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Chapter 7

Affective Economies: Lacan's Four Discourses against the Historicism of Capitalist Abstraction

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Materialism of practice versus materialism of affect

The representation of capitalism as a system of abstraction gains a widespread reception in contemporary analyses of social relations. A particular version of this representation is the account of real abstraction, where commercing subjects are said to be practicing a form of material abstraction even when they are not aware of it. This representation and its versions are usually mobilized to remind the proponents of post-capitalist politics (e.g., solidarity economies, community economies, Occupy movements) that they should not underestimate the hold of abstraction and fetishism of commodities on subjectivity. What seems to give the account of real abstraction its persuasive appeal is the way in which it posits abstraction not as a “veil” that obscures the real relations of production but rather as a “reality-effect” of markets. We welcome this sobering warning, not only because it gestures to break with an idealist model (appearance as epiphenomenon) in favour of a materialist one (appearance as constitutive), but also because it foregrounds the problem of intellectual difference and the question of the division of mental and manual labour—which is itself a primary concern for many forms of post-capitalist politics. On the other hand, we worry that it attributes to capitalist abstraction an ontological solidity and uniformity that does not exist, especially if we

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take seriously the matter of affect (*jouissance*) and its various modalities. This is not to suggest a false opposition between the presumed “necessity” of real abstraction and the purported “contingency” of *jouissance*—for the latter is neither simply contingent (hence, the insistence of the repetitive loop of the drive) nor simply necessary (hence, the instabilities caused by the smear of *jouissance*). Our aim is rather to deploy psychoanalysis and, to be more specific, the Lacanian theory of four discourses, in order to think systematically about the *affective* tonalities associated with different forms of social links that the subject entertains in relation to both capitalist and post-capitalist forms of abstraction.

We begin by bringing into question the broadly accepted assumption that real abstraction provides the truly materialist account of capitalist abstraction. To the extent that this assumption automatically deduces subjection from a presumably uniform practice of exchange, we think it is more in the vein of materialism to explore the ways in which subjection is both sustained and disrupted by *affective experiences*. The introduction of the dimensions of the unconscious and affects enables us to provide an explanation of the resilience and solidity of capitalist abstraction by accounting for its libidinal sources which is absent in the real abstraction literature. Moreover, it enables us to foreground the fact that the traversal of this resilience cannot be enacted merely through reflexive knowledge, but rather through a dislocation in the affective attachments to our ways of being and doing. If we proceed with the psychoanalytical insight that subjection is always sustained by some libidinal enjoyment (i.e., the *Real*), that it always generates surplus enjoyment as a by-product, then the question becomes: what are the different affective experiences of submitting to economic abstractions? Is capitalist abstraction the obstacle to articulating a *post-capitalist politics*, or is what matters the way in which we relate to different regimes of abstraction?

Real abstraction and the Real

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek takes apart those conventional readings of Freudian dream analysis and Marxian commodity fetishism that portray them as seeking to uncover some hidden content

behind a manifest form (respectively, latent dream content and labour-behind-value). Taking the opposite direction, he instead locates the shared object of these theoretical formations in the “secret of the form” (respectively, form of the unconscious and commodity form). In order to underscore the structural homology between the interpretive grids of these formations Žižek then turns to Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s discussion of real abstraction as the analysis that “has gone furthest in unfolding the universal reach of commodity form” (Žižek 1989: 17). For Žižek, the ontology of real abstraction “as the act of abstraction at work in the very effective process of the exchange of commodities” displays a “striking” homology with “that of the unconscious, this signifying chain which persists on ‘another Scene’” (17–8). Yet the homology Žižek locates between the unconscious and real abstraction has its limits. And exploring these limits will enable us to distinguish the psychoanalytical account of the (affective) experiences of capitalist abstraction from the practice of real abstraction.

In his influential *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, Sohn-Rethel finds the origins of abstraction in the practice of exchange, in the activity of life itself, rather than in the interiority of intellectual reflection. Indeed, real abstraction is not only Sohn-Rethel’s rebuttal of the idealism which he considers to prevail in philosophical thinking, but also his answer to what he perceives to be a major lacuna in Marxist theory, namely, the absence of a historical materialist explanation of the origins of scientific and philosophical thought. By obtaining the historical origins of the “thought form” in “commodity form” (Sohn-Rethel 1978, xiii), real abstraction is argued to furnish such an overdue explanation with comprehensive implications. Commodity form is not only tied up with the origins of scientific thought, but also connected with the historical emergence of the division of intellectual and manual labour.² And in so far as this division

² We want to distinguish “commodity-centered approaches” from “labour-centered approaches” to real abstraction (Kordela 2006; Toscano 2008a). The latter set of approaches sees real abstraction as “the properly ontological character of capitalist abstraction” (Toscano 2008a: 276). While Sohn-Rethel takes a “commodity-centered” approach, thus loosening real abstraction from the historicity of capitalism, now and then he switches to a slightly different explanation of tracing the origins of abstraction, besides commodity exchange, to the division of labour necessitated by class relations (as measurement becomes a necessary device to manage the appropriation and

conditions the phenomenon of alienation on which exploitation and domination of ruling classes depend, real abstraction stipulates a clear criterion for how a class society can be distinguished from a classless society. In short, the implication is that real abstraction is the ultimate obstacle to articulating a post-capitalist politics.

For Sohn Rethel, a defining aspect of real abstraction is that abstractness does not apply to the consciousness of the agents, but to their actions (26). In other words, real abstraction inscribes a “form of thought” within the practice of capitalist exchange without the exchanging subjects becoming cognizant of it. Or rather, we should say, without the exchanging subjects becoming cognizant of it *initially*—since Sohn-Rethel also adds that, in the end abstractness of exchange “does enter their minds, but only after the event, when they are faced with the completed result of the circulation of commodities,” that is, when they encounter abstractness in the separate embodiment of money (27). Sohn-Rethel’s note on consciousness eventually catching up with “exchange abstraction” is not so accidental to his argument as it might first appear. Quite on the contrary, we think it is actually revealing of the manner in which Sohn-Rethel imagines real abstraction as a spontaneous order, as a unifying condition that is supposed to eventually impose its colonizing influence on the entire social space.

This can be discerned from the way real abstraction subsumes *all* practices. It operates as their absolute condition of possibility just as it renders them as so many expressions of itself: Emanating from the action of commodity exchange, real abstraction spreads out and grafts itself not only on the mentalities of assessing individuals (e.g., legally equivalent exchanger-producer subjects, citizen-subjects); but also, on the methods of counting labour and value (e.g., the formation of intellectual labour as different from manual labour, fulfilling the function of supervising and quantifying the production of surplus labour); and on the

distribution of surplus labour produced by the direct labourers). This is why there is room in Sohn-Rethel’s discourse, otherwise absent in analyses of real abstraction, for the difference between surplus labour (or product) and surplus value, thus, for the application of the separation of intellectual and manual labour not only to capitalist, but also, to other non-capitalist forms of surplus labour appropriation.

procedures of thought itself (e.g., philosophical and scientific abstractions and conceptual basis of cognition for which Sohn-Rethel gave examples ranging from Greek philosophy to the Kantian categories of thought). While various scholars (Arthur 1993; Toscano 2008b) have connected the resilience of capitalist social relations to the embedded character of abstraction in the “real practice” of commodity exchange, one nonetheless wonders what makes this practice so intact and far reaching, if not the ontology that it presumes which assembles social being into an “expressive whole.”³

