously, this implies that there is some *jouissance* of the symbolic universe. Nihilism neatly presents this excessive feature in the anal fascination with clearing value. That is to say, the attentive character of nihilism, its persistent insistence, writhes in *jouissance*.

Following Lacan, Žižek does not present the reconstitution of the master-signifier as a better choice for the mystical ‘bad infinity’ derived from the elevation of the Lady. In the vein of *jouissance*, this reconstitution of the master-signifier after nihilism has cleared the symbolic universe shifts *jouis-sans* to *jouis-sens*, *jouissance* without the designation of the Lady *qua* automaton to a subjectivised *jouissance* returning to the root of *jouissance*

⁴⁶⁸ See the previous discussion of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* in Section A.3.

⁴⁶⁹ Žižek, 2006a: 7n

⁴⁷⁰ Lacan, 1998a: 90-100

⁴⁷¹ Žižek, 2000b: 293

in the Real.⁴⁷² Herein the Lady presents *jouissance* as what Lacan calls “*j’ouïs-sens*.”⁴⁷³ As a figure of radical Otherness the Lady invokes the mystic’s perverse suffering for the Other through the promise of the One in the sadistic messages the mystic believes.⁴⁷⁴ Outside the mystical relation (within the bounds of discourse), the Lady’s demands appear as a distortion of the subjectivisation of the subject in the symbolic universe. The mystic is therefore outside the range of knowledge but able to suffer for the Lady who promises something of the One. The nihilist, however, returns us to *jouis-sens*, *jouissance* intent on the reconstitution of the master-signifier, an ‘enjoy-meant.’⁴⁷⁵

The path through nihilism doubles the alienation the mystic undergoes on the side of knowledge. But the price for this is the reconstitution of the master-signifier, the remaking of the Other so the field of symbolic universe appears consistent. Such a doubling (tripping into consistency) is precisely the interplay that subjectivises *jouissance*, rendering it *jouis-sens*. But this directing of *jouissance* comes under the rule of the letter formulated by Lacan in his study of Joyce.⁴⁷⁶

According to Lorenzo Chiesa, Lacan’s reading of Joyce, “far from being a literary-clinical case study, represents his most mature formulation of a psychoanalytic ethics and politics.”⁴⁷⁷ The inventiveness of Joyce’s language, especially in *Finnegan’s Wake* (1957), carries within it a kind of raw violence: we *must* interpret the text otherwise it is un-readable (un-conscious). Nihilism recapitulates this negotiation of Joyce’s inventiveness in the point where the cynical clearing of the symbolic universe is overcome and nihilism becomes doubled: we must clear the clearing of the symbolic universe otherwise life will become too much, excessive, psychotic. The danger of nihilism is thus that its initial revelation of the Abyss hidden by *techne* threatens the subject with their dissolution that is negated by the persistence of the subject as a kind of raw violence. The choice of nihilism is therefore to move from the mystical ‘bad infinity’

⁴⁷² Here Lacan is playing on ‘sense’ and ‘direction’ as doubly instantiated in the French ‘*sens*.’

⁴⁷³ Chiesa in Žižek (ed), 2006: 350-351

⁴⁷⁴ Chiesa in Žižek (ed), 2006: 350-351

⁴⁷⁵ Laurent in Voruz & Wolf (eds), 2007: 237

⁴⁷⁶ Žižek, ‘From Joyce-the-Symptom...’ 1997

⁴⁷⁷ Chiesa in Žižek (ed), 2006: 348

to the even worse infinity of interminable *jouissance*. The nihilist returns to *jouissance* as *jouis-sens*.

VI – Conclusion

The above exploration of the mystic's relation to the Lady demonstrates how the ontology of the subject is problematised by the realignment of being in the frame of *techne*. In the mystical relation to technology there is no knowledge, only experience. This peculiar position does not constitute a discourse. Rather, it was shown that the mystical relation is the effect of a foreclosure on the field of the Other where the subject finds their identity unified by the illusion of their *imago* in a correspondence with the demands of the Other (the subject's desire is the desire of the Other). The mystic therefore inhabits the inconsistency of the Other because of this foreclosure. This inconsistency stands as a fissure in the symbolic universe that the persistent process of signification takes as its Ideal limit/horizon of meaning. And this fissure is where the subject *qua* mystic believes yet the mystic finds their social link severed because this belief is 'beyond' the symbolic universe. Detached from social reality the mystic appears at once too excessive and too minimal for symbolic reinscription: their mystical experience is enigmatic and their belief is ephemeral in its speculation on the One. It was noted that this is what Lacan calls '*j'ouïs-sens*,' agreement with the direction designated by the imaginary scenario of the Lady that severs the social link. It was also shown that the effect of this severance is the eventual collapse of the mystical relation. By maintaining the belief in their foreclosure the mystic is confronted with the Thing. Such an encounter with the Real renders the beloved Lady an incestuous maternal Thing who is possessed by the *jouisseur*. In this encounter the mystic is betrayed by the very courtly structure of love that sustains their mysticism.

Against the advent of a psychotic break in lieu of this encounter with the Thing it was suggested that the activity of nihilism offers the subject a way of reconstituting their social link by clearing away the valuation imposed by their courtly love for the Lady. Nihilistic activity such as this was shown to be two-fold: it is composed of a clearing and then a subsequent overcoming of this clearing. The clearing 'nihilation' accords with

what psychoanalysis refers to as the law of the Symbolic overwriting the wild play of the Imaginary. And this formulation in psychoanalysis raises an important point in Žižek’s ideology-critique: that the transition from mysticism into nihilism to the end of reconstituting a social link deprives the world of appearance.⁴⁷⁸ Where in mysticism *techne* is sublimated and wrought as the sublime appearance of ‘something of the One’ against the foreclosure on the paternal function of the Other, in nihilism no such sublimation of *techne* takes place. Instead, *techne* is desublimated in the wake of the ideation of mysticism. Where sublimation imposes some positive dignity on *techne*, the desublimation of *techne* by nihilism reduces the ‘human, all too human’ to an anal object to be manipulated; made and unmade. The above discussion revealed these two features of *techne* in Žižek’s treatment of desublimation in two important, definitive ways for contemporary society: “the elevation of enjoyment into a central ethico-political category” whose homeostatic balance is threatened by “the attraction exerted by some excessive *jouissance*.”⁴⁷⁹ And, secondly, the “full scientific-technological naturalization of man.”⁴⁸⁰ The subject thus becomes subject to *techne*, and becomes the object of *techne* when the subject negotiates *techne*. Here the *jouissance* of the subject becomes *jouis-sens*, a *jouissance* redeemed by *techne* rather than exploited by the *jouisseur*.

To close, in this chapter we have charted the subject’s escape into mysticism from the perverse ordering of the symbolic universe by the *jouisseur* and the subsequent return to the symbolic universe from this mystical position. This return was marked by a betrayal of the subject’s ‘being’ (*jouis*) because the anality of the *jouisseur* is predicated upon a ‘positive principle of being’ that posits the existence of the subject (*j’ouis-sens*) rather than the subject’s existence (*jouis-sens*) being understood for its antagonistic excessiveness that negates (*jouis-sans*) its symbolic demarcation. It was shown that the logical outcome of this ideological positing was psychosis if the subject did not overcome this positing of existence. However, it was also revealed that psychosis must be endured, at least initially, before the subject could overcome their positing by the symbolic universe. That is to say, there is a speculative identity between the authority of the

⁴⁷⁸ Žižek, 2004a: 136

⁴⁷⁹ Žižek, 2006: 188

⁴⁸⁰ Žižek, 2006: 188

symbolic universe (the *jouisseur*) and the subject that mutually supplements what the Other presupposes and disavows: the symbolic universe presupposes the totality of being while disavowing this pre-Symbolic unity through the signification of difference and the conceptual formulation of the subject presupposes a differentiation from psychotic Nothingness while disavowing this proto-Real separation through the symptom of existence. It is precisely this speculative logic that nihilism takes aim at in the clearing of the symbolic universe and the overcoming of the principle of being through the transformative affirmation of the negativity of *techné* in the crafting of being, now released from its positing by the signification of the symbolic universe. The reintegration of the subject into the symbolic universe is therefore both a return to and a departure from the symbolic universe that reveals the antagonistic gap between ideation and signification that is the clearing of being revealed through *techné*.

Section C: Ontology and the Ideology-Critique of Techne

C.1 The Subtraction and Purification of *a*

The Many Faces of Non-Identity – Simulation and *geistgekritik* – Returning to Repetition in Kierkegaard – A Dark Contingency – The Two Prongs of Mallarmé: Necessity and Antecedence – Beckett and the Abyss – Conclusion

Let us now turn from the *jouissance* of *techne* to the comportment of Žižek's critique of ideology which gives shape to his nascent critique of *techne* as a phenomenon of the symbolic universe rooted more broadly in human activity. In this chapter we will delineate and explore Žižek's ideology-critique to the end of conceptually distinguishing what separates the subject from technology as a social and political activity rather than a biological mass dissected by technicity. Central to this task is the way Žižek phrases his definition of ideology as: "a symbolic field which contains [a filler] holding the place of some structural impossibility, while simultaneously disavowing this impossibility."⁴⁸¹ From this definition Žižek derives the task of his ideology-critique to be elucidating this 'filler' and its inherent impossibility, to the end of bringing forth a critical awareness of the presence of ideology and its demystification.⁴⁸² The credentials of this style of critique rest on there being an ideal point in constellations of value and social ties in the life-world that encourages the constitution of the identity of the human subject and, at the same moment, hides the full realisation of this identity from the subject, making it impossible for s/he to develop the identification of their subjectivity beyond merely a token gesture of what they can 'become.' Our central task for this chapter is thus to locate and articulate this moment of impossibility in its various modalities.

Žižek unveils the modulations of this impossibility in three distinct and different ways, which compliment his formal framing of ideology as 'a filler.' The first of these that we shall examine in some depth is his understanding of repetition. This view is composed of insights into the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard and the registers of human interaction developed by the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan. As we shall see, Žižek's reading of Kierkegaard is reminiscent of the critique of Kierkegaard undertaken by the critical

⁴⁸¹ Žižek in Hallward, 2003: 90

⁴⁸² Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1994: 4

theory of Adorno, whose work also comprises an important part of Žižek's elaborations on repetition. According to Adorno's critique of Kierkegaard, the necessary historical emergence (impossibility) of the bourgeois *intérieure* is the non-identity of Kierkegaardian existentialism where the social and historical conditions of this *intérieure* expressly appear as the 'worldliness' Kierkegaard's philosophy set out to salvage from Hegel's philosophy of history.⁴⁸³ As we shall see, this position of Adorno constitutes a necessary part of Žižek's theorising as he adds the categories of Lacanian psychoanalysis (Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real) to Adorno's critique by taking Kierkegaard literally: the three levels of aesthetic, ethical, and necessitated repetition carry within them specific moments of non-identity where repetition becomes impossible due to the very modalities of these strata of repetition.⁴⁸⁴

The next of Žižek's significant articulations of impossibility to be discussed builds on this elaboration of Kierkegaard's existential philosophy to approach the epochal moment of modernism as the French experimental poet Mallarmé articulates it. Here we will observe that Žižek's philosophical contemporary Badiou is a strong influence on this reading of Mallarmé. But as some commentaries on Badiou and Žižek have observed, these thinkers diverge in their understanding of impossibility as a hallmark of the Lacanian Real in Mallarmé's *oeuvre*.⁴⁸⁵ This divergence becomes even more pertinent to our elaboration when we consider the terms Žižek uses to couch his discussion of Mallarmé: 'purification' and 'subtraction.' As we shall see, these terms are of mutual interest to both Badiou and Žižek, but in Žižek's account we find they are reconfigured to help his argument focused on Mallarmé and bring about formal-structural consequences for the failure/impossibility of identity, the point where non-identity emerges.

We will then depart from this discussion of Mallarmé and move on to the third substantial way Žižek frames impossibility. This third way is a further development on repetition and the purification and subtraction of the Real mentioned above. In this third

⁴⁸³ Adorno, 1989: 32-34; Buck-Morss, 1979: 115

⁴⁸⁴ Žižek, 2001: 78-83. These three levels also have their Lacanian coordinates as imaginary alienation, symbolic separation, and subjective destitution.

⁴⁸⁵ And, at an even more general level, this difference can be traced to Žižek's 'consequentialist' position as against Badiou's more 'proceduralist' outlook.

argument the moment of impossibility is detailed, in which non-identity intervenes between identity and otherness as the indivisible bare minimum of the subject. Under the influence of the philosophy of both Badiou and the German Idealists, this ‘subject stripped bare’ is understood by Žižek as an imaginary stand-in for the abyss of the Real. This discussion is borne on the back of an underlying logic of structural antecedence which initially appears in the reading of Lacan and Mallarmé by Badiou, and reaches its apex in the theatrical and literary work of Samuel Beckett. While Žižek rarely takes up a discussion of the work of Beckett, in more recent times it has provided him with a touchstone for articulating the transition from an ethical (categorical) imperative to the face of necessity revealed by the subject’s sense of need, precisely the relation between identity and otherness that will be taken up immediately below.⁴⁸⁶ To begin then we must first provide some preliminary remarks on the relationship of these three readings of ideologically-rendered impossibility and non-identity in Žižek’s thought.

I – The Many Faces of Non-Identity

Žižek relies on all three of the articulations of impossibility stated above (repetition, reduction, and remainder) to generate the dynamic that animates his dialectical materialism. Across his catalogue of works Žižek develops the critique of ideology through the methodological structure of this ‘dialectical materialist’ approach. As a methodology dialectical materialism is composed of four moments that constitute the procedure as a method: firstly the *positing* of some thesis, secondly the *reversal* of the thesis, thirdly the *inversion* of the reversed thesis, and finally the *inverse reversal* of the thesis which constitutes a new positing.⁴⁸⁷ An example of this is as follows: “‘all history is natural’ and therefore transitory,’ “‘all nature is historical’ and therefore socially produced,’ “‘actual history is not historical’ but merely the representation of the victor,’ and finally ‘representation is unnatural because it denies the transitoriness of history.’⁴⁸⁸ Žižek follows the method of dialectical materialism to intervene in and critique ideology

⁴⁸⁶ Žižek, 2006a: 120

⁴⁸⁷ Buck-Morss, 1979: 77-81; for both Žižek and Adorno this style of intervening critique in the mode of dialectical materialism takes aim at the formal ‘ideated’ structure of the ideas (*geistige*) which are contained by some ideological belief/motif, and therefore has an affinity with metaphysics.

⁴⁸⁸ Buck-Morss, 1979: 131

through moments of ‘non-identity,’ the limit of political, social, and cultural identification and belief.

This materialist and dialectical unfolding of ideology-critique with Žižek’s characteristic blending of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and popular culture is particular to Žižek’s Slovenian brand of ideology-critique. Such ideology-critique was also shown in earlier discussion to be bound to French political philosophy after Althusser and his social critique. One should note, however, that the kind of ideology-critique Žižek and his Slovenian inner circle (Dolar, Zupančič, Salecl, to name a few) are engaged in is highly reminiscent of the early Frankfurt School scholarship.

This similarity to the Frankfurt School of the 1930s and 1940s is noticeable in the philosophical dispositions and theoretical attitudes of Žižek and his colleagues. Beyond merely thematic similarities, Žižek’s dialectical materialism is differentiated by his emphasis on the aesthetic field as conceived through social and economic forces. This position is apparent in his discussions of politics in the non-academic popular press, which often relate to their subject matter by way of the incommensurability of an apparent phenomenon with a commonly held conception of it. For example, in an opinion piece published in *The New York Times* on the 5th of January, 2007, Žižek critiques the aggressive approach of the United States of America to Iran during their ongoing occupation of Iraq as effectively retaining the same underlying structure as the former-Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein’s aggressive approach to Iran two decades earlier.⁴⁸⁹ Žižek claims that where the United States of America professes to have changed the effective political constitution of Iraq and brought the foundations of peace and democracy to the region, they have in fact brought Iraq into a state of regress, in the strict sense Freud gives the latter term in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1991): pro-Iranian influence saturates the *realpolitik* of Iraq where in the same moment the official ‘conscious’ relation to Iran of the occupying U.S. is oppositional and attempts to cover-over the really existing political disposition of the Iraqi people.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁹ Žižek, 2007

⁴⁹⁰ Žižek, 2007

What is important about the above example is its demonstration of Žižek's critical process. The above example shows that Žižek's dialectical materialism focuses on the non-identity of the object, the point where the correspondence between a concept and the appearance of an object breaks down. Like members of the early Frankfurt School, especially Adorno, Žižek's critical gaze hinges on moments where the object resists to our conception of it.⁴⁹¹

Žižek takes up this focus on non-identity in two particular ways: the critique of aesthetics and the demystified structure of existence *a propos* ideology-critique. The first of these is characterised by attentiveness to the socioeconomic conditions of the aesthetic field. Žižek is not in search of a theory of art to justify his dialectical materialism, but rather he treats the aesthetic dimension of any object as the grounds for ideology-critique to take place.⁴⁹² Such a move is highly reminiscent of the way Adorno produced his various critiques during his association with the early Frankfurt School.

Like Žižek, Adorno maintained an intellectual procedure where the critical philosophical gaze intervenes in the object to reveal its non-identity with itself.⁴⁹³ An example of this comes from Adorno's early critique of Kierkegaard, which holds to the formal structure of his later analyses with the Frankfurt School.⁴⁹⁴ In this critique Adorno turns the socioeconomic forces sustaining and producing the bourgeois *intérieur* against Kierkegaard's mystical departure into existentialism, charging that Kierkegaard's philosophy dissolves the worldliness it sets out to salvage from Hegel.⁴⁹⁵ This inversion of Kierkegaard allows Adorno to bring the Danish existentialist's philosophical project into the dialectical fold of materialism and further Adorno's end of renewing the validity and value of aesthetics as a domain for unearthing and "knowing objective truth."⁴⁹⁶ This valuation of aesthetics goes well beyond the importance (or lack of) either Kierkegaard or

⁴⁹¹ Butler, 2004: 99

⁴⁹² Žižek, 2006: 3-13

⁴⁹³ Buck-Morss, 1979: 47

⁴⁹⁴ Buck-Morss, 1979: 23

⁴⁹⁵ Buck-Morss, 1979: 115

⁴⁹⁶ Buck-Morss, 1979: 114

Hegel imagined for the aesthetic field. The privileging of aesthetics by Adorno gives his ideology-critique a particular slant where we find aesthetics deployed to read the formal conditions of various political scenarios.

This aesthetic over-determination is similarly characteristic of Žižek's ideology-critique. A clearer example of this than that of the *New York Times* article cited above is Žižek's careful reading of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Ode To Joy*, the unofficial anthem of the European Union (E.U.), to articulate the economic movements and social inconsistencies within the political constitution of the E.U.⁴⁹⁷ In this reading Žižek clearly shows his critique's indebtedness to Adorno:

“Of course, these lines are not meant as a criticism of Beethoven; quite the contrary, in an Adornian mode, one should discern in this failure of the fourth movement Beethoven's artistic integrity: the truthful indexing of the failure of the very Enlightenment project of universal brotherhood.”⁴⁹⁸

Here Žižek is distilling the moment of non-identity not as the positing of some transcendental truth but as the ‘truthful indexing’ of a failure in Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* that is integral to the constitution of the work as a whole. It is clear then that Žižek's critique is herein operating along an analytical axis the same as it does in the *New York Times* piece.

Aside from the clear influence of Adorno, Žižek's understanding of ideology also shows the influence of a post-Althusserian reading of Marx. In the majority of his English-language works to date this post-Althusserian tangent has tended to be developed through the political philosophy of Badiou.⁴⁹⁹ Whereas between Adorno and Žižek it is the dialectical method of their ideology-critique that is similar, the consonance between Badiou and Žižek centres on the demystified structures of existence *a propos* ideology-critique. This consonance forms an important alternate branch of Žižek's treatment of non-identity, which is by no means ‘secondary.’

⁴⁹⁷ Žižek, ‘Against the Populist Temptation,’ 2006: 569-572

⁴⁹⁸ Žižek, ‘Against the Populist Temptation,’ 2006: 571

⁴⁹⁹ Parker, 2004: 30 & 86-87

Hallward states that Badiou is clearly distinct from Adorno in both content and critical direction, yet Žižek takes little pause in casting Badiou's notion of the 'event' as an Adorno-esque 'real kernel' of reality's incommensurability with itself, a kind of formal non-identity of ontology.⁵⁰⁰ Badiou takes up this point in *Being and Event* wherein he shows how the logical nature of mathematics illuminates the formal speculative dimension of subjectivisation, what is left over when the subject has been subtracted and all that is left is a remainder that resists.⁵⁰¹ This remainder is an object that resists to the conception of it as an object but with the interesting twist that it is a subtracted ontological subject and therefore is not a particular object to be subsumed under a less fundamental banner such as 'technology.' Badiou is here elucidating the confrontation of the subject with a Thing at the limit of ontology where it is composed of certain 'objectlessness' untenable in the particularities of epistemological conditions (unlike the life-world of the subject).

