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Precarious enjoyment: Suicide *contra* schizophrenia

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PRECARIOUS ENJOYMENT: SUICIDE *CONTRA* SCHIZOPHRENIA

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction

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This Study by: Mohammed Rawwas

Entitled: Precarious Enjoyment: Suicide *Contra* Schizophrenia

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

University Honors with Distinction

Date

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Abstract

Mainstream psychology denies the unconscious, and is therefore unequipped to properly address the problematic of mental health, instead providing the coordinates for the symptom-formation of mental unwellness as a reaction to the inherent split of the subject, through the installation of the myth of the self-identical I. This same myth is perpetuated through capitalist individualism and the imperative to enjoy, and in the University through the discourse of science. The aim of psychoanalysis is to traverse the fantasy of this symptom-formation, and return the split to the subject. Finally, suicide is posited as the inevitable result of a self-identical notion of freedom as contingency, and is countered by a freedom of necessity, a freedom of the split subject.

In other words, contemporaneous mental health discourse is actively harmful to those suffering from mental health issues, as it merely confers a new set of demands: namely, to become yourself. The more this discourse “empowers” us, the more we are ultimately to blame for our own predicament. The more it tells us to focus on ourselves and fixing our own lives, the more it exacerbates our mental health issues, which presupposes this very narrative focused on the self. Instead, it is only by aiming elsewhere, by partaking in a collective project of universal emancipation, that one can indirectly resolve their mental health issues as currently configured. It is the eradication of the self as object of concern that allows the self to continue in its existence, except now as non-substantial, as a non-entity.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Happiness.....	1
Mental Health.....	4
Capitalism.....	14
The University.....	20
Liberation.....	29
Literature Cited.....	37

Happiness

What does capital want? The vicissitudes of capitalism necessitate a schizophrenic capital, and any discourse that attempts to grasp it must be able to wrangle contradiction. Marx's problematic of overproduction does this succinctly: corporations simultaneously want to reduce the wages of their workers in order to cut down on their production costs, yet corporations as a whole simultaneously rely on the return of those very worker wages in order to generate profit through the sale of their products. This leads to undervaluation, since prices of goods need to be low enough for workers to be able to purchase them with their depressed wages, and this undervaluation can only be accomplished through overproduction.¹ Because, in order to turn a profit, corporations must recapture more in workers' wages through selling their products than they give out to their workers in wages, capitalism can only function as a diachronic system, meaning that it is only through selling to workers of other companies that any individual corporation can turn a profit, meaning that for some businesses to succeed, many more must constantly fail, which is why the small business entrepreneur must remain structurally precarious. This leads to the contradiction in which any individual corporation has as its own self-interest the depressing of wages as relates to its own firm, but the increase in wages for all other firms, since wages shift from costs to potential revenue streams depending on the standpoint of the firm. Parenthetically, finance capital (money begetting money) is one of the central adaptations that capitalism has developed in order to contend with the falling rate of profit that results from overproduction and undervaluation. This is not to deny that capital does not have unified interests, or that corporations do not collaborate to bring about such phenomena as price fixing, but that they are also structurally necessitated to compete, leading to shorter lifespans for firms and resulting in precarity and unemployment. This is all to say that corporations strive for both higher and lower wages, which means that they can endorse both pro- and anti-consumerist messages, since if their workers are content with less, there will be less pressure to increase wages, and that the one-sided critique of consumerism that emerged from certain sectors of the Left in the mid-20th century does not capture the full story of capitalism in contradiction, and focuses on the realm of consumption to the detriment of an analysis of the means of production.

This dialectical interplay is neatly captured in the conversation between two texts that never directly interact, but rather (mis)communicate through their mutual reference to the central claims of British psychologist Oliver James' texts such as *Affluenza* and *The Selfish Capitalist*, in which he notes that increasing rates of mental distress are more prevalent in hypercapitalist countries that have installed a certain cultural narrative that he calls "selfish capitalism", and argues that this increased mental distress is indeed caused by the promulgation of the idea that "material affluence is the key to fulfillment."² This argument is taken up in Mark Fisher's seminal text, *Capitalist Realism*, and it certainly seems to have leftist credentials, since it is

¹ Marx, Karl. *Das Kapital, Volume III*. (p. 836)

² James, Oliver. *The Selfish Capitalist: Origins of Affluenza*. London, UK: Vermilion, 2008.

precisely the myth of the “invisible hand” of the market that advocates the pursuit of self-interest, and communism that argues that more meaning and purpose can be derived through collective action and solidarity.³ It certainly seems to be a critique of capitalism given the damage that the pursuit of the profit motive has wrought upon the Earth, and the communist belief in a more egalitarian distribution of resources. Nevertheless, in *Semiotics of Happiness*, Ashley Frawley, citing James among others, cautions against pursuing a narrative that moves too quickly. She notes that discourse on “happiness” as a crisis of capitalism as a rhetorical phenomenon often pits material concerns against an ostensibly higher concern for happiness or mental well-being, as the quote above does, and dovetails into anti-consumerist narratives.⁴ The issue is that anti-consumerist narratives quickly become pro-austerity ones, and de-emphasizing material interests and concerns also implicates working-class struggles for higher wages and better living conditions. Importantly, Frawley notes that research indicating that underdeveloped countries are indeed happier than more-developed ones negates the critique of imperialism as a process of resource extraction, if emphasis is placed exclusively on happiness as a goal beyond any material concern.⁵ And as noted above, it is in the interest of corporations to promote this anti-consumerism narrative, as they well do in many instances. In fact, Marx himself describes the ideology of capitalism as a “science of asceticism”, minimizing human needs and wants to the bare minimum in order to construct the capitalist subject as a worker.⁶ Of course, capitalism also needs to sell products, so it demands its subjects to both work and enjoy, but anti-consumerist narratives often only address one side of this equation. Frawley seeks a return to a critique of capitalism centered around material deprivation and inequality. There is a tension between critiquing the bourgeoisie for hoarding wealth and critiquing capitalism for promoting consumerism, which deflects the critique onto the proletariat, which anti-consumerist narratives often elide without notice, and which a return to the problematics of inequality, commodification, and a structural critique of capitalism as a mode of production would redress.⁷ Billionaires amassing capital is in no way equivalent to the “middle class” buying more than they need, and discourse on “selfishness” and “material affluence” in general necessarily collapses this distinction. Furthermore, anti-consumerist rhetoric that emphasizes environmental effects not only can frequently slip into a Malthusian narrative on overpopulation, but also buys into the capitalist myth that demand is what drives supply, which the above discussion on overproduction would do well to demystify. Finally, it is noted that this discourse on happiness gives rise to the Expert who will intervene in order to secure mental wellness for us, and this specific relation to knowledge is something we will interrogate further later on.⁸

³ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009. (p. 35-36)

⁴ Frawley, Ashley. *Semiotics of Happiness: Rhetorical Beginnings of a Public Problem*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015. (p. 153)

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92

⁶ Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. (p. 95)

⁷ Jameson, Fredric. *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2016. (p. 89-91)

⁸ Frawley, Ashley. *Semiotics of Happiness: Rhetorical Beginnings of a Public Problem*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015. (p. vi)

Yet it is certainly the case that capitalism does indeed worsen mental health issues, as much of this work will seek to argue. Fisher convincingly calls for a repoliticization of mental illness, arguing that its neuro- and chemico-biologization does not properly speak to its social causation.⁹ As to mapping out this causation, we will return to this question presently. The question for now is a matter of the relation between the material and mental effects of capitalism, and how we must grasp both simultaneously, in thought and in discourse. It is certainly true that the material effects of capitalism can lead to or exacerbate its mental effects, but the latter is not reducible to the former. This also brings into view the question of privileging one over the other, in terms of their structural place within capitalism. We can see this tension already in Marx's concept of alienation, in which objective conditions give rise to a subjective phenomenon. Yet this is already complicated by a fundamental alienation that transcends capitalism, just as mental health issues are not reducible to capitalism either. The following exploration seeks to answer just this question on the relation between capitalism and mental health. But before we do so, we may well ask, what are we talking about when we talk about mental health?

⁹ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009. (p. 37)

Mental Health

“Mental health” is a rather confused category. Especially in recent decades, there seems to have emerged a newfound interest in the subject, correlating to a worsening mental health epidemic both nationally and globally. Yet despite its seeming ubiquity in contemporaneous discourse, there does not seem to be a clear definition of the term. There are certainly mental health disorders, such as clinical depression, and one could provide a negative definition of mental health as the state of lacking any of these disorders. However, complications arise, as now “mental health disorder” must be defined, and this cannot merely be done by listing the disorders without explaining what connects all of them. Furthermore, reducing such a category to a list of symptoms also seems problematic, as people experience all sorts of negative emotions that would not be characterized as an issue of mental health, sometimes persistently and sometimes seemingly without external cause. An empirical approach that reduces mental unwellness to levels of certain chemicals in the brain also seems to miss an important qualitative dimension of mental health, even simply as a phenomenological occurrence. Nevertheless, “mental health” is usually defined symptomally, either negatively or positively, either as the lack of a series of conditions, or as the presence of a series of criteria. However, when mental health is defined as such, the symptom is all there is (the symptom coincides directly with mental unwellness itself), rather than the symptom being construed as a mere surface appearance that ties back to more fundamental questions. The tendency to define it positively would suggest that “mental health” cannot merely describe an absence of a certain set of mental states, but that there must be the presence of a certain set of mental states. It is not enough to not feel bad, but one in fact must feel good, to simplify. This definition is also normative, in that there must be a positive existence of “negative” (i.e., “bad”) mental conditions for someone to be deemed mentally unwell. The World Health Organization, for one, defines mental health as including “subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence, and self-actualization of one’s intellectual and emotional potential, among others.”¹⁰ This seems to hew close to the general understanding. The “among others” is especially instructive, as this open set, this inability to define “mental health”, is quite important to the following exploration. Our operation here is not to pierce through the metaphysical mystifications in order to expose the true category of mental health, but rather, apropos of Marx vis-à-vis the commodity, to uncover the metaphysical presuppositions latent within the category of mental health itself.

