

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Twelve, Number Two

# Žižek and Lacanian Henology—With a “Silent Partner”

Kenji Nobutomo, Kagoshima University, Japan

## Abstract

This article aims to clarify the meaning of henology for Lacan and Žižek. Žižek apparently rejects Neoplatonic way of thinking, but by considering Lacanian Henology through its origin, Etienne Gilson, Lacanian henology and Žižek’s Hegelian reading of the One become converged. Both of them think the movement of the One from one principle and its two aspects. The principle is that the One gives something that it does not have, and it corresponds to Lacanian definition of love. Regarding its two aspects, the first one is the logical necessity that generates necessarily the One, and the second is the logical contingency that generates contingently the surplus element. By this, we can clarify the theoretical development of each period of Lacan. In early Lacan, henology was a logic that ties his “the Symbolic” and Freudian Death drive. In middle Lacan, his main concern was the mathematical logic as the logic of the Id, and henology became the generative logic of the subject of enunciation or the subject of the jouissance. But at the same time, this movement produces as a co-product a inassimilable remainder, “object a” with the subject of signifiant. In late Lacan, by virtue of the “necessary” movement of the One and its “contingent” co-product, the universe of the discourse became indeterminate, undecidable, “not-all,” which means for Lacan “the contingent.” This characteristic became the logic of Lacanian “sexuation.”

## 1. Introduction: What is Henology?

In a session in 1971, Jacques Lacan used the term *hénologie* to describe his “analytic discourse” and its relation to the classical philosophical notion of “the One.”

The annoying thing, is that when you proceed, as I have just said in this writing, that it is a matter of proceeding, namely, to envisage from a discourse what plays the function of the One in it, what do I do from time to time? If you will allow me this neologism what I do is “Henology”. With what I articulate, anyone can construct an ontology with what it involves, beyond precisely these two horizons that I marked as being defined as the horizons of the signifier. (Lacan 2011: 135)

As Lacan suggested, henology is generally considered a science of “the One” in contrast to ontology, the science of “the Being.” Moreover, it is thought that henology’s principal characteristic is that it gives primacy to the One rather than to the Being. The origin of this term can be traced to Plotinus. The slogan of this year’s seminar—There is One (*y a d’l’Un, yad’l’un*)—clearly conveys the importance of this notion, henology, for Lacan. His successor, Jacques-Alain Miller, explained its importance on the back cover of this seminar, which Miller edited himself. However, Lacan never explicitly defined henology, and few articles treat this important notion.

Thus, this article attempts to reconstruct some principal features of Lacanian henology, particularly from the ideo-historical standpoint, and illustrate the role it played in the development of his theory in each period of his career. For this reconstruction, we trace the origin of Lacanian henology, Etienne Gilson. With Gilson, We will find that Žižek’s anti-Neoplatonism does not mean that he is anti-henologist, and the proximity of the logic they use will be demonstrated.

## 2. For Lacan, why Henology?

Why did Lacan introduce this notion? His primary objective is not difficult to ascertain. He said,

And if something gave me the idea that there is in the Platonic dialogue some first foundation or other for a properly analytic discourse, I would say that it is indeed this “Parmenides” that confirmed it for me. (Lacan 2011: 139)

We try to follow more a concrete process in the analysis. As the first step, Lacan posed in analytic experience to introduce into it the One as the analyst (Lacan 2011: 127), and its objective is that the analyst should be promoted as an abjection at the place where the One occupied, in a word, as his famous concept *objet a* (“object a”) (Lacan 2001: 548). Lacan believed that his “psycho-analytic discourse” originated in Plato’s *Parmenides*, and he frequently advised his students to re-read this work in order to understand this process better (Lacan 2011: 112).

Miller devoted several sessions of his seminar to the Neoplatonic authors, such as Damascius and his famous “ineffable.” He repeatedly complained that, in spite of his disinclination, he had to spend much time studying them. Miller’s objective here is mainly to clarify the notion of the Lacanian “Pass” (a kind of qualification as a psychoanalyst) through these studies. In his seminar, Miller opined that Lacan placed himself within another tradition, that is, Plato’s *Parmenides*, and therefore within the tradition of henology, or the doctrine of the One. In this context, Miller described henology as having flourished under the Neoplatonists, and summarized its characteristic as conceiving of the One beyond the Being and the Essence, and regarding the One as superior, anterior, and independent with regard to the Being.