If one agrees with our reading that the ontology of real abstraction, in a historicist vein, presents a unifying horizon from which nothing seems to escape, one is obliged to ask: where is the unconscious in real abstraction? To this question, Žižek’s response is that the *a priori* inscription of a “form of thought” in the action of commodity exchange is the correlate to the unconscious (Žižek 1989: 19). This implies that real abstraction occupies a similar position to the institution of an “alien kernel,” a dimension of nonrecognition within subjectivity: Just like the unconscious, as the unrecognized effects of the signifier on the subject, does not lie in the depths of subjective interiority and is constituted in the field of the Other, real abstraction operates outside the consciousness of the subject, as a structuring albeit unacknowledged “part of its social being” (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 18). We wonder, however, how far this analogy can really be extended, especially because the “partial and plural” being of psychoanalysis (Copjec 2002: 9) and the

³ Is not this presumption also what instigates the critical remarks of Louis Althusser on the topic of abstraction (of labour) in the first section of *Capital*? Althusser argues that the ambiguous formulations of Marx in these pages give way to a historicist interpretation, as a result of which Marx’s new problematic is misrecognized simply as another version of Hegelian “expressive totality.” Althusser finds this historicist interpretation problematic because it represents abstraction as the absolute knowledge that is directly produced by the generalization of commodity relations and given in the immediate form of consciousness (Althusser and Balibar 1997: 124–5). This suggests not only that consciousness already contains its own self-criticism, leading to the union of consciousness and science into one and the same thing, but also that all knowledge concerning a historical object is reducible to an expression of the present consciousness. Thus, there is a refusal to acknowledge the real differences separating the different practices, levels, and instances of a historical “presence.” While Althusser’s interlocutor is not Sohn-Rethel, his criticism can be readily extended to the former’s thesis of real abstraction as a “social synthesis,” and to its historicist implication that “the socially necessary forms of thinking in an epoch are those in conformity with the socially synthetic function of the epoch” (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 5). For another trenchant critique of historicism that is psychoanalytically oriented see Joan Copjec who offers one possible definition for historicism as “the reduction of society to its indwelling network of relations of power and knowledge” (Copjec 1994: 6).

“social being” of real abstraction are fundamentally at odds with one another. To summarize beforehand the argument we develop below: The fragmented and not firmly placed being that psychoanalysis has discovered in relation to the formation of the drive and its disequilibrating function is radically different from the “social being” which the synthesizing order of real abstraction anticipates as *one* consistent process. There is no *Real*, thus, there is no experience of *Real* qua affect in real abstraction. Let us explicate.

For psychoanalysis, the encounter with the symbolic order (the Other as the locus of language as well as the culture a subject inherits and is submitted to), rather than providing the subject a familiar place of its own, results in the out of jointness of her being with herself. We can elaborate further on this statement with the hypothesis that the arrival of the subject in language involves a *forced choice* between being and meaning. The choice is forced, not only because choosing being is not an option, since this would amount to losing both being and meaning and entering into psychosis, but also because choosing meaning comes with a splitting within being that entails a loss (Zupancic 2000, 40). As various scholars of psychoanalysis put it, the being that is lost is not to be regarded in terms of some originally existing state of plenitude. The subject’s desire for a wholeness of being is rather a retroactive effect of the splitting within being, and of the concomitant formation of partial objects of the drive, as a necessary result of the “network of signifiers overlaying the world” (Lacan 2007: 48). The lost object forever eluding the desiring subject (that is, object *a* as the object cause of desire) is suggested to us only through the bits of satisfaction (surplus *jouissance*) attained by the repetitive loops of the drive.⁴ Object *a*, or *jouissance* is what refers to the split being, as both that which constitutes the alien core of subjectivity, and that part of the subject’s corporeal being located outside his or her body. In fact, Lacan’s concept of *extimacy* points precisely at this ambivalent status of object *a* as that which is simultaneously internal and external to the subject. Object *a* is not only what makes

⁴ This is how Lacan explains this fictitious materiality of the drive: “The drives are our myths, said Freud. This must not be understood as a reference to the unreal. For it is the real that the drives mythify, as myths usually do: here it is the real which creates [*fait*] desire by reproducing therein the relationship of the subject to the lost object” (1996: 418).

being out of joint with itself, but also what makes the Other itself inconsistent, thus, rendering it impossible for the subject to seamlessly unite with the Other.

We are already distancing ourselves significantly from the issue concerning the synthesizing function of real abstraction, which causes subjectivity to combine into a network and act as an extension of the social being of abstraction. Real abstraction presumes a social interface, an “actor-network” integration, through which the “whole of the subject’s corporeal presence is engaged or chiasmically intertwined with the Other, ‘directed in what is called [its] total intentionality’” (Copjec 2006: 97–8). Whereas object *a* disqualifies just such an ontology of being that would fit and merge smoothly with any social design. If there is a synthesizing function of object *a* (and one might argue that there is) this function is at the same time destabilizing and without a purpose or telos. Similarly the drive, which has no goal, aims at satisfaction through circling around partial objects that come to occupy the void of the lost object—it has no measure, or moderation. Singular and contingent to each subject’s history, partial objects serve as representatives of unevenly charged zones of affective intensity. These cathected privileged partial objects have a contradictory status: On the one hand, they are the objects of an acephalic drive that knows nothing other than its own satisfaction. On the other hand, they function as screens for the projection of synthesizing fantasies of wholeness that account even for what thwarts their attainment. To put it differently, the very extimate objects that disrupt the rational and functional integration of the “actor” with the network (of real abstraction) are also, as privileged nodal points, what enable partial totalizations of a non-all social field.

It should by now be evident that the “partial and plural” being of psychoanalysis does not overlap with the totalizing ontology of social being implied in real abstraction—on the contrary, it provides a resolute critique of it. Rather than a unifying structure that imposes a comprehensive and cohesive historical present (without heterogeneity), capitalist abstraction is recast as a partial totalization that is supported by the surplus of affective investments. Moreover, when we say that capitalist abstraction is a partial ordering, this should not imply that it is part of a complete, well-defined, or eventually definable whole (of economy),

but rather that it is partial, even when hegemonic, to a heterogeneous field along with other, non-capitalist, partial orderings of abstraction, obliging us, in effect, to talk about discontinuous regimes of abstraction in the plural, rather than about the consolidative practice of real abstraction in the singular. This critique of abstraction may also lend some insight on why Louis Althusser adopted an analytics of ideology and insisted on the necessity of reproduction, instead of working within the problematic of commodity fetishism. By doing so, one possible aim of his was to move the focus of analysis from the market and its narratives of spontaneous order to the state and its dispositifs, constitutive of the social order. Another aim was to displace a centered understanding of materiality based on the *practice of exchange* through an aleatory understanding of materiality based on the *plurality of practices*, which do not line up to produce some uniform Zeitgeist, in which whatever happens happens as a corresponding part of one consistent totality. Following the perspicacity of Althusser's remarks on the non-contemporaneity of history, we argue not only that one cannot explain the phenomenon of capitalist abstraction without taking account of the practices of capitalist (re-)production, but also that the practices of abstraction are irreducible to the capitalist form.⁵ Yet, diverging from Althusser's materialism which—along with the break with a humanist tradition centered on the subject—attempts to dismantle any notion of the subject, we think that taking the affective dimension of practices into account is a necessary materialist step against the regeneration of totalizing logics.