Regardless of how it is formulated, “mental health” in the commonplace imaginary refers to a goal, an end state, that the mentally unwell subject strives to achieve, and the mentally well subject strives to maintain. “Mental health,” colloquially understood, is in the final instance a normative claim regarding the achievement of mental wellness. Here, “mental wellness” refers to a condition of stasis. Mental unwellness, on the other hand, refers to a turbulent deviation from this stasis. The most pervasive and damaging lie of mental health discourse is the presupposition

¹⁰ “The World Health Report 2001 - Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope,” ed. Rangaswamy Srinivasa Murthy, World Health Organization, 2001, https://www.who.int/whr/2001/en/whr01_en.pdf?ua=1.

that such a state of stasis can be achieved. It is here that our understanding of mental health will diverge radically with the hegemonic conception, by way of F. W. J. Schelling's ruminations on the emergence of the universe, the emergence of the human subject, freedom, and the problematic of evil. As Schelling himself maintains,

life itself is in contradiction. Without contradiction there would be no life, no movement, no progress; a deadly slumber of all forces. Only contradiction drives us - indeed, forces us - to action. Contradiction is in fact the venom of all life, and all vital motion is nothing but the attempt to overcome this poisoning.¹¹

“Mental health”, as traditionally conceived, is an attempt to overcome contradiction, to overcome the combatting of opposing mental forces within one's own psyche. It is assumed that this internal mental struggle is what causes the conscious psychic stresses that weigh down the mentally unwell subject. A state of calm, of stasis, of self-assuredness, is considered superior to that of confusion, of a loss of stable identity, that comes about through this interplay of competing forces. However, as Schelling notes, this contradiction is inherent to the subject as such, since “life” for Schelling refers to the ontology of existence in itself, not merely the state of being alive. For now, we must posit the question of how mental health discourse must be reframed once “mental health” is no longer conceived of as a condition of stasis, and once we readily accept the reality that contradiction is inevitable. This will be our primary task ahead.

Schelling insists on the necessity of contradiction within the subject as a condition of possibility for the emergence and existence of the subject itself. This contradiction means that the subject is never equal to itself, that the subject is torn between competing notions of itself, and this necessarily entails a gap between the subject and itself. This gap is necessitated, Schelling argues, because it is the condition of possibility for freedom. The notion of freedom is central to Schelling's work, especially the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, though it appears again in *Ages of the World*. To work backwards instead of forwards, the question for Schelling is how freedom is possible. Schelling accepts the materialist claim that matter is causally determined, governed by the laws of nature and physics, as a general principle. The question, then, becomes that of how freedom can occur within a (causally determined) system, of how the causal chain can be suspended and a new one created. Schelling's answer is that freedom comes first, only to become entangled in causality, since freedom must exist outside of the temporal causal chain and therefore outside of time, and must therefore exist “prior” to time itself.¹² This necessarily leads him back to the question of the formation of the universe, with all the attending theological implications and complications. However, through this exploration, Schelling is able to draw a parallel between the emergence of God as a free subject and the emergence of the human as a, likewise, free subject. Thus, it is the gap within God Itself that is then mirrored in the gap within the human subject. We will thus

¹¹ Žižek, Slavoj, and F. W. J. von Schelling. *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997. (p. 124)

¹² Schelling, F. W. J. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006. (p. 51-52)

explore the necessity of the ontological gap between God and Its ground in order to better understand the necessity of the gap in the human subject.

As with any explanation of God's creation of the universe, Schelling encounters the same fundamental questions that plagued medieval philosophers. One of these fundamental questions relates to the question of evil: how is it that an omnipotent yet benevolent God creates evil, and allows evil to exist? Schelling's conception of God's creation of the universe is inextricably tied to tackling this question, and our reading of freedom cannot be extracted from its implication with evil as well. Schelling discounts medieval philosophers' answers to this question as unsatisfactory; for example, he denies the claim, most famously argued by St. Augustine, that evil simply has a negative existence, that it merely refers to the absence of good, since this in no way resolves the question, since God would still be responsible for this absence of good.¹³ Schelling's response to this problematic is to introduce the gap within God between God and Its own condition of possibility (Its ground), which is that which is in God and yet not God. Thus, evil does not derive from God Itself, but rather from Its ground.¹⁴ The gap inherent to God is thus necessary to explain the emergence of evil, since evil is inherent to God's ground, which is the disturbing element within God that leads to the ontological gap within God. Nevertheless, this may not seem like a perfectly satisfactory answer, since if God is omnipotent, it would seem as though God would be capable of stopping evil from existing altogether. It does not seem reasonable to remove the responsibility of the existence of evil from God merely because God is not the source and originator of evil Itself.

This point in Schelling's exploration is where his notion of necessity overlapping with freedom becomes crucial for his argument. It is only through a freedom that coincides with necessity that God can maintain Its status as omnipotent while not being able to stop the emergence of evil. Now, it will be noted that the position of freedom overlapping with necessity was already formulated by Baruch Spinoza, but it is one that Schelling carries forward here. Essentially, Schelling argues that there must be a ground that exists that is separate from God but within God, and that evil must exist. As he puts it, "the will of love cannot withstand the will of the ground, nor abolish it because it would then have to oppose itself. For the ground must be active so that love may exist, and it must be active independently of love so that love may really exist."¹⁵ Here, "love" refers to God as spirit as the eternal bond of light and darkness, not as a stable "synthesis" but as the antagonism between the opposing principles as such. Thus, here spirit (and therefore God) merely refers to contradiction itself. God cannot exist without Its ground, and this ground is the condition of possibility of evil, meaning that evil is implied in the ground itself. However, Schelling does not question the status of God as a free subject. For Schelling, the fact that there exists necessary conditions for the emergence of the universe in no way contradicts the idea that God has freedom. As Schelling puts it,

¹³ Ibid., p. 36

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 42

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 42

because God brought order to the disorderly offspring of chaos and proclaimed his eternal unity into nature, he opposed darkness... The will to creation was therefore immediately only a will to give birth to the light and the good along with it... the self-revelation in God would have to be considered... a morally necessary, act in which love and goodness overcome absolute inwardness. Thus if God had not revealed himself for the sake of evil, evil would have triumphed over the good and love... in order that there be no evil, there would have to be no God himself.¹⁶

Yet, as Schelling maintains, “Plainly free or conscious will is, however, the will of love, precisely because it is what it is: the revelation that results from it is action and act.”¹⁷ It is important that Schelling states that God’s act of self-revelation is both free and morally necessary, and we will return to this presently.

We will relate this concept of the ground in God back to our discussion on mental health. As we have already stated, Schelling draws a parallel between God’s emergence and the subject’s, meaning that humans also have a ground, a condition of possibility, and as we will later see, it is evil that allows the subject to emerge. However, how might we contrast that to what mental health discourse would conceive of as the mentally well subject’s ground? Simply from a cursory glance at the prevailing rhetoric on this topic, we might imagine that the condition of possibility for a mentally well subject, as mainstream psychology would have it, would include a certain balance of chemicals in the brain, a stable environment that is free of risk, surprise, or challenge, etc. Yet what is immediately striking is that this picture seems too homologous to the opposite of mental wellbeing, to the empty wasteland of depression that is devoid of meaning and where nothing ever happens. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how the chemico-biologization of the category of mental health through neuroscientific prescriptions does not lead back to a fundamental unfreedom, if our brain chemicals are being manipulated in such a way as to reduce our symptoms or produce happiness. For Schelling, it is only evil that allows us to be free, that is the condition of possibility of freedom - or, that unhappiness or contradiction is a necessary precondition to pleasure.

Another reason that God must have an internal gap, and that evil must exist, is so that humans can be free. Schelling explicitly draws a parallel between the emergence of God as a free subject and the emergence of humans as free subjects. Our act of self-positing comes by way of speech, which gathers our essence, but only outside of ourselves.¹⁸ The subject’s ground, their condition of possibility, is through speech, just as evil is necessary for God’s free act of self-positing. But this self-positing is a structural identity between the Word’s determination and the subject’s particular position to it. The same gap that is present in God through the Word must also exist in all humans: we are all internally split between opposing forces of good and evil, or the binary opposition between the constitutive alienation of language *qua* the Word / signifier

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 65-66

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 59

¹⁸ Žižek, Slavoj, and F. W. J. von Schelling. *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997. (p. 139)

and our conscious relation to it. As such, there can be no non-contradictory being-in-itself, since being as such - even God Itself - cannot exist in the absence of the source of contradiction itself, the Word. So what does Schelling mean when he says that one gathers one's essence outside of oneself? Taking account of what we have just stated, we can only conclude that the subject's essence is just what the Word determines them to be, in its contradictory imposition: the split in the subject between the structural and constitutive determination, as well as the conscious and fantasmatic relation to the structure of the Word. The depressive feels as if they have lost something, a substantial enjoyment long since forgotten, and yet this enjoyment had to be rotten from the beginning for it to have been spoiled. To follow Schelling's imperative requires the depressive to grasp the essentially fleeting nature of enjoyment, and to insist on the effacement of the source of their constitutive alienation *qua* the Word. If the Word determines the subject, then what is the Word today? Under capitalist hegemony, the Word is the profit motive, the insatiable desire for infinite growth.

This Word is not neutral or contingent, but is rather necessarily determined historically in relation to the subject, as the subject always comes into the determined Word. Thus, we have only ever lived in capitalism (capitalism has always been necessary for us), and our subjectivity is therefore necessarily inextricable with capitalism. The depressive relation, in its discontent with the present yet its inability to posit a future, presupposes a pre-capitalism that has been lost, a time outside of necessity, and mourns this (imaginary) loss. Yet the depressive remains chained to the signifier so long as they maintain this repression of the alienation inherent to the Word. However, as with God, freedom and necessity overlap for humans as well. For Schelling, we unconsciously and freely posit ourselves and our character. Schelling comes to this understanding by way of a question: how is it that we find people with certain propensities for evil, that we cannot say have freedom (say, a pathological liar, or a serial killer), yet we hold them responsible for their actions, and simultaneously claim that they have the capacity to deliberate their actions?¹⁹ Schelling's answer is that all humans posit themselves, their own disposition, in a free act that is nevertheless unconscious, and occurs outside of time, so that they never actually experience this decision that they freely make.²⁰ This ties into Schelling's earlier claim that acts of freedom must occur in eternity, since the causal chain occurs in temporality. It also parallels God's self-positing, since this also occurs outside of time, creating the very division between past and present that founds time.

Both the conception of the gap inherent to the human subject and the question of necessity are intimately connected to the notion of freedom. In his essay on Schelling, Slavoj Žižek makes clear the notion that a self-identical "I" cannot be free:

True freedom means not only that I am not fully determined by my surroundings but also that I am not fully determined by *myself* (by my own notion, by what I am, by my

¹⁹ Schelling, F. W. J. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006. (p. 52)

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51-52

positive features): a person relates freely both to her existence and to her notion - that is to say, she is not fully determined by them but can transcend them.²¹

Thus, contradiction is at the heart of the human subject, and is in fact a necessary condition for freedom. This is why the current discourse surrounding mental health, which denigrates having conflicting thoughts as confusion, and exalts “finding” or “discovering” oneself, or “self-actualizing”, is so damaging, because it demands that people become their individuated immediate relation to the Word, that people equate themselves to just this fantasmatic relation. It is especially dangerous to demand that people who are already in a vulnerable circumstance do something that is literally impossible, since to do so would be to erase freedom itself. Their inability to conform to this impossible demand will likely be seen by them as a failure on their part, causing greater damage. Yet, they are unable to break out of this cycle, since enjoyment always revolves around an impossibility, and this impossible task allows them to remain chasing it forever. This is why an accurate account of the human subject is so crucial when discussing the issue of mental health. But this is a topic to which we will return.