### **3. Slavoj Žižek against Neoplatonism**

Miller uses the orthodox definition of henology in this summary. The question therefore arises, should we view late Lacan as Neoplatonist? Here it is necessary to consider Slavoj Žižek’s counterattack on Neoplatonism.

Žižek does not discuss the Lacanian term “the One” very frequently. One of his most detailed readings can be found in his book *Less than Nothing* (Žižek 2012), in which he clearly criticized the Neoplatonic interpretation of the One. For example, he disputed Armand Zaloszcyc’s Neoplatonic reading of the One, as follows:

There is, however, one conclusive counter-argument which pretty much ruins the case: Zaloszcyc refers to the Neoplatonic mystics as the missing link between Plato

and Lacan, yet, as we have already seen, Lacan explicitly rejects the Neoplatonist reading of Parmenides. (Žižek 2012: 57)

For Žižek, Neoplatonism is “a piece of mystical negative theology—its lesson being that the Absolute is ineffable, that it eludes the grasp of our categories, that we can say anything and/or nothing about it.” To deny such Neoplatonism, Žižek relied on a phrase of Lacan’s: “Neoplatonic confusion” (Žižek 2012: 50). Yet, this citation is somewhat misleading. Lacan referred to “*la confusion plotinienne* [Plotinistic confusion]” (Lacan 2001: 547) with a definite objective: simply to criticize Leibniz’s understanding (or presentation) of his own monadology. To avoid this “Neoplatonic confusion,” Žižek interpreted this Lacanian notion from a Democritian and Hegelian standpoint. Does this therefore mean that Žižek, as a great Hegelian, opposes the henological reading of Lacan’s “the One”?

As will be shown later, this conclusion about Lacanian henology is similar to the interpretation presented in Žižek’s *Less than Nothing*. One of the characteristics of Žižek’s discussion of this problem is that he never mentions the term “henology,” and instead relies on a highly stereotyped image of Neoplatonism. It is thus necessary to ask, in what context did Lacan use the term henology? By outlining the term’s ideo-historical context and thereby enriching the content of this concept, this article aims to demonstrate how the interpretation of Lacan’s “the One” by us converges with Žižek’s interpretation.

#### **4. Etienne Gilson as “A Silent Partner”**

Today, the name Etienne Gilson is rarely heard, and this great Thomist of 20th-century France and member of the Académie Française could be considered one of the forgotten masters of thought. Yet, those who still appreciate his importance are not so rare. For example, many Deleuzians recognize that Deleuze’s interpretation of Duns Scotus relies heavily on Gilson. So why is this not true of the Lacanians?

When Lacan mentioned the term “henology” in 1972, he rightly called it a neologism. Many henologists think that Gilson invented this term in his masterwork *L’être et l’essence* (Gilson 1997). This work was originally published in 1948, with the English translation, *Being and Some Philosophers*, published in 1949 (the current English translation [Gilson 1952] is based on the first edition, while the current French version is based on the third). Unfortunately, the English translation rendered *énologie* (without an “h” at the time) as “monology.” This French neologism was later widely accepted as

*hénologie* in French or “henology” in English. This may indicate that the term was still new at that time.

As for their personal relationship, Lacan called Gilson “my master” (Lacan, 1978: 112), and said that reading Gilson gave him “surplus enjoyment.” Miller testified that Lacan regularly studied Gilson’s works. There is therefore no evidence that refutes Gilson’s influence on Lacan, particularly with regard to henology.

## **5. Gilson’s Henology 1: Being and Non-Being**

So what exactly did Gilson say about henology? In his view, the origin of henology can be traced to Plato and his *Parmenides*, which was still imperfect in the mind of Plato, and was finally fully revealed with Plotinus (Gilson 1952: 24). Yet he does not specify to which aspect of Plotinus he refers. Gilson’s definition of the general rule of henology is somewhat astonishing, particularly for Lacanians.

In a metaphysics of the One, however, it is a general rule that the lower grades of reality are only because their first principle itself is not. In order to give something, a cause is bound to be above it, for if the superior already had that which it causes, it could not cause it, it would be it. (Gilson 1952: 23)

At this point, his definition of henology is typically Neoplatonic. This is not surprising. However, according to Plotinus (as cited by Gilson), the process of so-called emanation suddenly becomes similar to the Lacanian definition of love.