This necessary minimal failure of reality is internal to subject's 'place in the world' and it draws Žižek through the fluctuations of his dialectical materialism, especially when we consider what he says of Mallarmé or Beckett, or even in comparison to Adorno's reading of Kierkegaard. Instead of highlighting this finality as an ending, Žižek illuminates it in the same terms as Badiou: as what Mallarmé calls the '*futur antérieur*,' the future perfect.⁵⁰² Such an open finality is at once a closure and a rupture of a prevailing system. And Mallarmé's poetry is attractive to Badiou for precisely this reason. The poetry of Mallarmé demonstrates "what is at stake in a modern poem is the pattern [*motif*] of an idea."⁵⁰³ The poetry of Mallarmé has "no mimetic, semantic, or figural relation either to an object or an author."⁵⁰⁴ Unlike Adorno who places a very high value on the mediating power of interpretation, Badiou and Žižek are interested in the spaces beyond the reign of interpretation. But where Badiou identifies the structuring principle of these subtractive spaces to be simultaneously singular and universal, Žižek

⁵⁰⁰ Hallward, 2003: 193-194

⁵⁰¹ Badiou, 2005a: 4

⁵⁰² Žižek, 2000b: 172-173

⁵⁰³ Badiou in Hallward, 2003: 10

⁵⁰⁴ Hallward, 2003: 10

keeps the singular and universal distinct.⁵⁰⁵ While this tension keeps their work distinct, Žižek is more sympathetic to Badiou's readings of the absurdist theatre of Beckett where the subject is reduced, subtracted, to the very minimum of structure, a repetitive motion drawn on by some distant object-cause than to Badiou's elucidation of a generic truth procedure in Mallarmé's poetry.

When read with Žižek's ideology-critique, Beckett's theatre presents Žižek with an analogy for the function of ideology in post-modernity. This function draws its believability from the structure of mysticism. Yet in the transition from Kierkegaard through Mallarmé to Beckett we find '(ideological) mystification' undergoing changes in its modulation. In Adorno's critique of Kierkegaard the valorisation of interpretation leads him into the spaces of the bourgeois *intérieur* in order to fragment Kierkegaard's philosophical project so it could be remade to serve the intervening interrogative method of dialectical materialism. A point of similarity therefore emerges with the respective critiques of Adorno and Žižek insofar as Kierkegaard's mysticism is the product of a doubled-interiority of the subject that Adorno intervenes in by critiquing the spiritual 'double' as the bourgeois *intérieur*.⁵⁰⁶ Thus Kierkegaard's 'religious' dimension is deprived of its belief and collapses back into the material aesthetic field where the process of ideology-critique can then set about locating its constitutive non-identity (i.e. the spiritual double) and demystifying the bourgeois *intérieur* as a socially formed historical object.

Badiou attempts to bypass Adorno's historical image of the bourgeois *intérieur* by way of Mallarmé's reaching beyond the mediation of interpretation to move the conception of the subject within a fragmented world ruled by no unifying historico-interpretative mapping. This is significant because interpretation sustains Adorno's critical project as a practical outcome, which thus allows us to identify Badiou's disengagement from historico-interpretative mapping as a type of mysticism where the subject experiences

⁵⁰⁵ Žižek, 2000b: 172-173; Bensaïd in Hallward (ed), 2004: 102

⁵⁰⁶ Adorno, 1989: 40-46

‘truth’ disconnected from its socioeconomic structures.⁵⁰⁷ The mysticism to be found in Badiou’s use of Mallarmé’s poetry relies on the framing of knowledge similarly elucidated in the detailing of the phantasmatic promise of knowledge in Section A.2: if proper knowledge is of some knowable objective truth then the subtracted subject confined to their subjectivity/subjectivisation is held enthralled by the abstract patterns of immediate experience which we claim as indicative of the ontological formlessness of truth but which themselves have some form. Here Badiou has us encounter Truth at one remove, as though the articulation of knowledge is known to the subject through the misrecognition of their subjectivisation (enactment of themselves as a subject) as being without form.⁵⁰⁸ It is as if one can never really know the truth except for a miraculous ‘Truth-Event,’ only be beholden to the abstract patterns of knowledge that promise access to a ‘positive truth’ without delivering with it the ontological prerequisite of its constitutive failure to be whole. Conversely, however, this signals the ideological manoeuvre *par excellence*: the indexing of knowledge to a posited ‘objective’ order, ‘posited’ in the sense that it fills in this constitutive failure of knowledge.

While taking some elements from Badiou’s discussion of the subject Žižek does not repeat the ideological manoeuvre stated above, and instead integrates it with the analysis of non-identity he shares with Adorno. Žižek’s shifting away from Badiou is formalised by his formulation of a subtracted subject extremely similar to the characters found in the works of Beckett. This subtracted subject is framed by Žižek as a pattern in the Real operating between desire (the symbolic universe and its transgression) and the “Truth-Event” of Badiou.⁵⁰⁹ This pattern is a motif moved by the Real. The characters of Beckett’s plays are drawn on by some object-cause, i.e. Godot in *Waiting For Godot* (1986) or the affair being recounted in *Play* (1986), but it is the Real that moves them. Mysticism thus appears in the interminable, impossible, element of the Real which Beckett’s characters experience but know nothing about: an antecedent cause. Such an unassimiable real-kernel of the subject is the minimum of the subject reduced to an object of critical inquiry, its very non-identity.

⁵⁰⁷ Buck-Morss, 1979: 79

⁵⁰⁸ Badiou, 2005a: 192-193; Hallward, 2003: 197-198; Macherey in Riera (ed), 2005: 112-114

⁵⁰⁹ Žižek, 2000b: 146-147

While Adorno's critique of Kierkegaard's existential philosophy and Badiou's reading of Mallarmé are important for the respective authors, the specific modal transition from Kierkegaard through Mallarmé to Beckett appears in Žižek's work with the dialectical outlay of his ideology-critique (we will return to these points throughout this chapter). It can be seen from the above discussion that Adorno and Badiou present influential counterpoints and effective comparative treatments for an understanding of Žižek's ideology-critique.

II – Simulation and *geistgekritik*

The demystification aimed for by the dialectical materialism outlaid above is clearly not a direct correspondence between what a subject knows and an objective order of reality against which this knowledge can be simply indexed. In Žižek's ideology-critique however, this demystification does invoke a loose correspondence between the constitutive failure that limits knowledge and the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) of the subject. This correspondence marks each terrain with a particular topology. Žižek expresses the genesis of this topology through the aim of demystification: it does not target some extra-worldly transparency but the opaque core of our everyday experience that resists interpretation.

We should be careful here to resist reading this relationship between opacity and transparency as a simple binary-opposition because, as a topology, the relation is far more ambiguous and complex than a simple juxtaposition of ideas. In *The Plague of Fantasies* Žižek gives a good example of the problematic ideological comportment of transparency in the instance of technology:

“Modernist technology is ‘transparent’ in the sense of retaining the illusion of an insight into ‘how the machine works’; that is to say, the screen of the interface was supposed to allow the user direct access to the machine behind the screen... The postmodernist ‘transparency’ designates almost the exact opposite... the

interface screen is supposed to conceal the workings of the machine, and to simulate our everyday experience as faithfully as possible.”⁵¹⁰

Here Žižek aligns transparency with the power of belief, the faith in instrumental thinking that guides human practices and communication in everyday life. The path of this belief in instrumentalising everyday life leads into a culture of calculation that the dialectics of Žižek’s materialism accounts for. Rather, the problem for Žižek is how this instrumental mode of thought hides its culture of calculation with the post-modern “*culture of simulation*.”⁵¹¹ The term ‘simulation’ aptly captures the nuances Žižek gives to the incommensurability between the conception of an object the subject retains and the resistance of the object to the subject’s subjectivisation of it. We may even go so far as to extend this notion to include the body of the subject, inasmuch as the subject has some relation to their embodied appearance. This resistance (non-identity) of the object provokes Žižek to find an interlocutor with the meaninglessness of existence portrayed in Kierkegaard’s existentialism in a similar way to Adorno. However, where Adorno liquidates Kierkegaard’s idealism Žižek draws out an opacity that underlies the Ideal, the apex of idealism.⁵¹² This opacity comes to bear on the subject through the verisimilitude of the culture of simulation.

Simulation presents a problem for Adorno’s elevation of interpretation in his *geistgekritik* (critique of spirit/ideas). If we examine the case of his critique of Kierkegaard for example, Adorno states:

“All Kierkegaard’s gloomy motives have good critical sense as soon as they are interpreted in terms of social critique. Many of his positive assertions gain the concrete significance they otherwise lack as soon as one translates them into concepts of a right society.”⁵¹³

While Žižek is similarly engaged in social critique, his framing of post-modern simulation collapses the category of ‘right society’ that Adorno appeals to.⁵¹⁴ Perhaps it is this that motivates Žižek to not propose an alternative social or political model, and

⁵¹⁰ Žižek, 1997: 131

⁵¹¹ Žižek, 1997: 131

⁵¹² Buck-Morss, 1979: 111-121; Žižek, 2006: 206

⁵¹³ Adorno in Buck-Morss, 1979: 121

⁵¹⁴ Žižek, 1997: 140-143

instead provide a vigorous critical interpretation of existing ideological conditions.⁵¹⁵ In light of this intervening tone of Žižek's ideology-critique it is necessary to consider that if the realm of everyday experience is simulated by the technology, which in no small way goes toward constituting the fabric of this everyday experience, then the rightness of everyday life is not being called to justify itself. The question of a reference to some measure outside the self-legitimation/self-referentiality of everyday experience is made irrelevant by technological simulation. Given that technology is part of human activity, party to the Aristotelian relation of *techne* to *praxis* and *poiesis*, interpretation is here restricted as that point where *techne* folds back into itself. Žižek refuses to outline an alternative political model because it is the everyday life that is the focus of his critiques.⁵¹⁶ Even when Žižek takes aim at international politics, he is all the time referring his readers to the everyday reality of these politics, the inescapability of their formal structure.⁵¹⁷

The shift from imitation to simulation in the conception of technological transparency is important for everyday reality because it marks an adjustment in the correspondence between our conception of the world and the activities through which we engage with the world. As the interface of technology comes to more and more simulate our everyday experience,

“The price of this illusion of a continuity with our everyday environs is that the user becomes ‘accustomed to opaque technology’... In other words, the user renounces the endeavour to grasp the functioning of the computer, resigning himself to the fact that in his interaction with cyberspace he is thrown into a non-transparent situation analogous to that of his everyday *Lebenswelt*.”⁵¹⁸

Within everyday experience we have to ‘find our bearings’ by trial and error, and Žižek is therefore suggesting that trial and error is faithfully simulated for us by our relation to technology. In effect, this technological simulation of Sisyphean everydayness reinforces that the conceptions of the subject must conform to the structure of the object for human

⁵¹⁵ Žižek, 2002b: 132-134

⁵¹⁶ Butler, *et al*, 2000: 9

⁵¹⁷ Žižek, 1993: 200-237

⁵¹⁸ Žižek, 1997: 131

praxis to take place; “the postmodernist universe is the universe of naïve trust in the screen which makes the very quest of ‘what lies behind it’ irrelevant.”⁵¹⁹ This naïve acceptance is problematic for Žižek because it exposes the subject to a kind of phenomenological stupor as regards finding their way in their life-world where the totality of phenomenal appearance is trusted as a self-sufficient whole. This trust is underscored by Žižek as a trust in the opaque object, a trust which forfeits the subjectivisation of the subject. The domination by the phenomenological comportment of the object therefore dominates the conception of the object, and exposes the narcissistic belief of the subject to the extreme vulnerability of “actual psychic contact with another person.”⁵²⁰

In the post-modernist universe this opaque interiority of consciousness which defines the subject from the object is problematic in its relation to the world because it is constantly on the brink of disruption.⁵²¹ This precariousness comes of looking toward the opaque object for some point of identification without being critical of the effects of this object. Here alienation can take place within the confines of the life-world, with the important Lacanian qualification that alienation takes place along the imaginary axis of binary oppositions, i.e. subject-object, right-wrong, passive-active, etc. That is to say, the naïve trust in the phenomenology of everyday experience alienates the subject’s *techne* from identification by turning it inward, e.g. the subject ‘does’ being in the container of her/his life-world. This alienation embeds *techne* in an imaginary scenario where understanding the function of *techne* (its knowable objective truth) is made irrelevant.⁵²² The prosthesis and extension of the human in its technological metamorphoses is therefore a moment of bondage to the prevailing binary oppositions in our everyday experience/life-world rather than emancipatory and of symbolic overwriting/separation. The subject is thus doomed to compulsive repetition, to endlessly repeat the attempt to identify with the object where the very opacity of the object means that it resists inclusion in the identity of the subject that seeks to identify with it. Yet, all too tragically, the subject needs these objects of the

⁵¹⁹ Žižek, 1997: 132

⁵²⁰ Žižek, 1997: 133

⁵²¹ Žižek in Bergstrom (ed), 1999: 103-104

⁵²² Žižek in Bergstrom (ed), 1999: 107-110

life-world to identify their position in the symbolic universe otherwise they are bereft of their particular subjective constitution. The culture of simulation is thus a form of compensation for this lack of social separation, attempting to mimic the delineation of the individual in her/his autonomy when it is merely a repetition of the ‘instrumentation’ of everyday experience.

III – Returning to Repetition in Kierkegaard

Žižek formulates the repetition derived from the culture of simulation in three different dispositions co-extensive with Kierkegaard’s philosophy and Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory: the aesthetic attempt to recreate, the repetitive appeal to some symbolic mandate in ethics, and the religious compulsion to repeat historical events outside the frame of historical necessity.⁵²³ However, as above it is important to note that repetition relies on a fundamental opacity (impossibility) of the object that antagonises the subject to repeat.⁵²⁴ When encountered in an imaginary scenario this impossibility of repetition is experienced “under the guise of the imaginary deadlocks that the subject encounters when he endeavors to resuscitate the fullness of past pleasures.”⁵²⁵ This is the attitude of the aesthete, the subject who professes a great sensitivity to the beauty of art and nature.⁵²⁶ This is also the subject of the culture of simulation whose *techne* is consistently configured to appear with the same immediacy as everyday experience. The sensitivity of the aesthete is therefore problematic because it is sensitivity to the ineffability of beauty. And this ineffability has its repercussions for the subject in the way “even if, on the level of ‘reality,’ the thing is exactly the same, it now leaves him cold and indifferent.”⁵²⁷ Coupled with binary opposition, repetition therefore traps the subject in their processes of failed identification because repetition becomes the apogee of identity, never making identity successful but at the same time being the process through which it can be achieved.⁵²⁸ In Žižek’s Lacanian terminology this repetition is the drive of the ego-ideal

⁵²³ Žižek, 2001: 78-83

⁵²⁴ Žižek, 2001: 78-79

⁵²⁵ Žižek, 2001: 78

⁵²⁶ Žižek, 2002a: 113

⁵²⁷ Žižek, 2001: 78

⁵²⁸ This is concomitant with the structure of the *bodhisattva* discussed in Section A.1.

toward the Ideal-ego, the concept the subject has of their phenomenological self in some relation to what they want to believe they are.⁵²⁹

If we reflect on this impotence of identification, to ask whether our wish to identify with the opaque object in the first place is justified, this reflection must invoke an ethical or symbolic domain which can supply the measure of this process. Indeed, such a measure is already inherent to the acknowledgement of the failure of identification.⁵³⁰ In this ethical register the subject is within a ‘symbolic universe’ where repetition “is a sign of maturity... We find satisfaction in the return of the Same.”⁵³¹ This satisfaction is structured around the enjoyment of the repetition of a signifier. In terms of a shift away from the aesthetic subject held in the embrace of the culture of simulation, the ethical stage is characterised by a shift toward the *techne* of identification. This *techne* is repetition, but in the symbolic register repetition is a difficult failing; it constitutes the ideal point “at which we overcome the futile yearning for the New without falling into a nostalgic backward-directed attitude, [which] is never present as such.”⁵³² Žižek here signals the self-referential paradox of the symbolic universe: the ideal point between hope (the belief in the Ideal-ego) and memory (the trust in the ego-ideal) is present “only in the mode of hope or memory.”⁵³³ Thus in place of the wild procession of imaginary deadlocks/binary oppositions, where the subject announces they are ‘this and not that,’ we find the Ideal future perfect already present in the ego-ideal (Mallarmé’s ‘*futur antérieur*’). Herein the ego-ideal furnishes the retroactive reference of achieving identification with the Ideal-ego that refers us back to the reliable rhythm of our attempts to achieve the ideal point. Interestingly, such a formulation is very similar to Badiou’s appeal to the Universal in his understanding of the possibility for philosophy today to “seize our time in thought”⁵³⁴ which ceases all suggestions of the end of philosophy and, instead, maintains the reliable rhythm of our attempts to ‘seize thought’ in its temporality.

⁵²⁹ Žižek, 1989: 121-123

⁵³⁰ Freud, 1963: 253-254

⁵³¹ Žižek, 2001: 78

⁵³² Žižek, 2001: 78

⁵³³ Žižek, 2001: 79

⁵³⁴ Noys, ‘The Provocations of Alain Badiou,’ 2003: 127

Further than this, and beyond either Žižek or Badiou, the coalescing of the repetition to attain the ideal point and the enjoyment of this Ideal in its ideation constitutes *techne*. That is to say, *techne* is the mode of enjoying in and of the symbolic universe with the qualification that *techne* cannot be the Ideal, even though it promises the subject access to the Ideal-ego. Hence, in the structure of the culture of simulation the role of *techne* is to reduce sociality to a circle of enjoyment, a tessellation of pleasure elsewhere analysed as the guiding principle of ‘sociality’ under the authority of the *jouisseur*.⁵³⁵

This formulation of *techne* sets the post-modern culture of simulation to appear with a shading of neutrality. Simply put, the reproduction of everyday experience is the universal norm of simulation. However, such simulation fails to repeat *techne* as a fundamental (artistic) gesture due to the ethical neutrality/separateness of its activity.⁵³⁶ Here we are drawing out the line of Lacanian criticism so prevalent in Žižek ahead of his Leninist tendency to pass off freedom as a neutral loop because the culture of simulation entraps the subject in their life-world by compensating for the subject’s place in the symbolic universe by diffusing the unifying symbolic trait of the subject across many discursive forms.⁵³⁷ The culture of simulation is therefore subordinated to the symbolic universe where repetition is enacted as the repetition of a signifier that repeats “the symbolic *trait unaire*, the mark to which the object is reduced.”⁵³⁸ And this holds the important consequence that a culture of simulation has the symbolic effect of reducing the reality of everyday experience to a series of marks that overwrite the phenomenological/imaginary content of everyday experience, in turn which renders the everyday experience which the subject trusts as indistinct, kitsch, cosmetic, unreal, and so forth, although it nevertheless coordinates and promotes the subject’s compulsion to repeat rather than some limited freedom to choose.⁵³⁹ A ‘free act’ thus becomes the intervention in and traversing of ‘culture’ as a type of diffusing compensation for this symbolic reduction of the subject to the *trait unaire*, to begin from the ordinance of ‘thou art that.’

⁵³⁵ Refer to Section B.1 for an extended discussion of the *jouisseur*.