Uses and limits of homology

The complex relationships between regimes of abstraction and the dimension of affect can be explored through Jacques Lacan's four discourses, a set of mathemes which he designated as “a four footed apparatus,

⁵ To relate this insight to our discussion further down the road, we can suggest that the master signifier of the value of labour-power (for capitalist abstraction) both conditions as well as is conditioned by state ideological apparatuses (as state's various signifying practices), such as the “money minted by the state, transactions registered by state agencies, and courts capable of settling possible disputes” (Althusser 2006: 132).

with its four positions” (2007: 20), and which constitute a conceptual matrix to make sense of the four different social links through which subject’s affective experiences are organized and transformed: The discourses of the Master, the University, the Analyst, and the Hysteric. In deploying the four discourses in the theoretical context of the relation between abstraction and affect, we follow Lacan who posits a structural homology between signification and abstraction, discourse and social link, signifier and value (1998: 17). Yet, working within the frame of this structural homology (or any homology as we have already observed above) requires an awareness of its limits, of what it obscures as much as what it sheds light on. This section establishes the terms as well as the limits of Lacan’s homology.

The structure of these mathemes find their initial form in the Lacanian adage: a signifier (S_1) represents (constitutes) the subject for the other signifiers (S_2), “which implies that there is no signifier of the subject, so that this is a process of an always failing representation” (Dolar 2006: 143–4). Hence, the divided, barred subject under S_1 .

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow S_2$$

This matheme—which is yet to become the first of the four discourses as the surplus product, object a , is missing—is a formalization where a multiplicity of problematics can be discussed simultaneously. Indeed, *Seminar XVII* represents an important milestone in Lacan’s gradual turn towards formalization. In particular, Lacan’s return to Freud’s metapsychological writings represents a significant level of formalization of Freud’s discussions (Grigg 2008). For instance, it is in this seminar that he proposes “to analyze the Oedipus complex as being Freud’s dream” (Lacan 2007: 117), and substitutes the already structuralist notion of Name-of-the-Father with the even more purely formal notion of the master signifier (S_1) (Verhaege 2006: 30). The particular accent of reading and deployment of Lacan’s mathemes and the four discourses is conditioned by Lacan’s distinct usage of formalism. Informed neither by the positivist tendency to find the true essence of what appears to be complex phenomena, nor simply by an attempt to

get rid of Freud's turn-of-the-century Viennese morality, Lacan's turn towards formalization was an attempt to develop a conceptual framework for the analysts both to make sense of, and strategically intervene in, the discursive structures that entrap the subject.

For Lacan the above basic matheme is as much a formalization of the constitutive splitting of the subject between that of the enunciation and the enunciated in the very moment of its suturing to the signifying chain, as it is of the logic of the signifier where meaning is always produced retroactively within the chain of signifiers. Since language is the quintessential social institution, the ground zero of the social link among speaking beings, this matheme also lends itself easily to the articulation of "a strict *structural homology* between economic and semantic systems of representation" (Kordela 2006: 540). Similarly, Ernesto Laclau, when mobilizing the psychoanalytical categories in his discussion of hegemonic logics of populist reason, maintains that categories of psychoanalysis "are not regional but belong to the field of ... a general ontology" (2005: 114). For Laclau, some time around early twentieth century, psychoanalysis and politics simultaneously discovered the same formal dislocation in "the very structure of objectivity" (114). We agree with the basic premise of these observations. Lacan's drive towards formalization did enable post-Marxist thought to identify the similarities between the Freudian unconscious and social systems of representation. It is now possible to add to this couple the Marxian value theory—with the proviso that we read it symptomatically. In particular, rather than treating *abstract-labour time* as an ontological given (a metaphysical presence, a transcendental signified) *represented* by the system of values, we propose to read this central Marxian category as a retroactive product, a theoretical abstraction that exists only in its effects which are visible and measurable through the *differential* signifying operations of the value-form (Roberts 1996). Just as "the unity of the object is a retroactive effect of naming it" (Laclau 2005: 108), the system of value "transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic," which we then "try to decipher" (Marx 1976: 167).

Yet, some care is necessary when exploring the structural homologies between different systems of representation. For instance, Gayatri Spivak carefully problematizes the “isomorphic analogy” that Jean-Jacques Goux makes in his *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud* (1988) between the phallus and gold as the universal equivalents of the subject and products respectively, finding the analogy to be a “domestication [oedipalization?] of Marx’s analysis of Value” (Spivak 1988: 156).⁶ The existence of “general morphological similarities between centralized sign-formations,” Spivak maintains, warrants neither overlooking the specificities of the analogized sign-formations, nor excluding “the fields of force that make them heterogeneous, indeed discontinuous” (156). Identifying “in those similarities the structural essence of the formations thus analogized,” she notes, courts the risk of excluding those relationships between the fields “that are attributive and supportive and not analogical” (156). And finally, forcing a very “strict structural homology” risks overlooking the dimensions of the fields that exceed the terms of the homology.

For instance, according to Spivak, because in constructing the homology between the phallus and gold Goux has limited his discussion to Marx’s account of “the emergence of the money-form” (found in the infamous first three chapters of *Capital*), the Marxian accounts of the value of labour-power and the process of exploitation are excluded as what exceed the terms of the homology (156–7). Similarly, there will be something exceeding on the psychoanalytical side of the homology as well. Regimes of economic representation through the differential system of markets, while constitutive of economic value, are nonetheless secondary phenomena, as they presume the prior symbolic castration and the simultaneous sexuation of the subject. In other words, not all readings of the matheme are at an equal ontological level. To retain the difference between “the fields of force” of the two sign-formations is necessary not only to evade the pitfalls of a linguistic reductionism (which may entail the denial of the specificity of the economic and its internal heterogeneity) but also to remark the immanent possibility of re-organizing the economic

⁶ According to our reading, “isomorphic analogy” and “structural homology” refer to the same phenomena where two fields are composed of elements which are positioned in relation to one another in a similar manner.

system of representation. If one ontologically equates the “signifying operations” of economic regimes of abstraction with the constitutive processes of symbolic castration, without theoretically acknowledging that the latter is the very condition of sociality as such, and the former is merely a regional sign-formation, one will end up hypostatizing, in this case, the capitalist value-form as the only form of economic representation possible.

Value of labour-power: A master signifier for capitalist abstraction

Given that theoretical choices made in establishing the terms of the homology have strategic and conceptual consequences, we propose to develop a Marxian reading of Lacan’s matheme as a formalization of the *differential* and *retroactive* determination of the economic value of a commodity within the nexus of exchange. In this regional sign-formation, the commodity which has no value outside of the network of values is placed under S_1 , in the place occupied by the barred subject, and S_2 represents the values of all the other commodities in the marketplace. Here the commodity is barred, because a *thing* can only become an *object* once it is part of a differential system of value, i.e., when it becomes a *commodity*. A *commodity* is a (useful) *thing* that is produced for exchange and thereby it is split in its very constitution between use-value (which is supposed to satisfy concrete needs and wants) and exchange-value (which represents the *socially necessary abstract-labour time* for the production of the commodity at any given moment, under given production conditions).⁷

Yet, the central contribution of Marxian political economy, as Spivak as well as many others have noted (e.g., Resnick and Wolff 1987), does not lie in the analysis of the commodity or money-form, but rather in the analysis of a very specific commodity, that of *labour-power*. To do a properly Marxian reading of these mathemes, we need to read them in relation to capitalist exploitation. And to do that we take the cue