Such is the exact meaning of the formulas by which Plotinus defines the problem of the origin of the world: “How did the One bestow what itself had not?” And we already know the answer: It is because nothing is in the One that everything comes from it. Thus, in order that being be, it is necessary that the One itself be, not being, but that which begets being. Being, then, is as its first-born child. (Gilson 1952: 23)

Its resemblance to the Lacanian definition of love is undeniable. According to Lacan, to love is to give what one does not have (Lacan 1998: 210). In Gilson’s henology, the One is nothing, non-Being, but also that which gives birth to the Being. This can be said to be the main principle of Gilson’s henology.

Although a simple resemblance does not prove an influential relationship, Lacan thought that the One is all alone, and from this we can grasp the crux of love (Lacan 1975: 67). In this context, the One is regarded as what “the subject supposed to know,” or an object of demand for love. Thus, the analyst occupies the place of the One at first. Starting from this point, “The end of the symbolic process is that non-Being come be, because it has spoken” (Lacan 1988/1978: 308). In Lacanian theory, this character of the Symbolic order is exactly what Freud had in mind when he talked about the death instinct in the process of coming, insisting on being realized (Lacan 1988/1978: 326). Particularly with regards to early Lacan (1950), Gilson’s henology suggested how to locate the Symbolic.

From the first aspect of Gilson’s henology, and under this principle, we can develop the following five theses:

**G-1: The One is non-Being.**

**G-2: The One gives that which it does not have.**

**G-3: The One gives birth to the Being as existence.**

**G-4: It is impossible to think of the One.**

**G-5: The One does not think; being thought and the thought are the same.**

From these theses, Gilson posited two aspects of the world of the Being, that is, reality in the Lacanian sense. First, the trace of the One (in the form of numbers and quantity, which derives from the numbers) gives rise to reality (G-3), and the Being is nothing more than that trace of the One (Gilson 1952: 25). However, in this reality, we find only intelligible relations, which are the very stuff of which beings are made (G-4). The only intelligible relations that we know of are the multiple ones that ceaselessly succeed each other in a fragmentary, disconnected, and never-ending patchwork (Gilson 1952: 26). Plotinus’ thesis—“The Intelligence is identical with the Being”—and Parmenides’ thesis—“To be and to know are one and the same thing”—must both be interpreted in this context (G-5). This is not an ultra-idealistic assertion. It is rather something to be compared with the Lacanian definition of the Lacanian *trait unaire* and *signifiant*.

## **6. Gilson’s Henology 2: Essence and Unessential**

It may be argued that this resemblance between Lacan and Gilson is quite natural because the latter’s interpretation of *Parmenides* was influenced by Hegel’s. This is partially true. Gilson once explained that, since the Being is nothing, it should not be said

that concrete givenness is creating itself out of nothing. Rather, nothingness itself appears in becoming as a determined nothing. It is the “nothing of the Being.” Here, he referred to the Introduction of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, where non-Being appears as a “nothingness of Being,” that is, a nothingness determined by the very Being it denies (Gilson 1952: 139). It is understandable why Lacan recommended that Plato’s *Parmenides* be read along with the Introduction of *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Lacan 2011: 117–118). This is Gilson’s method for interpreting henology.

In light of this fact, it is necessary to point out another principle of Gilson’s henology. Under the Hegelian influence, Gilson presented two different aspects of henological emanation. The first, discussed above, is the emanation of the Being based on the One as non-Being. Gilson regarded this emanation as Existence. The second aspect is emanation based on the Unessential, which Gilson regarded as Appearance. Thus, the One divides into two (Mao and Dolar).

Gilson said that any given reality is to be “Essence.” Essence then is the Being in its simple relation to itself, but the two aspects of this relationship of self-identity are not themselves identical. In Essence, the Being appears identical to self. In other words, the Being that Essence includes is “that which appears in Essence.” Between “Being qua Being” and “Being as Appearance” there is a difference, so that Essence is different from itself grasped as identity with itself. Essence is neither pure sameness nor pure otherness (Gilson 1952: 139–140).

Here, with Gilson, we can understand the movement of the One through two aspects: Existence and Appearance. In the first aspect, the One is understood ontologically, that is, from the terms “Being” and “Existence.” In the second aspect, the One is understood phenomenologically, that is, from the terms “Essence” and “Appearance.” As Miller said, for Lacan perhaps the most important thing in Gilson’s henology is that he treated Existence and Essence in the same way (*essence et existence se confondent*). It is now possible to derive two more theses from Gilson’s henology, as follows:

**G-6: The One is Essence, which includes its own Unessential.**

**G-7: This Unessential gives birth to Essence as Appearance.**

Gilson’s conception of the Essence is worthy of note.