⁵³⁶ Žižek, ‘Kierkegaard with Lacan,’ 2005: 110

⁵³⁷ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 180-181

⁵³⁸ Žižek, 2001: 79

⁵³⁹ Freud, 2003: 83

Where the aesthete is beholden by the infinite march toward the Ideal-ego and the ethical subject reduces objects to a series of metonymic and metaphoric marks that stand-in for the objects, the third compartment of repetition in Kierkegaard invites a retroactive recognition of real necessity:

“What Kierkegaard has in mind here is, ultimately, the well-known opposition of two attitudes to history: when we are thrown into historical ‘becoming,’ caught in its flow, we experience the abyss of history’s ‘openness,’ we are forced to choose; afterward, when we cast a retrospective gaze on it, its course loses the character of ‘becoming’ and appears as the manifestation of some ‘eternal’ necessity.”⁵⁴⁰

The problem for Kierkegaard, according to Žižek’s commentary, is that those who comprehend the whole of history or cast prophecies on the future err on “the free decision involved in the act of becoming.”⁵⁴¹ The repetition of history does not mean to re-enact what necessarily came to pass but to undermine the very status of history as a linear chain of necessity by making visible the “existential deadlock” of free decisions made at the time, “the weight of decisions [people] were forced to assume within [a] unique constellation.”⁵⁴² Žižek is aiming here to elucidate the traumatism of the Real (necessity) where a failure to integrate the opacity of the object’s resistance to conceptual liquidation re-emerges in the repetition of the object in an imaginary scenario, symbolic universe, or a subject deprived of their subjectivity on the virtue of their free choice.⁵⁴³ This formulation of repetition is important because it suggests that the point where concepts break down, their non-identity with the object they capture in their conceptualisation, can repeatedly emerge within the ahistorical stasis of the culture of simulation in post-modernity.⁵⁴⁴ This re-emergence of the traumatic kernel of the object’s resistance to conceptualisation means that far from annihilating everyday experience by way of simulation, the technological saturation of post-modernity is thwarted by the very reality it attempts to simulate.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁰ Žižek, 2001: 79

⁵⁴¹ Žižek, 2001: 79

⁵⁴² Žižek, 2001: 79

⁵⁴³ Kierkegaard in Žižek, 2000a: 148; Žižek, 2002a: 136-137

⁵⁴⁴ Žižek, 2001: 80-81

⁵⁴⁵ Žižek in Bergstrom (ed), 1999: 116

IV – A Dark Contingency

The critique of Kierkegaard by Adorno adds another dimension to Žižek's formulation of repetition and its constitutive limit or impossibility. Adorno suggests that Kierkegaard incorporates the hallmark of historicity unabashedly presented by Hegel's notion of history (the progression of objective spirit) by trying to avoid Hegel's philosophy of history through a turning inward to the category of 'the person.'⁵⁴⁶ According to Adorno, historicity re-emerges in the transient existential situation as hereditary sin in Kierkegaard:

“In Kierkegaard's doctrine of hereditary sin, history is nothing else than the formal schema according to which the intrasubjective dialectic is to reverse into the dialectic of the 'absolute.' It establishes the borders against mere subjectivity, leaving, however, the historical fact in dark contingency.”⁵⁴⁷

Adorno's metaphors allude here to Žižek's regard for the opacity that persists in Kierkegaard, to the point where the subject is reduced to an objectless symbolic mark as an 'I' in historical discourse. All the more importantly, the concrete antidote to the post-modern simulation of history is given a twist here reminiscent of Benjamin's theses on the philosophy of history: history is not natural because history means the violent act of decision recorded by a dominant victor.⁵⁴⁸ The representation of history is always insufficient to represent the totality of history because the truth of history is one-sided; the facticity of the facts remains a dark contingency.⁵⁴⁹

While this opacity is vital for Žižek's above analysis, repetition is the main support of the analyses of historicity in Kierkegaard enacted by both Adorno and Žižek. The first way repetition arises in both discussions is through the process of dialectical materialist critique. Here, the way an object is expressed/represented as being always-already within the codifications of the symbolic universe is the moment of its positing. For Adorno, this makes any aesthetic expression a possible site for objective truth because the imagining

⁵⁴⁶ Adorno, 1989: 32-34

⁵⁴⁷ Adorno, 1989: 34

⁵⁴⁸ Benjamin, 1968: 245-255

⁵⁴⁹ Žižek, 2001a: 148-149

of a symbolic mark/expression always relies on the concept it expresses, and it is when conceptual thought breaks down at the point of non-identity that truth can emerge, i.e. where when repetition is suspended but *techne* continues.⁵⁵⁰ That is to say, the plenitude of representation in the symbolic universe becomes reversed into an insufficiency when it is deprived of its conceptual support.

Žižek's Lacanian reading of repetition in Kierkegaard also suggests that it is the way *techne* is performed that is at issue because the formal structure that registers doing/making as expressions of a phenomenological intent is itself prone to insufferable impossibility. This gap between simulation and the everyday phenomenological experience of our life-world reappears again and again in the attempt to simulate everyday experience precisely because the subjective life-world is treated as an object. As an object of simulation the experience of the life-world is rendered opaque at its core, and therefore the conceptual understanding at the level of symbolic meaning is inverted. This opacity distinguishing everyday experience from its simulation comes under the banner of Adorno's 'dark contingency,' something that thwarts the simulation of the life-world because it is itself lacking total transparency. The subject's very awareness of (and trust in) experience implies that there is something opaque to believe/trust in, something ideal.

Because of his dialectical materialism Žižek often suggests this opacity is the mark of the subject in their life-world.⁵⁵¹ By being a subject we engage *techne* to integrate into and identify with the world we find ourselves in. But tragically this process leads us into alienation at the same moment as the mediation of *techne* puts the world at a symbolic distance, a "sickness unto death"⁵⁵² where imaginary possibility is of greater value than real/impossible actuality; the anxiety of what one can be over-determines what one is.⁵⁵³ Following Adorno, this relation extends this repression of the relation between the subject and the world further than the 'organic' level of immanence, reaching out to the

⁵⁵⁰ Adorno, 1989: 40-46

⁵⁵¹ Žižek, 2006: 45-46; 2000b: 62; 1993: 33-35

⁵⁵² Žižek, 1997: 90

⁵⁵³ Žižek, 2006: 89; 2001a: 105; 2002a: 136-137

phantasmatic ideal to assure the consistency of the life-world. Here we should be careful not to return to the ‘God’s view’ of ideology and reality wherein the stripping away of ideology gives us “access to objective reality as it ‘truly is’.”⁵⁵⁴ As Žižek phrases it: “the ultimate support of the critique of ideology – the extra-ideological point of reference as ‘ideological’ – is not ‘reality’ but the ‘repressed’ Real of antagonism.”⁵⁵⁵ The subject’s ‘sickness unto death’ rests on the inability to internalise some hard traumatic kernel which they then attempt to negotiate around by positioning themselves in relation to the phantasmatic ideal. On the one hand, the fantasy of beauty (i.e. technological progress improves the quality of human life) sustains the plane of immanence where the subject is/relates. On the other hand, the other side of fantasy sustains where the subject is not, the spectral apparitions that invoke my envy about what the Other is doing just out of sight (i.e. humanity is only able to be thought through technological ways and becomes yet another technical object). For the immanent communal relation to be sustained the community is regulated by the former ‘beautifying’ fantasy while the latter ‘envy’ fantasy embodies its necessary disavowal.⁵⁵⁶ The challenge then is to locate the antagonism that distorts these fantasies, necessitates their askance particularity.

This process bears a striking similarity to our earlier methodological elaboration of dialectical materialism. Here we have the reversal (critique) of the inverted thesis, that conceptual understanding alone is insufficient for knowledge, and so the process of dialectical critique returns to the aesthetic sphere of material appearances and a new thesis: the human subject pursues the understanding of the world through *techne* but this process itself puts the world at a distance and it is only by the failure of *techne*, when technology does not smoothly function, that we are forced to confront the world beyond the mystical conceptual strictures of the ‘object.’ One should note here the clearly Hegelian position being elaborated: the contradiction of *techne*, understanding the world only puts it at a greater distance, reveals the limit of *techne*, i.e. when technical understanding fails the subject is forced to confront the world beyond her/his conception of it.

⁵⁵⁴ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 263

⁵⁵⁵ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 263

⁵⁵⁶ Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2005: 266

V – The Two Prongs of Mallarmé: Necessity and Antecedence

The ontological repercussions for maintaining this naïve phenomenological trust in the experience of the life-world are elaborated on by both Badiou and Žižek using the demonstrative example of Mallarmé’s experimental poetic modernism. Underlying Žižek’s engagement with Mallarmé is the formulation of the commands of authority in the post-modern universe as imperatives to enjoy.⁵⁵⁷ As an imperative, this argument about the formal structure of duty in the post-modern universe constitutes the particular mode of enjoying (*mode de jouir*) that values the variety of objects and activities able to be taken up by the subject. With this configuration of propriety supporting his argument, Žižek is specifically interested in two features of Mallarmé’s work: the future perfect and the failure of sustaining identification. The future perfect (*futur antérieur*) tense of Mallarmé’s famous ‘nothing takes place but the place’ (*rien n’aura eu lieu que le lieu*) is read by Žižek to be “dealing with a utopian state which, for a priori structural reasons, can never be realized in the present tense.”⁵⁵⁸ This first aspect suggests that far from merely being an ignorant stasis, the post-modern subject’s naïve trust in phenomenological experience has a powerfully conservative political direction and fetishist economy of value. The presence of an ideal point in the present constellations of value and social links in the life-world encourages the identification of the subject at the same moment that the subject can never realise this identity beyond merely a token gesture, a marker of the yet-to-come. And this tension remains an extant simulation of the future proper.

Žižek takes up a second aspect of Mallarmé’s work where this failure of identification is its justification, “his entire writing is nothing but a series of failed attempts to produce ‘the Book’.”⁵⁵⁹ In the case of Mallarmé this repetition of failure constitutes the justification of “modern art as ‘experimental’.”⁵⁶⁰ Such a formulation of the tension between what is and what ought to be is a shift into a symbolic universe where

⁵⁵⁷ Žižek, 2002a: 231-233

⁵⁵⁸ Žižek, 2000a: 31

⁵⁵⁹ Žižek, 2002a: 110

⁵⁶⁰ Žižek, 2002a: 110

transparency is impossible. This impossibility is included within the bounds of the symbolic universe with the advent of an ethical agency, “of an irreparable symbolic debt which undermines the ‘regression’ to the fetishism [sic] that pertains to the status of the traditional work of art.”⁵⁶¹ Fetishism therefore disappears from the symbolic universe, only to emerge as a little piece of real-value that animates and disrupts the continued attempts to constitute a symbolic totality. To rephrase the interlinking of these two aspects of Mallarmé in the terms of a critique of technology: it is not that the symbolic universe reifies technology as a tool for performing the identity we experience in our life-world but that technology is staged as a claim to identity where you can be anything, anywhere, at any time, but only where the subject *is not* present. In the categories of Lacanian psychoanalysis technology therefore appears along the vector from the Imaginary to the Real, it is the realisation of a fantasy decoy which promises the total perfectibility of identity and only alludes to the successful constitution of ‘my place in the world’ against the backdrop of nothingness. When I attempt to locate myself in this imaginary scenario it dominates me, renders my identity a merely ‘re-presentational metaphor’ of who I am and not ‘the real me.’ As a fundamentally symbolic object, identity is herein set against the symbolic universe as a space of meaningless formulae unable to be integrated into our vivacious life-world. *Inter alia*, as the realm of nothingness the symbolic universe therefore constitutes *techne* only to immediately dissolve its activity where *techne* cannot serve the life-world of the subject, and thus identity is short-circuited from within the very processes that constitute it. Identity herein becomes a void place, and it is this paradox of the placelessness of the promise of place sustained by technology as a symbolic construct that is the target of our critique herein.

This void place of nothingness enlists the fascination of both Žižek and Badiou. Žižek however does not seek to go beyond the structural dialectic of Lacan and Mallarmé wherein the vanishing of an object and the traces of its disappearance “sustains the whole scene itself.”⁵⁶² From this disappearance a chain of effects emerges where each effect is

⁵⁶¹ Žižek, 2002a: 111

⁵⁶² Bosteels in Žižek (ed), 2006: 138

divided by “the mark of the lack” that caused them.⁵⁶³ Thus the subject emerges as the one who pays heed to these marks of a vanished object, “the unspeakable vacillation eclipsed in the flickering intermittence between two such markings.”⁵⁶⁴ Therefore, the subject emerges as an interval between the knowledge of these marks and the ideal point of some absent cause within the structural dialectic.⁵⁶⁵ As Badiou notes, in philosophy such antecedent causation is elaborated as idealism.⁵⁶⁶ And within Žižek’s intellectual project it is apparent that he is trying to salvage something of the subject from this German Idealist position on antecedence, e.g. in Schelling God’s primordial egotistic contraction creates a deadlock within the subject which is then externalised as ‘prohibition’ (natural law) that subsequently instates the law of desire as the impetus of our doing/making.⁵⁶⁷

We may be tempted to suggest that *techne* constitutes the attention paid to these marks and that an Idealist construction of the subject underlies this procedure given the presence of such a notion of antecedence within the bounds of Žižek’s ideology-critique. However, given Žižek’s often exclusive insistence on the Lacanian Real this idealism is subsumed into materialism. This means that the consistency of *techne* in the field of the symbolic universe is always-already antagonised by something resisting symbolisation. In the case of the structural dialectic this agent of antagonism is the real object-cause which we cannot access directly because it is absent *a priori*. This is one of the ways Žižek comports the *objet petit a* as an object-cause of desire.⁵⁶⁸ Such a framing gives powerful clarity to the way the *objet petit a* is not the object of desire but that little bit of something extra that transforms an ordinary epistemological object into an object of subjective fascination, a fascinating semblance of what it objectively was. Here what falls away from the object is the register of the object at the level of the symbolic universe where its formal ‘objective’ conditions are recognised and constructed. In the stead of this subtraction of the formal *a priori* conditions from the object we are left with the

⁵⁶³ Bosteels in Žižek (ed), 2006: 139

⁵⁶⁴ Bosteels in Žižek (ed), 2006: 139

⁵⁶⁵ Badiou in Žižek (ed), 2006: 139

⁵⁶⁶ Badiou in Žižek (ed), 2006: 139

⁵⁶⁷ Žižek, 2006: 89

⁵⁶⁸ Žižek, 2002a: 231-234 & 257

description of an imaginary semblance, of some sublime appearance that inhabits the place of the object as it appears to the subject.

In his ideology-critique, Žižek seeks to turn this structural formulation of the *objet petit a* on its head. To do this he points out that rather than disappearing altogether, the subtracted formal conditions are ontologised, included in the description of the imaginary semblance as the impossible tipping point into necessity.⁵⁶⁹ Thus as a philosopher and critic of ideology, Žižek seeks to explore the conditions of the limits of possibility by demystifying this imaginary semblance.⁵⁷⁰ Žižek turns to Mallarmé to do this, in whose work this transformation of the objective epistemological conditions into the subjective experience of necessity (something in the life-world greater than the life-world, able to totally condition its possibilities) is purified: *rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu*—‘nothing takes place but the place.’⁵⁷¹ This transition from the subtraction of the formalities of the symbolic universe conditioning the object to the purification of the object from its imaginary content does not bring Žižek back to the symbolic universe as a void place of nothingness.⁵⁷² Instead, Žižek is forced to confront the ontological abyss of objectlessness because this purification of ‘place’ is formulated at the level of ontology as the fundamental ‘stuff’ that brings the object into existence, the *a* in the *objet petit a*. Yet because ontology has no proper objects, this formulation casts the *a* against the backdrop of a pure Abyss. Herein nothingness is no longer merely the product of a nihilistic clearing of the symbolic universe wherein objects still persist; it is transfigured into a negative Cause, a black hole which draws all positive (imaginary) elements to it and consumes them whole.⁵⁷³ In this way the very self-designation of the subject through their ‘subjectivisation,’ the constitution of the ego as a secret treasure (*a*), is destroyed in a break internal to the nihilistic procedure of demystification.

How is it then possible for Žižek to still continue his project of ideology-critique and avoid the danger of obliterating the descriptive life-world of the subject given this

⁵⁶⁹ Žižek, 2003: 162-163

⁵⁷⁰ Žižek, 2006: 60-61

⁵⁷¹ Žižek, 2000a: 31

⁵⁷² Žižek in Žižek (ed), 2002: 178-182

⁵⁷³ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 2002: 233

destructive threat of demystification? Strictly speaking, the subtraction of the life-world to its inadmissible element is the result of a categorical overwriting in the transposition of symbolic nihilation onto the imaginary scene where ‘place’ is purely staged through subtraction and purification. As Žižek notes in a commentary on these concepts as they appear in the work of Badiou who reifies Mallarmé’s modernist *oeuvre*, subtraction and purification are constituted in different ways.⁵⁷⁴ On the one hand, purification seeks to “isolate the kernel of the Real by violently peeling off the imaginary reality that conceals it.”⁵⁷⁵ On the other hand, subtraction begins free from all determinate content in the Abyss, “and then tries to establish a minimal difference between this Void and an element which functions as its stand-in.”⁵⁷⁶ This analytic difference gives us some clue as to why Žižek seeks to reconfigure Mallarmé, because the mode of Mallarmé’s experimental modernism puts subtraction ahead of purification, i.e. Mallarmé’s unfulfilled life-long devotion toward writing “*the Book*.”⁵⁷⁷

The reconfiguration of Mallarmé’s experimental modernism by Žižek takes place along the lines of the demystification of imaginary semblances mentioned earlier. Simply put, Žižek is reconfiguring Mallarmé’s Idealist position to move with the flows of dialectical materialism. Like Badiou, Žižek’s ideology-critique is taken with the focus on the Idealist *topos*. And because of this similarity it is possible to read Žižek’s comments on Badiou’s materialism back into Žižek himself. For example, the transition of technology from a subjective life-world phenomenon to the formal relational condition of *techne* that forms the basis of thinking technology within the frame of Žižek’s ideology-critique begs the same question (*petitio principii*) that Žižek imputes to Badiou: “how can the ‘transubstantiation’ from the pleasure-oriented life of an *individual* to the life of a *subject* dedicated to a Cause occur?”⁵⁷⁸ By focusing on the Idealist *topos* from within his materialist frame Žižek is contrary to Mallarmé’s experimental modernism because Žižek puts purification ahead of subtraction, critical demystification ahead of reductive

⁵⁷⁴ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 165-181

⁵⁷⁵ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 165

⁵⁷⁶ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 165; one should note that Žižek’s use of the term ‘Void’ is interchangeable with ‘Abyss’ due to its context and the relationship between this Abyss and the void-subject, which is explored in greater detail in Section A.3 and Section C.2.

⁵⁷⁷ Žižek, 2002a: 110

⁵⁷⁸ Žižek in Hallward (ed), 2004: 169

isolation. But this is not all. Žižek's method of ideology-critique is nuanced by an attentiveness to the way the formal structure of dialectical materialism finds itself always-already attempting to establish a minimal difference between the Real-Abyss and the imaginary semblance standing in for it when it is intervening in and demystifying an object.⁵⁷⁹

Žižek is herein following the logic of the Moebius strip articulated in the later work of Lacan. The use of this logic denotes that when the subject attempts to locate themselves at the heart of a signifying order as the agent who structures the symbolic universe they find that this place of super-egoic enthronement is always just beyond the grasp of the subject in the Symbolic. Compositely, this would suggest that Badiou's enthronement of Mallarmé as *the* poet of the Event means that Badiou recognises in Mallarmé's *oeuvre* an acute awareness of this antecedent displacement. What at first appeared to be the powerful arbitrary designations of an 'authoritarian personality' becomes historically necessary and beyond the reach of the lust for power. Such a critical evaluation of the symbolic universe demystifies it at the same moment that it reveals the principles and axioms that guide *techne* as standing in for a blind horrific necessity which deprives the subject of their subjectivisation as autonomous individuals. *Techne* here functions as a stand-in for a normative necessity outside the subject's *histoire*, or, in Hegelese, 'the negation of the negation of *techne*' is autonomous because causality is exterior to the identity of the subject. This is exemplified by Žižek's allusions to Stalin's appeal to historical necessity wherein "we, the Communists, are people of a special mould. We are made of special stuff."⁵⁸⁰ And what is the Lacanian name for this 'special stuff' but the "*objet petit a*, the sublime object, the Thing within a body."⁵⁸¹ Hence we come upon the procedure of subtraction where the kernel or trace (*tracé*) of the Real is found in the imaginary semblance standing in for the Abyss by stripping away all the descriptive (imaginary) content to access the hard core of the semblance, that which makes its existence necessary and Real (in the Lacanian sense).