⁷ This is not to say that use value is the firm ground against which the differential determination of value-form unfolds. Use-value is also pervaded by the unstable economy of desire.

from Lacan’s humorous reminder that, despite the fact that the master never works, she “gives a sign, the master signifier, and everybody jumps” (2007:174). What is this sign, if not the variable capital extended by the agent of Capital in order to purchase the capacity of the worker to perform living labour, her labour-power, so that “Capital consumes the *use-value* of labour-power” (Spivak 1988: 161)? Accordingly, the split subject can now enter this regional sign-formation, the system of commodity exchange constituted by the *value of labour-power* (V_{LP}) extended by the capitalist Entrepreneur “who never works.” In foregrounding the value of labour-power as the master signifier we are treating it as the privileged signifier that turns the system of market exchange, which preceded the historical emergence of capitalism, into a specifically capitalist mode of abstraction. In the place of S_2 , we have once more the battery of all other exchange values that the subject gains access to in order to reproduce her capacity to perform living labour by purchasing a subset of them, given her wage rate. The value of labour-power has a very paradoxical function; on the one hand, it enables the subject to bridge the division of labour and reproduce her labour-power and, on the other hand, it enables the partitioning of the living labour performed by the worker into its necessary and surplus components, entailing her alienation from the surplus, namely, the exploitation of the subject.

$$\frac{V_{LP}}{\textit{Exploited Subject}} \rightarrow V_{\textit{other}}$$

The institution of a regime of value requires a founding gesture of giving a sign, throwing a master signifier which would make everyone jump. The first of the four discourses, the discourse of the Master, formalizes precisely this constitutive act embodied in the organizing intervention of the master signifier in a given battery of signifiers (S_2). Yet, this network of signifiers, provisionally organized and made to do work by the master signifier (S_1), always ends up producing a remainder, an excess. This excess, an after-effect of the signification process, is nothing but a trace of a pre-supposed wholeness that is lost forever as a result of the splitting of the subject.

$$\frac{S_1 \rightarrow S_2}{\$ // a} \quad \frac{agent \rightarrow other}{truth // product}$$

Above the line, the relation between S_1 , the dominant term occupying the position of *the agent* under the discourse of Master, and S_2 , the battery of signifiers occupying the position of *the other*, is one of *impossibility*. As Lacan notes, “it is effectively impossible that there be a master who makes the entire world function” (2007: 174). Below the line, the relation between *the product* and *truth* is one of *impotence*: “Whatever the signs, whatever the master signifiers that come to be inscribed in the place of the agent, under no circumstances will production have a relationship to truth” (Lacan 2007: 174). The *impossibility* that structures the agent’s relation to the other is linked with the *impotence* of conjoining the product with the truth of the agent. On the one hand, the (surplus) product qua excess marks the *impossibility* of the agent to fully master the other; on the other hand, the inadequacy of the (surplus) product to account for the truth of the agent, the barred subject, marks the relation of *impotence*.⁸ Let us try to think through these relations of impossibility and impotence in the context of the capitalist mode of abstraction.

If “a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s labour” is an attempt to constitute a harmonious social division of labour through the authority of the master signifier (value of labour-power), it is one that is nonetheless bound to fail. On the one hand, there is an *impossible* communication between the value of labour-power and the world of commodities, where we can think of this impossibility as standing in for the irreconcilable relation of the subject to her needs. At the same time that the articulation of needs through the signifying chain S_1 and S_2 cuts the subject off from coinciding with some mythical pre-symbolic enjoyment, it also produces an unassimilable excess, a surplus product/surplus *jouissance*, i.e., *a* as product. The consequence is that needs are never that self-evident to be defined and fulfilled, and not because they are socially contingent, but

⁸ In the discourse of the Master, this inability of conjoining the product with the truth of the Master is rendered by the matheme of fantasy $\$ \diamond a$. When Lacan claims that “the master’s discourse excludes fantasy” (2007: 108), this is because the foundational gesture of the Master relies on the illusion of an identity of the *term* (the master signifier) with the *position* it occupies (that of the agent) (Žižek 1998: 76), the illusion that the Master is truly the agent of the discourse. Such an identity, however, is impossible.

rather because they are mediated through symbolic and imaginary demands which try to get at a bit of *jouissance*. Needs are in the first place derailed from any presumed course of biological survival since they are caught up in the formation of partial objects of the drive. Clearly, this impossibility that pertains to the opaqueness of needs is not unique to capitalist abstraction per se; indeed it holds for all regimes of abstraction. On the other hand, there is no conjoining of this product, the excess produced by the representational system of capitalist abstraction, with the truth of the exploited subject. A plausible translation of this statement would be the alienation of the exploited subject from the product of surplus value, the fruits of her labour. Nonetheless, to bring out the affective dimension of the psychoanalytical notion of alienation, and to distinguish it from a Marxian one, we locate in the place of product not an actual physical object, or even the quanta of (surplus) value appropriated by capitalist agents, but the uncanny presence of surplus *jouissance*. Approached this way, the consequence is not only a Marxian one which exposes the division of the total product into its necessary and surplus components, but more properly a psychoanalytical one which argues that the unification of the divided subject with the product of her labour is an idealization: There is no perfect organization of class whereby the subject masters the enjoyment, the “usufruct” (qua *jouissance*) of the property of surplus value she participates to produce (Lacan 1998: 3).

Pushing forth the limits of the homology between Lacan’s discourse of the Master and Marx’s value-form brings about a result that applies more broadly than just to the institutions of capitalist abstraction: If the discourse of the Master is “the founding gesture of every social link” (Žižek 1998: 77; emphasis added), then the non-descriptivist, differentialist perspective of retro-active constitutivity can be deployed to make sense of *all* institutionalized practices of abstraction as regimes of signification, or, to use Karl Polanyi’s (1944) term, as “forms of integration” that facilitate the distribution of “objects” at any given social scale, from a town using a (post-capitalist) local exchange trading system (LETS) to a trans-national (capitalist) economy using a common currency (e.g., euro). Given that impossibility marks the relation between the

master signifier and the network of signifiers, a notion like “forms of integration” should be handled with care and with full recognition of the impossibility of instituting a “mode of distribution” that would enact a harmonious integration, a social synthesis that would cancel all the contradictory consequences of the different concrete forms of division of labour (between intellectual and manual labour, between the producers and appropriators of surplus labour, between genders, etc.).

In fact, following Marx’s indications from the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1966), we need to concede that, as long as society is organized through different forms of division of labour, there will always be a division between necessary and surplus labour; “the total social product” will always need to be “shared” by a non-all and socially negotiated list of deductions inclusive of, but not exclusive to, the remuneration of direct labourers.⁹ What differentiates one social organization of division of labour from another is the nature of the institutional mechanisms and devices through which the decisions and measurements pertaining to how much to produce, what is necessary and what is surplus, how to distribute the surplus, and so on, are negotiated and struggled over. In other words, direct labourers are exploited in the Marxian sense not because abstraction forces them to produce a surplus product above and beyond what is socially deemed necessary for their reproduction, but because abstraction is organized by an exception which excludes them (as well as other stakeholders) from the appropriation of this surplus product. Therefore, given that (some forms of) abstraction are here to stay, a post-capitalist politics, rather than advocating an imaginary abolition of surplus, could strive to encircle the moment of appropriation and render visible and politicize the occluded (through political, cultural, ideological and legal discourses) social (class) antagonism. But, in and of itself, this post-capitalist agenda of “speaking truth to power” cannot be enacted without hitting the *Real*, the affective dimension of abstraction. We have turned our attention to the four discourses precisely in order to take this very dimension of affect into account. But, there too,

⁹ For an extended discussion of the *Critique of the Gotha Program* in relation to Lacan’s formulae of sexual difference, see Özselçuk and Madra (2005).

before we proceed further, we need to identify certain historicist tendencies to grant Lacan's formalist turn the dignity it deserves.