The One is not remade with the many nor Being with essences—which invites us to think of essence as a by-product of Being. It is the condition of the possibility of beings which are not the pure act of existing. (Gilson 1993/1960: 115)

Here, the word “by-product” is very suggestive. The movement of the One cannot be a pure generation of the Being; it leaves an irremediable remainder, just like the Lacanian “object a,” which was once defined as a *sous-produit* (Lacan 1966–1967, Jun. 7. 1967). Thus, another thesis must be added here, as follows:

**G-8: The Essence is the by-product of Being, or more precisely, the generation of Being by the One.**

In Gilson’s henology, the One has two vectors. The first (G1–G5) is the One as non-Being, which generates the Being as the Existence. The second is the One (G6–G8) as the Unessential, which generates the Essence as a co-product of the Being.

## **7. Žižek’s Reading of *Parmenides***

“Parmenides was wrong and Heraclitus right” (S 20, 223). It could be argued that Žižek’s reading of *Parmenides* developed alongside this 1972 commentary by Lacan. Žižek clearly denied two standard interpretations of *Parmenides*: that it consisted of logical exercises, or that it should be viewed as a negative theological message that the ineffable One is beyond the grasp of logic (Žižek 2012: 49).

Yet, as already mentioned, herein lies the problem. Did Žižek view the Neoplatonist interpretation of Lacan’s “the One” as something to be rejected? If so, is the aim of this article, to converge Žižek’s interpretation of henology with that of Lacan, a hopeless effort? The answers to these questions are yes and no. The key is that, for Gilson, henology is not a mystical, somehow esoteric interpretation of the One, as we have seen. To compare both interpretations, we must first return to Žižek’s reading of Lacan’s “the One” in his *Less than Nothing* (Žižek 2012).

In this book, Žižek posited the eight hypotheses of the second part of Plato’s *Parmenides* as a systematic Hegelian exercise; for him, these eight hypotheses deploy all possible relationships between the One and Being, with the final “nihilistic” outcome that there is no ultimate Ground guaranteeing the consistent unity of reality (i.e., that the ultimate reality is the Void itself) (Žižek 2012: 207). As Plato of course could not rely on



Hegel, he was unable to think of the One as a concept. To do this, one needs not only a self-relating reflexive predication but also the positive concept of zero, which Plato did not possess. With this concept, one can begin to think that being-a-One adds nothing to the content of an object; its only content is the form of self-identity itself (Žižek 2012: 54–55). This self-identity is exactly what Lacan called “impossible.” Žižek said,

The “One” is originally the signifier of (self-) division, the ultimate supplement or excess: by way of re-marking the pre-existing real, the One divides it from itself: introduces its non-coincidence with itself. Consequently, to radicalize things even further, the Lacanian One as the Master Signifier is, *stricto sensu*, the signifier of its own impossibility. (Žižek 2012: 847)

According to Žižek, it should not be thought that there is the “real” on the one hand and the “signifier” on the other. Simply, there is the One, and this divides itself in two, which in no way re-unite into the One because this yields a kind of surplus that Lacan named “object a.”

## 8. The Movement of the One by Gilson and Žižek

Here, one naturally begins to wonder whether Gilson’s Neoplatonic henology differs from Žižek’s reading of the Lacanian One. To compare them, we must clarify the generative, productive movement of the One.

First of all, there is the One. It speaks and in the case of Gilson’s henology, it acts, because for Gilson, as a Thomist, “Being” is the same as its efficiency. In Žižekian terms, the One divides itself. We do not know, or we do not say what it says (in Neoplatonism, it is “ineffable”), but it makes itself different with itself. In psychoanalytic terms, it is the instant of fixation—the traumatic, ineffable instant. Everything said about this instant is a so-called *proton pseudos* in the Freudian sense. According to Gilson, this means that Essence has its own Unessential in itself. Thus, Žižek, Lacan and Gilson, they use the same logic. It can be said that “the One divides itself into two, two do not merge into one” because of its own surplus (Žižek, Lacan) or co-product (Gilson).