⁵⁷⁹ Žižek, 2002a: 10-11

⁵⁸⁰ Stalin in Žižek, 2002a: 257

⁵⁸¹ Žižek, 2002a: 257

To help unearth this process further we should recall here the way Jungian archetypes function as the *a priori* conditions of all possible narratives, myths, and histories; the very imagining of humanity *qua* definitive feature of the human subject.⁵⁸² We cannot think outside these archetypes because in their function as archetypes they condition all references within description itself with an impossible, interminable, ‘sense’ of propriety. Yet if we attempt to venture away from this Thing, ‘in us more than ourselves,’ in favour of the ontological Abyss we are liquidated by the Thing because it endows the polity of the subject with a consistency born of a relation with necessity. Here we have an intersection of two different modes of the Real: the Imaginary-Real where some element stands in for the primordial Abyss and the Real-Real where an undead, horrifying Thing stubbornly persists and disrupts the polity of the symbolic universe as it is internalised by the subject as ‘reality,’ and in doing so breaks the ontological boundaries and metaphysical limits that constitute reality (*à la* the alien of Scott’s *Alien*). However, if we attempt to subtract the imaginary semblance, we find that when we dismiss the imaginary lure of the kernel of the Real because it is composed as a description (imaginary content) we do not gain direct access to the Real without lapsing into an insufficiency of structure, i.e. an object that simply ‘is’ without its description and integration into discourse. In terms of the subject who fantasises their identity, faced with an ultimate necessity my creative individualism is invalidated and I merely become a Cartesian machine whose trust in predestination is the only sufficient structure to spare me from the psychotic nothingness of the primordial abyss where necessity emerges and consumes itself.⁵⁸³

It is at this impossible point that Žižek seems close to Badiou between the recognition of subjectivity within the bounds of an imaginary scenario staged in the ontological abyss so as to spare the subject an encounter with the necessity of some dark contingency and the Pyrrhic elucidation of the kernel of the Real. Hallward has suggested Badiou endorses a move toward condensing the imaginary semblance into a complex pure, singular, and sublime object where for Žižek the ontological abyss, the Abyss, disappears when we remove the simple/fundamental imaginary stand-in (there is literally Nothing to orient the

⁵⁸² Žižek, 2002a: xii

⁵⁸³ One should note here how close the definition of necessity comes to the *jouissance* of anal Father (*jouisseur*) that liquidates the subject discussed in Section B.2.

subject).⁵⁸⁴ But Badiou's enthronement of poetry by way of Mallarmé troubles this point. With Mallarmé Badiou develops poetry as a procedure capable of providing us with generic truths, and herein Mallarmé becomes "a thinker of the event-drama."⁵⁸⁵ In Mallarmé's work Badiou finds a double sense of the "aleatory event" of coming upon truth: "the staging of its appearance-disappearance, and of its interpretation which gives it the status of an 'acquisition for ever'."⁵⁸⁶ With Mallarmé one often finds references to traces of an absent cause, an antecedence that directs the critical gaze toward the truth that something has indeed occurred. It is not a refusal or ignorance of the ontological abyss, but a more subtle method of its expression in service to the revelation of truth.

Badiou gives this peculiarly Idealist configuration of antecedent causation and revelation in the paradox of the site of an event:

"The paradox of an evental-site is that it can only be recognized on the basis of what it does not present in the situation in which it is presented. Indeed, it is only due to it forming-one from multiples which are inexistent in the situation that a multiple is singular, thus subtracted from the guarantee of the state."⁵⁸⁷

Badiou is here signalling that, although under different terms, the singularity of the fantasy decoy in the imaginary scenario is a complex lure drawing us toward the kernel of the Real at the same moment that it keeps us at a distance from this kernel. The kernel of the Real is always just beyond the apprehension of the subject, as per Badiou's deployment of the axiom of infinity, e.g. "the ruin of any elementary conception of the One, and thus the definitive proof of God's 'nonexistence'."⁵⁸⁸ In his analysis of Mallarmé in *Being and Event*, Badiou remarks that this kernel of the Real is absent, "for every event, apart from being localized by its site, initiates the latter's ruin *with regard to the situation*, because it retroactively names its inner void."⁵⁸⁹ And in the instance of Mallarmé's poetry we find precisely such a paradoxical and retroactive ruin of the site of truth: "the master... hesitates... rather than playing as a hoar maniac the round in the

⁵⁸⁴ Hallward, 2003: 149

⁵⁸⁵ Badiou, 2005a: 191-198

⁵⁸⁶ Badiou, 2005a: 191

⁵⁸⁷ Badiou, 2005a: 192

⁵⁸⁸ Hallward, 2003: 149

⁵⁸⁹ Badiou, 2005a: 192

name of the waves... to not open the hand clenched beyond the useless head.”⁵⁹⁰ Might we therefore say that Badiou is not so far from Žižek after all? The conceptual designation of the kernel of the Real in Badiou elaborated above appears to be consonant with Žižek’s supposition that the kernel of the Real resists integration in the symbolic universe/situation. But Badiou draws an important lesson from Mallarmé that may develop the path out of the dead-end between nihilistically chasing the kernel of the Real and the disintegration of the imaginary semblance in the Abyss:

“On the basis that ‘a cast of dice never will abolish chance’, one must not conclude in nihilism, in the uselessness of action, even less in the management-cult of reality and its swarm of fictive relationships.”⁵⁹¹

Thus Badiou formulates a dare to critique and vigilantly reconstitute the world on the antecedent basis of the trace of the Real because we must make a decision to face the world or shy away from it by persisting in a smoothed-over fantasy that dangerously conceals paradoxes like hidden traps for the unsuspecting subject.⁵⁹² At a glance this ‘dare to critique’ gains some traction in Žižek’s consequentialist minimalism, but it is most certainly a procedural development on Badiou’s part.

Given Badiou’s tendency toward revelation in the case of Mallarmé what then does Žižek’s engagement with the French symbolist poet reveal of his ideology-critique and the place of *techné*? Let us begin with the final point presented from the work of Badiou: “one must not conclude in nihilism.”⁵⁹³ As a relational and transformative activity, *techné* can serve many ends including nihilistic clearing. Within Žižek’s ideology-critique it is possible to discern nihilism engaging the subject from without through Žižek’s morbid “fascination with a lethal Thing.”⁵⁹⁴ The manifestation of the Thing leaves nihilism as an acerbic taste in the subject’s mouth as they are forced to ‘ingest’ their contingent basis under the rule of something resisting the instrumental machinations of the technologically savvy subject of the post-modernist universe, e.g. the predestination of necessity overwhelms the polymorphous performance/constitution of identity. As an explicitly

⁵⁹⁰ Mallarmé in Badiou, 2005a: 193

⁵⁹¹ Badiou, 2005a: 198

⁵⁹² Badiou, 2005a: 198

⁵⁹³ Badiou, 2005a: 198

⁵⁹⁴ Žižek, 1989: 181

subjective activity *techne* therefore becomes subservient to the Imaginary-Real as it is subsumed by some sublime Cause.

This move from the covering over of identity to the apparition of necessity haunts the subject's *raison d'être* with a sublime Cause. Herein nihilistic clearing becomes, on the one hand, crucial to critiquing the ideological filler sustained by this covering over. Yet such a clearing threatens the subject's *raison d'être* with the deprivation of its purpose. This interior threat of critique manifests in the empty space of the normative background conditions sustaining the symbolic universe as the logic of the discourse is sublated and nothingness washes into the empty space of normative conditions. With the *nihilio* of nihilism inhabiting the normative framework we are then confronted with the positive law of *techne*, how the subject is to craft their *raison d'être* in the fragmentation of a discourse deprived of its normativity. This task is an exemplar of transitions from one normative framing to the next. Copyright, for example, forever classes challenges to its normativity as 'pirating' as though to suggest that the agents of the illicit challenge are bereft of obeying the rules of capitalist ownership when it is rather that the mode of ownership itself has become untenable given the disappearance of the old horizon/limit of possibility that sustained the background conditions of this socio-institutional framework; the 'order' of copyright being exposed as pathologically obedient to the determinate conditions of the objects under its aegis such that there is no 'natural right' to ownership at all (one is reminded here of the electronic hacker mantra from the 1980s: 'the information wants to be free'). Far from technological developments threatening to destroy the fabric of society or the emergence of some kind of 'neo-Luddism' that can visualise industrial collapse and ruin, the annihilation of the normative background conditions destroys the fantasmatic framework that sustains the limits and possibilities of the axiology that makes objects mediated by the symbolic universe intelligible.⁵⁹⁵ Here we encounter a kind of psychical break wherein the chaos that would otherwise be gentrified by discursive logics surges through the symbolic universe and destroys the 'autonomy of choice' held in check by the dialectic of limitation and possibility.

⁵⁹⁵ Jones, 2006: 230

Nevertheless, the subject persists in this ‘meaningless universe,’ and the way is open for the reconstitution of the normative conditions. This shift from negative annihilation to transformative affirmation is precisely the point where Badiou demands that we cannot conclude in nihilism.⁵⁹⁶ Yet there is a certain shift that must take place here, from clearing customary determinate values to dedicating oneself to a Cause. This shift rests on the persistence of the subject, or to phrase it in terms of dialectical materialism: while everything ‘out there’ may objectively exist, where does my seemingly transparent subjective interiority fit in a world of opaque material? It is not enough for the subject to simply produce something or perform an action, they must have a ‘frame’ through which this production or action can be understood. This frame is the positive law of *techné* inasmuch as the term designates art and craftsmanship, the ‘way’ something is produced or acted out. Herein *techné* performs the normative conditioning of the symbolic universe *after* nihilism has cleared the customary traditions, determinate content, and so forth. Yet *techné*’s positivity relies on the persistence of the subject that is itself a negation of the objective order of material that is crafted through *technics*.

This post-nihilistic breaking out of annihilation is given philosophical license by another relevant lesson Žižek draws from Mallarmé: the persistence and therapeutic value of thought. Žižek pertinently aligns himself with Mallarmé’s (and Badiou’s) designation of the coincidence of subjectivity and universality:

“I become ‘universal’ only through the violent effort of disengaging myself from the particularity of my situation: through conceiving this situation as contingent and limiting, through opening up in it the gap of indeterminacy filled in by my act.”⁵⁹⁷

Therefore it is not the case that the subject has a spurious moral duty to engage their life-world in a critical manner because this position relies on there being an ideological ‘filler’ for the gaps in the life-world of the subject, the moments of decision are filled in by the ‘right’ choice. Instead, and as Hallward outlines in his discussion of Žižek and Badiou, Žižek qualifies critical thinking with the extra-clinical value of a “therapeutic

⁵⁹⁶ Badiou, 2005a: 198

⁵⁹⁷ Žižek, 1997: 222

form of engagement with the real.”⁵⁹⁸ In this way Žižek’s intellectual project finds its point of difference with Badiou’s thought. For Badiou focus is given to the event of truth that destroys and renews the conditions of my existential situation. Žižek on the other hand focuses on the occurrence of the Real in the paradoxes of everyday experience in the life-world of the subject. This differential formulation of Žižek’s focus signals that while thought may be reduced to “an ultimately passive and at best therapeutic form of engagement with the real”⁵⁹⁹ in his ideology-critique, this simply emerges because Žižek affirms the fundamental role of inconsistencies in enabling life-world activities to be meaningful in an otherwise indifferent world. And it is this strong focus on the paradoxes of the Lacanian Real that constitutes the critical import of Žižek’s ideology-critique: to not let the dangers of the (de)mystifying of *techné* in our life-world pass by unnoticed.

VI – Beckett and the Abyss

Beckett appears in Žižek’s critical analyses as a figure that helps to further the above elaboration of the indivisible and persistent drive that defines the subject *a propos* the attempt at purification by Mallarmé and the consequence of its post-nihilistic transformative affirmation by *techné*. Where Kierkegaard provides Žižek with a critical formulation of repetition and Mallarmé delivers a configuration of experimentation which Žižek subsequently twists to reveal the effects of an imaginary semblance, Beckett’s work exemplifies Žižek’s formulation of the human condition *a propos* Kierkegaard and Lacan: “Man as such is ‘nature sick unto death’, derailed, run off the rails through a fascination with a lethal Thing.”⁶⁰⁰ This fascination with ‘a lethal Thing’ is given a particular comportment in Beckett’s *oeuvre* that specifies it as partly composed of repetition, imaginary lure, and the especially Beckett-esque framing of human existence as the drive to persist. Žižek uses the language of this Beckett-esque persistence to compose a wager on the basis of drive that moves near to Badiou’s insistence on thought: “in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.”⁶⁰¹ This insistence of the ‘core’ of humanity can subsequently become a sublime object of

⁵⁹⁸ Hallward, 2003: 151

⁵⁹⁹ Hallward, 2003: 151

⁶⁰⁰ Žižek, 1989: 181

⁶⁰¹ Beckett in Žižek, 2006a: 120

ideology, as in the case of human rights where this real-kernel of the human is the basis for the ideological Cause of humanitarian debate. Moreover, we should note how this drive to persist conjures the coincidence of necessity and ethical agency at the precise moment of the subject's non-identity. To return to the example of human rights, this coincidence suggest that humanitarianism is a discursive method of mediating the repression of the antagonistic kernel that persists in the heart of being 'human,' allowing rights to assert humanity as a Thing and not merely another epistemological object. However, here the subject's being human does not coincide with their identity within the bounds of the language of rights but instead the subject becomes 'human' through the drive to persist beyond the limited nature of humanitarian discourse. It is as though the naming of 'the human' in rights discourse obscures the unbearably 'all too human' element that persistently resists to be gentrified by the symbolic universe that propagates the 'second-order' representational language of rights. Beyond the noisy discourse of human rights, the 'all too human' persists in silence as the locus of what makes the subject necessarily human and, therein, bound to the (categorical) ethical moment that frames the customary morality of rights.

Žižek takes his wager on drive from the language of Beckett's *The Unnameable*.⁶⁰² This reference elucidates an important feature of the framework of Žižek's ideology-critique, namely the reformulation of non-identity. What is at stake in Žižek's critical analysis is not a dialogical opposition of two elements but rather a specific triadic relation where a third element intervenes in the juxtaposition of a thesis and its antithesis. Beckett's characters manifest their 'all too human' humanity as this third element in a modality reminiscent of Žižek, an indivisible remainder that resists being subsumed into the dialectical interplay of 'the human' and 'the unhuman.' Herein, the indivisible remainder that Žižek takes from his reading of Schelling underscores the grounding of hysterical human subjectivity, "the hysterical – feminine – subject merely 'imitates' morality, symbolic order, and so on; she merely 'puts on' morality without effectively identifying with it."⁶⁰³ Like the indivisible remainder that grounds the 'imitative play' of the

⁶⁰² Žižek, 2006a: 120

⁶⁰³ Žižek, 1996: 78

hysterical subject, Beckett's drive to persist grounds the subject in the opaque core of their *raison d'être* that always exceeds the attempt to describe this subjective purpose in the determinate ontic horizon of discourse and its objects. This minimalist conception of the subject is crucial to understanding both Beckett and Žižek's comments on 'the human condition' because it is here that we find a formulation of the 'all too the human,' that which resists and exceeds discourse and at the same time interrupts the phantasmatic consistency of discursive logic (i.e. the ethical injunction intervenes in the customary morality sustained by discourse).

First, let us examine Žižek's accounting for this indivisible 'all too human' remainder. Žižek outlines the 'all too human' in three variations: the human, the unhuman, and the inhuman.⁶⁰⁴ 'The human' is the descriptively human of these three, the human as it is posited. This positing renders the 'human' in the structure of an imaginary fantasisation because it relies on an index of the human-as-object, as with the celebration of humanity during the Italian Renaissance. Because of its comportment as some imaginary content, the human is set in binary opposition to the unhuman; that which is not human. However, the category of the unhuman instigates a symbolic separation of the human by virtue of its being antithetical. Therefore a tension emerges between the positing of the human and its over-writing by its designation within a symbolic universe of other elements, the many different imaginings of 'the human.'⁶⁰⁵ This tension invites that which remains unaccounted for in both instances to intervene because the antecedence of 'the inhuman' can only be recognised in lieu of the dialectical interplay of the binary opposition of 'the human' and 'the unhuman.'

Both the human and the unhuman raise questions about their conceptual foundation. In the case of 'the human' it is necessary to discern the space into which it is posited because the act of positing demands a 'ground' onto which the object can be posited *a priori*. For 'the unhuman' the critical issue is raised of how the reflection of positing (the imposition of symbolic separation) becomes self-validating, unable to find justification

⁶⁰⁴ Žižek, 2006: 21-22; 2003: 100

⁶⁰⁵ Žižek, 2006: 111

outside itself and ultimately meaningless. It is Žižek's contention that these distortions in the moment of thetic positing and symbolic separation are effected by a third element, something that refuses to be integrated into either the positive ideation or the symbolic negation but which both orders attempt to recoup in their defining motions of positing and negating.⁶⁰⁶

We can observe this distortion as the effect of the inhuman on the terms of the human and unhuman. The inhuman intervenes in the human as that which makes the human *necessarily human*. Beyond all purification, the kernel of the Real in the imaginary content of 'the human' defines the human as a persistence that cannot be articulated in the imaginary content alone. Positing thus becomes 'alienation' through the very *techne* of imagining ourselves as human. Compositely, in the instance of the unhuman, the inhuman intervenes as that point where the human is revealed as fundamentally indifferent to the symbolic universe and therefore meaningless to it. Because the order of the symbolic universe is negative it furnishes reality with objects that differ from one another. The associations between these objects are sustained by the self-referentiality of representation, the logic/syntax of the symbolic universe. The third element intervenes in the fundamental motion of the symbolic universe to thwart the over-writing of thetic positing. This intervention forces the unhuman to fall short of constituting a Whole, a totality. Indeed, the inhuman puts the human 'out of joint' with the unhuman. For example, even though the human being may be in possession of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) like other living organisms, the human being is nonetheless differentiated on the basis of the way this DNA is sequenced, arranged, and so forth.⁶⁰⁷ That is, where at first the feature of DNA appears to bond us to other living creatures as the repetition of the same element it is the inescapable logic of this element that effectively renders this sameness meaningless *because* it differentiates one entity from another. DNA thus comes to be a properly real element, something that is in us more than ourselves.

⁶⁰⁶ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1992: 239

⁶⁰⁷ Žižek, 2004a: 133

The third element is therefore a formal structure. Like non-identity, it manifests at the point where the object exceeds our conception of it. And also like non-identity, the third element provides a focus for critique. However, unlike non-identity this element is not some part of reality shining through our imagining. Rather, the third element is not a manifest resistance but something real that exceeds reality's insistent existence. Simply put, this 'third element' is a persistent and radical antecedent.

Beckett emphasises this third element within the class of what Žižek calls a minimal difference, the bare minimum between existence and nothingness.⁶⁰⁸ But whereas Mallarmé's poetry invokes a subtraction of the Abyss in an attempt to access "*the Book*," Beckett's theatre identifies the human with their inhuman element.⁶⁰⁹ This emphasis on the third element pushes Beckett's characters to constellate their *raison d'être* in the face of an existential abyss, the half-light of non-being (*non-sens*). The subtracted subjects of Beckett's work dwell in the turmoil of imprecise repetition and re-beginning (representation).⁶¹⁰ Under this (Badiou's) description, Beckett's characters come very close to Žižek's articulation of the Lacanian third, the Real; "the sense that the Real in Lacan can only be grasped through negative description,"⁶¹¹ i.e. senseless, indifferent, impossible, and so on.

Given their Lacanian training, both Badiou and Žižek's definitions of the Real follow the sense that the Real slips from the attempt to posit it. It is part of Lacan's antecedent schema, and therefore is revealed in moments of lack from that which is posited. The generic, bare humanity of Beckett's characters marks them as standing in for the Abyss where all value is annihilated. As stand-ins the characters suffer from the 'worsening' malaise of positive existence, such as the daughter in *Footfalls* (1986), May, who constantly paces back and forward and eventually disappears.⁶¹² However given the bare character of Beckett's protagonists, the sheer weight of their depletion paradoxically draws them ever nearer to the Abyss without this distance ever becoming precise. It is

⁶⁰⁸ Žižek, 2003: 93-98

⁶⁰⁹ Žižek, 2002a: 110

⁶¹⁰ Badiou in Hallward, 2003: 404n9

⁶¹¹ Lecercle in Hallward (ed), 2004: 214

⁶¹² Hallward, 2003: 200-203

this sublime sense that at any moment the subtracted subject may fall back into the nothingness of the abyss of the Real that marks their persistence.

The status of this persistent acting in the Real, signalled by Beckett, is received differently by Badiou than by Žižek. Badiou praises Beckett for this reduction of human subjects to their generic state because it signals the anti-philosophical emergence of truth as some unnameable element internal to the object.⁶¹³ For Žižek however, the real-act is a special case of the human subject encountering the ultimate ‘truthlessness’ of their finitude.⁶¹⁴ In both instances the Real persists as the focus proper, but Badiou and Žižek’s respective exegeses are discursively different. Despite this tension at the level of discourse, both Badiou and Žižek conceptually point to the Real as a resistance; for Badiou it is the resistance toward naming and fantasisation, for Žižek it is the resistance toward totality and death.