A psychoanalytical historicism of one quarter-turn

Our reading of the discourse of the Master through the founding gesture of the commodification of labour-power is somewhat different from the more popular reading of this discourse derived from the dialectics of the Master and the Slave (or the Lord and Bondsman). According to the latter, which is rendered quite plausible by Lacan's own recurrent (albeit, on occasion sarcastic) references to Hegel, the Lord (or the Master) occupies the position of the agent, and the exploited Bondsman (or Slave), the position of the other. Here the truth of the Lord is that he too is a divided subject, a mere *träger* of the role of the master; he receives his status of master only because the slave grants him that status, "it is delivered to him by the work of the slave" (Lacan 2007: 79). While work here could be read in the sense of producing economic values, a proper psychoanalytical reading would supplement this with the sense of "doing the affective work" of reproducing the status of the Lord. Indeed Mladen Dolar, in an acute reading of the Master's discourse, argues that "the slave is enslaved by his own enjoyment, and not by the master's, he is paid off with bits of enjoyment, and the surplus enjoyment is what his work produces and what makes him work" (2006: 133). Even the puritan ethics of denouncing enjoyment in the name of work generates a surplus enjoyment as a by-product of this process of domination. This standard interpretation accounts for both the *impossibility* of a harmonious class relationship between the master and slave, the fact that we need to take into account for the affective dimension to make sense of what makes the production of surplus labour to happen, and the *impotence* of the master "who, as usual, fails to understand anything about it [surplus *jouissance*] and what constitutes his truth" (Lacan 2007: 108). Nevertheless, this interpretation of the discourse of Master as a feudal relation, when combined with various passages in Lacan's text that refers to

a *historical transition* from “the old masters” to “the new masters,” lends itself too easily to a historicist reading of the four discourses. Let us take a closer look at this.

Lacan seems to identify early on in *Seminar XVII* a historical transition, roughly located in the late 1960s, from a society of prohibition, where “prohibition was observed, purely and simply” (Lacan 2007: 40) and a puritanistic renunciation of desire turned into a source of satisfaction (surplus *jouissance*), to a society of enjoyment, or “of permissiveness, where what can sometimes be the cause of difficulty is the prohibition on prohibiting” (Miller 2006: 12). While elsewhere Lacan speaks of “the persistence of a Master’s discourse,” he also indicates that “the present one does not have the structure of the old” (Lacan 2007: 31). In fact, throughout the *Seminar*, Lacan articulates a “capital mutation,” a particular regressive quarter-turn from the discourse of Master, towards a University discourse, that gives it “its capitalist style” (168).

$$\frac{S_2 \rightarrow a}{S_1 // \$}$$

In one of the more careful readings of the *Seminar*, Alenka Zupancic (2006), following the work of Todd McGowan (2004), develops a reading of the discourse of the University as a new configuration of the Master’s discourse in a historical passage from a prohibitive order to that of a permissive one, where there are no impossibles, where everything is permitted and everything is possible.¹⁰ In the old regime, repetition, necessitated by enjoyment structured around a constitutive hindrance, functioned as a symptom of “a fundamental impotence” regarding conjoining the (*a*) with master’s truth (*\$*). In the new regime of “enjoyment without hindrance” nothing can be impossible—even *jouissance* ends up being accountable and accumulable ($S_2 \rightarrow a$). Let us explain how this regressive quarter turn towards the University discourse plays out in this reading. First, S_2 qua “complex signifying operation” (Zupancic 2006: 169) comes to occupy the

¹⁰ See Yannis Stavrakakis (2012) for a critical extension of this argument where he argues for both “spirits” of prohibition and the commanded enjoyment to be simultaneously operative in the history of capitalism as well as in contemporary discourses on austerity and consumption-oriented credit push, in effect, “constituting a single functional system” (2305).

position of the agent, not unlike, Zupancic notes, “value becoming the subject of the process” (170) in Marx’s discussion of the self-valorization of capital. Standing for the value-form, S_2 turns living labour into an amassable and countable abstract labour, or in Zupancic’s preferred terminology, “*pure work*” (through the commodification of labour-power). Hence, “surplus value [a] combines with capital [S_2]” in the “homogeneous [...] field of values” (Lacan 2007: 177–8). But this accumulation of valorized enjoyment, the rendering of every form of enjoyment into a safe-for-use commodity, into an enjoyment-without-enjoyment, is a colonizing process propelled by the fact that the plasticity of the drive always finds newer sources of satisfaction, until the subject is reduced to a pure negativity, into pure death drive (Zupancic 2006: 173).

While we do not disagree that these readings may describe certain affective economies in relation to capitalist abstraction, we question the *historicism* that structures the grand narrative of a historical passage from the society of prohibition to the society of enjoyment, as well as the *historicist usage* of the four discourses. Let us begin with our former concern. While Lacan does explicitly refer to the time of his writing as the moment when “this society called capitalist society can afford to allow itself a relaxation of the university discourse” (2007: 168), elsewhere he notes that, even in 1960, “we were a long way away—are we any closer? that’s the question—from challenging authority” (40). Taken together these declarations indicate that he is speaking from within a historical conjuncture where the said transition from a prohibitive to a permissive capitalism is far from fully completed (“are we any closer?”). But, perhaps more importantly, elsewhere in the same *Seminar*, when Lacan refers to the transition from the “old” to the “new” discourse of the Master (qua the University discourse), he seems to be referring to the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

Something changed in the master’s discourse at a certain point in history. We are not going to break our backs finding out if it was because of Luther, or Calvin, or some unknown traffic of ships around Genoa, or in the Mediterranean Sea, or anywhere else, for the

important point is that on a certain day surplus *jouissance* became calculable, could be counted, totalized. This is where the accumulation of capital begins. (Lacan 2007: 177)

This conflation between these two different transitions (one *within* capitalism, the other *into* capitalism) is reproduced in Zupancic's discussion of the discourse of the University. When explaining the commodification of labour-power as a result of "the complex signifying operations" of the value-form ($S_2 \rightarrow a$), she argues that "in itself and before that operation, pure work is never *pure* work, but is something closer to the slave's 'knowledge at work'" (2006: 169). In doing so, she theorizes the regressive quarter-turn from the Master's discourse (where the "concrete-labour" of the slave and the specific know-how associated with it is unattainable by the Master) to the "new" discourse of the University (where the unpaid portion of the "abstract-labour" performed by the direct labour combines with the Capital) as the transition from the pre-capitalist modes of production (e.g., feudalism, slavery) to the capitalist mode of production, with labour-power as its defining commodity. So, we are tempted to ask, does the regressive quarter turn towards the University discourse refer to the transition from pre-capitalism to capitalism (i.e., the commodification of labour-power) or to the transition within capitalism (from the prohibitive to the permissive order)?