Of course, it could be said that this resemblance is expected. At the time, Hegelism had deeply influenced not only Lacan himself, but also many authors on whom Lacan relied concerning Neoplatonism, including Jean Wahl, Père Fustigière, and Gilson himself. Therefore, if Žižek’s reading of *Parmenides* is a kind of exercise for Hegelian dialectic, as

he said, this resemblance is inevitable. This does not mean that Lacan and Miller's Neoplatonic way of reading *Parmenides* is incompatible with Žižek's apparently anti-Neoplatonic standpoint.

## 9. Toward Lacanian Henology: *Parmenides* as a Position of the Psychoanalyst

Finally, what is henology for Lacan himself? Following his comments with regard to *Parmenides*, it is possible to identify three aspects of this concept.

The first, as mentioned above, concerns the relationship with the psychoanalyst's position. The second is a logic of the Id, especially contrasted with a logic of the unconscious. This may be viewed as Lacanian vitalism versus Lacanian structuralism. Finally, the third, which derives from the second, is so-called "sexuation" in the Lacanian sense.

It is always difficult to define the goal or objective of the psychoanalyst. Thus, we borrow a "quick reference" made by Miller during a session of his seminar. According to Miller, the goal of analysis in early Lacan is "a certain assumption of the lack," and the analyst focuses on the subject's "lack of being." In middle Lacan, the interpretation of the analyst focuses on the "object a," or the mobile object of enjoyment in the subject's speech. In late Lacan, the psychoanalysis focuses on the reiteration of the One, that is, the One of the enjoyment, which Lacan named *sinthome*.

First, for early Lacan;

I begin with A, which is the radical Other, that of the eighth or ninth hypothesis of *Parmenides*, which is equally the real pole of the subjective relation and is what Freud ties the relation to the death instinct to. (Lacan 1988/1978: 321)

The term, "radical Other" is memorable. Lacan used this term several times in this seminar, and its objective is very clear.

When I tell you that the only real resistance in analysis is the resistance of the analyst, that means that an analysis is conceivable only to the extent that the a [other] is effaced. A certain subjective purification must be accomplished in analysis [...]

The analyst partakes of the radical nature of the Other, in so far as he is what is most inaccessible. From then on, and beginning at this point in time, what leaves

the imaginary of the ego of the subject is in accordance not with this other to which he is accustomed, and who is just his partner, the person who is made so as to enter into his game, but precisely with this radical Other which is hidden from him. (Lacan 1988/1978: 324)

In early Lacan, the “death instinct” is the ability of “a certain subjective purification” of the “radical Other,” and the analyst partakes in this nature to efface the imaginary other, Lacan’s “small a” at this time. This effaced place is what Miller called “the lack.” For Lacan, the wrecked dialogue concerning Being and non-Being in *Parmenides* demonstrated his concept of “the Symbolic,” realized by the “death instinct.” In this period, Lacan thought that the psychoanalytic process is, simply put, a kind of symbolic recognition process, meaning that non-Being comes to Being because it speaks (Lacan 1988/1978: 308).

For middle Lacan, this nature of the “radical Other” was maintained.

Nothing represents in it the Other, the radical Other, the Other as such. This representation of the Other is lacking, specifically, between the two posed worlds that sexuality designates for us in the masculine and the feminine. (Lacan 1998/1973: 193)

Yet, the relationship between the psychoanalyst and Parmenides (not Plato’s *Parmenides* but the philosopher himself) is here a bit ironic. Lacan generated his “object a” in the form of the famous Freudian *fort-da* by arranging one of the theses in Plato’s *Parmenides* as follows:

If you have, for example, some difficulties, even some fatigue, in reading a text as exciting as Plato’s “Parmenides”, it is in as much as on this point of “A is A” let us say that you lack a little reflection, and in as much precisely that if I said above that the “A is A” is a belief, you must indeed understand it in the way I told you. [...] [that “A is A” signifies nothing] It is precisely this nothing (rien) that is going to be in question, because this nothing has a positive value because it says what that signifies. We have in our experience, indeed in our analytic folklore, something, the image never sufficiently explored, exploited, which is the game of the little child so shrewdly picked out by Freud, perceived in such a perspicacious fashion in the Fort-Da. (Lacan 1961–1962: Dec. 6. 1961)

Here, we can find the original idea of Democritus' *den*, to which Lacan referred in his seminar in 1964. Žižek also gives a detailed interpretation in his *Less than Nothing*. However, as we have seen, this idea is already found in Gilson's "Unessential." For late Lacan (at least the beginning of late Lacan in the early 1970s),