According to the ideology-critique of Žižek, the meeting of objects’ resistance to the conceptual furnishings of the subject’s persistence confronts the subject “with the death drive at its purest, prior to its reversal into sublimation.”⁶¹⁵ Following this principle of the encounter between objective resistance and subjective persistence in the real-act, to say Beckett’s characters are reduced to a type of bare humanity is to follow Žižek all the way:

“What ‘Death’ stands for at its most radical is not merely the passing of earthly life, but the ‘night of the world,’ the self-withdrawal, the absolute contraction of subjectivity, the severing of its links with ‘reality’.”⁶¹⁶

This passing from the bonds of symbolic reality does not conclude with silence. Rather, following Lacan, Žižek designates this nihilistic clearing of existence as the moment of “the symbolic New Beginning, of the emergence of the ‘New Harmony’ sustained by a newly emerged master-signifier.”⁶¹⁷ This reconstitution of the symbolic universe puts the subject out of joint with the positive order of entities. The subject heretofore ‘posited’ becomes the indivisible excrement of the reconstituted symbolic universe because they

⁶¹³ Badiou, 2005: 54-55

⁶¹⁴ Žižek, 2000b: 166-167; Hallward, 2003: 261

⁶¹⁵ Žižek, 2000b: 160

⁶¹⁶ Žižek, 2000b: 154

⁶¹⁷ Žižek, 2000b: 154

have undergone a radical subjective destitution in their encounter with the death-drive.⁶¹⁸ Thus we can come to an understanding of repetition and re-beginning in Beckett, the way the subject that is deprived of all but a positive minimum of unnameable truth persists as a remainder in the eternal Abyss. Indeed, the death-drive is not a tendency toward self-destruction but rather *immortality*, the resuscitation of finitude through persistence (life beyond death, the dimension of the undead).⁶¹⁹ This minimalist reduction of the subject to the bare minimum of their self-positing *raison d'être* heralds the drive to persist, to re-structure the universe of symbolic relations from the vantage given by this (Žižekian) minimalism.

Although the Abyss does differ from the subject's self-positing as a remainder as it is signalled by the work of Beckett, the subject in the Abyss is neither alienated nor separate. The minimum of difference between the Abyss and the subject-as-remainder flags the contingent existence of the subject's persistence wherein their activity, named '*techne*' above, is reduced to a form that is purified and subtracted. However, when Žižek locates the subject stripped bare by Beckett in political ordering, such as that of the 'undead' Jew in the Nazi concentration camps (the *Muselmann*), we already find an ideological reconfiguration underway.⁶²⁰ Žižek appropriately names this human subject reduced to their generic indivisibility a 'sublime object of ideology.'⁶²¹ Such a subject is an ideological phenomenon insofar as at the level of description they are reified by the socio-symbolic order structuring reality (as with the discourse of human rights, in a way our humanity echoes that of the *Muselmann*). That is to say, reification occurs when the discourse focuses on a particular object and fills any inconsistencies in the symbolic universe/reality with the semblance of this object. However, despite the illusions endowed by this reification Žižek stands by the strength of the ethical moment that it engenders.⁶²² When the subject is taken as generic they are reduced to an inhuman remainder that cannot be absorbed into the reified symbolic description of humanity but which nonetheless constitutes the truth of humanity because it cannot be explained away

⁶¹⁸ Žižek, 2000b: 161; Hallward, 2003: 262

⁶¹⁹ Žižek, 2000b: 294

⁶²⁰ Žižek, 2006: 112-113

⁶²¹ Žižek, 2006: 113 & 365-366

⁶²² Žižek, 2006a: 118-120

by the self-referentiality of the symbolic universe. Ethics therefore emerges from the truth of *techne*, the attempts of the subject to find their place in the symbolic universe when the symbolic universe ejects them and they nonetheless persist.

The repercussion of this formulation of ethics *a propos techne* is that the subject is exposed to a radical Otherness.⁶²³ Such Otherness situates other subjects beyond merely constituting New Age mirror-images along the path to my self-realisation.⁶²⁴ Rather, in others I observe an abyssal dimension that defeats my ability to empathise with them: “can I really rely on him? Who is he? How can I be sure that his words are not a mere pretence?”⁶²⁵ In this precise sense the subject-as-remainder constitutes a stand-in for this abyssal dimension, a contingency that at any moment might disrupt the flow of the relation between the subject and another entity. For this reason, when we inquire into another’s purpose for doing something,

“[It] is not simply an inquiry into ‘What do you want?’ but more an inquiry into ‘What’s bugging you? What is it in you that makes you so unbearable not only for us, but also for yourself, that you yourself obviously do not master?’”⁶²⁶

A subject as an other (and ultimately as a subject as such) is therefore always subject to a presupposition, a belief, because all relations that can be constituted are in some way part of a symbolic logic. Given to the pretence of the signifier in this way, the subject is always ‘a subject supposed to...’ This supposition is filled out by whatever product the symbolic universe associates with the *techne* of the subject. In the case of the psychoanalyst for example, the analyst is the subject supposed to know the meaning of the patient’s symptoms.⁶²⁷ Or, in the case of Žižek’s engagement with ideology-critique, Žižek is the subject supposed to intervene in ideas and elucidate their critical structure. *Techne* therefore always implies the pretence of a commitment to its ends, even though it holds the status of a means rather than that of a synthetic imperative. But further than this, as a presupposition in possession of some antecedent truth the subject is haunted by their *a* that exceeds their designation by the symbolic universe because they cannot

⁶²³ Žižek, 2006: 113

⁶²⁴ For a thorough exploration of this radical Otherness, see Section B.1 and Section B.2.

⁶²⁵ Žižek, ‘Mel Gibson at the Serbsky Institute,’ 2006

⁶²⁶ Žižek, ‘Mel Gibson at the Serbsky Institute,’ 2006

⁶²⁷ Žižek, ‘Mel Gibson at the Serbsky Institute,’ 2006

directly access the real-kernel of their self, it must always be mediated and performed *vis-à-vis techne*.⁶²⁸ Thus the critical value of Žižek's ideology-critique is that it interrogates this pretence of the signifier which can represent the subject for another signifier, but which is not the subject as such in their private historico-genealogical specificity.

VII – Conclusion

In this chapter it was revealed that the critique of *techne* as an ideological phenomenon extends from the understanding of *techne* as the dynamic character of the subtracted subject as a bare remainder. The effects of this dynamic were shown to constitute the structure of the life-world of the subject. And it was noted that this constitution can be seen in the 'Aristotelian' character of the life-world, the way its validation hinges on activity/*techne* having some pretence to purpose.⁶²⁹ In this context it was shown how the demystification of the life-world is a direct intervention into this sense of purpose. Žižek's ideology-critique was shown to interrogate this *raison d'être* of the life-world to the end of locating its imaginary contents that serve to form the ideological filler that renders the life-world transparent, without distortion or paradox. It was thus possible to examine how, to Žižek's reasoning, this ideological naturalisation of the life-world through its simulation is problematic for the explicit reason that it conceals the disruptive forces which traumatically impose themselves on the subject, such as the case of necessity or the pretence of *techne* that deprives the subject of their historico-genealogical specificity.⁶³⁰

Furthermore, it was shown that Žižek reads these disruptive forces as a repressed antagonism that re-emerges as a fundamental conflict in the 'politics' of the symbolic universe, e.g. left-wing versus right-wing politics both address the same interminable problem of the non-identity of the political sphere as such. In the above extended elaboration on the consequences of purification/demystification *a propos* Žižek and Badiou's readings of Mallarmé, this antagonism took on a further two features after it

⁶²⁸ Žižek, 'Mel Gibson at the Serbsky Institute,' 2006

⁶²⁹ Habermas, 2003: 44

⁶³⁰ Žižek, 1989: 123

was shown how it was covered over by the phantasms of the symbolic universe and how nihilism clears away the determinate content to leave only a bare subject who persists beyond the clearing of nihilism. The first of these features was ‘the positive law of *techne*’ wherein the movement toward reconstituting the ontological horizon of the symbolic universe was shown to begin from this point of persistence. The second feature was that such a return to the origin of the subject constitutes a departure from this origin, toward reconstituting the normative background conditions within a post-nihilistic transformative affirmation of the persistence of the subject. And, as we saw in the discussion of Beckett, this ‘drive to persist’ re-constitutes ethical agency as a dialectic of ‘persistence’ and ‘potentiality’ played out through *techne* on the grounds of non-identity.

This chapter also demonstrated how Žižek and Adorno understand this ‘ground of non-identity’ as moments of disruption wherein the correspondence between the conception of an object and the appearance of the corresponding object collapses. Žižek was shown to use this moment of collapse to entwine non-identity with his dialectical materialist critique of ideology. And it was also noted how, *a propos* this instigation of ideology-critique, Žižek seeks to demystify the structure of existence as it appears without the naturalising force of ideology.⁶³¹ It was thus surmised that this critical attitude toward intervening in the *techne* of the life-world unveils the therapeutic value of thought concealed by the naturalising force of ideological belief.

It was shown that the naturalising of the subject’s ethico-symbolic *raison d’être* taking place in the life-world was critiqued by Žižek as the second in a series of three restrictions on the subject’s ability to consistently constitute a social link. By way of Kierkegaard it was shown that Žižek elucidates these three moments of imaginary alienation, symbolic separation, and subjective destitution.⁶³² In each moment it was found that Žižek designates a mode of enjoying and an opaque core which the mode of enjoying repeatedly attempts to colonise but cannot directly access. This critique of repetition resulted in a very particular conception of the subject and *techne*, as stated

⁶³¹ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1994: 1-7

⁶³² Žižek, 2001: 78-83

above: the human subject pursues the understanding of the world through *techne* but this process itself puts the world at a distance and it is only by the failure of *techne*, when technology does not smoothly function, that we are forced to confront the world beyond the mystical conceptual strictures of the ‘object.’

The critical import of this opaque core (*a*) over which the subjective relation to technology trips should not be underestimated. It was shown that Badiou and Žižek both turn to the modernist poet Mallarmé to understand the conditions under which the subject can attempt to access this real-kernel. Two relations became apparent in their discussions of Mallarmé: subtraction and purification. It was revealed that in subtraction it is the imaginary contents, the ideological filler, which are removed in an attempt to get to the real-kernel. However, what we encountered herein was not the opaque core of the object but merely the place of the object in a positive order of entities; ‘nothing but the place takes place’ in the *futur antérieur*. Purification, on the other hand, was demonstrated as the attempt to purify the real-kernel by locating the opaque core of the object as the point of failure in the relation with the object. The discussion showed that Mallarmé furnishes Žižek with a good example of this, “his entire writing is nothing but a series of failed attempts to produce ‘the Book’.”⁶³³ In the case of Mallarmé this repetition of failure was found to justify the experimental purpose of his modernist *oeuvre* and therein his *raison d’être*. And, furthermore, this failure also appeared to be inherent to his identity.

The case of Mallarmé’s constitutive failure of identification is interesting because it suggests that the domestic treatment of technology by the symbolic universe designates technology in some relational way that is inherently flawed. Where technology may seek to amplify, extend, and prosthetise the capacities of the subject, it is not that the symbolic universe reifies technology as a tool for performing the identity we experience in our life-world but that technology is staged as a universal claim to identity where you can be anything, anywhere, at any time, but only where the subject is *not* present. Even with the enabling strength of technology, the subject remains haunted by their opaque core of

⁶³³ Žižek, 2002a: 110

subjectivisation (*a*) that resists assimilation into the symbolic universe.⁶³⁴ Hence, Žižek's ideology-critique is important for a technology saturated post-modernity because it highlights the way that technology may appear to give us heightened and amplified interactions but conceals the way we subjectivise the world, the way all *techne* is enacted under the pretence that the medium through which we relate is conditional.

The above excess of subjectivisation is, in a way, not subjective at all. Properly speaking within the terms of psychoanalysis, it is what causes the subject to find something in an object that enlists their fascination beyond its regular epistemological attributes. Following Lacan, we noted how Žižek calls this excessive object-cause the *objet petit a*.⁶³⁵ And it was also shown that Žižek relates to this object-cause of desire in a way reminiscent of the work of Beckett and Kierkegaard: “Man as such is ‘nature sick unto death’, derailed, run off the rails through a fascination with a lethal Thing.”⁶³⁶ The discussion then suggested that this fascination is to be understood as a perpetual returning to the thing that endows a regular object with a special status; the attempt to get to what really causes me to desire something in the first place.

The final part of this chapter revealed how Žižek turns to Beckett to exemplify the way this procedure of attempting to get to the ‘*a*’ in the *objet petit a* restricts the subject to a bare minimum that differentiates them from nothingness, from being unable to imagine a way to enjoy.⁶³⁷ Herein it was noted that the reduction of the subject to the bare minimum of their *raison d'être* is a drive for immortality. But at a symbolic level it was found that the minimum of difference between the Abyss and the subject-as-remainder flags that the contingent existence of the subject is a persistent ‘doing’—a *techne*—and therefore part of the symbolic universe.

This binding of the subject to the symbolic universe was demonstrated to bind them to an ethics *a propos techne*. The discussion then showed how it is in this way that, according

⁶³⁴ Žižek, 2000: 36-38

⁶³⁵ Žižek, 1989: 44

⁶³⁶ Žižek, 1989: 181

⁶³⁷ Žižek, 2006a: 120

to Žižek, the subject observes an abyssal dimension in other people which defeats their ability to empathise with them.⁶³⁸ This abyssal dimension was revealed above as a radical element that may at any moment disrupt the social link between subjects, thwarting their *techne*. Such a radical element is precisely the *a* of the *objet petit a* discussed above, but in the context of morality and the social link formed through discourse we found that it must be performed and mediated by *techne*. Therefore we may conclude that in this chapter Žižek's ideology-critique was shown to reveal an antagonism at the heart of the category of the symbolic universe, "the world of the machine," that threatens to rupture this symbolic universe.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁸ Žižek, 'Mel Gibson at the Serbsky Institute,' 2006

⁶³⁹ Lacan, 1988a: 47

C.2 The Ontology of the Subject: Technicity and the *Techne*-Symptom

Beyond Heidegger's Threats of Technicity – The Problem with Technical Substitution – The Void, the Thing, and the Concrete – Breaking into Deferral – *Techne*-Sinthome – Rupture and Reordering – The Silent Circuit of Drive – Conclusion

Because we have shown in the preceding chapter and sections how *techne* emerges in the ideological phantasia of technology it is now necessary to address the persistence of the subject's existence evoked by Beckett. Here we are beginning from the manifestation of the subject in technological discourse as the hallmark of *techne*'s status as a symptom of technology, a remainder of technology that cannot be assimilated into the 'binary code' of technology. Thus our starting point is the subject grounded in non-identity and rendered through *techne* in the dialectical interplay of persistence and possibility expressed in the previous chapter. Where the question of the subject persists, the question of her/his activity presents technology with a riddle: if the presence of the subject enables technology to effect a teleology, to take aim at a goal and achieve it by the efficient course of logic, why then does the subject still persist as a being and not yet another technical object? When the embodiment of the subject is explained away by the banal materialism of medicine (physiology), biology (genetics), or physics (causation), this materialism is found wanting because it must always clothe its knowledge in the promise that the world is objectively present regardless of the power relations or socio-historical, political, or cultural contexts that contributed to the formation of this knowledge.⁶⁴⁰ While post-structuralist, post-modernist, feminist, queer, and various other semiotic approaches to materialism take the 'material' of materialism to be mere hyperbole, one is less inclined to follow suit when the question of the subject's existence is raised. This resistance to the wholesale reduction of technological/scientific discourse to an ideological shibboleth arises because of the fundamental philosophical axiom derived from the conception of "a *signifier* which fills out the void of the excluded

⁶⁴⁰ See Section A.2 for an extended discussion of knowledge and this phantasmatic promise.

representation,”⁶⁴¹ the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*: discourses are generated in the attempt to recoup that which must necessarily be lost for the discourse to manifest, i.e. the materialist discourse of the subject in epistemological materialism (modern scientific discourse, broadly conceived) arises from the suspension of the ‘material status’ of subjective imagination in the founding of the materialist discourse.⁶⁴² To rephrase, one must first lose the ‘I’ to have the capacity for explaining it as an illusion. Further, in the self-experience of their illusory ‘I’ the subject is able to accommodate the gap inherent to every systemic explanation of existence: who in particular is explaining existence? This question is problematic for any discourse because it must always be answered in terms the discourse itself can accommodate otherwise the answer falls on deaf ears. The self-referentiality of representation is thus the mark of an insufficient repetition.⁶⁴³ However, as Lacan and others have shown, the subject only becomes a subject with the ‘dotting of the I’, with the integration into a discourse. Therefore it will be our purpose in this chapter to elucidate the shape of this incongruous subject who begins from the void and moves into the structure of technological discourse as *techne*.

We will begin by outlining the critique of technology by Heidegger and then explore how this intersects with the thought of Žižek. While Heidegger provides a significant analysis of the metaphysical principles of annihilation and producibility conditioning technicity, it is possible to embellish this analysis by taking away the motif of an indivisible remainder from Žižek’s discussions of Schelling and Lacan. This indivisible remainder of technicity is herein conceived as *techne*. In this regard *techne*’s indivisibility is ontological and not metaphysical. And for this particular reason we shall see how it becomes vital to the intervention of philosophy in technicity’s decimation of fundamental questions of ontology, the open searching for our reason for being (*raison d’être*).

Following this conceptualisation of the indivisibility of *techne*, the next part of this chapter will unravel the complexities of *techne*’s position in the idealist *topos* of technicity. Herein *techne* gains a crucial analytical qualification that improves the

⁶⁴¹ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1992: 239

⁶⁴² See Section A.3.

⁶⁴³ Heidegger, 2006: 153

understanding of its indivisibility: *techne* rests in the void, unprescribed by technicity, and yet prescribes the being of the subject articulated in the discourse of technicity. Such a qualification is important because it establishes *techne* on the side of being rather than that of presence, the latter being the founding premise of technicity's vulgar materialism.

With the indivisible status of *techne* thus defined we will then move on to examine how *techne*, as a symptom, functions as a cipher that separates the discourse of technicity from its metaphysics. The void status of the subject comes into play here as the site of the *techne*-symptom in the structure of technicity. This particular arrangement establishes any signification of *techne* by technicity as a constitutive failure because *techne* comes to stand for the lost ground of technicity's abstract structure. This will also demonstrate that such a position of *techne* is the proper definition of the ontologically void status of the subject, to avoid any confusion with purely Žižekian or Heideggerian definitions.

Our argument will then return to the discussion of being that opened this chapter. This return takes the form of a departure as the articulation of being in its limited mode is contrasted with the infinite deferral of the symbolic economy of technicity's discourse. Here we find being embodying a limit that brushes up against the non-being of infinity, a motion that sets it out-of-joint (as demonstrated in earlier chapters). The purpose of this disjuncture within a given ontological structure then becomes the promise sustaining existence, e.g. for technicity it is upheaval and renewal.

With the question of being firmly focused on the *techne*-symptom we then go on to examine the internal logic of *techne* as a symptom of technicity. Here it shall be shown that the logic of the *techne*-symptom in lieu of its place within technicity results in the hypostatisation of the subject-*qua*-being. This essentialism occurs because technicity supplements its metaphysics with a direct causality, effectively killing off 'cause' only to resuscitate it through the complex of *techne* making up the site of the subject. Such a process has the effect of moving the subject into the position of a cipher that separates technicity's discourse from its foreclosed metaphysics.

Following the above we will then address how this codification of the *techne*-symptom shifts into what Lacan called the ‘sinthome’. In the mode of the sinthome, *techne* reintroduces the question of being by intervening in technicity’s reliance on objective presence. This disruption goes to the heart of technicity’s vulgar materialism and opens it to disorganisation and rearrangement.

Lastly, we shall examine the appeal to drive that is characteristic of the disorganisation and rearrangement of technicity generated by *techne*’s shift from symptom to sinthome. Herein it shall be shown how the silent motility of drive enlivens the advent of the *techne*-sinthome with the emergence of the subject, and therefore sustains a perpetual disorganisation and rearrangement of technicity. This effervescent rearranging will then be explored, especially its particular approach to the *objet petit a* which will be realigned to fit the emergent organisation of technicity and the open searching for the subject’s *raison d’être*.