Radicalism of the mathemes

Perhaps the problem lies in the historicist usage of the four discourses. Lacan, both in *Seminar XVII* and later on in *Seminar XX*, consistently tries to distance himself from the structural necessity of historicism associated with Hegel (Feltham 2006). At one point, he notes that his "little quadrupedal schemas [referring to four discourses] are not Ouija boards of history. It is not necessarily the case that things always happen this way, and that things rotate in the same direction" (Lacan 2007: 188). Or, elsewhere when he discusses Hegel's conception of history as "the succession of phases of dominance, of composition of the play of the mind," he notes that in Hegelian historicism the entire game is directed by "the cunning of reason" (170–71). And, in

Seminar 20, Lacan notes that the four discourses are “not in any sense to be viewed as a series of historical emergences—the fact that one may have appeared longer ago than the others is not what is important here” (Lacan 1998: 16).

In fact, if one reads Lacan’s commentary on four discourses and the rhythm with which he uses them, the anti-historicist, formalist tendency becomes even more accentuated. He likens the mathemes of the four discourses to “an apparatus ... a lever, as a pair of pliers, that can be screwed down, assembled in one way or another” (2007: 169). He insists that “these more or less little terms” of the four discourses “can be of use in a very large number of relations” if one becomes “accustomed to how to manipulate them” (188). For Lacan, the four discourses constitute a matrix, a structure that enables the analyst to make use “these manipulations of the signifier and its possible articulations” (45). Yet, this would be a very particular type of structure organized around the real: “In supposing the formalization of discourse [...] we encounter an element of impossibility” (45). In a number of places, when defining the real as the impossible, Lacan refers to the three impossible professions that Freud identified earlier: “governing, educating, and analyzing” (166). To these three impossible professions, Lacan adds “causing desire, so as to complete the series with a definition of what the hysteric’s discourse might be” (173).¹¹

These discourses are within history; yet none of them describes the shape of history, which is a non-all, heterogeneous field, as rich and diverse as the plasticity of the drive and the singularity of the objects of its satisfaction. In fact, the real as the impossible is the condition of possibility of historicity itself. The four discourses provide a conceptual matrix to analyze and strategically intervene into the articulated social structures that produce history through regulating and transforming relations to *jouissance*. Thus, it is

¹¹ It may be useful to contrast these “professions” with Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses: the Family, the School, the Church, the Army, and so on. Yet, Lacan’s conceptual matrix differs from Althusser’s approach in, at least, two fundamental ways. First, the four discourses, unlike the ideological dispositifs, take affect into account. Second, these “professions,” because they describe the formal structures within/through which subjects relate to the signifying systems, regimes of abstractions, and so on, inhabit all institutional dispositifs, whether it is the schooling system, or the trade unions.

possible to read them as a matrix of potential affective relations the subject can have towards the exact same signifier, the exact same “unary trait.” In a brilliant reading of Hegel as the other side of psychoanalysis, Dolar (2006) does exactly this: He goes through the four different affective dispositions that Lacan entertained throughout *Seminar XVII* towards *Hegel, the unary trait*: Hegel, the Master; Hegel, the most sublime of Hysterics; Hegel, the Professor from Jena; and Hegel, the Impossible. If read in this manner, it becomes possible to conceptualize the four discourses as invariably co-existing in an articulated formation within any given institution, at any given moment in history.

With this insight, we can see the “quarter-turn regression” in the Master’s discourse not necessarily as an epochal transition to the discourse of the University, but rather as the identification of a particular combination of “governing” and “educating” functions in the libidinal constitution of a capitalist social link at a given historical conjuncture. Having said this, Lacan’s own dynamic deployment of “little quadrupedal schemas” gives us no reason to expect that the libidinal constitution of a capitalist social link will be exhausted by the articulation of these two discourses: at any given moment, the discourse of the hysteric may also come to entertain a dialectic tension with the other two.¹² Furthermore, the distance gained this way from the historicism of one quarter turn enables us “to authorize” not only the same historical moment with different configurations of tools, but also different historical moments with the exact same configurations of tools: Hence, Lacan’s discussion of transitions to and within capitalism in relation to the discourse of the University.

As a final stab at the historicist-empiricist reading of the four discourses, let us note that the analytical discourse has a different relation to the other discourses. Lacan says in *Encore* that the analytical discourse emerges “whenever there is a movement from one discourse to another” (1998: 16). In this sense, it must be located simultaneously at the same level as the other three discourses as well as apart, since its function is

¹² After making the point that the master/hysteric couple is “found throughout history” Collete Soler demonstrates the ways in which the discourse of the Hysteric is responsible for the “present state,” that is, the state of the scientific-capitalist couple functioning as the discourse of the University (2002: 47).

to operate through dislocating them; that is, to force, through interpretation, the subject's production of new meanings (always linked to new forms of satisfaction) in place of her nonsensical *jouissance*, and, ultimately, the subject's production of a new master signifier. The analytical discourse has this dislocatory effect of the uncanny on the other discourses as much as it is able to force the split subject to take a position in relation to the real, the object cause of his desire, the void around which drive circulates ($a \rightarrow \$$). This dislocation is also the experience of love: "I am not saying anything else when I say that love is the sign that one is changing discourses" (16). But, if we do not want to fall into the trap of treating love here as a relation of complementarity between the analyst and the analysand, where the analyst gives the analysand the truth about her object *a*, we need to read Lacan's statement along with the one where he claims "to love is to give what you haven't got." The analyst is not the subject supposed to know; she cannot give the analysand *jouissance*. She is not the object cause of the subject's desire; rather, she occupies the *place* of her object cause of desire. Functioning as the screen that holds the place of the lost object, the analyst incites the analysand to produce symbolizations of her symptom and interprets them, not to proliferate them infinitely, but to reduce them in order to make the nothingness of being appear: "Interpretation is directed not so much at sense as towards reducing the signifiers to their non-sense, so that we may rediscover the determinants of the subject's entire behaviour" (Dolar 1998: 22, cf. Lacan 1986: 212; translation modified). Following this insight, it becomes even more important to read the four discourses as analytical tools that cause movement in the discursive-affective structures towards making nothingness pass into meaning. Lacan says that his "is only an appeal for you to locate yourselves in relation to what one can call radical functions, in the mathematical sense of the term" (2007: 188). When he invites us to practice a radicalism of the mathemes this way, we understand from this invitation that we need to approach his four discourses not as holding the key for the knowledge of history, but rather as strategic devices to disrupt all historical knowledge towards producing new meanings for the silently operating and overbearing affects that would transform the subject's relation to the world.

Affective economies of capitalist abstraction: Anxiety, guilt, interpassivity

The severing of Lacan's four discourses from the grip of historicism enables us to deploy them towards delineating the different affective social links that operate in relation to capitalist abstraction—with the proviso that each social link is approached not as some stand alone unit that sits apart from others, but rather exists in a dialectical and dynamic relation to the rest, configuring the overdetermined historicity of capitalist abstraction. We have already established that the value of labour-power functions as the master signifier (S_1) given by the Master “to make everyone jump.” In placing the value of labour-power in the position of the agent we have intentionally diverged from the traditional reading of the Master's discourse that carries the historical baggage of the master-slave dialectic and separate the personified master (in this case, the capitalist Entrepreneur) from the master signifier (S_1). Our aim has been to further formalize the Master discourse as a possible affective and constitutive relation to capitalist abstraction, by bringing it closer to the state of forced choice. That is, one can argue that the value of labour-power and all the other commodities for which it represents the (exploited) subject implies a forced choice—similar to the one Lacan expresses, “your money or your life”—between the “freedom” to sell one's labour-power or one's life. One might locate in this forced choice the truth of Marx's sharp criticism of bourgeois freedom that the subject is “free” in the double sense of the word: not only because she is free of her feudal obligations (so that she can sell her labour-power) but also because she is free from the means of production to procure her means of subsistence, such that she is compelled to sell her labour-power.