This is that in analytic experience, the first step is to introduce into it the One as the analyst that you are. You make him take the step into it, as a result of which the analysand who is what is at stake, the first mode of the manifestation of this One, is obviously to reproach you with only being One among others. (Lacan 2011: 127)

Thus, the analyst must finally be promoted as an abjection in the place rightly occupied by the One. To regard the analyst as something that is from this abjection supposes that the analyst is differently rooted in a *pratique*, which plays the role of another "Real" (Lacan 2001: 548). Lacan describes this move from the One to "object a" in the clinical context, as follows:

We are brothers of our patient in so far as, like him, we are the sons of discourse. To represent this effect that I designate as "object a," to make ourselves for this lack of being the support, the waste product, the abjection to which they can cling on what is going, thanks to us, to be born to saying, to saying that is interpreting, naturally with the help of something which is what I invite the analyst to support himself with, so as to be worthy of the transference. (Lacan 2011: 235)

## **10. Toward Lacanian Henology: *Parmenides* as a Logic of the Id and Logical Necessity**

Lacan himself well recognized the shift in the meaning of the One. As always, this shift can be considered as moving from "desire" to "drive." In this case, two lines emerge: desire—unconscious—unessential—"object a" (as transfinite numbers); and drive—Id—non-Being—Phallus (as an empty set).

In this context, Lacan's interest in henology treats the relationship between Being and the One. As Lacan once clearly stated "the Id, it's non-being" (Lacan 1978: 84), the formula of early Lacan from non-Being to Being can be understood as a variation of Freud's "*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*—Where the Id was, there the Ego shall be." To the

position of non-Being named Id, something that can be called “Being” shall come. Lacan translated the name of this Being as “I” (*je*). For late Lacan, this relationship between the One and the Being is defined as a “non-relationship,” because the One speaks by itself alone. In contrast with his famous concept, *signifiant*, which always refers to another *signifiant*, *le dire* of the One who speaks itself alone does not refer to any other thing. Thus, it naturally has no relationship with anything, or no relationship with nothing.

In early Lacan, the unconscious is the locus of the subject where the Id speaks (*ça parle*) (Lacan 1961–1962: Jan.10.1962); this may be described as follows: from the mouth of the unconscious, Id speaks. In the Freudian tradition, the mechanism that makes the unconscious speak is called the repetition (*répétition*). However, here, the One speaks itself alone at the place where something about the “relationship” must be spoken, and it will become unconscious knowledge only when it exists. In Lacanian terms, “*ex-sistence*,” which means that something appears from the void of the One and now becomes a Being, is a kind of masque of the void. This “*ex-sistence*” is enabled from two angles or two stops (*l’arrêt*)—the first symbolic and the second imaginary—meaning that the Lacanian One has two levels. The couple real-symbolic is the *trait unaire*, and the couple real-imaginary is the numbers or generation of natural numbers inspired by the set theory. In this section, we will try to verify this simplified hypothesis.

Lacan said,

Analytic theory sees the One being highlighted at two of its levels. The One is the One which is in repetition; it is at the foundation of this major incidence in the talk of the analysand that it exposes with a certain repetition, with regard to what? A signifying structure.

What is it, on the other hand, to consider the schema that I gave of the analytic discourse, what is produced from placing the subject at the level of the enjoyment of speaking? What is produced and what I designate at the level described as that of surplus enjoying, is that S1, namely, a signifying production that I am proposing, while leaving me the duty to make you sense its impact, that I propose to recognize in what is involved in what? What is the sameness of the difference? What does it mean that something that we designate in the signifier by different letters, is the same? What can be meant by saying “the same”, if not precisely that it is unique, starting from the very hypothesis from which there starts in set theory the function of the element. (Lacan 2011: 165)

The first level, which enables signifying structure through repetition, the real stopped by the symbolic, is the *trait unaire*. Lacan defined this as what one is dealing with in identification. In every battery of the signifier, we find ourselves confronted with this single trait (*einzigster Zug*), which could be substituted for all of the elements that constitute the signifying chain, that supports this chain all by itself simply by being always the same (Lacan 1961–1962: Nov.29.1961). The function of this *trait unaire* (Freud's *einzigster Zug*) is to indicate the place where there is suspended in the signifier, where there is hooked on the question of its guarantee, of its function, of what use this is, this signifier in the advent of the truth. Lacan at that time considered the *trait unaire* to be the function of the One.