I – Beyond Heidegger’s Threats of Technicity

Let us begin with a reiteration of what exactly constitutes these discursive ‘technological structures’ in the existential life of the subject. The understanding and rationalisation of the subject as a force that drives or gives purpose to a tool that then carries out a given task is a common place of technical discourse. As Heidegger eloquently suggests, this relation is important because:

“One points out with enthusiasm that the machine is powerless without the power of man and then concludes, equally enthusiastically, that the overcoming of technicity by man is thus already and fundamentally accomplished. However, on the one hand, the machine is not the same as technicity. And, on the other hand, there arises the question: what is this power of man that utilizes the machine? This power is nothing other than the empowering of engineering to the fundamental form of organizing beings. And this empowering is grounded in the includedness of man into being insofar as being is determined as machination.”⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴⁴ Heidegger, 2006: 155

In this quote from his second major socio-historical treatise, *Mindfulness* (2006), Heidegger is sensing the problem of technological structure, or ‘technicity’, ensnares the subject in the same way that afore mentioned materialist discourses manifest the subject: it is only in terms common to the discourse that the subject can emerge, however these terms are already part of the self-referential chain of representation allowing us to recognise ourselves as subjects in the first place. The matter is all the more pressing when we consider Heidegger’s definition of ‘machination’: “the accordance of everything with producibility, indeed in such a way that the unceasing, unconditioned reckoning of everything is pre-directed.”⁶⁴⁵ Heidegger’s outlining of machination here directs our attention to the way that machination “adjoins beings as such to the space of a play that continually plays into machination as an ongoing *annihilation*” and the way that machination constantly annihilates in “the very threat of annihilation.”⁶⁴⁶ This threat of annihilation grounds the producibility (fabrication) of technological structures, their machinations. Yet Heidegger also points out that the chain of representation erected by the discourse of technological structures is the metaphysics of technicity in these structures. Thus we have the situation that technicity can offer itself up as a world-view that obfuscates the grounding of the subject in existence, the hard kernel of my ‘be-ing’, by reducing the subject to merely an object of discourse that cannot defy description and therein annihilation.

Heidegger decries this delicate dynamic of technicity for hiding be-ing, for disenfranchising the subject’s questioning of technology by claiming the subject only questions out of ignorance of the ‘essence’ of technology, its producibility. Questions of the *a priori* justifications of technology do not feature in the metaphysical hierarchy of value sustained by technological discourse because any ‘thing’ must be able to be annihilated/produced. Broadly then, the target of Heidegger’s critique is technocratic nihilism in its social manifestation.

⁶⁴⁵ Heidegger, 2006: 12

⁶⁴⁶ Heidegger, 2006: 12

Žižek's limited engagement with technology is largely complicit with this Heideggerian critique of technicity, although it hardly sustains this critique for long before moving back to Žižek's more familiar Lacanian territory.⁶⁴⁷ This return to Lacan reveals Žižek's reliance on the Lacanian point that the realm of the Symbolic is the realm of machines.⁶⁴⁸ We may therefore read Žižek's discussions of the Symbolic with an eye to the way these are also discussions of technology, despite the absence of an overtly phrased critique of technicity. The Lacanian understanding of the Symbolic makes the nuances of technicity apparent: the annihilation and producibility of technicity are endowed with the imaginary privilege of being necessary archetypes over our valuation/metaphysics of the world (i.e. everything inhabits the annihilation-producibility binary), fabricated objects are revealed as meaningless due to mechanised productions' need for the annihilation of the non-technological aspects of an object (everything is 'technologised'), and technicity ordains the 'subjectivisation' of the subject's self-experience by representing her/his inner-states as signifiers in the chain of technicity's signification with the promise of having ourselves understood by other agents/objects/signifiers in the discourse of technicity. The latter point also suggests that any power one suspects they have over technology is a metaphysical misnomer for the phantasmatic promise offered by technicity wherein the subject is promised a fabrication that will deliver them from their illusory subjective mind (*res cogitans*), i.e. the infamous dream of 'uploading' consciousness. This promise of deliverance is a feature of technological structures worth puzzling over because it promises to validate the subject as a notional 'Subject' (the ego-Ideal, we appear to ourselves likeable) and simultaneously constitute her/him in the metaphysics of technicity (the ideal ego, what we would like to be).⁶⁴⁹

This phantasmatic promise of technicity extends through its metaphysics and herein conditions the manifestation of the subject as s/he is integrated into the discourse with 'the dotting of the I' by the promise of validation. Here metaphysics appears to be

⁶⁴⁷ See, for example, the discussion of cyberspace in *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997: 127-167) or this discussion's improved version in Žižek's contribution to Janet Bergstrom's *Endless Night* (1999: 96-125), the reading of becoming against Deleuze in *Organs Without Bodies* (2004a: 15-19; 118-123), or even his essay on traversing the fantasy in cyberspace in *The Žižek Reader* (1999: 102-124).

⁶⁴⁸ Lacan, 1988a: 47-49

⁶⁴⁹ The 'Subject' is herein capitalised to emphasise its transcendent status as the point from which we observe ourselves. (Žižek, 1989: 105-108)

restricted to designating the background of rules giving a discourse its conditions of signification, i.e. annihilation and producibility condition the signification of technicity as a discourse. In this limited capacity metaphysics gives a form to the integration of the subject into a discourse that is particular to that discourse, i.e. the technological subject-machine, the psychoanalytic subject-analysand, etc. Where the promise of technicity gestures to some future fulfilment for the subject this promise functions as a metaphysical treasure, thus sustaining my place in the conditions under which the discourse operates rather than simply being a mere signifier in the discourse alone. To follow Žižek's Millerian paraphrasing of Lacan, the 'Subject of the I' is the point from which we observe ourselves.⁶⁵⁰ It is not the case that the subject is in some pre-symbolic beyond, but rather that my place in the discourse of technicity only defines me in signifiers common to the signification of technology, and therein the subject proper to my be-ing cannot be fully articulated by the delimiting modalities of discourse.⁶⁵¹ We may therefore deduce that the subject is always composed of some ontological excess that cannot be fully integrated (metaphysically) into the conditions of the discourse, and this 'indivisible remainder' is what we have elsewhere named *techne*.⁶⁵²

Techne is our non-metaphysical (ontological) crafting of a distance between our be-ing and the subjectivisation of the 'I', it is a name for the ontological difference that the subject partially inhabits and that inhibits the full symbolic integration of her/him. The status of *techne* is herein a problem for technicity because it threatens the metaphysical promise of the discourse, i.e. the idea that in technology there magically inheres some purely technical hierarchy of value that can sufficiently define objects in their 'natural state' and therein reveal an authentic subject.⁶⁵³ Here we find technicity's absurd reduction that reduces ethics to 'the most efficient course of action,' aesthetics to 'the

⁶⁵⁰ Žižek, 1989: 105

⁶⁵¹ Heidegger refers to this phenomenon as the 'forgetfulness of being' constitutive of the metaphysical conditions of the annihilation-producibility binary in technicity. (2006: 191)

⁶⁵² This use of the term *techne* departs from the regular Aristotelian usage that reappears in the work of Heidegger. Instead, we are here melding it with the discussion of the remainder Žižek takes from Schelling and Lacan.

⁶⁵³ Such philosophical categories as ethics, aesthetics, and love are herein relegated to mere unreflective mechanics by technicity's metaphysical first principle of *prima causa* (first cause) presented by the Cartesian critique of method.

concordance with neurology,' and love and desire to 'purely biological attachment and attraction.' Such a reduction does not mean that these causes are not constitutive of their object, but rather that the annihilation of an object in the production of its mechanical potential is absurd in the critical sense of making the object meaningless in a metaphysical hierarchy of value. The absurdity comes from metaphysics announcing itself as the background that conditions the terms of the discourse into an 'order' of significance which nevertheless regards some objects (ethics, aesthetics, love) as orderly *and* able to be reproduced by the mechanics of the discourse, ignoring the modulation of technicity. The task then is to fight for philosophy as the properly mindful critique of the metaphysics of technicity if the technological discourse of technicity is enacting an idiotically reductive decimation of the philosophical questions where the existence of the subject as a being is brought to light. Where the openness of philosophy clears a space for the truth of objects as things to take place, the technological discourse of technicity crowds the mere appearance of objects into an aetiological line of causation; while technicity rigorously interrogates the appearance of things it enacts a reduction of other modes of inquiry. We may therefore imagine a simple division between metaphysical technicity on the one side and discursive technology on the other, and have *techne* appear as the intervening bar between the two. Given the indivisible status of *techne* (in lieu of Žižek's discussions of Schelling and Lacan), its status as a bar becomes a symptom to the 'technological discourse' of Heidegger and an unassimilable remainder for technicity's metaphysical ordering.⁶⁵⁴

II – The Problem with Technical Substitution

The status of *techne* as a bar between the metaphysical background of unwritten rules and the discourse of technicity (technological structure) rests on the Lacanian understanding that for there to be a 'Subject of the I' there must be a discourse for this 'I' to be articulated in. But for this discourse to first emerge it must arbitrate the instantiation of its own order or logic.⁶⁵⁵ In this grounding of the validity of the discourse, the discourse posits a 'ground' from which extends the justification for its symbolic law. That is to say,

⁶⁵⁴ Žižek, 1996: 76-79

⁶⁵⁵ Žižek, 1996: 76

the emergence of technicity accompanied by the technocratic ‘end of metaphysics’ in nihilism must first violently penetrate the subject’s self-conscious relation to herself or himself. In an act of reverse-engineering this cut or ‘scission’ gives language to the subject, facilitates the articulation of an ‘I’, and phantasmatically promises the subject that the removal of any chance for monadic homogeneity is more than compensated for by the chance to be a technological-subject.⁶⁵⁶ Here it is crucial to avoid misinterpreting the instantiation of discourse as an absolute beginning because this merely mystifies how the subject can exceed the grounding of technicity.⁶⁵⁷ As a discourse technicity must misinterpret what persists to refuse full symbolic integration, and as this objecting element *techne* is a cipher that stands for the emergence of autonomous self-consciousness parallel to the instantiation of the mechanics of discourse. Herein *techne* is a self-conscious engagement with technicity, and therefore arises not from the mechanics of the discourse but *ex nihilo*, from the void outside the discourse, insofar as the subject who exceeds technicity is party to technological structure yet cannot begin from within the discourse of technicity. *Techne* thus operates in the fashion of a symptom: the *techne*-symptom. This ‘*techne*-symptom’ is a cipher through which technicity can promise full symbolic integration on the side of discourse but shift the failure of this integration onto the insufficiently technical nature of the void starting point of the subject. This shifting of lack occurs through a blurring of the distinction between the ‘Subject of the I’ repeated in discourse and the metaphysical externalisation of the inner self-conscious states of the Subject in the mechanics of this discourse (the point where we observe ourselves, the ego-ideal). And, moreover, this obfuscation hides the void-subject indicated by the contingency of the arbitrary justification of technicity as a discourse through its self-positing ground. A paradox thus emerges where the arbitrary justification that conceals the violent grounding of technicity, the cut of discourse, reveals a void-subject where the *techne*-symptom threatens the phantasmatic compensatory promise of technicity with its dissolution.

⁶⁵⁶ An important qualification to be made here is that the ‘symbolic totality’ promised by technicity is not ‘monadic’ but, rather, self-referential and repetitive.

⁶⁵⁷ Žižek, 1996: 78

This paradox of concealment and revelation situates the *techne*-symptom between metaphysics and discourse as an impediment blocking any direct relationship between the metaphysical hierarchy of value that binds the mechanics of technicity and the self-justification of the discourse as such. Herein the mechanics of the discourse become mimetic significations of the metaphysics rather than the presence of metaphysics itself. The metaphysics of technicity is thus repressed and re-emerges as attributes of the discursive objects themselves, i.e. annihilation and producibility become the *prima causa* of technical objects in their totality.

Such a repressive *mimesis* is problematic because it expropriates the subject through their *techne*-symptom facilitating her or his integration into the discourse of technicity. This expropriation distances the void-subject, the initial non-discursive position of the subject, and modifies the *techne*-symptom to be a supplement for the *sui generis* Subject of discourse. In this instance, the supplementation of the Subject (the point from which I observe myself) through the *techne*-symptom augments the conscious self-relation of the subject (to their pure *jouissance*) by keeping her or him at a remove from the externalisation of their inner-states by the discourse of technology. Rather than my anger or lust as indications of my character and moral decisions these states of interiority are reduced to mere technical objects as chemical neurology able to be produced, fabricated, annihilated, abstracted, and modelled without 'moral pretence'. In this instance the subject as a *techne*-symptom is too weak to defend against the pre-destination of the discourse in its archetypes of annihilation and producibility, i.e. there is no reflection on necessity, everything simply 'is', my position as a Subject lacks registration in the symbolic universe. Yet, at the same time, it would also appear that the technological supplementation of the subject also shows that the status of she or he *ex nihilo*, from the void, is too much for technicity to sufficiently accommodate because the discourse would have to introduce an inner-outer boundary to the unarticulated void-subject that condition the *techne*-symptom in its role as mediator.

An *aporia* of technicity emerges at precisely this point of failure. The difficulty here begins with the objectification of the subject through the externalisation of their inner-

states, which re-presents the subject in technicity and also points to this objectification as the motor driving representation.⁶⁵⁸ This is problematic for technicity because it is predicated on the objectivisation of materiality, positing the apparition of reality prior to the experience of its representation, or *meta*-physics. Metaphysical questions of the grounding of materiality are thus refused by technicity because such questioning has the dangerous potential to illegitimate the grounds of materiality. Herein technicity is an inherently anti-metaphysical discourse because (as a discourse) its founding premise is self-legitimizing and cannot repeal the investment in materiality without destroying the discourse of technicity in the process. This naïve materialist inhibition therefore refuses the legitimacy of objectification because it leads to the re-presentation of the limits of materiality and therein reveals the *a priori* position of the subject to be beyond the realm of technicity. Even more strongly, however, this inhibiting of objectification drives the supplementation of the position in technicity from which the subject can view herself or himself as likeable (the Subject/ego-Ideal) with the material-yet-contingent symptom of the subject's being (ideal ego) wherein the fantasy space of all hypothetical imaginings become apparitions of reality, ordering fantasy into the category of hallucination. We are thus confronted with the question of the subject's immateriality: if the symptom of the subject's being is contingent then where is the subject if there is no nervous tic of being, what domain is the subject in if not being? This question shows that the materiality of technicity is strung over the abyss of non-being, of nothingness, and that this is what grounds the presupposition of the apparition of materiality by technicity. Moreover, it also means that the manifestation of the subject as an object, its objectivisation, can assure its registration by technicity provided that the objectification involved remains inhibited and void. If the subject is held to be a contingency, a symptom of their *techne*, then this also introduces an inner-outer boundary to the abyss that voids the subject when they are in the abyss.

The lesson of supplementation is crucial because it allows the conclusion to be drawn that the *techne*-symptom is on the side of the void-subject, and implicitly that we begin from

⁶⁵⁸ 'Objectification' is herein the re-presentation of an object in the terms of an unchanging character, e.g. the inscription of elements on the periodic table or the reduction of corporeal responses to ever-more basic units of interaction.

the presentation of being in the void that is then ‘externalised’ in the discursive relations between objects (objectification). While annihilation and producibility may appear to be the activities of various technologies from keyboards to moulds, this ‘activity’ remains shackled to the determined relations between objects (technicity) and this objectivisation is insufficient to account for the subject *in toto*.⁶⁵⁹ Thus the manifestation of the *techne*-symptom is part of the idealist *topos* of material reality wherein any claim to transcendence made by *techne* rests in the void that remains unprescribed by technicity’s metaphysics, yet prescribes the being of the subject articulated by the discourse of technicity.

III – The Void, the Thing, and the Concrete

The void status of the subject outside the discourse of technicity strictly codifies the subject in two ways. Firstly, because the subject is outside technicity they are designated as psychotic by technicity insofar as the void-subject apparently lacks the key signifiers that would allow them integration into technicity, i.e. rather than being given to annihilation and producibility the void-subject is an indivisible and antecedent stain on technological structures. It follows from this that the void-subject is indivisible due to their being outside the cut or scission of technicity as a discourse. Here the void-subject is also antecedent in the sense that where the erection of the discourse of technicity must arbitrarily abstractly posit its own ground or justification because it is a discourse, the void-subject cannot be co-extensive with this discursive self-positing if the ‘Subject of the I’ in technicity is the attempt to explain the subject-thing who enters the discourse. In this first instance what we therefore encounter is the void-subject functioning as a persistent ‘stain’ on the discourse of technicity.⁶⁶⁰ The void-subject holds a special place for technicity’s order of plentiful materialist definitions that is not amenable to the annihilation or production driving this vulgar materialism of technicity. Given the devotion of technicity to annihilation and producibility, the void-subject manifests as an ineradicable thing (*die Sache*) that exposes technicity to a horrible vacuum without

⁶⁵⁹ Hence, technicity maintains a politics of being limited to its ability to articulate the subject.

⁶⁶⁰ The term ‘stain’ is used here with its Lacanian psychoanalytic meaning grounded in the analysis of the psychoses: a thing that eats away at the reality constructed by the symbolic universe and cannot be destroyed.

meaning (the Abyss) and yet is characterised by its absence or ‘voiding’ from the discourse of technicity.⁶⁶¹ However, the introduction of the *techne*-symptom facilitates the recuperation of this ‘lost object’ that stains the mechanics of technicity’s discourse.⁶⁶² Where the void-subject is a psychotic stain on technicity that gives body to an unrepresentable and inert presence (the failure of the reality principle), the *techne*-symptom performs the function of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*, “a signifier which fills out the void of the excluded representation.”⁶⁶³ Thus in the second instance what we are encountering is the separation between reality and the Real, as Žižek states:

“‘reality’ is the field of symbolically structured representations, the outcome of symbolic ‘gentrification’ of the Real; yet a surplus of the Real always eludes the symbolic grasp and persists as a non-symbolized stain, a hole in reality which designates the ultimate limit where ‘the word fails’. It is against this background that the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* is to be conceived as an attempt to inscribe the surplus that eludes the field of representation.”⁶⁶⁴

Here, in the second codification of the subject as a *techne*-symptom, the signifier for the void-subject becomes a signifier of lack that signifies ‘nothing’ rather than a lack of a signifier that would leave the void abyss gaping wide in technicity’s chain of signification. That is to say, the characteristic absence involved in the enunciation of the subject in technicity (its voiding) shows that the lost object cannot be recuperated but nevertheless regulates the persistent effort to locate it ‘beyond’ what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ according to the metaphysics of technicity.⁶⁶⁵

Insofar as technicity is a discourse, the above point is astride Lacan’s insistence that ‘there is no meta-language.’ Žižek elaborates on this in the following way:

“There is no (meta-language) exception to language, it is not possible to talk about it from an external position, precisely because language is “not all”, because

⁶⁶¹ As per Lacan’s *Seminar VII* (1992: 44-47), as a ‘thing’ the void-subject here has two sides: within the limited conscious discourse of technicity it is *die Sache* (*Sachvorstellungen*) or what Freud called a ‘word-presentation’ of the Thing governed by language (*Wortvorstellungen*), and in the abyssal vortex of the unconscious it is *das Ding* or a ‘thing-presentation.’

⁶⁶² Wolf in Voruz and Wolf (eds), 2007: 198-199

⁶⁶³ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1992: 239

⁶⁶⁴ Žižek in Žižek (ed), 1992: 239

⁶⁶⁵ Lacan, 1992: 62-66

its limit is inscribed into it in the guise of ruptures in which the process of enunciation intervenes in the enunciated.’⁶⁶⁶

To recast Žižek’s explanation in the terms of *techne* and technicity: the rupture of *techne* intervenes in technological processes and limits technicity from within. This understanding of the limit of technicity shows us that the subject of technology (i.e. the being who is ‘subjected’ to technology broadly conceived under such technical headings as medicine, bureaucratic efficiency, engineering, and so forth) is a ‘technological subject of lack’ erected by the discourse of technicity to accommodate the speaking being (*techne*) while denying a direct causal link to the embodiment of this technological subject in an unknown pre-Symbolic (pre-discursive) horizon beyond the structures of technicity. That is to say, when my being is subjectivised in the discourse of technicity (I am rendered a subject) my being is fragmented across the multitude of signifiers that accommodate the externalisation of my inner-states. And this fragmentation is driven by the properly symbolic structure of technicity, which cannot escape its reflexive dimension of self-referentiality to establish a direct causal connection. Direct causality’s refusal to acknowledge the horizon of the subject (what figures in both Badiou and Žižek as ‘cause’) leads this direct causality with regards to the subject, i.e. the seeing into another’s mind, to become part of the meaningless ocean of junk that technicity necessarily voids in annihilation so that the abstract ideal of producibility can resonate in the paradoxical subjectivisation of the discourse.