Finally, we must examine the notion of necessity overlapping with freedom more closely. We have already encountered this in relation to both God and humans, and Schelling has already hinted that this relates to an ethical dimension as well. Nevertheless, we will explore more closely what Schelling has to say on the matter. As Schelling argues,

For the common concept of freedom, according to which freedom is posited as a wholly undetermined capacity to will one or the other of two contradictory opposites, without determining reasons but simply because it is willed... when applied to individual actions, it leads to the greatest inconsistencies. To be able to decide for A or -A without any compelling reasons would be, to tell the truth, only a prerogative to act entirely irrationally...²²

This may best be termed the antinomy of metaphysical free will. Free will is often contrasted with determinism, for we are certainly not free if we are mechanistically determined to act in a way that has been predestined and to which we can exercise no control. However, determinism often becomes conflated with necessity, and contingency is often posited as the opposite of determinism, such that contingency becomes conflated as a condition necessary for the existence of free will. Yet, as Schelling has just argued, pure contingency is not freedom at all, since if there are no reasons governing someone’s actions, and they are just as likely to commit an action as they are to commit its opposite, then it certainly seems as though they do not have any control over their actions whatsoever, and are therefore “willing” nothing. We would like to believe that we have the ability, that we are free, to respond to external stimuli, which means that we must be determined by our surroundings to some extent. Thus, if contingency is not freedom, then necessity is not necessarily mutually exclusive or incompatible with freedom. In fact, as

²¹ Žižek, Slavoj. *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*. London, UK: Verso Books, 1996. (p. 71)

²² Schelling, F. W. J. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006. (p. 48)

Schelling maintains, “free is what acts only in accord with the laws of its own being and is determined by nothing else either in or outside itself... inner necessity is itself freedom.”²³

In order to develop this thesis more fully, and especially its connection to the ethical dimension hinted at by Schelling, we will examine a quote by Malcolm X that perfectly exemplifies this proposition. As he states, “I’m a man who believes that I died 20 years ago. And I live like a man who is dead already. I have no fear whatsoever of anybody or anything.” Malcolm X gave this quote shortly before his assassination. The salient point here is that, while Malcolm X was hurtling towards his own death, which is a perfect example of necessity, of an outcome or event that is completely unavoidable, he was nevertheless free to act only when he recognized this inevitability and assumed it fully. In this sense, he decided to die: even though he knew his actions would lead to his own death, he decided to pursue them anyway because he knew that it was the right thing to do, and that he couldn’t bear to do otherwise; in this sense, he freely decided. This does not mean that he could have acted otherwise, but that true freedom comes from directly taking up your own necessity, your own destiny. And it is in this sense that Malcolm X is a truly ethical actor. In this sense, to be ethical is to identify with one’s alienation, with the necessary position that one maintains within the Word’s domain, and to recognize one’s own symbolic death is to gather one’s essence. The depressive attempts to avoid death, and opts instead for the domain of imaginary pleasure.

What Schelling makes clear is that what is considered mental unwellness does not in fact refer to anything else except properties that are constitutive of the subject as such. Thus, the issue is not in the presence of these factors themselves, but in the way that the subject relates to them. The solution is not to resolve the contradictions within our psyche, but rather to relate differently to these contradictions, which starts out by acknowledging their inevitability and fully assuming our contradictory nature. For Schelling, both good and evil must exist, and while it may be uncomfortable to come to terms with one’s own capacity for evil, it is only because we have the capacity for evil that we can freely decide to do good. Otherwise, there would be no virtue in acting ethically. The existence of and capacity for evil is a necessary precondition for freedom, and per our discussion above, the gap or contradiction within the subject is another name for this capacity for freedom. Thus, the notion of “mental health” is inextricably tied to the concept of freedom, in that freedom opens up a fundamental anxiety due to the tension between good and evil, since we are terrified of both. In fact, one may say that, to the extent that mental unwellness is defined by a lack of “self-actualization” and other such definitions, that mental unwellness ultimately reduces to a potential outcome that occurs due to a fundamental rejection or unacknowledgement of one’s own freedom, of one’s own contradiction. Schelling is right to name contradiction the “venom of all life”, which ultimately means that all subjects are mentally unwell, while clinical categorizations of illness are symptoms of the social structure. However, by positing contradiction itself as the problem, mental health discourse only serves to exacerbate these issues, since contradiction is impossible to overcome. Perhaps our most important contribution here is the recasting of mental health as a properly ontological category, as a

²³ Ibid., p. 50

reference to that anxiety towards our own freedom, our own capacity for both good and evil, that we as subjects must feel. Thus, while what is termed mental unwellness is related to this ontological reality, this only realizes itself as depression and suicidality once we have turned away from our own freedom, which can only occur if we no longer conceive of ourselves as free. This occurs only when we accept capitalism as the only possible horizon of our reality. Therefore, our bid for freedom can only become misconstrued as the individualist concept of a free will, and can only apply to individual actions severed from any collective, such as taking our own life as a desperate bid to exert control, to prove that one can enact consequences onto the world through a free act of willing. Yet, as our discussion on the overlapping of necessity and freedom presaged, the true solution will come from fully accepting one's own freedom, which means one's own contradiction and capacity for evil, but also one's necessity, and to decide to act ethically. However, it must be made clear here that the failure is not on the part of the subject, since one may well ask to what end are we supposed to act? The issue is not reducible to a failure on the part of individuals, but rather a structural failure that has led to the destruction of our capacity to conceive of a future, or in the terms of philosophical doxa, the Good, which has led to an exacerbation of the mental health epidemic in recent years, including increasing rates of suicide.

The Centers for Disease Control reports an increase in the suicide rate in the United States from 10.5 per 100,000 to 14.2 per 100,000 from 1999 to 2018, an increase of 35%.²⁴ Our investigation thus far has pointed to the failure of mental health discourse to satisfactorily address the issue. Per our discussion above, suicidality may be conceived of as arising through the failure of the subject to achieve the stasis of mental health championed by our current discourse. Mental unwellness as uncomfotability with freedom may recast suicidality as a retreat from freedom and a consignment to necessity, rather than conceiving of necessity as liberatory. However, these insights do not explain why suicide rates are increasing, and this can only be understood by analyzing changes on a structural level; in other words, through examinations of the mode of production. As Fredric Jameson has succinctly pointed out (“it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism”), late capitalism has eradicated any sense of a future, exemplified most starkly in the climate and ecological crisis. As Mikkel Krause Frantzen has theorized, “depression is a chronopathology, characterized by the loss of (the ability to imagine) the future.”²⁵ We would complement this quote by clarifying that this future must be fundamentally different from our present state of things, not merely an extension of it. Suicide is not the final retreat of the depressive, but rather the willing of something to happen, the act that symbolizes that one still has control over their destiny. Ultimately, this is the result of a conception of freedom as a free will, in which one can freely decide to overcome the necessity of the unchanging circumstances of one's life by willing themselves out of it (through

²⁴ Hedegaard, Holly, Sally C. Curtin and Margaret Warner. “Increase in Suicide Mortality in the United States, 1999–2018,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 8, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db362.htm>

²⁵ Frantzen, Mikkel K. *Going Nowhere, Slow: The Aesthetics and Politics of Depression*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2019. (p. 7)

death). As our prior exploration has shown, this notion of freedom fundamentally misrecognizes the free act, which overlaps with necessity rather than (an attempt at) overcoming it. Furthermore, there is no reason that we cannot say that an act of suicide was historically, causally determined, since we can always point to the stark life conditions that led someone to the act. Freedom, rather, lies elsewhere, but the free act requires a belief in something that the act strives for, and therefore requires a resuscitation of Utopia, a concept to which we will return.

For now, let us summarize where we find ourselves at this point in our exploration. Schelling has provided us with a framework through which to analyze the contradiction of the subject. Hegel will take up this insistence on contradiction as an ontological category, and Freud will codify contradiction within the subject through the development of his theory of the unconscious. Lacan will clarify that it is precisely language (and therefore intersubjectivity) that castrates the subject, already pre-saged in Schelling. Ultimately, we have posited that mental health discourse not only is incapable of dealing with mental unwellness, but in fact exacerbates the issue, as it is founded on rejecting contradiction within the subject, which means rejecting both evil and freedom. Thus, subjects can only relate negatively to their own evil, which they have been incorrectly led to believe they must purge, and pursue an ideal of freedom that is built on free exercise of individual will rather than one grounded in necessity, leading to suicidal ideation rather than participation in collective projects of emancipation. Finally, mental health discourse instructs its mentally unwell patients to strive towards a noncontradictory stasis, which only extends mental unwellness through this endless striving that will never arrive at its destination. In other words, what mental health discourse installs is the myth of the self-identical I, which is just to say that mainstream psychology denies the unconscious. Jacques Lacan tackles the myth of the self-identical I through his exploration of the Mirror Stage, discussing how the mirror (or other people) is what constructs the image of the total, self-identical I for the human child.²⁶ We will only note that in the era of the front-facing camera-equipped smartphone, this device literally functions as a mirror, constantly reinforcing the image (myth) of the self-identical I.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, then, we can say that mental unwellness is not the split of the subject (their failure to “self-actualize”), but rather a symptom or reaction-formation to the contradictions inherent to both the subject and to capitalism, through which the subject enjoys. As Zupančič clarifies,

What is a symptom that one “brings” to analysis? It is always a subjective solution to some contradiction or impasse. And it is a solution that usually makes one’s life very complicated; it comes with some degree of suffering. Yet it is a solution, and it involves serious subjective investment. The work of analysis consists in forcing out the contradiction “solved” by the symptom, in relating the symptom to the singular contradiction of which it is a solution. Psychoanalysis does not solve the contradiction; rather, it solves its solution (given by the symptom). It bores a hole where the symptom

²⁶ Lacan, Jacques. “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.”

has built a dense net of significations. And the subject needs to “reconstruct” herself as part of this contradiction, as directly implied in it.²⁷

It is our claim that mental health discourse can lead people towards this particular symptom-formation, as outlined above, which is to say that mainstream psychology’s “solution” to mental unwellness is in fact the very symptom of mental unwellness itself. To be more specific, this symptom is brought about by the demands made to the subject, both by capitalism and by mental health discourse. In the case of depression, the demand to be self-identical and the demand to enjoy coagulates as the demand to enjoy by failing to be self-identical, yet simultaneously (un/consciously) misconstruing oneself as self-identical. Suicide, then, is the final attempt to become self-identical, to gather one’s essence within Oneself (rather than externally, through the Word) through an act of freedom, which is misconstrued as sheer contingency, or not-A (the irrationality of negating oneself). Important to note is that for someone to remain mentally unwell, they must enjoy their mental unwellness, and doing so relies on the myth of the self-identical I or the centered ego, since struggling with mental illness is ultimately a narrative about oneself. This works structurally in much the same way that imaginary enjoyment does, and in both cases the subject imagines others perceiving them, constructing an image of themselves not dissimilar to that which the mirror creates. The split in the subject only leads to mental unwellness from the standpoint of the self-identical I as one’s goal. Without the myth of the self-identical I, one can no longer aim at it, or enjoy through attempting to gain it. The psychoanalytic solution, then, is to reorient the subject in relation to their inherent split or contradiction in a way that does not lead to symptom-formation in the way that mental health discourse does. This is not to say that the contradictions of capitalism do not cause suffering in and of themselves, or that there will be no mental health issues in a post-capitalist society, but merely that the way in which mental unwellness is experienced under capitalism cannot exist under a different system. These very contradictions of capitalism are what we turn to next.