As much as the institution of the value of labour-power attempts to do away with *jouissance* through passing off an unambiguous communication between needs and desires, between individual and social reproduction, the discourse of the Master co-exists with the discourse of University that aims at valorizing *jouissance*. University discourse qua administrative-bureaucratic-expert apparatus is another social link to capitalist abstraction which, as Žižek (2006) reminds us, can take various guises such as (socialist) state

institutions of planning, welfare state provisioning of public goods, neoliberal state's market-making devices, and so on. These apparatuses provide conditions of existence for an expanding world of lustrous commodities, or commodity-substitutes which occupy the place of the agent and address at the uncanny presence of enjoyment in order to turn it into some measurable and isolable account of what the individual needs and wants.¹³ What is the nature of this uncanny presence of enjoyment that the University discourse attempts to domesticate? It is the feeling when the subject suddenly and directly encounters her *jouissance* as the object-cause of her desire, manifesting in the paralyzing experience of anxiety. Copjec encapsulates the experience of anxiety with the concise description "riveted to being," which she explains as "[r]ather than simply and immediately being our being, coinciding with it, we are ineluctably fastened, stuck to it—or it to us" (2006: 100).¹⁴

Proceeding from Lacan's presentation of anxiety as the "central affect' around which every social arrangement is organized; every social link is approachable as a response or transformation of anxiety" (Copjec 2006: 106), one can regard the organization of the network of signifiers by the plethora of capitalist commodities as a defence formation to mediate the experience of anxiety, the encounter with the alterity of the subject's *jouissance*. The signifying processes of capitalist value-form aim at anticipating and accounting

¹³ Nonetheless, it would be conferring too much agency to capitalist abstraction to reduce this attempt to transform *a* into marketable knowledge to an effect of capitalism. This attempt, we think, has always been part of what we can perhaps designate more broadly as the modern ambition, which is connected with various other social systems, including but certainly not limited to capitalism—such as the positivist scientific approach which places knowledge within the reach of our understanding, the colonial system that involves a will to unveil, affix and regulate Other's *jouissance*, or the utilitarian endeavor that attempts to make pleasure accountable and usable (Copjec 1994). The examples can indeed be multiplied.

¹⁴ Anxiety, different from fear, is "not without an object" (Lacan 2007: 147). There are two ways to think about the double negative in the "not without an object." On the one hand, it indicates that there is something that sticks out in the process of subject's integration in the socio-symbolic order, that some object *a* that cannot be fully integrated into the world of commodities always remains, something that incites anxiety crops up reminding the subject her rivetedness. On the other hand, the double negative can be interpreted as an attempt by Lacan to indicate the fact that this object *a* is not just like any object, it is at best a quasi-object which cannot be exhausted by the substitutable world of commodities. If, in the former sense, Lacan seems to be differentiating himself from the social constructivist reduction of the subject to subject positions within the social structure (underscoring an unassimilable residual that remains), in the latter sense, Lacan seems to be marking the distance between his notion of virtual object and the part objects of Kleinian object relations theory.

for every possible mode of enjoyment by exhausting the social field with every possible choice that can be made. Even the value of labour-power, the commodity that defines capitalist exploitation, becomes something that the subject is supposed to be able to manipulate and refashion through her choices, as in the arguments of neoclassical human capital models where the subject is represented as an entrepreneur of himself, who produces her own value of labour-power, ultimately, as a means to produce her own satisfaction as a consumer (Foucault 2004: 226–7). In short, neoliberal capitalism demands that the subject “enjoys” her exploitation!

Hence, the psychoanalytical evaluation hits the mark when it points to the intensification of oppressiveness as we are increasingly called upon to perform the master, to be in control of our enjoyment. What is ironic about this intensification of oppression is that it produces what it aims to defend the subject from: the heightened feeling of anxiety experienced by the subject who is faced with an inflation of choices in the marketplace, in education, in health, in financial investments, and so on (Salecl 2011). Correcting the sociological explanation that relates the cause of anxiety to the *uncertainty* associated with the sheer abundance of choice, psychoanalytical insight instead argues that the availability of options, rather than baffling the subject regarding her true desire, puts into relief the *Real* cause of her enjoyment. The cause of anxiety in “the society of choice” is *not* not knowing how to make a choice among infinite alternatives, but the certainty of *jouissance* that becomes palpable and reins in the subject towards an inescapable choice. While anxiety is triggered neither by any random object, nor by the numerousness of objects, its precipitation is stimulated when the subject is continuously prompted to decide on the “right” enjoyment for herself. The subject’s thoroughly inalienable yet alien libidinal attachment suddenly presents itself as she encounters an object among many that uncannily resembles to her object cause of desire (Salecl 2011; Copjec 2006).

If directly encountering the *Real* cause of desire is an unbearable experience, the feeling of guilt, referring to the subject’s continuous inadequacy to herself in her attempts to make the “right choices,”

functions as a secondary formation of defence against anxiety. University discourse does not just court anxiety; as various scholars point out, it also transforms anxiety into guilt. Copjec succinctly depicts this process as the conversion of “a question of being,” (i.e., the paralyzing state of being stuck to one’s *jouissance* which raises a question for the subject) into a “problem of having—or, more precisely of having more” (Copjec 2006: 107). Does not this formulation precisely capture the Lacanian definition of biopolitics, not simply as the administration of life, but as the administration of enjoyment? The discourse of capitalist abstraction, through erecting ideals that argue for the malleability and perfectibility of the individual producer and consumer, bind us to attain goals that can never be attainable. It, thus, externalizes the inability to be at one with one’s *jouissance*. Rather than being experienced as “being stuck to an inalienable alienness,” *jouissance* is now experienced as an “inability to close the distance that separates us from something that excludes us” (Copjec 2009: 174). The contemporary problem of “having more” then does not merely refer to the capitalist interests for commodification, but rather to the paradoxical excess, the drive of guilt that pushes forth commodification. The more the subject obeys ideals, the more she is excluded from her enjoyment, and the more she tries to compensate for it through obeying. This guilt in fact can be so burdensome that it leads to a solution of *interpassivity* (Žižek 1997) where the subject delegates her enjoyment to fantasmatic others (successful entrepreneurs, financial risk-takers, celebrities of all sorts, fearless adventurers, and so on) who enjoys on her behalf, thus, releasing her to some extent not only from the anxiety of encountering her own *jouissance*, but also from the guilt of constantly facing the inadequacy of enjoyment.

Our reading of capitalist abstraction has identified an articulation of the Master’s discourse with that of the University, mobilizing affects that range from the generation of anxiety to the transformation of it into guilt, potentially operating simultaneously. Yet the discussion so far has described an affective economy which appears all too subservient to the expanded reproduction of the political economy of capitalist abstraction (i.e., the accumulation of capital). If, all discourses are marked by both impossibility and

impotence, how is it that these two discourses, representing respectively governing and educating, so successfully function, even in their failure, to reproduce capitalist accumulation? A short answer is that there is no necessity for this to be the case. But a longer answer has to be given on at least two levels, one of which relating to the complex and overdetermined articulation of discourse-affect analysis with that of class and value analysis, and the other relating to the other two discourses, that of the Hysteric and the Analyst within the rotational structure of four discourses.