The intervening rupture of the *techne*-symptom in technicity is a momentary glimpse onto this ocean of Real-Junk—what we have elsewhere called ‘*gomi*.’⁶⁶⁷ This intervention is a disruption in the chain of signification inherent to technicity, certainly, but it is also disruptive for the normative commitment enlisted from the subject by the discourse in the course of subjectivisation. Normative commitment is entailed here because the rupture of the *techne*-symptom cancels direct causality, ‘the word fails’ as it were. And from this failure emerges the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* as the attempt to

⁶⁶⁶ Žižek, 2002a: xiii

⁶⁶⁷ See Section A.3

recoup the causality lost in the eruption of *techné*; it is a matter of grounding both the subject and technicity.⁶⁶⁸

During his early structuralist period of the 1950s Lacan made a similar point *a propos* of performative statements such as “‘You are my teacher’... [Because] one never really knows, one never directly sees into, the other’s mind.”⁶⁶⁹ One should embellish this point with the qualification Lacan makes during his seminar in 1954: that in the encounter with the limit of language “there is nothing present, nothing emotional, nothing real in this situation,” however, once the rupture occurs and the encounter happens “it changes the meaning of speech, it reveals to the subject that his speech is only what I called in my Rome report *empty speech*, and that it is as such that it is lacking in any effect [in the course of treatment].”⁶⁷⁰ Following Freud, Lacan’s clinical reasoning burgeons out from here in how “speech, that is the transmission of desire, can get itself recognised through anything, provided that this anything be organised in a symbolic system.”⁶⁷¹ This last point means that the limit of technicity-*qua*-discourse is analogous to an empty universal (not-All) limit and not a singular (All) symbolic limit.

In the instance of the discourse of technicity, this ‘universal limit’ indicates that the discourse is not a monadic totality. All the more importantly, to treat the void-subject as both the limit of technicity and its empty signifier (*Vorstellungs-Repräsentaz*) suggests that this limit functions as a compass for technicity to negotiate the terrain of the void-subject, the subject who threatens to rupture (ontic) technicity from within with ontological questions of the being of the subject (*techné*). The difficulty of the void-subject reprises the ontological difference that separates the discourse of technicity from its metaphysics, returning technicity to its self-positing in a ‘ground’ that is an Abyss proper. The problem herein is that the stability of technicity and its principles of annihilation and producibility are not common to the terms of technicity itself, the short-circuit that brings these axiomatic conditions to bear within objects themselves are not

⁶⁶⁸ Here causality evaporates cause only to revive it through technicity’s metaphysics of supplement because the Abyss cannot produce objects, only consume them.

⁶⁶⁹ Žižek, 2002a: xii

⁶⁷⁰ Lacan, 1988: 244

⁶⁷¹ Lacan, 1988: 244

themselves calculable because they stand at a remove from the discourse describing the object. As earlier, technicity's insistence on materiality obscures the questioning of this grounding and herein the axiomatic binary of annihilation and producibility supplements the 'cause' of objects with the 'causality' of the discourse.

As we have already suggested this normative meaninglessness permeates the discourse in the form of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*, lest the discourse disintegrate and drive the subject into a psychotic 'outside'. The *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* therefore serves to recoup and also screen the void-subject from the Abyss: *techne* is brought into the ontic discourse but cannot be assimilated by it because it is ontological, and instead it becomes a *techne*-symptom that interrupts the all too smooth functioning of the symbolic machinery of technicity as a discourse. We are using the phrasing 'symptom of *techne*' here to reiterate that *techne* does not sit well with technicity because technicity as a discourse is necessarily abstracted from its 'ground'. The problem then, logically speaking, is that if technicity and its objects or signifiers come into being, i.e. technologies are created, there is 'nothing' preceding the instantiation of these objects. Moreover, here we are retroactively recognising that nothingness is the cradle of technicity's ground, yet when the discourse of technicity is instantiated then this 'outside' to ontic being becomes void in the terms of the discourse and is screened out by the mark of meaninglessness, the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*.⁶⁷² Thus where there is a tendency in commonsense reasoning to think of the ontic domain of technologies, fabrication, and annihilation in the sense of something 'concrete' this concretisation of technicity rests on a founding abstraction from the site of its mysterious emergence. While it is possible to map the ontic shifts of technology and technicity through history, such accounts are unable to accommodate the recurring ahistorical kernel of *techne*. If we say that (ontological) *techne* is rendered visible to (historical) technicity it is only because *techne* is not historical; misrecognising *techne* as an historical feature of technicity is tantamount to forgetting the ontological difference that stops the discourse of technicity from becoming supplemented by its metaphysics. Thus if we admit the *techne*-symptom as the bar or ontological difference separating technicity from its metaphysics, then it is also

⁶⁷² For Žižek's position, this is the entry point of ideology.

necessary to note that *techne* is a symptom insofar as it persists as a stain that ciphers the discourse of technicity for its metaphysics and the metaphysics of technicity for its discourse—in both instances it stands for the lost *stratum* in technicity's abstraction.⁶⁷³

IV – Breaking into Deferral

This lost grounding in *techne* construes *techne* as a cryptic symptom for technicity and an inhibitive 'voiding' to technicity's metaphysics. In both instances *techne* constitutes an exception, the form of which depends on whether we are dealing in the principles of technicity's metaphysical axiology (annihilation and producibility) or the description of the world under the sway of technicity as a discourse. For the discourse of technicity, the unassimilable remainder of *techne* manifests as a symptom of technicity's inability to complete itself—binding itself into a totality of discourse and metaphysics wherein the metaphysical principles of annihilation and producibility inhere within the very objects of discourse. We will be exploring the category error of direct causality that makes such a totality impossible, but for the moment it is sufficient to note that *techne* operates at this limit of impossibility as a cipher that leads technical rationality into a process of continually attempting to unravel 'the enigmatic riddle of existence' and institute a positive principle of being *tout court*. Here, the *techne*-symptom functions as the ontological difference that separates the discourse of technicity from its metaphysics, the gap from which the subject emerges into discourse only to find that some remainder of being that resists identification is cordoned off and marked as 'void' because it cannot be assimilated by the common terms of technicity as a discourse or metaphysics.

Such an ontological 'gap' manifests in the discourse of technicity as a cryptic excess that haunts the discourse of technicity, always standing just beyond the limit of technology as a cipher that contracts the unknowable and dismissed 'dark continent' of *techne*. Simultaneously this voiding of the subject (as a symptom of *techne*) serves to strengthen the structure of technicity by reinforcing its self-referentiality and *difference*. Yet, as we

⁶⁷³ For a generic outline of the four notable Lacanian modalities of the symptom (i.e. signifier, signification, metaphor, and enigmatic message) see Evans (1996: 203-204).

shall see, this voiding of the subject also serves as the liberation of the subject from technological domination and fetishisation.

On the other side of this ontological difference is the metaphysics of technicity. Here the ‘lost ground’ of *techne* manifests through the guise of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* juxtaposed against the ‘existing’ portion of this binary-signifier rather than being a cipher or symptom as in the discourse of technicity. In the axiological form of metaphysics this existing portion of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* is given voice through the principles determined by Heidegger: annihilation and producibility. The manifestation of the subject on these metaphysical grounds compromises the Thomist and Cartesian notion of an undivided subject or *res cogitans*, who comes into being only to be cleared away by technicity’s principle of annihilation and rebuilt/refashioned into forms common to the producibility of technicity, a contingent example of which being artificial limbs and pacemakers or the Freudian dream of the psyche being reduced to a set of neuro-chemical processes.⁶⁷⁴ Yet if *techne* performs the function of technicity’s lost grounding and we are to continue with the contention that the subject emerges from this gap ontologically separating technicity from its metaphysics, then it becomes apparent that the self persists in this rather inhospitable metaphysical climate. Thus from the vantage of metaphysics the subject comes forth and is doomed to return to a psychotic outside by the nihilistic tendency of technicity’s metaphysics, which is one way technicity can short-circuit the relation between metaphysics and discourse by bringing about a foreclosure on the ontological difference setting them apart. The discursive steps of technicity toward totalisation in contrast to the mysticism of supplementation preceding presence evoke this internal logic of technicity’s metaphysics where the minimum of symbolic content or difference is idealised, made into an imaginary icon whose existence remains experienced but unknowable.

The idealisation of difference is a significant difficulty with direct causality because it is a foreclosure on difference. The blurring of first-order metaphysical axioms and second-order discursive description by direct causality creates a category error that drives the

⁶⁷⁴ Gay, 1998: viii

subject erected by technicity into mysticism by depriving the subject of their (screening) position between ontic discourse and ontological metaphysics (the bar constituted by the *techne*-symptom). The outline of such a category error is visible when the discourse of technicity supplements the subject by externalising their inner-states through different signs common to technology and technical calculation. Here we must be prudent not to reduce the subject writ large in technicity to a subject *in toto* because to do so is to commit ourselves to a category error whereby the subject that appears in the field of technicity's ontic display of objects, in both the senses of past and future (e.g. development), is obfuscated with the ontological horizon of being that draws the subject into becoming. Herein the subject is deprived of form because they are directly linked to causality (the principle of ontological becoming) without the mediation of a cause (the instantiation of this order in being as described by technicity); 'cause' is misrecognised as 'causality'. That is to say, when the discourse of technicity attempts to totalise the subject through intensive rationalisation we find ourselves with nothing short of a mystical experience where we can experience ourselves as subjects of technicity but know nothing of this experience, and therein have no claim to the fantastic promises of scientific knowledge—the spell of technicity is broken, but in such a way that the subject is bereft of any access to knowledge of itself at all. Such a mystical reduction of the subject reduces the subject to a void status, and herein the mysticism of technicity's own internal logic is what drives the structuring of the void-subject.

While technicity may serve to structure this void-subject, such a subject is manifestly *techne* reappearing as a leitmotiv whose limited creative energy must be harnessed to fuel the efficiency of the technological order of things. Clearly, such a relation leads into a deterministic mysticism. What then if we turn the relation around and begin with *techne*, from the subject of the void, and move away from the subject as a *techne*-symptom leitmotiv that is endlessly repeated in the chain of technological discourse? In technicity the subject in their 'doing' (*techne*) is voided by the 'emancipatory potential' of technological efficiency, the subject remains negative and therein defined by her or his uncomfortable—yet structurally necessary—symptomal emergence as the 'Subject' of

technology. If we begin from *techne* however, the ground which technicity must necessarily lose to instate its abstract symbolic chain of discourse, we find ourselves again confronted with the fundamental point of the subject's emergence in technicity under the aegis of a symptom. Yet rather than allowing this symptom to be one problem among many to technological efficiency, by beginning from *techne* it is necessary to mark the *techne*-symptom as singular, as *the symptom*. That is to say, rather than read this *techne*-symptom as alien to the discourse of technicity that must be treated and explained away, let us instead read this symptom for what it is: the emergence of the subject and their limited possibilities in the infinite deferral of technicity as a discourse. In this light, the subject is 'the problem' for technicity's structure of promulgating symbolic (that is, technical) efficiency because the subject's limited extant being cannot be fully integrated into the infinite symbolic deferral of technicity on virtue of its limited status.⁶⁷⁵ Simply put: being is limited, non-being is infinite, and the attempt to resolve this in the bounds of technicity dissolves being in the attempt to fabricate a mystical supplement for being that is more efficient and therein commensurate with the symbolic economy of technicity.

V – *Techne*-Sinthome

Herein it is apparent that any critique of technology that states its starting point as what we have thus far distinguished as technicity, technical thinking, technological innovation, and so forth, commits itself to the repression of the limited status of being in its becoming which inevitably returns due to its structure. Such a structural return is what psychoanalysis calls a 'symptom'. After Lacan, in the Freudian tradition of psychoanalysis/metapsychology, the medical language of a 'symptom' has been distilled to the concentrated understanding of a repression of something from the symbolic field of discursive relations and difference which subsequently re-emerges in the register of the Real without the guarantee of discourse that makes it palpable to discursive relations and their constitutive symbolic differences. In this context a symptom is akin to a garbled message that stands as a cipher: attempts to symbolise it are meaningless, efforts to

⁶⁷⁵ It is interesting to note that the axiology of annihilation and producibility structuring technicity relies on this infinity of the discourse otherwise the process of producibility cannot rebuild (technologically) what annihilation has cleared away.

imagine it are overwhelmed by its complexity, and ventures to realise its full potential result in the de-structuring and disorganisation of the symbolic field of knowledge that ventures this realisation. So then the repression of being's limit by technicity (and its 'Subject/s?') only serves to reintroduce this limit as an unknowable but nonetheless very Real-Thing (*das Ding*) that inhibits the subject as a symbolic object from rising to an ideal Infinite state, rendering the human condition as a problem to be overcome.⁶⁷⁶

This symptomatic treatment of the 'technological subject' is all too familiar in the 'regular' critiques of technology/technicity endorsed by a variety of post-modern readings, and it is counter-productive to the understanding of the existence of the subject in her/his being. In effect, focusing on technicity in this way inhibits understanding the subject as a being because it does not enter into a reflective questioning of what being is; what Heidegger called '*Dasein*' (the being who questions being in its being-there). To correct such an inconsistent position on the subject we need to intervene into the foundations of the critical thinking of technicity, taking 'being' in an active rather than a passive sense. Under the sway of technicity the being is disenfranchised by a symbolic economy of desire because of a repeated lack in the subject herself or himself: the exclusion of *techne* (the lost ground of technicity) ultimately results in the endless return of *techne* as a symptom, a garbled or ciphered message that trips up the discourse of technicity, or as a stain of the limit of the unknowable on the axiology of technicity.

Yet as ancient and modern philosophers alike, from Hesiod and Aristotle to Heidegger and Levinas, have shown *techne* is the ground of existence for technicity, the grounding that the discourse is abstracted from. After Heidegger, Lacan's metapsychology advanced this idea with his reading of Aristotle that suggests that this 'lost ground' returns to the abstract symbolic domain of discourse (technicity) as an inhibitive limit or gap that separates the formalities of discourse from its metaphysical claims and axiological first principles. Continuing to treat the being of the subject in *techne* as passive is

⁶⁷⁶ As was demonstrated in Section A.2, because all knowledge is symbolic the images of the Imaginary or the realisation of the Real can only be 'known' through their constitutive relations: access to the *das Ding* is domesticated by the Symbolic as a meaningless formula (*Sachvorstellungen*)—wherein such meaninglessness hides the pervasive horror the incestuous *Ding*—while the access to the Imaginary becomes an icon, i.e. the representation of infinity becomes infinity taking place. (Evans, 1996: 204-205)

conceptually insufficient and naïve because it remains between the symbolic register of discourse and the imaginary register of metaphysics, and therein represses the *techne*-symptom that is substantialised in the Real—for all its purported post-modernism, technicity is still caught in the Kantian prejudice against ‘pathological’ substance.⁶⁷⁷ The purpose of an intervention into the thinking of technicity is therefore to move from the naïve understanding of being as passive, lacking, and symptomatically repetitive to an embracing of being as activity. The core of this transition rests on a shift from thinking *techne* as a symptom that repeats amongst the many repeated symbolic differences of discourse, and functions as a ‘lost ground’ that stands as an ineffable stain on the metaphysics of technicity, to taking *techne* as the singular symptom whose repetition brings the subject into the discourse of technicity and at the same time disorganises and de-structures the tightly wound symbolic economy of technicity to clear spaces for the subject of *techne* and their questioning. The Lacanian name for such a singular symptom is the ‘sinthome,’ a neologism coined by Lacan in his reading of the Biblical tale of the doubt of Saint Thomas. For our purpose here, this sinthome of *techne* is the fresh thinking of how properly philosophical questions of being can be aired in technicity.

The thinking of the *techne*-sinthome entails changes to the relations between *techne* and the discourse of technicity, as well as *techne* and the metaphysics of technicity. Firstly, rather than thinking *techne* as a symptom in the discourse of technicity that appears as a shameful disruption to be ‘treated’ under the aegis of technological expediency, *techne* becomes the advent of our identification with being. In this instance what we have is the transition from the subject of desire and metaphor to the subject of drive and metonymy: the subject goes from lack and supplementation where the signifiers of technicity stand for but differ from the subject to rupture and displacement where being becomes the mark that subjectivises the subject on virtue of which they are included in the structure of technicity, and which contributes to the fragmentation and disorganisation of technicity around the (philosophical) questioning of the subject.

⁶⁷⁷ Diamantides in Diamantides (ed), 2007: 199-200

The mark of this shift from symptom to sinthome, from desire to drive, lack to rupture, is the key narrative terminus in the second of the Wachowski brothers' *Matrix* films: *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003). Towards the end of the film the protagonist Neo (Keanu Reeves) confronts the architect of the world of *simulacra* called 'the matrix'. In this scene the architect reveals that Neo's status as the messianic One (established in the first film, *The Matrix*) is merely the remainder of an unbalanced equation that functions as the formal ontological condition of the matrix, the discursive equation gives the matrix the semblance of existence. Furthermore, the architect states that the manifestation of the One is a recurring event in the life of the matrix that is on the eve of the annihilation of the remnants of human resistance holding out in the city of Zion. Neo is thus given a choice by the architect and presented with two doors: one door leads Neo to select a small group of individuals to rebuild Zion for the seventh time and the sacrifice of himself, while the other door leads back to the matrix and his dying love Trinity whom he might or might not be able to save. Buddhist overtures aside, what confronts Neo here is the divergence of the symptom and the sinthome. The first door offers repetition but in a mimetic way that is gradually being eroded; the architect points out that the predatory machines are becoming "very efficient" at destroying Zion's incarnations... Left unchecked, the treatment of Neo's being as a symptom has led it into a pathological thicket of worldly disaster, for even if Neo sacrifices himself Zion is doomed. In contrast the second door is qualified by Neo's passionate attachment to humanity *vis-à-vis* his love for Trinity. Neo goes through this latter door and plays out the logic of love: Neo gives Trinity what he is not free to give, his being. Neo's anomalous existence is herein no longer merely a constitutive lack of the matrix (as in technicity) to be annihilated, but instead becomes the fulcrum of Neo's *Dasein* which he actively assumes, he gives himself a 'place in the sun'. It is significant that at a glance the two doors seem alike, yet the abstract calculation proffered by the first doorway stands in stark contrast to the activity of the second. In effect the latter doorway required Neo to commit himself to actively assuming the remainder of *techne* to complete the elaboration of the choice because it was a 'performative' elaboration where the former was merely 'abstract'. Where the first door imagines Neo as the centre of the matrix it overlooks his status as an anomaly. The second door however recognises Neo's anomalous existence as a necessary

decentration that attaches him to what exists, the fragments coordinated by discourse rather than the discourse itself. In a way the scales were always-already weighted in favour of the second door, but this could only be recognised retroactively after Neo made his choice.

What *The Matrix Reloaded* further demonstrates is that the change in relating to the discourse of the matrix is accompanied by a requisite alteration to the metaphysics maintaining this discourse's axiology that gives the 'meaning making' of Neo (a subject) a grammar; Neo dwells in *techne*. Under the thumb of the symptomal reading of *techne* and metaphysics, *techne* performs the function of a 'lost ground' from which technicity is abstracted, and at the same time attempts to stabilise itself by attempting to recoup *techne* by way of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*, the binary signifier that is the founding moment of extrapolating an understanding of being within a given discourse (e.g. technicity).⁶⁷⁸ With the return of the *techne*-symptom from the realm of the Real to the Symbolic, the subject is situated by technicity on the side of being (the first door confronting Neo)—which is recognisable under the grammar of technicity (annihilation and producibility).⁶⁷⁹ However, as has been shown above with *The Matrix Reloaded*, this positioning of the subject in a second-order representation of being familiar to technicity as a discourse (language) leads into a category error where the metaphysics of presence maintaining the presentation of the subject in being are supplemented prior to the presentation of being; briefly put: the *techne*-symptom leads into the hypostatisation of being (*techne* goes from symptom to *sinthome*). Neo's selection of the second door marks the shift from being as an anomalous lack to a point of rupture. The shift into the *techne*-*sinthome* presents the subject on the 'lost' side of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*, yet by virtue of its singular rather than plural status the *techne*-*sinthome* is an understanding of a remainder and not a lost ground. Here we have the subject of *techne* in the capacity of a

⁶⁷⁸ One can imagine here that Neo's two doors are in tension with one another where the first re-presents an abstract causality ordained by the discourse of knowledge while the second presents a lost ground, i.e. even in being Neo is a complex of *techne* that cannot be assimilated into the chain of abstract causality (repetition).

⁶⁷⁹ For an eloquent elaboration on these two statuses of the 'symptom' see Jean-Louis Gault's contribution to Voruz and Wolf's edited compilation *The Later Lacan* (2007: 72-82).

circulating grammar of drive (the Real) rather than a repetition of abstract desire and lack (the Symbolic).