²⁷ Zupančič, Alenka. *What IS Sex?* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017. (p. 66)

Capitalism

I. Ideology Critique

On April 20, 1999, two students at Columbine High School carried out what was, at the time, the deadliest school shooting in US history. While mass shootings in general have continued to become ever-present in the national consciousness in the years since, the school remains a privileged location for these shootings to occur. For Todd McGowan, Columbine represents just another instance of the increasing aggressivity and violence of our present-day society, itself a symptom of the emergence of the Society of Enjoyment, which marks a transition from the previous Society of Prohibition. “Whereas formerly society has required subjects to renounce their private enjoyment in the name of social duty, today the only duty seems to consist in enjoying oneself as much as possible.”²⁸ This is not to say that there was no enjoyment in the Society of Prohibition, as enjoyment is always operative, and must be so for the society to function. Rather, the Society of Prohibition characterizes a different relation to enjoyment than that in the Society of Enjoyment. While renouncing private enjoyment in the Society of Prohibition, there is still a symbolic enjoyment in adhering to a duty, being part of a collective, that the Society of Prohibition engenders in the subject. Here, Symbolic refers to the Lacanian realm in opposition to the Real and the Imaginary, the realm in which the subject can constitute their self-identity as existing within a symbolic framework. In other words, in the Society of Prohibition, the subject enjoys their castration (by the family, the state, religion, etc.), where castration refers to the renouncement or denial of total satisfaction. Castration simply makes manifest lack - the fact that we are non-all.

In contrast to the Society of Prohibition, modern society does not ask directly for sacrifice, but rather imposes the injunction to fully enjoy. McGowan states that “what the society of enjoyment thus makes manifest is the impossibility of any direct experience of enjoyment... what we enjoy is the barrier itself.”²⁹ Thus, the imperative to enjoy does not provide the promised end of dissatisfaction – which would amount to the overcoming of castration, lack, and prohibition – and this very promise itself, of a direct, full access to enjoyment, actually engenders greater dissatisfaction as this quest for frictionless enjoyment necessarily fails, and subjects fail to fulfill their duty to enjoy. Yet, because enjoyment must still remain operative, we still enjoy in this very failure to enjoy. It is the failure to enjoy that allows us to continue (attempting) to enjoy, yet this does not mean that we do not remain dissatisfied. What makes matters worse is that, with the decline of the Symbolic that characterizes the Society of Prohibition and the turn to the Imaginary (through *images*), subjects perceive Others as stealing their enjoyment when they see them enjoying in their stead. Social media is perhaps the best exemplification of this phenomenon: when people see (imaginary) images of other people

²⁸ McGowan, Todd. *The End of Dissatisfaction? Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004. (p. 2)

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7

enjoying, they assume that they are somehow enjoying fully, while knowing that they themselves are dissatisfied and incapable of this full enjoyment. McGowan ties this phenomenon directly to the Columbine shooting, noting that interpreting the shooting as either a pseudo-revolutionary act or a neo-fascist one necessarily misses the whole picture, as the shooters specifically targeted *both* popular students *and* racial minorities. “What both popular and minority students seem to share, at least in the eyes of white outsiders... is a privileged relationship to enjoyment.”³⁰ Despite the fact that popular students are just as, if not more, insecure than any other student, they appear as if they know what they are doing - they appear as uncastrated - and thus appear to have direct access to enjoyment, and present themselves as enjoying subjects. Furthermore, McGowan notes how the prevailing white (male) fantasy casts the African American male as having an unmediated access to sexual enjoyment, allowing the white person (man) to think they are not subject to this sexuality, while still being able to enjoy it through the fantasy.³¹ Thus, McGowan reads Columbine not as a defiance of authority but an attempt to obey it: to obey the imperative to enjoy.

McGowan’s Society of Enjoyment is an injunction to enjoy fully, and Jodi Dean highlights the importance of individualism in this process of enjoying: we are told that the way to enjoy is by “being ourselves”.³² McGowan explicates how this individualism is supposed to provide us with enjoyment: we provide satisfaction to ourselves by imagining Others seeing (the image of) us enjoying - this is imaginary enjoyment. Of course, because we can never fully enjoy, this imperative to enjoy fully ends up causing dissatisfaction, but what McGowan does not explicate is how the Society of Enjoyment continues to function despite widespread dissatisfaction - why people fail to act in response to their ills. This is found in the *jouissance* of the death drive, the strive to repeat, which exemplifies how dissatisfaction can reproduce itself, how seeking satisfaction can become a project of its own. Despite prevailing dissatisfaction, we end up enjoying our very dissatisfaction (the enjoyment in pain that is *jouissance*). Ultimately, our enjoyment comes from the failure of the Other to fully recognize us in our enjoyment, since this failure is the only thing that allows enjoyment to continue (the imaginary enjoyment of symbolic enjoyment). People do not return to social media because they enjoy it; rather, it is the fact that they do not enjoy it (along with the belief that somehow it can provide enjoyment - that the Other will fully recognize them if they keep trying - despite having failed to do so yet) that keeps people returning to it, and it is this lack of enjoyment that they enjoy.

Perhaps exemplary here is the recent trend of the aestheticization of suicide and depression, with the emergence of the “emo rap” genre and the increasing casual references to mental unwellness constantly trotted out on social media, or even students constantly referencing their unbearable workload and lack of sleep. Despite an ever-worsening mental health epidemic, in the US as in other countries, our turn to the image society means we are left with nothing to do except to display our own lack of mental well-being. Isn’t the old adage of how we need to

³⁰ Ibid., p. 188

³¹ Ibid., p. 171

³² Dean, Jodi. *Crowds and Party*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2016. (p. 74)

destigmatize talking about mental health already anachronistic (to borrow a term from the post-ideologues), since talking about our own mental health seems to be all that we can do (speaking especially of the Generation Z cohort)? Yet, it is not simply a matter of displaying our unwellness that provides us with enjoyment, but the fact that we are failing to fulfill our symbolic mandate to enjoy which allows us to continue striving towards our duty. However, to return to Dean, we can only enjoy our own mental unwellness to the extent that it is individual, to the extent that we see it as an expression of what we are uniquely (individually) going through, not a collective problem that we can collectively overcome. To summarize, the process of individuation provides the subject with imaginary enjoyment (imagining Others perceiving your enjoyment), with its attendant symbolic enjoyment (of failing in your symbolic duty, and the *jouissance* of enjoying your failure to enjoy), as well as the imaginary enjoyment of symbolic enjoyment (imagining Others perceiving your enjoyment of your non-enjoyment).

II. Political Economy

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari begin their 1972 collaboration, *Anti-Oedipus*, with the observation that, in capitalism, “a schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch.”³³ This characterizes their break with psychoanalysis, and the beginning of their explication of “schizoanalysis” as a theoretical alternative, as they characterize the phenomenological experience of late capitalist subjectivity as more in line with that of a schizophrenic than with a hysteric or a neurotic, which is the typical patient in a psychoanalytic setting. Setting their claims about psychoanalysis aside for a moment, we will take as our point of departure the simple observation that the schizophrenic does indeed provide a phenomenological model for late capitalist subjectivity. For example, returning to Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism*, in a remark on post-Fordist work structures, he notes that,

time ceases to be linear, becomes chaotic, broken down into punctiform divisions... to function effectively as a component of just-in-time production you must develop a capacity to respond to unforeseen events, you must learn to live in conditions of total instability, or ‘precarity’, as the ugly neologism has it. Periods of work alternate with periods of unemployment. Typically, you find yourself employed in a series of short-term jobs, unable to plan for the future.³⁴

What Fisher notes about the breakdown of temporality in the new configuration of post-Fordist workplaces also applies to the university, an institution we will explore in more detail later. For example, Eli Meyerhoff cites an essay by Amanda Armstrong and Paul Nadal, two student activists at UC Berkeley, that notes that “debt alienates us from the temporal substance of our lives. It becomes the privation of our present and future being.”³⁵

³³ Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983. (p. 2)

³⁴ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009. (p. 34)

³⁵ Meyerhoff, Eli. *Beyond Education: Radical Studying for Another World*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. (p. 35)

This observation of the breakdown of the temporal dimension in late capitalism is joined by a breakdown of the spatial, or perhaps a folding in on itself, what Fredric Jameson terms postmodern hyperspace - has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world... the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.³⁶

This inability to form coherent narratives is central to the schizophrenic subjectivity that Deleuze and Guattari outline. Finally, with institutions in crisis and the competing and even contradictory injunctions of capital, this can only intensify this sense of incoherence.

Furthermore, since in capitalism we have replaced any feeling of a collective will with a multiplicity of particularities (person as family member, as student, as church-goer, as citizen, etc.) without any overarching value system or goal (beyond the individual aspiration to profit and the value that greed is good), the subject's self-identity is necessarily caught between these conflicting symbolic mandates. The only collectivity offered appears in degraded forms such as patriotism, which is itself founded on exclusion and particularity, rather than a truly universal collectivity that would be embodied in a (socialist) internationalism. We may also note that the decline of ideology, and the prevailing cynicism that follows, fulfills much the same function. McGowan describes the decline of the symbolic order characteristic of the Society of Enjoyment as leading to this prevailing sense of cynicism. Without a framework to evaluate our own existence, and without a purpose to strive for in life, it is no wonder that the mental health crisis is worsening, and this is what Deleuze and Guattari attempt to capture with their theoretical musings on schizophrenic subjectivity.

This loss of (symbolic) identity and this inability to form coherent narratives (about our own lives, about history, about society), coupled with the imperative to enjoy, causes late capitalist subjects to simply pursue pleasure as the only mechanism for attempting to cope with this lack of (symbolic) meaning. Fisher calls this state "depressive hedonia",³⁷ a paradoxical term meant to contrast with the more generally accepted "depressive anhedonia". This is ultimately meant to illustrate the same point as McGowan, that the pursuit of (full, direct, unmediated) pleasure leads to displeasure as this pursuit always necessarily fails, but following on our earlier conversations on *jouissance*, we deem to invert the formula, so that instead of a displeasure from seeking pleasure, it is ultimately an enjoyment of that displeasure (from seeking pleasure). It is this extra layer of reflexivity, this degree of removal, that allows the system to function. In either case, opposites coincide, which only serves to intensify this schizophrenic feeling.