In terms of the relation between the two fields, it is necessary to recognize that the complex articulations of the field of Marxian political economy are not reducible to the sale of labour-power and the realization of surplus value through the consumption of those who receive their so called “fair wage.” Consider the 2008 financial collapse and the subsequent, on-going economic crisis. The economic collapse is the outcome of an unsustainable articulation of two distinct affective economies: on the one hand, a guilt-based consumption economy which posited a superegoic injunction to enjoy, causing subjects to consume beyond their means under the idealized notion of exceptional *jouissance*; on the other hand, another guilt-based production regime which posited the Entrepreneur (who receives something for nothing) as the unquestionable exception to the exchange of equivalents, as the fantasy frame under which exploited subjects work towards uncastrated, full *jouissance*, causing the rate of surplus appropriation and exploitation (i.e., the ratio of surplus value to the cost of labour) to reach unsustainable levels (Özselçuk and Madra 2010). A nearly three-decade-long suppression of real wages, combined with an increasing pressure on boosting mass consumption, created unsustainable levels of indebtedness, both public and private, in advanced capitalist formations. The articulation of these two particular affective economies of production and consumption ended up preparing the conditions of the most devastating economic collapse capitalist network has experienced since the Great Depression.

A post-capitalist turn

Nevertheless, there is yet another reason why the affective register does not smoothly reproduce capitalist abstraction, or any regime of abstraction for that manner. The two discourses and their multiple readings do not exhaust all the possible affective economies that are available in the field. In fact, the underside of the University discourse is the Hysteric's discourse where the exploited subjects question the adequacy of the value of labour-power ($\$ \rightarrow S_1$), and claim that an injustice is being done.¹⁵ Today, it is possible to read the Occupy movements all across advanced capitalist formations in part as a performance of the Hysteric's discourse and in part as an enactment of the Analytical discourse. One of the many operations that they are undertaking is to announce the fraud at the heart of capitalist abstraction, the inconceivably unjust distribution of wealth between the top 1 percent and the overworked (higher productivity), underpaid (lower real wages), and indebted (financialization) 99 percent. They also declare that the promised world of wealth and prosperity is a fraud because the economic growth which is necessary for it has as its "externality" the destruction of Earth itself. And yet they also register that the betterment of the value of labour-power as a result of higher wages, cheaper commodities, or even wider availability of public goods and services cannot address the partitioning of the social product between what is necessary and what is surplus at a fundamental level; it can only ameliorate the imbalance between the 99 percent who either produces or helps the production of the social product the 1 percent appropriates.

¹⁵ For instance, during the Great Depression, the Roosevelt Administration moved to a more convincingly populist position only later, during the so-called "Second New Deal," as a result of increasing labour militancy demanding higher wages, better working hours, and so on (Piven 2010). Without doubt, the institutional constellation, composed of, with different configurations and balances of power, the State, the Law, the Corporation, the University, and so on, failed (and will always fail) to adequately address the truth of the exploited subject ($a//S_2$) even while producing a *battery* of public goods such as free education, health care, child care; institutional mechanisms such as wage negotiation boards, farmer subsidy and support programs, public works programs; and welfare programs such as unemployment benefits and social security.

However, the hysteric’s exposure of the fraud of satisfaction can go one of two ways. In so far as the discourse of the Hysteric calls upon a “more masterful” master signifier that would better measure up to what it promises, it continues to reinstitute economic ideals that will only produce more dissatisfaction.¹⁶ To the extent that the discourse of the Hysteric begins to shift from questioning the inadequacy of the authority of capitalist abstraction towards encircling the lack of any legitimate ground for satisfaction, for a harmonious organization of the production and distribution of economic values, it moves in a progressive direction (in the analytical sense). The object *a* begins to rotate forward from the place of the truth to the position of the agent, facing the split subject as the Analytical discourse sets about to form. This shift, this rotation describes the analytical practice of the talking cure, which begins by hystericizing the analysand, so that she starts to question—until the accumulating signifiers reach a certain critical threshold where the quantitative changes, in a manner that causes surprise in the subject, lead to a qualitative shift at the affective level. Whenever this affective shift happens, the Occupy movements will change tracks from an anti-capitalist to a post-capitalist politics.

$$\uparrow \frac{S_1 \rightarrow S_2}{\mathcal{S} // a} \downarrow \quad \uparrow \frac{\mathcal{S} \rightarrow S_1}{a // S_2} \downarrow \quad \uparrow \frac{a \rightarrow \mathcal{S}}{S_2 // S_1} \downarrow$$

These two tendencies within Occupy movements find expression in the dual meaning of the word, occupation, which Maliha Safri (2012) notes as “to take up the space and to do work.” The first meaning, as embodied in the declaration “Occupy Wall Street!” and the very *physical act of taking up the space* marks the fraud of capitalist abstraction in a bodily manner. We see this as the necessary moment of hystericization in the analytical rotation. The second meaning, which refers to *the creation of a space through doing work* marks, for us, the post-capitalist moment of the Occupy movements. Once engaged in an analytical rotation, the

¹⁶ See for instance a recent video which puts into question the present wealth inequality in US <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM>. While the video powerfully demonstrates the dismal failure of the promise of American Dream in terms of a fair distribution of wealth by showing the extremely large gap between the existing distribution and the popular ideal of what it should be, it nonetheless erects yet another ideal of what wealth distribution should be like in capitalism. For the research underlining the video, see Norton and Ariely (2011).

Occupy movements begin to create a (sublimated) public space where difficult questions about who is, what and how to produce and distribute values are debated and navigated. In practicing politics, economics and communication they adhere to a set of principles of conduct that emphasize horizontality, collaboration and equity at each turn of decision. The question of who is to produce attends not only the tensions and negotiations between the occupiers, the homeless, and the visitors but also the “intellectual difference” in the organization of the division of labour between the “political’ work of running meetings” and the “manual” work of providing for welfare infrastructures (Herring and Glück 2011; Dowling et al. 2012). The question of what to produce has generated the *in vivo* experiment of working committees (such as kitchen, library, education and empowerment, facilitation, press, comfort, technology, and janitorial) as self-organized institutions of welfare and care that address the immediate manifestations on the very ground of occupation of a wider crisis of social reproduction of capitalism (Safri 2012). And the question of how to produce has forced to negotiate the tensions pertaining to the politics of representation (e.g., between centralized versus de-centralized decision making structures) and the redistribution of abilities through job rotation and active participation.

Safri argues that in “doing work” the Occupy movements demonstrate “how society can and does organize partial production and distribution of goods and services outside market mechanisms.” We witness that this partiality is often banalized, at best, as an insignificant localized alternative; at worst, as a misguided distraction from the real struggle against the structural power of capitalist abstraction. These views suffer from, among other things, reading the Occupy movements literally—restricting them to particular representations, particular productions, and particular places. In doing so, such views misrecognize how the Occupy movements operate metaphorically, as cathected representatives of different ways of organizing the economy, instituted at the empty place of power otherwise occupied by capitalist abstraction. In fact, if it were not for the metaphoric surplus of Occupy, how else would we make sense of the appearance of so

many Occupy movements? It is this affective investment which estranges occupation from its literal coordinates and makes it move as a partial model that travels across many different scales and sites.

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