VI – Rupture and Reordering

The singular status of the *techne*-sinthome facilitates the integration of the subject into discourse. This integration however is not without its disruptive potential. On the one hand, this remainder pins down the subject and the sinthome of *techne* marks the manifestation of the subject in the discourse of technicity. It is not the exteriorisation of the subject's inner-states that is at stake here, but rather the very 'being' of the subject. The difference herein is between the ontic and the ontological, between the everyday appearance of the subject in the objectifying discursive terms of technicity (as a technical object to be managed by efficient technological/calculative procedures) and the arrival/advent of the subject *ex nihilo* in the structure of the discourse. In the former the subject is a mere object of technicity, impinged under the structural rule of the symptom necessitated by annihilation and producibility/fabrication, whereas in the latter the subject is instantiated as a being that is an object still partial to the ontological difference between technicity as a discourse and its metaphysics. As psychoanalysis shows us, the subject as a partial-object (on the path to being a thing) is the point where the demands, fantasies, desires, and imaginings coordinated by technicity (discourse and metaphysics alike) swirl about. Rather than the subject articulating itself through the *lingua franca* of technicity, the subject here operates as a locus that drives technicity to become fragmented and rearranged according to the pulsing (*pulsion*) of drive.

Here it is important that we are careful not to confer fullness on the subject as a locus because the articulation of the subject as some spurious substantiality recognisable under the aegis of technicity-*qua*-discourse remains trapped in the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz* reading of *techne* as a 'lost ground'. Yes, the subject's *poesis/praxis* makes her or him manifest as a locus but it is only to the extent that this activity of *techne* is able to articulate its origin in its instantiation that it can be subjectivised. Logically speaking this separates *techne* from technicity, yet simultaneously incorporates *techne* within technicity.

Two important features of the subject and *techne* come to bear upon this understanding of the relation between *techne* and technicity. Firstly, the ontic status of technicity as both discourse and metaphysics restricts it to articulating ontology as void; it forecloses on questions of first principles and structure. Given that *techne* effectively brings forth the ontological claim of the subject as *something* unassailably different to the ‘word play’ of technicity that forecloses ontology from discourse, it becomes clear that the subject articulated by technicity is an object and not the subject of ontological propriety—the subject of technicity is somehow obscene, excessive. Secondly, if the subject is not merely an object domesticated by discourse (*die Sache*) but also a thing (*das Ding*) at the root of presentation (*Vorstellung*) beyond vulgar materialist definitions of reality, then this calls for a self-understanding of the subject in their ontological function of excessive difference that separates the conflation of technicity’s discourse and metaphysics despite this being the obscene outcome of materialism under the sway of technicity. Such a self-understanding is necessarily philosophical because it goes to the foundations of the purposes of technicity and the subject. The great wealth of continental philosophy and contemporary theory (with its philosophical disposition, i.e. Badiou, Žižek, Santner, Zupančič, among others) rests in its elaboration of this fundamental gap in its vast variety of guises. Knowledge is managed by discursive production, but the understanding of the promise of knowledge rests not on its production but the attempt to suture knowledge-production with the metaphysical purpose of the production itself. Accepting such a suture is nothing short of naïve mysticism given the fundamental gap between a discourse and its metaphysics, and it is here that the return to this excessive difference begins to bear its philosophical fruit.

The wisdom to understand the phantasmagoria constructed by the suture of knowledge-production to its metaphysics entails a criticism of this elaboration of fantasy as a ‘transcendental schematism’, a pacifying of the being of the subject. Why would one pursue this wisdom however if the alternative to the terminus of technological mysticism is psychosis? The problem is that both mysticism and psychosis are possibilities exclusive to the self-referentiality of technicity as a discourse, a prevailing mode of order.

To de-structure and disorganise technicity clearly threatens the ‘Subject of technological discourse’ insofar as they are a construct of technicity. Our aim here is to propose that the ‘lost ground’ of technicity remains voided by the technological abstraction that sustains technicity as both a discourse and its inherent metaphysics. *Techné* remains an ungentrified excess from the interior of technicity. As the remainder of technicity, *techné* is in the subject greater than it. Moreover, as a remainder *techné* demands to be understood rather than known, it is a matter of ontology rather than epistemology.⁶⁸⁰ Thus we are confronted with an opening onto ontology, the very foundations of existence, and this calls forth philosophy insofar as the task of philosophy is to resist the preclusion of any particular mode of being over another, to keep the places of questioning open. This ‘task’ of philosophy is posited in technicity as questions of being (morality, love, ethics, and so forth). But such questions can only be asserted in technicity when the tight stranglehold of the discourse’s self-referentiality is disrupted and driven apart. Therefore to de-structure and disorganise the phantasmagoria erected by technicity we must begin from the motility of this disruption, the ability for this disruption to propel its contents, to drive apart the chain of signifiers making up the discourse of technicity.

VII – The Silent Circuit of Drive

The motility of *techné* propels the subject of the void into technicity. Here the symptomatic status of *techné* moves the subject from the Real-Abyss (of freedom) into the symbolic domain of technicity not as yet another technical object but as a thing (*die Sache*). As a ‘thing’ the subject is identifying with *techné* as that which includes them in technicity. Herein *techné* is a sinthome, it has all the characteristics of a symptom but has the extra ‘little bit of something’ in which the subject identifies her/himself. This identification effectively decentres the subject and identifies them singularly across this decentration, whereas technicity constantly attempts to pin the universal subject down by fabricating each ‘part’ of their being with a technological supplement. The activity of technicity ultimately invites the voiding of the subject, but it is precisely this voiding that brings the subject back into technicity’s foundations through *techné*. Technicity thus

⁶⁸⁰ The understanding demanded by *techné* is not an *a posteriori* knowledge synthesised through experience but rather something that is in the subject greater than the subject alone (as singled out by technicity).

carries within itself a phantasmatic limit wherein the phantasmagoria it erects forecloses on the question of being. This foreclosure can resign the symbolically ordained ‘Subject of technology’ (whose ‘I’ has been dotted by the discourse) into mysticism if they accept the coordination of technicity, i.e. the desire of annihilation/consumption and producibility/fabrication. Yet this foreclosure also threatens the subject with psychosis if they refuse the transcendental schematism posed by the suture of knowledge to its production.

The subject’s identification with *techne* does not invite the wholesale rejection of technicity. Rather the subject who begins from the *techne*-sinthome ruptures technicity and allows philosophy to enter at the sites of tearing and perforation. Herein the question of being is not posed in technicity as such, but rather changes technicity from without, questions the conditions of the limits of technicity’s axiology, and therefore the questions of philosophy that are driving the conditions under which technicity functions are more a matter of ‘gravity’ than of ‘mass’, an effect of *das Ding*.

In *The Puppet and the Dwarf* Žižek uses this trope of gravity to examine the way drive affects the coordination of desire by fantasy. Simply put: drive circulates around a hole (the absence of *das Ding*) which it can never fill yet wants to fill, that it stops itself from satiating. The aim of drive is to overcome its own overcoming, and this holds strong resonances for the way philosophy interdicts technicity with the manifestation of the subject grounded in the *techne*-sinthome. To our end here, it is significant that when Žižek discusses drive across a number of texts he asserts a situation identical to that of *gomi*.

The main locus for *gomi* in Žižek appears to be the commercial aircraft graveyard in the Mojave Desert.⁶⁸¹ Žižek suggests that the large hulks of these demised, inert, and useless aircraft cannot but impress us with their “bare presence.”⁶⁸² This ‘bare presence’ articulates the visage of drive in capitalism, the capitalist drive ‘at rest’. Yet here are we

⁶⁸¹ Žižek, 2006: 158-159; 2000a: 41; Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2006: 46

⁶⁸² Žižek in Butler & Stephens (eds), 2006: 46

not again encountering what Gibson called ‘the sea of cast-off goods our century floats on?’⁶⁸³ The currents pushing and pulling our epoch are what drive our epoch in the sense that we have an oceanic feeling of helplessness against the tide of technological development and capitalism’s persistent reinvention of itself. However, here in the swirling depths of drive we encounter the liberating potential of *techne*: the locus of the subject that is pushed and pulled by drive. It is precisely because drive persists in circulating that the subject cannot obtain a simple positing in the locked coordinates of objective presence, but rather finds themselves enlivened by their (at base, artistic) doing and making. Here the agitation of the subject is registered in the phantasmagoria of technicity by the disruption of the subject, the necessarily de-structuring moment of the subject of *techne* that changes the course of technological over-determination. This disruption occurs because the question of being, of existence rather than presence, is a question of drive and its partial objects.⁶⁸⁴ Why ‘partial objects’? Because unlike the objects of technicity that resist the subjectivisation of the subject in terms common to the discourse, partial objects do not wholly resist the interpretation of the void-subject; they are lathered in ‘a little bit of something’, they become *objet petit a*.

Techne is thus not merely a matter of doing and making in the discourse of technicity, it is the primordial fragmenting of technicity into discourse and metaphysics. This rupturing of technicity is exactly what endows the subject with a certain ontological innocence, because technicity (to echo Heidegger) remains discursively and metaphysically ontic in its mundane and average everydayness. This subject of *techne*, who identifies themselves in their doing/making, is scattered and thrown across technicity by the motility of *techne*. That is to say, the question of a being’s existence raised by *techne* against the background of the voided subject disperses and decentres the being across the multitude of *objets petits a* that are strewn across the landscape of technicity by the rupture of *techne*, each a site of the event of the rupture of the subject in their *techne*-sinthome. Yes, the technological fantasies of technicity do coordinate our desires (for the *objets petits a*), but such symbolic coordination is forever in the wake of the rupture of *techne*, the emanation

⁶⁸³ Gibson, 1995: 141

⁶⁸⁴ Žižek, 2001a: 95-96

of the subject-*qua*-being as a remainder that disorganises the relation between technicity's discourse and metaphysics.⁶⁸⁵ Hence technicity is an epiphenomenon. Although technological fantasies may well persist through the production of knowledge and its promises, this production is shaped, averted, and redirected by the return of *techne* to technicity through the most fundamental of ontological premises: the being of the subject that the discourse attempts to articulate and functionalise through a metaphysics, the articulation of the reason for being (*raison d'être*). A third properly persistent state therefore exists between the excessive and deficient modes of mysticism and psychosis: a *techne* phantasmagoria that is only coordinated by technicity to the extent that it is an obstacle that disorganises and de-structures the discourse and metaphysics of technicity.

VIII – Conclusion

In this chapter we have demonstrated how *techne* operates as a locus of the subject's ontology that moves the status of the subject from that of a symptom induced by the structural lack of technicity (its 'voiding' of the subject) to that of a sinthome which disorganises/rearranges technicity with a fresh integration of the subject, forcing technicity to recognise the abyss it forecloses on in premising itself on the vulgar materialism of apparition. It was shown that the reverberations of *techne* dislodge the neat ordering of technicity, allowing this foreclosed groundlessness to manifest itself in the guise of the *Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz*, the signifier that enigmatically stands for nothing. This empty signifier highlighted the position of the subject as an excessive difference through its inability to accommodate the direct causal relationship delivered by the conflation of discourse and metaphysics by technicity's vulgar premise. Yet in this conflation it was found that technicity reveals itself as intensely anti-metaphysical because metaphysics was negated in the vulgarity of the discursive appeal to material apparition (presence). It was subsequently shown how in this idealisation of presence the subject finds themselves trapped in the constant repetition of facts and descriptions, unable to question the fundamental function of this process of elaboration, and ultimately resigning themselves to a mysticism that forecloses on the question of being (*raison d'être*), i.e. everything simply 'is'. It was noted that this position threatens the subject

⁶⁸⁵ Žižek, 2003: 59

with a dire psychotic break if they refuse technicity's transcendental schematism erected by the suture of knowledge (metaphysical truth) to its production (discourse). But this position relies on the categorisation of the activity (*techne*) of the subject's subjectivisation as a symptom. And, as was demonstrated above through the Lacanian psychoanalytic relation between symptoms and structures, this *techne*-symptom is ultimately what sustains the repeated definitions of the subject in technicity. Thus it can be suggested that the subject disturbs technicity because s/he is an excess that technicity cannot fully integrate. Herein it is clear that our questing for the ontology of the subject with regards to technicity should not begin from the presentation of the subject in technicity but, rather, from the existence of the subject prior to its mysterious emergence in technicity. And as has been shown above, this moment of mysterious emergence constitutes an *aporia* in the structure of technicity. This *aporia* shakes technicity's structure to the core of its founding premise in vulgar apparition, and reveals this premise as a foreclosure on the excessive difference that separates the discourse of technicity from its metaphysics. Addressing this *aporia* above we observed that our conception of *techne* shifts from that of a symptom, the subject as a repeated cryptic lack in technicity's discourse, to that of a *sinthome*, the being becomes a 'subject' as they enter technicity's discourse by way of identification with *techne* as their grounding. The shifting from the *techne*-symptom to the *techne*-*sinthome* therefore captures the third intervening state between the mystical terminus of technicity's naïve refusal of metaphysics and the psychotic rejection of apparent material reality: the *techne* phantasmagoria. Such an intervening state is the site of the subject's perpetual re-emergence and the endless disorganisation and re-arrangement of technicity. The *techne* phantasmagoria follows the silent motility of the drives; the subject is enlivened by their existence instead of the subject's coordination in objective presence (material apparition). In conclusion then, the subject of the *techne* phantasmagoria is the actively engaged subject who, like Neo in *The Matrix Reloaded*, dwells in *techne*.

Thesis Conclusion

This critique of technology has philosophically unveiled the dangers and difficulties of technology. Herein, the *techne* at the conceptual core of technology was revealed as a significant feature of the emergence of the human subject in the highly technologised world of the twenty-first century. *Techne* displays two important facets in this light: it is the primordial point where technology ‘becomes’ itself through the construction of the subject, and it is the laconic *aporia* that can rupture technology from within its own phantasia and therein offer the opportunity to transform the symbolic universe through the affirmation of the persistence of the subject. These features situated *techne* in our critique of technology in such a way as to suggest that there is more to the subject than her/his horrendous excessiveness and vacuity emphasised by Žižek’s conception of the subject in the Real. The subject signalled by *techne* is persistent and champions this persistence through their rupturing and rearranging of the *technics* of technology, its (Symbolic) Law. In Section C.2 this point was iterated as technicity’s appearance in the wake of the rupture of *techne* wherein *techne* is defined as the emanation of the subject-*qua*-being as a remainder that retroactively disorganises the relation between technicity’s discourse and metaphysics. Herein, *techne* is the ontological disclosure of the subject in the Real, and marks this disclosure as that which resists technological over-determination and persists in the Abyss for so long as technology is fetishised in the post-modern celebration of technicity.

The ontological disclosure of the subject in the Abyss of the Real by *techne* also unveils the position of the Abyss underlying the ideological structure of technicity. When understood in this light the subject is clearly in a different position to their ontic appearance so fetishised by post-modern representationalism. This critical rereading of the subject that enters technicity from without underlines that the being of the subject, their persistence in existence however discursively understood, remains an indivisible remainder for the discourses in which the subject is constructed through *techne*. Precisely because technicity jettisons *techne* through its vulgar materialism is it possible for the

subject's indivisibility to their discursive construction to antagonise the discourse of knowledge conceived under the aegis of technicity. The subsequent 'voiding' of that which in the subject is greater than their *imago* recognised by technicity potentially exposes the totality of technical and technological structures to a dismantling from without through the 'floating organ' of technicity, that which has no proper place in technicity: *techne*. That is to say, within the ontic naïveté of technicity the legitimate 'subject' writ large in technology is a sublime object of ideology; a partial-object that gestures to an horrendous excess within technology itself that can instigate traumatic upheavals.

This constellation of the subject, *techne*, and technicity was highlighted in Section C.2 where it was shown that the subject must necessarily enter into technicity through rupture and rearrangement if they are to stave off the psychoses that can be engendered by the Abyss. Taking up *techne* through the lens of the sinthome, our analysis demonstrated that this rupture and reorganisation of technicity suspended the sway of technological overdetermination that ideologically supplements the decline of the Father/Other's authority revealed in Section B.1. In the space of this suspension we observed a subject who dwells in a *techne* phantasmagoria based upon the persistence of the subject-*qua*-being. Herein we shift from the Imaginary-Real politic maintained by the fetishisation of technicity as explored in Section A.2 to a politic of the Real-Real where the *techne*-sinthome inhabits the non-identity of technicity in the Real and reveals the point where the ontological disclosure of the subject manifests in the interstices of appearances, but wherein these ontic appearances of the subject are not the ontological disclosure of the subject, as expressed in Section C.

In addressing this ontological disclosure of the subject through the *techne*-sinthome, which is the interlocutor of the subject and/with technicity, we are—and have thus far been—engaged in a *geistgekritik* of technology (in the symbolic universe) based upon Žižek's Leninist treatment of philosophy. Herein philosophy's task of revealing ontological disclosure is juxtaposed against (technical) knowledge production's preclusion of ontological disclosure in the university discourse, as criticised in Section

A.2 and Section A.3. The final chapter of Section C demonstrated that philosophy, rather than knowledge-production, reveals *techne*'s capacity to 'unhold' the sway of technology by suspending it through the rupture of technicity's vulgar materialism and reorganise this sway through the ontological persistence of the subject that resists direct codification, and therein supplementation, by the binary logic of annihilation and producibility that structures technicity.

Section C.1 began by showing that this rupture comes from the comportment of *techne* as the non-identitary moment of technicity; the possibility of redemption for the subject within technicity. *Techne* is the dark openness in the horizon of technicity that is set alight by the machinations of the symbolic universe. Philosophical critique facilitates the addressing of and critical engagement with this darkness. Avoiding such a critique entraps the subject within the repressive ignorance of technophilia that merely serves to turn this dark openness into a spectre that haunts the innermost corners of the subject within the Imaginary of technicity. As per the critical discussion in Section B.2, such repression leads to further supplementation of the non-object sense in which this spectre haunts the subject, driving technicity into the abstract idealism that it purportedly refutes through its naïve vulgar materialism and, ultimately, rendering a kind of 'technological schizophrenia' as the *Weltanschauung* of technicity.

What renders such technological schizophrenia psychotic is its foreclosure on the minimal difference between the ontic appearances recognised in the university discourse of knowledge production and the ontological horizon that embeds technicity in existence as a Symbolic Law rather than a wild Imaginary scene, a fantasy decoy, or a horrible Real-Thing that invites primal terror. This minimal difference must be ideated if the embodiment of the subject is to be able to negate the mysticism inherent to technicity and dialectically abstract the raw material of the subject into a (Hegelian) coherent psychical semblance. Without such ideation the subject experiences their existence but knows nothing of it, and because of this lack of symbolic domestication the existential being of the subject becomes a symptom to be 'domesticated' by the therapies of technicity: annihilation and producibility. The dark openness that haunts the psychoses of the

therapeutic industry is structurally problematic because it cannot account for the ontological crack in the grounding of technicity: its ungrounding through *techne*. The psychotic subject is psychotic precisely because they have lost the abstraction of *techne*, the gap that separates their own emergence *ex nihilo* from its discursive articulation. Against these avenues of mysticism and psychosis Section C.2 asserted the *techne*-sinthome as the possibility for redeeming the void-subject.

The elucidation of the *techne*-sinthome by the critique of technology reprises the subject of the Real from this pathology of technicity. Yet what are we to expect in the wake of the *techne*-sinthome? Section C revealed that, nascent within Žižek's Lacano-Leninist analyses, the Real-Real suggests that there is a politic of persistence for the subject; a 'bringing forth' that discloses the subject in the openness of their ontological horizon. Such a post-sinthome subject dwells in the 'new dawn' of the symbolic universe, a *techne* phantasmagoria built upon the taciturn persistence that remains unaccounted for by the Symbolic Order or the Imaginary theatre of psychopathology. The post-sinthome subject redeems their future through the openness of their history and therein affirms her/his place in the symbolic universe through its transformation from a realm of lack that supplements the placeless *topos* of the void-subject into a *techne* phantasmagoria that discloses a meaningful *topos* that stitches together the fragments of the symbolic universe in the chaotic vortex of Real-necessity and its traumatic upheavals. In the *techne* phantasmagoria the subject is not trapped in the mystical search for a Good at one remove, as is the technofetishist. Instead, the subject is philosophically engaged with their emergence from the ontological disclosure of *techne* into the redeeming light of a new dawn that transforms technicity from within and redeems the subject from their over-determination by technology writ large by its fetishisation in the (university) discourse of knowledge production. Thus there is a further line of philosophical inquiry into the critique of technology that goes beyond merely the subtractive purging of technicity or the purification of the subject to be pursued. This new critique must address the redemption of the void-subject as they persist in the Abyss that belies the structure of technicity.

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