There is yet another dimension to the loss of the temporal that more directly ties into depression. Mikkel Krause Frantzen picks up on a few key concepts from Fisher, namely the

³⁶ Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991. (p. 44)

³⁷ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009. (p. 21)

connection between Fisher's notion of "capitalist realism" and its link to depression. Beyond the fragmenting or splintering of time expounded by Fisher earlier in his explication of post-Fordist work configurations, Frantzen notes that the concept of capitalist realism involves the loss of futurity itself, which Fisher already presages. We have previously noted Frantzen's linking of this neoliberal phenomenon to the concept of depression itself.³⁸ As Armstrong and Nadal pointed out above, the function of debt produces this same result of depriving us of our future, meaning that this general loss of futurity that marks late capitalism, from impending climate doom to Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis that precludes any alternative to capitalism, and that Frantzen defines depression as, is even more acute in the university and for indebted subjects.

However, depression is not the only symptom paradigmatic of late capitalism (finding its apogee in the university). In *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han describes burnout as the paradigmatic mental condition of the day, a result of the auto-exploitation of today's capitalism: "depression, burnout, and ADHD... indicate an excess of positivity, that is, not negation so much as the inability to say no."³⁹ As Han puts it, "burnout represents the pathological consequence of voluntary self-exploitation... the imperative of expansion, transformation, and self-reinvention."⁴⁰ Han characterizes this paradigm as the "achievement society", in which people turn themselves into projects to constantly imbue with more and more skills. This is one way in which capitalist (neoliberal) subjects can react to the injunction to enjoy, by enjoying through achievement. Finally, Han notes that "the achievement-subject exploits itself until it burns out. In the process, it develops auto-aggression that often enough escalates into the violence of self-destruction,"⁴¹ which heavily mirrors what McGowan says about aggressivity and violence as symptoms of the dissatisfaction present in the Society of Enjoyment, and what we have said above regarding the educational institution as the privileged site of mass shootings. Ultimately, mass shootings are an expression of self-destruction, as they usually result in the shooter's suicide, if not suicide by cop. And as such, mass shootings are indeed symptomatic of wider suicidality. Ultimately, what McGowan says about the dissatisfaction prevalent in the Society of Enjoyment is true, but perhaps recast in terms that refer more explicitly to mental health, which he does not emphasize, can help us shed light on the origins of the worsening mental health epidemic.

III. Summary

To answer the question of the relation between capitalism and mental health, we have properly identified four causal explanations. The cult of individuality installed by capitalism perpetuates the myth of the self-identical I (as mental health discourse does), and this is the impossible task that leads to depression or suicide, either by causing the enjoyment of striving

³⁸ Frantzen, Mikkel K. *Going Nowhere, Slow: The Aesthetics and Politics of Depression*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2019. (p. 7)

³⁹ Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burnout Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015. (p. 41)

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47

towards it, or leading to death in attempting to accomplish it. Furthermore, the society of enjoyment and its attendant imperative to full enjoyment is nothing other than this very call to become self-identical, as a castrated subject is necessarily one that cannot enjoy fully, and imaginary enjoyment (of symbolic enjoyment) also requires a self-identical I, in which the Other functions as the mirror which provides the stability of the self-image. However, while simultaneously championing stability for the individual and the self-identical I, the crises and precarity inherent to capitalism lead to the breakdown of both time and one's ability to form a cognitive mapping, leading to a schizophrenic (phenomenological) subjectivity. Finally, capitalist realism leads to a loss of the future, and with that the loss of a self-identical notion of freedom, which can be summarized as being the hero of your own story, which in no way relates to actual freedom, the freedom of necessity. The latter two "objective" factors cut against the former two "subjective" ones, and this may be termed as the contradiction of capitalism. This does not mean that without the specific narratives of capitalism, its material dynamics would no longer be troublesome, since crises, precarity, and the loss of the future are intrinsically harmful; all we are claiming is that these problems are accentuated by capitalism demanding of its subjects the opposite.

The University

I. Political Economy

The university has been almost completely integrated into the neoliberal circuit. Many analyses on the role of the university in the reproduction of capitalism today can fall into one of two main categories, that will be termed here as: ‘Student as Consumer’ and ‘Student as Producer’.

The ‘Student as Consumer’ analysis tends to focus on the commodification of higher education, noting that rather than perceiving education as a fundamental human right – which would fit the ethos of the Modern period – higher education is often marketed as a product for potential consumer-students, with universities serving as corporations whose sole imperative is to profit, far removed from any notion of kindling curiosity and creativity in their students. This is certainly tied to empirical trends in policy, from the decrease in public funding for public universities and the subsequent increases in tuition, which fundamentally shifts higher education from a public service to a product with a price - tuition. The increasing commodification of higher education is perhaps best exemplified by the “corrosive branding of... universities... endless, witless mission statements, websites overrun with ‘badges, stickers and logos’... promising to ‘enhance’ the ‘student experience’.”⁴² This recasting of education as the “university experience” resonates with what McGowan says about late capitalist society and its injunction to enjoy, in that the commodification of higher education also recasts education as a product that one enjoys, an experience that will provide satisfaction. In Freudian terms, the university and late-capitalist society in general operates with the assumption that the pleasure principle can be overcome, negated, which would bring about the end of the pleasure principle altogether, and along with it, pleasure as such.

The ‘Student as Producer’ critique has a different starting point, emphasizing the university’s ties to the larger corporate world. In essence, this critique posits that the university exists to imbue students with skills to make them productive workers when shuttled into the corporate world, cutting down on training costs for corporations (by offsetting those costs onto the workers themselves) and creating “humans as functioning economic units.”⁴³ As Melinda Cooper notes, “it was [Theodore] Schultz who first popularized the idea that spending on human services such as education should be considered an investment rather than an act of consumption - and therefore that education itself should be considered a form of capital or interest-bearing asset.”⁴⁴

⁴² Roberts, Ron. *Capitalism on Campus: Sex Work, Academic Freedom, and the Market*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2018. (p. 10)

⁴³ Bakhshov, Nadim. *Against Capitalist Education: What Is Education For?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2015. (p. 4)

⁴⁴ Cooper, Melinda. *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*. Brooklyn, NY: MIT Press / Zone Books, 2017. (p. 219)

Cooper immediately spells out the tension between these two interpretations: the rise of the ‘Student as Producer’ is intimately tied to notions of “human capital”, in which education itself becomes an investment in order to increase this capital, not simply a commodity to be consumed. And clearly, the idea of gaining skills in order to enter the workforce does not seem to operate by way of the instant gratification of seeking satisfaction, as it does require work and effort on the part of the student. Perhaps it would be useful here to re-interject the notion of “auto-exploitation” or “self-exploitation” in the “achievement society” as articulated in Han’s *The Burnout Society*, as cited above: “the late-modern achievement-subject... positivizes itself; indeed, it liberates itself into a project.”⁴⁵ So perhaps the key lies in making students enjoy their own “exploitation”, their need to gain these skills only so that they may enter the workforce, bridging the gap between enjoyment and exploitation. This reflects the ambiguous nature of work itself: people are told to work so that they can enjoy (by collecting wages that they can then use to consume). But how does this mechanism proceed? And is it really that simple of an operation?

Yet another analysis can be seen as an extrapolation from the ‘Student as Producer’ position, reminiscent of the Foucauldian disciplinary society, which remarks that universities are “institutions for producing obedient, governable subjects.”⁴⁶ This ostensibly functions in order to prepare students for their role as workers, in which they must follow orders. However, as many, including Fisher, have already noted, the days of seating in rows in schooling that reflected the spatial organization of the factory floor are over, at least in the imperial core. Post-Fordist society has meant the decline of the assembly line and the prevalence of industrial production and the rise of the service economy. Yet, the row seating in schools, to a large extent, remains. To what extent does this signal that the university may be in crisis, that it may not even know what role it should be fulfilling in reproducing capitalism? Capital no longer needs disciplined subjects in the traditional sense, given that neoliberal subjects obey even as they believe that they are transgressing, so capital can directly call for “transgression”, which puts into question the political efficacy of transgression as such. Yet is the university still producing obedient subjects?

While ‘Student as Consumer’ posits the university as a corporation selling students a product, ‘Student as Producer’ posits the university as an interstitial training academy preparing students for work, in which students are a becoming-worker, a becoming-employee. The remark regarding the university as a producer of obedient, governable subjects can be seen as an extension of this framing of student as a becoming-worker. Perhaps we can add a third element in order to form a triad: ‘Student as Worker’ or ‘Student as Employee’. As Cooper notes, with the increase in tort litigation against universities, along with the appropriation of personal injury rhetoric recasted as a call for safe spaces, microaggressions, and trigger warnings, the relationship between students and the university becomes perceived as one that “should be

⁴⁵ Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burnout Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015. (p. 46)

⁴⁶ Meyerhoff, Eli. *Beyond Education: Radical Studying for Another World*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. (p. 205)

subject to the same rules of civil liability as those that prevail in the business world.”⁴⁷ While this novel analysis explores what this relationship means in terms of expectations on the part of the university (in terms of becoming liable for the protection of the student from personal injury), what does this relationship entail in terms of what is expected of the student, now that they are considered directly an employee, rather than simply a becoming-employee? What injunctions are now to be placed on the ‘Student as Employee’?

Finally, we should mention a thread that has been running throughout the various analyses of the university’s function: the promotion of individualism. As Nadim Bakhshov notes, people “go to college for [their] own benefit, get a qualification so [they] can get a better job.”⁴⁸ Here we can see how the ‘Student as Producer’ function of the university promotes individualism, since students are ostensibly there so that they can singularly succeed in the job market, competing with their fellow students for employment. However, the ‘Student as Consumer’ function also promotes individualism, through the standard story of individual consumers deciding what university they would like to attend (what product they would like to buy) of their own volition as an expression of their individual free choice, the decision that will proffer for them the most individual enjoyment. We may also note that the freedom of the market is yet another misconstruing of freedom as free willing, per our discussion on Schelling above. Lastly, it is easy to see how the rhetoric surrounding the ‘Student as Employee’ paradigm promotes individualism, with its focus on personal injury. In fact, Cooper herself notes that “the harms once attributed to the phenomena of ‘social discrimination’ or ‘structural violence’... are now more readily perceived as private wrongs embedded in offensive words or images.”⁴⁹ This refiguring of “collective violence” as “psychic trauma” erases issues of systemic oppression, instead becoming slights against individuals. Ultimately, the fight against injustice becomes the fight to protect the individual *qua* individual.

Now that we have some idea of *why* the university seeks to produce certain subjectivities, we can turn to *how* this is accomplished. Perhaps most relevant here would be a brief examination of Louis Althusser’s notion of ideological interpellation and how that relates to his notion of Ideological State Apparatuses. Althusser famously writes that:

All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects... ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way as to ‘recruit’ subjects among individuals (it recruits them all) or ‘transform’ individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) through the very precise operation that we call interpellation or hailing. It can be imagined along the lines

⁴⁷ Cooper, Melinda. *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*. Brooklyn, NY: MIT Press / Zone Books, 2017. (p. 254)

⁴⁸ Bakhshov, Nadim. *Against Capitalist Education: What Is Education For?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2015. (p. 36)

⁴⁹ Cooper, Melinda. *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*. Brooklyn, NY: MIT Press / Zone Books, 2017. (p. 255)

of the most commonplace, everyday hailing, by (or not by) the police: ‘Hey, you there!’.⁵⁰

In essence, this notion of interpellation as hailing means that people become ideological subjects when ideology calls out to them and they recognize that they are the person being hailed, turning to face their accoster. Althusser takes care to note that there is no pre-ideological individual, that we are always-already subjects, as even before our birth we are (generally) imbued with a name, a sex, a place, which already subject the individual, commanding them to take up the roles associated with these categorizations, and telling them who they are (or should be). Because interpellation acts as a symbolic mandate, constraining the individual into a predetermined role and thus denying them total satisfaction, it can be seen as Althusser’s attempt to explain castration. However, interpellation is also a constant process, as people are subjected to multiple ideologies all at once. For Althusser, ideologies interpellate through material institutions and practices, what he terms “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs). These include the School, the Family, and the Church, but also Politics, Media, and Culture.⁵¹ This allows the most basic framework for analyzing how universities produce subjectivities in their students, in that an ideological message is directed at students, and they become subjectivized when they recognize that the message is indeed directed at them.

Jodi Dean reverses Althusser’s formula of interpellation, “the individual is interpellated as a subject”, into “the subject is interpellated as an individual.”⁵² Dean supports this inversion by citing Warren Montag, noting how he comments on the individualizing operation that is inherent to the process of hailing: “individuals are picked from an undifferentiated mass, singled out, removed from it and endowed with a unique identity, as if such a singling out or separation of individuals were necessary to the functioning of the economy.”⁵³ Thus, there is a process of individuation that is intrinsic to the act of interpellation itself, as every person is hailed as an individual, and must recognize themselves as such in order for the process to proceed. Ultimately, the “individual” is already an ideological notion, and Dean marks interpellation as the production of an “individuated subject”.

Thus, the university castrates the subject because it interpellates students and tells them that they have a duty to be a Consumer (to enjoy), a Producer (to learn), and an Employee (to be aggrieved as an individual). However, because as a consumer the student is told to enjoy fully, as the Society of Enjoyment also does, the university also posits the potential for total satisfaction, the potential to be uncastrated. The student enjoys in failing to live up to these contradictory symbolic imperatives. The injunction of the university is twofold impossible: not only is the imperative to enjoy fully (to be uncastrated) itself impossible, but the university (re)produces this injunction as it is itself castrating the student, by interpellating them, by telling them that they

⁵⁰ Althusser, Louis. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2014. (p. 190)

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75

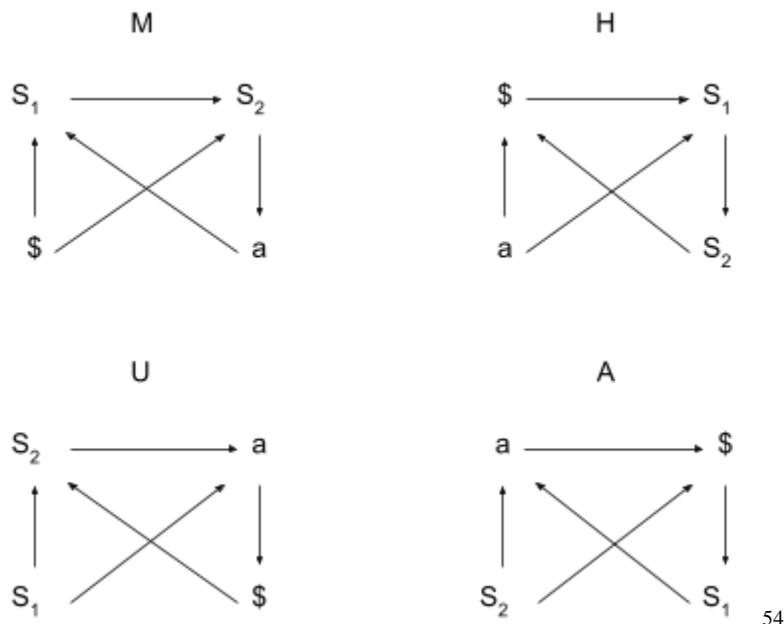
⁵² Dean, Jodi. *Crowds and Party*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2016. (p. 74)

⁵³ Montag, Warren. *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy’s Perpetual War*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. (p. 104)

need to study, to learn, to gain skills. Yet, this is the symbolic enjoyment of striving to be dutiful, striving to become the Student. The student has freedom because it is their enjoyment that retains them in this system (and they can ultimately change their mediation to enjoyment).

II. Ideology Critique

In *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan outlines the four discourses: Master's, Hysteric's, Analyst's, and University. Lacan describes the passage from the Master's discourse, which characterized feudal relations and subsisted into the industrial stage of capitalism, to the University discourse, which constitutes the discourse of capitalism after the Scientific Revolution. The University discourse is so called as it finds its apotheosis in the university itself. Samo Tomšič, in *The Capitalist Unconscious*, combines the mathemes that Lacan provides in the *Seminar* with Lacan's discursive relations from the same seminar, which clarifies the diagrams. They are reproduced below:



where, of course, S_1 represents the Master Signifier, S_2 represents the Big Other (the field of knowledge), a represents objet petit a (the object **cause** of desire, as opposed to the sensuous commodity), and $\$$ represents the barred subject. We are most interested here in the University discourse, and what it says about the injunction of the University today. We will quickly note that each discourse is a quarter turn of another discourse, making the Analyst's discourse the inverse of the Master's (and the Master's the "other side of psychoanalysis").

In order to decipher these mathemes, Lacan provides an apparatus for deciphering the meaning of each position / placement of each variable within the matheme:

⁵⁴ Tomšič, Samo. *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2015. (p. 207)

the appearance of neutrality when issuing directives that are simply “objectively” the most “efficient” course of action. This is perhaps best exemplified by university administrators, who (claim to) exist outside of politics. They speak from the meta-position; they exist outside of ideology. This is what marks the passage from the Master’s discourse of early industrial capitalism to the University discourse of late postmodern capitalism.

Furthermore, in a note that may resonate with Jodi Dean’s emphasis on the individualization operation so fundamental to capitalism, Lacan writes:

it is, very precisely, out of the I identical to itself that the S_1 of the pure imperative is constituted... the myth of the ideal I, of the I that masters, of the I whereby at least something is identical to itself, namely the speaker, is very precisely what the university discourse is unable to eliminate from the place in which its truth is found. From every academic statement by any philosophy whatsoever... the I-crazy emerges, irreducibly.⁶¹

It is not simply that speaking from the position of objective knowledge perpetuates the myth of the existence of objective knowledge, but that it perpetuates a perhaps much more insidious myth: that of the self-identical I. When someone takes up the position of objective knowledge, they are also positing themselves as the bearer of that knowledge. And beyond anything such a statement says about that individual person, is the idea that the self-identical I exists at all, or in general, such that everyone may believe that such a position is possible for themselves. And what could be more true of the injunction to “be yourself” than the fact that its presupposition is that such a “self” exists at all? And what better term to describe the worship of the individual in neoliberalism than the rule of the I-crazy? Not simply some Kafkaesque bureaucracy stowed away in some far-away Castle, but that everyone can be their own I-crat (Han’s auto-exploiter?).

Perhaps worth exploring here is the connection between science and the University discourse. As Lacan states, “the master’s discourse... fully develop[s] and reveal[s] its last word in the capitalist’s discourse, with its curious copulation with science.”⁶² So, the Master’s discourse was the discourse of capitalism until the discourse of science became that of capitalism, at which point the University discourse became the predominant discourse of society. While the University discourse, which is the discourse of science, is the discourse of capitalism, it is not the same as what Tomšič calls the “Capitalist discourse”. For now, however, it is this interchangeability between the University discourse (as the discourse of capitalism) and science that we are interested in exploring. For example, Bakhshov notes that both capitalism / the market and science “believe numbers and number systems are fundamentally real, more real than concrete and particular human life.”⁶³ It is this epistemological valorization of quantification that connects the University discourse (capitalism) to science. Anything quantifiable is deemed “objective” and therefore epistemologically valid in the scientific discourse, the discourse of capitalism.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 62-63

⁶² Ibid., p. 110

⁶³ Bakhshov, Nadim. *Against Capitalist Education: What Is Education For?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2015. (p. 53)

In fact, despite one of the four discourses being titled “the University discourse”, Lacan does not speak much directly about the university, though when he does, it is specifically in regards to this quantification mechanism, namely with respect to the credit points system that had just been implemented by President Charles de Gaulle in response to the May ‘68 protests. Lacan says, addressing the students, “you leave here, yourselves equivalent to more or fewer credit points. You come here to gain credit points for yourselves. You leave here stamped, ‘credit points.’”⁶⁴ Lacan also claims here that students are the products / surplus value of the university, which resonates with the discussion earlier of the *matheme* and the placement of the barred subject \$ in the position of production. Furthermore, Lacan explicates exactly what is wrong with this valorization of numbers in his analysis of thermodynamics, which he says privileges beginning and end states, losing whatever occurs in the interval, and energy itself becomes nothing other than what is counted.⁶⁵ Yet this discourse pretends to speak the truth when in reality the truth is always partial. Starting with Marx all the way through psychoanalysis, Modern science produces an object which, properly speaking, does not exist: the variable reality of physics, the commodity form, and the object *a* of psychoanalysis.

Another way that this quantification is established in the university is explored by Ron Roberts, in his analysis of British universities and the specific role of the National Student Survey, which reduces “a student’s experience of a whole range of issues... to a single score on an ordinal five-point scale.”⁶⁶ Roberts also discusses the “league tables” for university rankings that are published in leading British newspapers every year, which might be analogous to the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings stateside. Furthermore, Roberts continues, “the pursuit of satisfaction ratings has resulted in many institutions investing heavily in landscaped campuses, sports and social facilities, marketing and public relations staff - a case of never mind the quality, pay for the myth.”⁶⁷ Stefan Collini notes that this “amenities arms race” may well result in universities looking more like luxury hotels and spa resorts than academic institutions.⁶⁸

Roberts’ use of the term “myth” is quite instructive here, as multiple authors note that the university is becoming more and more a simulacra as it increasingly financializes. The more the university attempts to present numbers (such as rankings) as definitive, objective terms, the more the numbers actually obfuscate from any sort of reality. Yet, the fiction still holds true, in that students make decisions on what universities to attend partially on the basis of these rankings. And, in a self-justifying circle, the fact that the appearance holds actually does make the numbers true, because so long as others believe in the numbers and act based on them, so long as employers hire based on which universities they think are superior to others based on these rankings, then these rankings actually do inform students on what university they should attend

⁶⁴ Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. (p. 201)

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80-81

⁶⁶ Roberts, Ron. *Capitalism on Campus: Sex Work, Academic Freedom, and the Market*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2018. (p. 11)

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12

⁶⁸ Collini, Stefan. *Speaking of Universities*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2017. (p. 34)

to increase their chance of hire. No other concept better signifies this interpassive social structure better than Lacan's big Other: the Other (students) who *know*. But this enclosed loop is completely untethered to any sort of reality, to anything about the universities themselves or the quality of education offered there.

What this ultimately means for student subjectivity is that everything is drawn to the laws of numbers, from rankings to credits to grades. What does it mean to assign students grades, to reduce their understanding of the material to a single, (alpha)numerical value? The grade generates its own fiction, its own enjoyment, its own drive, as students seek to achieve grades rather than learning. Students posit a vitality in the grade that does not exist: the objet *a* of the A, the fantasy relation. Everything at the university occurs at a level removed from reality. We chase images, which is exactly what McGowan is pointing to when he says the Society of Enjoyment is an image society. The university, ultimately, exists in the Imaginary. The imaginary enjoyment of receiving imaginary grades, for some imaginary future that simply will not be possible.

The University can only function as an Ideological State Apparatus so long as people (students) still believe in a vital I, still believe that they themselves exist as a substantial, enclosed, whole, entity, one that can be "unique" or become "itself". Perhaps to return to Freudian terms, the capitalist (university) subject must disavow their own castration (lack) to become a true Student of the university.

III. Summary

The university re-duplicates all of the exacerbators of mental health issues of capitalism writ large. The myth of the self-identical I is promoted through the University discourse's positing of a subject as a bearer of knowledge, and through the very act of interpellation as an individual that the University as an Ideological State Apparatus enacts on its students. The 'Student as Consumer' paradigm posits the University as demanding the same imperative to enjoy fully as that of the society of enjoyment, which again requires a self-identical and uncastrated I to enjoy in the Imaginary. The same breakdown of cognitive mapping occurs through the contradictory injunctions of the University, as posited by the three paradigms of the University's imperative (to enjoy, to learn, to individuate). Finally, student debt leads to another loss of the future, as does being locked into specialties and therefore careers.

Liberation

I. Castration

Every discourse is a 90° clockwise rotation of the previous one, meaning that the Analytic discourse is the inverse of the Master's. Lacan claims that his discourse is that of the Analyst's. This is perhaps best exemplified by Lacan's infamous statement, "don't expect anything more subversive in my discourse than that I do not claim to have a solution."⁶⁹ What is the political efficacy of eschewing the position of the subject supposed to know? Clearly, if we are to resist capitalism, that means confronting the Master's discourse of feudal relations and early industrial capitalism that places the Master as the subject supposed to know, and the University discourse of late capitalism that replaces the Master with knowledge itself as a non-partial, complete (and non-ideological) body of knowledge. This body of knowledge is that which grants the subject the ability to "speak their truth" through the consumption and display of commodities. Although it is perhaps useful to not fetishize knowledge and to not think that education is the panacea to political struggle, it is also the case that political movements thus far have relied on a discourse that purports to speak the truth. It does not seem rhetorically effective to claim to know nothing, or at the very least to posit that you do not know the truth, especially in the political arena where persuasion is operative. How are we to break this deadlock?

Here, it is perhaps useful to return to Jodi Dean, and her analysis of the psychodynamics of the Party. As Dean says, "the subject supposed to know is a structural position. The Party doesn't know. It organizes a transferential space offering the position of the subject supposed to know."⁷⁰ Further, "there is no Other who knows... there is no Other of the Other, no guarantor of political knowledge."⁷¹ So while it is true that there is no self-grounding, objective "knowledge" out there, that there is no whole or non-ideological truth, the subject supposed to know cannot be left empty because it exists as a structural position. Yet we must posit that the subject supposed to know both knows and does not know. The University discourse represses the I-crazy, which sustains the stable ego of autonomous knowledge that allows for the fetishization of the Professor (here, Party leader), which is what must be avoided. Therefore, the Party must position itself as the voice that speaks the truth, yet the truth the Party speaks is always a symptomal, partial truth; a truth of the negative.

However, if we think back to the way in which psychoanalysis proceeds, considering that the Analyst's discourse is modeled after the psychoanalytic relation, it will be noted that the patient can only enter the psychoanalytic relation if they place the analyst in the position of the subject supposed to know. The patient would not seek out therapy or help if they did not think that the therapist knew something that they did not. Only through the process of psychoanalysis

⁶⁹ Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. (p. 70)

⁷⁰ Dean, Jodi. *Crowds and Party*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2016. (p. 199)

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 200

does the analysand realize that the analyst is not the subject supposed to know, that they are not privy to some hidden knowledge of which the analysand is unaware. As Eliot Rosenstock exemplifies in his matheme $\{\emptyset > 1\} \rightarrow \{1 > \emptyset\}$, where \emptyset represents the therapist and 1 represents the client, “the client must surpass the therapist” or “the therapy must surpass itself”.⁷² Likewise, the Party must fulfill the same function, first positioning itself as the subject supposed to know so that its members can come to the realization that the Party does not know through the process of political organizing and mobilization. Propaganda can only function if the subject posits the Party as knowing, while the actual work and involvement in the Party is the recognition that the Party does not know, a shift from the Imaginary to the Symbolic. This is perhaps best exemplified by Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, who, by taking on his *nom de guerre*, openly wears the mask rather than pretending to be (a fully constituted, totalized) human, and claims that though he speaks the Truth now, he will retire once the Zapatistas successfully take power, so as to avoid becoming the object of fetishism (perversion). As Naomi Klein notes, “his first words, in his new persona, were ‘through me speaks the will of the Zapatista National Liberation Army.’”⁷³ Yet, as Žižek makes clear, “if the Zapatistas were to effectively take power, statements like [that] would immediately acquire a much more ominous dimension.”⁷⁴ This is because speaking from the position of Truth itself is to speak within the register of the Master’s discourse, in other words, in a Stalinist fashion, in which History itself is the guarantor of the righteousness of your actions. As Dean says, there must be an element of *transference* in place, just as there is in the psychoanalytic relation. This is the only way to produce truly political subjects, which in this era of political apathy and “reflexive impotence” that Fisher alludes to, is more necessary than ever. The implications of this gesture to the Party today can be found in the slogan of Bernie Sanders’ 2020 presidential campaign: “Not Me. Us.”. It is the recognition that though the Party may appoint figureheads to speak on the behalf of the collective, there is no substantiality to those who take up the mantle of leaders. But neither is there some stable source of knowledge that support their speech. They can only speak by making object *a* appear, by accounting for the non-totality of their discourse through their very discourse. The collective does not guarantee their righteousness in the eyes of “History”, but it is only through the collective that they mobilize the abyssal act, and produce a Master Signifier: Communism. The Master Signifier is not the agent that speaks, nor does it support or guarantee speech; rather, as in analysis, the Master Signifier is what allows the analysand to restructure their relation to all other signifiers, in this case, allows the political subject to perform an analysis of capitalism and to forge a new relation to their present (and future) circumstance.

In order to better concretize this notion, we can continue the parallel to analysis further: ultimately, the political leader (or the Party) must give back the political subject their own

⁷² Rosenstock, Eliot. *Žižek in the Clinic: A Revolutionary Proposal for a New Endgame in Psychotherapy*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2019. (p. 48)

⁷³ Klein, Naomi. *Fences and Windows*. London, UK: Flamingo, 2002. (p. 211-212)

⁷⁴ Žižek, Slavoj. *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2004. (p. 177)

fantasy, just as the analyst does. In analysis, this is traumatic for the analysand, as it will be in the case of the political subject. For an example of this, Trump was openly racist, bigoted, etc., giving racists their own fantasy; despite the initial trauma, his supporters ultimately came to identify immediately with their fantasy. Likewise, liberal Trump hysteria was apotheosized into RussiaGate, revealing that the progressive fantasy is precisely to be a neo-conservative. Their embrace of hawkish, militarist stances on foreign policy, and their rehabilitation of a rogues' gallery of Iraq War architects, revealed their desire, their fantasy, to be seen as serious actors on the world stage. The difference here is that we must avoid love-transference, which can commonly occur in the psychoanalytic relation, and is paralleled by Trump's most devoted supporters (and detractors).⁷⁵ Accomplishing this is simply a matter of positing one's own lack, meaning that one must be a subject - must be non-all.

What this ultimately means for the university is that we must replace the University discourse with that of the Analyst's. The University discourse is found at multiple points within the institution, including in the classroom, where professors are posited as vessels through which the Truth of knowledge is channeled to students, and through administration, where administrators are deemed technocratic experts, who do not decide what is best for students and faculty, but must simply carry out what *is* objectively best for students and faculty, this being determined by some total body of knowledge that is out there, somewhere. As Lacan says, "what has a body and does not exist? Answer - the big Other."⁷⁶ Bringing the Analyst's discourse to the classroom, where the student takes the position of the analysand and the professor the analyst, means that, throughout the course of a class, the students must come to realize that the professor is not a subject-supposed-to-know, and that they, as students, have all the capacities required to study and learn. In Rosenstock's terms, we may even say that, "the class must surpass itself". Of course, "class" here can take on a double meaning: in Marxist terms, it is the working class that must surpass itself. This is related to Freire's notion of teacher-students and student-teachers, since at the end of the day what is uncovered is that we are all human, that there is nothing special about the professor that places them in their position, since they also do not know.⁷⁷ Administration, then, should be replaced by something resembling Dean's formulation of the (psychoanalytic) Party, one that does not claim to know but nevertheless brings people into a shared project.

II. Freedom

⁷⁵ This observation is taken from Freud, Sigmund. "Observations on Transference-Love: Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis III." *The Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research* vol. 2, no. 2 (1993): 171-180. Accessed September 3, 2020.

⁷⁶ Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. (p. 66)

⁷⁷ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002. (p. 72)

To understand what a true *Ethics of the Real* would entail, we turn to Alenka Zupančič's text of that name. As Zupančič states, "Kant discovered the essential dimension of ethics: the dimension of desire, which circles around the real *qua* impossible."⁷⁸ For Kant, ethics has nothing to do with whether or not something was possible; however, this does not mean that the ethical act is impossible. Rather, the impossibility of the ethical act within the framework of (pathological) desire is what reveals the functioning of our desire and allows us to go beyond it. As Zupančič further maintains, the goal of psychoanalysis is to traverse the limits of desire to reach the drive, which can only occur once the subject is mapped in relation to objet *a*, the object-cause of desire.⁷⁹ In the realm of the drive, pleasure is simply no longer desirable.⁸⁰ Ethics is not simply a matter of pursuing nobler goals, as pleasure remains pleasure, but a fundamental paradigm shift, a rebirth of the subject, in which acting for the pure sake of duty, a non-pathological motive, becomes pathological, where form takes on a materiality of its own.⁸¹ This form *qua* form is Lacan's surplus-enjoyment, objet *a*, as a void that has acquired form; the absence of an incentive becomes the incentive, it positivizes itself.⁸² As Žižek states, an (ethical) act radically transforms its bearer, temporarily eclipsing the subject and transgressing the limits of symbolic community.⁸³ This relates to a few points already discussed; namely, the eclipse of the subject as the erasure of the I, and the transgression of the symbolic community as the renunciation of symbolic enjoyment. In fact, as Lacan famously states, "suicide is the only completely successful act",⁸⁴ which means precisely that we must kill ourselves in the big Other, in the symbolic order that gives us identity, stability, and meaning.⁸⁵ And isn't the "drive" beyond desire simply Freud's death drive, which, as Zupančič clarifies, "is not a drive that aims at death. It aims neither at life nor at death... it is indifferent to death (as well as to life)."⁸⁶ Isn't this "suicide" what we must effectively aim at? Amilcar Cabral first posited the notion of "class suicide", later developed by Steven Osuna,⁸⁷ to refer to the "revolutionary petty bourgeoisie" who must renounce their (objective) class position in order to truly become revolutionary subjects.⁸⁸ We will just add that, ultimately, "class" is a subjective, not an objective, position, so that ultimately everyone must commit "class suicide", not merely petty bourgeois academics and intellectuals.

⁷⁸ Zupančič, Alenka. *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2000. (p. 3)

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9-16

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 17-18

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 83

⁸⁴ Lacan, Jacques. *Televisión: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990. (p. 66-67)

⁸⁵ Zupančič, Alenka. *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2000. (p. 84)

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 250

⁸⁷ Johnson, Gaye Theresa, and Alex Lubin. *Futures of Black Radicalism*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2017. (p. 31)

⁸⁸ Cabral, Amilcar. *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings of Amilcar Cabral*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1979. (p. 136)

Finally, we can come to an understanding of what an ethics of the Real actually entails, as an act, a transgression of the current order, which has absolutely no regard to the pathological motives of pleasure, and most certainly has no regard to the life or death of the subject engaged in it. We quote at length from Zupančič:

The ethics of desire is the ethics of fantasy... we cannot deny all ethical dignity to someone who is ready to die (and to kill) in order to realize his or her fantasy. Of course, we often deny this: we deny it more and more often, for it seems ‘anachronistic’. Those who practice such an ethics today are called terrorists, fanatics, fundamentalists, madmen... We are (post)modern, we know a great deal, we know that all these people are dying and killing for something which does not exist. Of course, we all have our fantasies and our desires, but we are very careful not to realize them - we prefer to die, rather than to realize our desire... Death proves to be the best shelter against the death drive.⁸⁹

To drive our point home, we can turn to perhaps one of the clearest avatars of an ethical actor, Thomas Sankara, who reiterates Zupančič’s point when he says, “You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness... It took the madmen of yesterday for us to be able to act with extreme clarity today. I want to be one of those madmen.”⁹⁰ Isn’t this the perfect description of the ethical act *par excellence*, the willingness to take a risk, to eschew the guarantee that the symbolic order of the big Other provides, and to act, dare I say err? Zupančič “refuses the unsatisfactory option of a ‘(post)modern’ ethics based on the reduction of the ultimate horizon of the ethical to ‘one’s own life’,”⁹¹ and the life and legacy of Thomas Sankara is the perfect exemplification of what that entails. This is also what Huey Newton is mobilizing with his notion of “revolutionary suicide”, as opposed to “reactionary suicide”: the only way to actually kill yourself is not by taking it up directly as an explicit goal, but by accepting it as a byproduct of your (revolutionary) actions.⁹²

Ultimately, McGowan is right to stress the Real as the counterpoint to both the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Yet he fails at articulating what enjoyment in the Real, what the ethics of the Real, would actually entail. Zupančič’s account is much more emblematic of the sort of political stance that we must take in order to *do something* about the university. Yes, we can change our subjective condition towards the university, but at the end of the day it is material conditions that are causing every problem we have thus far diagnosed at the university. As such, it will take political acts, ethical acts - in the true sense of the word - to *enact* the changes necessary to shift our material reality, not merely a liberal cognitive politics.

What does all this mean for the university? Firstly, it means rejecting the injunction to enjoy fully (to enjoy in the Imaginary) that serves as the obscene underside of the University. It also means rejecting the injunction to know more, purely for the sake of future employment. It

⁸⁹ Zupančič, Alenka. *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2000. (p. 254)

⁹⁰ Sankara, Thomas. *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-1987*. New York, NY: Pathfinder Press, 2007. (p. 141-144)

⁹¹ Zupančič, Alenka. *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan*. London, UK: Verso Books, 2000. (p. 5)

⁹² Newton, Huey P. *Revolutionary Suicide*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 1973.

means rejecting the very symbolic mandate of the University: to be a student, in all its totality; to be an I. We must build a new symbolic mandate for students that can proffer onto them a different symbolic enjoyment: the ideal ego, the ego ideal, and the superego of the Party. By subjectivizing the universality of castration, we can begin to move forward as a human species. We must transcend the pathological motives of the everyday and risk an act that will transform the very coordinates we find ourselves in. We cannot merely posit the partial universality of the communist Party in the clouds of thought, we must bring down from the heavens of metaphysics the Truth we believe: we must act.

III. Future

Finally, to return to our discussion on mental health, and how it relates to the ethical act as outlined above. The precondition for the ethical act is the belief in a Utopia that such an act has the capacity to inaugurate. Yet, it might be useful here to refer back to the oft-quoted Beckettianism, “Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” But the point is precisely that no act is a “failure”, that there is no objective History which could make such a determination, and that every act retroactively reconstructs (its) history. For Jameson, Utopia is merely an anticipation of the future, and is inherent to all ideology as such. We can use Jameson to help overcome suicidality by applying his method of literary analysis in which any work contains within it a Utopian impulse, an orientation towards the future, regardless of its political or ideological bent, perhaps best summed up in the notion that “every negative may therefore serve as a means of access to that positive which it conceals.”⁹³ This is only possible if the literary work is non-all, which is what opens it to interpretation. To demonstrate this further, and to note a certain resonance between Jameson and Schelling, Jameson further states, paraphrasing Ernst Bloch, that

this emptiness of the work within a work, this blank canvas at the center, is the very locus of the not-yet-existent itself; and it is precisely this essentially fragmentary and aesthetically unsatisfying structure of the novel of the artist which gives it its ontological value as a form and figure of the movement of the future incomplete before us.⁹⁴

Essentially, it is only because a work of art or literature has an empty center that it can be Utopian, that it can clear the ground for a positive vision of the future. If we apply this same framework to the subject, we can clearly see that although the gap within the subject is ultimately the name of evil, it is also only through this gap that the subject can posit itself and be free, to take control of one’s destiny that is nevertheless still laid out before them in advance. Jameson’s use of “fragmentary” is crucial here, since we can easily parallel the fragmentarity of a work of art to the fragmentarity of the subject, which we have been referring to here as the ontological gap within the subject. Similarly, we can see this fragmentarity in the Word itself,

⁹³ Jameson, Fredric. *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971. (p. 133)

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132

split between God's determination of the Word and its Utopian supplement *qua* heaven. Relating back to mental health, if we could achieve the stasis that is the purported goal of mental wellness today, if we could be whole or complete, then we would be fully determined, only able to be ourselves. Or, what is to say the same thing, that the only future (heaven) that is possible is simply the same reality in a new, purely formal rearrangement: we can only be capitalist subjects. The gap is what clears the ground for our freedom and allows for a future. As Jameson even explicitly states,

if one cannot refute an experience like anxiety, one can at least transform it into that positive anticipation which is its correlative... Indeed, a kind of prodigious enlargement of the existential horizon... suffices to transform the most acute anxiety into a breathless eagerness, an expectation of the future in which joy and terror are indistinguishable.⁹⁵

Jameson even notes the similarity on the physiological level between anxiety and positive anticipation, noting similar emotional responses (rapid heartbeat, sweating, etc.). Thus, it is only a formal shift, a change in relation or mediation, that can transform suicidality into a properly ethical and therefore necessarily political project. It is merely a matter of applying Jameson's framework for analyzing literary works to the subject itself.

Finally, we should note that it is not the subject's fault that they fall into suicidality. As we have discussed, there does not seem to be anything to anticipate or strive for in late capitalism, which has seemingly erased the possibility of a future. In a sick society, it is only "normal" for late capitalist subjects to themselves be sick. What would truly be abnormal would be to assimilate into a fundamentally broken social order. However, we cannot merely retreat into nihilism, to fall into the "capitalist realism" of reifying the conditions we find ourselves in. The cultural is the economic, and postmodernism, as the cultural logic of late capitalism, as Jameson puts it, is what disallows an authentic Utopia (a new social arrangement), insisting that we exist in post-ideology, and dismissing any totalizing narratives as teleological, if not downright authoritarian. Confronting the mental health crisis means confronting postmodernism, which has deconstructed any system through which people might find meaning for their lives, leaving only nihilism in its wake, which ironically is an ideological narrative in its own right.

The problem turns out to be the solution, to be reductively Hegelian, in that the causes of the worsening mental health crisis (existentialist dread brought about by a looming climate crisis, the desacralized commodity universe in which chasing enjoyment through consumption and instant gratification only brings about a feeling of hollowness) turns out to be the solution, in that it is only through fighting for a better future that we can move out of the meaningless driftlessness of depression and into a universe of meaningful struggle. Although we will not explore it here, we may begin to ask whether the construction of a "secular religion" may well be part of the solution. The contradictions of capitalism mean that it is both progressive and regressive, and if its movement entails that "all that is holy is profaned", as Karl Marx states in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, then Communism as a secular religion may be conceived of not as a nostalgic return to religions past that conferred meaning unto their followers, but as a

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 133

new belief system that holds open the possibility of Utopia, which provides a futurity to strive for. This is the sense in which we must take up the necessity of freedom that Schelling discusses: to declare ourselves evil (and therefore free) so that we may do good. If, as Schelling maintains, there is no movement, no life, without the poison of contradiction, then there can be no Utopia without suicide, which simply means that we cannot work towards a better future without first having experienced the hopelessness and desperation of our current situation, which is what drives us forward in our praxis.

IV. Summary

Analyst's discourse, as a break from both the University discourse and the Master's, does not posit a self-identical I. What we really need is not the empirical suicide of a biological body, but the overcoming of depression through the suicide of this self-identical I, and this is what the Analyst's discourse achieves. An Ethics of the Real posits a true freedom, as opposed to the self-identical notion of freedom, as a freedom overlapping with necessity rather than one of pure contingency, which can perhaps best be summarized as the ability to write one's own narrative. Finally, Utopia holds open the possibility of a future, meaning the ability to exercise a Real freedom.

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