A famous Lacanian notion, “object a,” is located in this repetition of the *trait unaire*. Lacan once said that “[object a] is only an effect of the position of the unary trait” (Lacan 2006: 139). In 1968, Lacan remarkably contrasted two subjects whose difference remains irremediable: “the subject of enjoyment” and “the subject established in the mark” (Lacan 2006: 141). In Gilson's henology, the generation of the Essence as a co-product of the Being (G-6, G-7, G-8) may be useful. What Lacan had described as the *trait unaire*, “the subject established in the mark” with the co-product as “object a,” was on the vector of “Essence” in Gilson's henology; yet here, this vector is strictly differentiated to another vector, that of “Being” or the generation of the Being by the One.

Thus, Lacan said that the *trait unaire* had nothing to do with the *yad'lan* that he was trying to circumscribe in 1971.

I already indicated that in a few sentences, I already indicated that at the Panthéon, namely, that as regards the *yad'lan* there are two stages. Parmenides and then subsequently we have to get to set theory for the question of a knowledge such that it takes truth as a simple function, and which is far from being satisfied with it. Which involves a real which in truth, has nothing to do[...] There only exists the One—with all that is putting pressure around us, I am also forced here to hurry—set theory is the questioning of why is there “*yad'lan*.” (Lacan 2011: 200)

From *Parmenides* to set theory—what does this shift mean? Or rather, what is the role of the One in the set theory that Lacan proposed?

The status of the One, from the moment that what is at stake is to ground it, can only start from its ambiguity. Namely, that the mainspring of set theory stems

entirely from the fact that the One of the set, is distinct from the One of the element.  
(Lacan 2011: 128)

Here Lacan explained a basic method of constructing natural numbers in set theory. The distinction between the set and the element corresponds roughly with the distinction between “the One” and “the thought” in the Neoplatonic tradition. Lacan translated this into the distinction between “the statement” (*le dire*) and “the spoken” (*le dit*). Lacan believed that by set theory, it became possible to think of the One as being grounded on pure and simple difference. By this differential nature, the One causes this distinction “by itself.” Because of this, the Other (*l’Autre*) becomes a self-differential field, where the One as an empty set is inscribed. In contrast with the case of the *trait unaire*, Lacan used the term *reiteration* here instead of the psychoanalytic term *répétition*, suggesting that, to construct the natural numbers, he would rely on the so-called “iterative set theory,” not on Frege’s theory, just as Miller did in his famous article “Suture.”

It can be supposed that this distinction always existed in Lacanian thought. It is very suggestive that, after the presentation of Miller’s “Suture,” Lacan immediately exclaimed that Miller’s notion could explain Lacan’s distinction between the enunciation and the enunciated. He distinguished between “the present of the statement” (*le dire du present*) and “the present in statement” (*le present du dire*). His objective was to point out the statement without “I” (*je*), which gives to the subject the exclamation, which is “[...] the very type of the presence of discourse in so far as the person that produces it completely effaces her present.” In 1967, Lacan tried to describe the same structure in another fashion, using the Cartesian *cogito*. In the seminars of this year, the *Id* was located at the side of “I don’t think,” and Lacan described it as “Pas-Je” (not-I). Here, the problem was also to point out the statement (*le dire*) without “I.” The unconscious was located at the side of “I am not,” and here the exclamation means the arising of the unconscious. Lacan described the relationship between the *Id* and the unconscious as follows:

To designate what is involved in the unconscious, as regards the register of existence and of its relationship with the I, I would say that—in the same way as we have seen that the *Id*, is a thought bitten by something which is not the return of being, but something like an unbeing (*desêtre*)—just as non-existence at the level of the unconscious, is something which is bitten by an I think which is not I and this I think which is not I, and which—by being able for a moment to reunite it with the *Id*

(ça)—I indicated it as an it speaks (*ça parle*), what we have here (as you are going to see) is a short circuit and an error.

The model of the unconscious, is undoubtedly that of an “it speaks,” but on condition that one clearly sees that there is no being at stake. (Lacan 1966–1967: Jan.11.1967)

It is very clear here that the Id is non-Being (unbeing, *desêtre*) and the unconscious on the side of the Being, and the surprise is exactly what signals the encounter between them. Set theory was, for Lacan, an effort to mathematize his long effort to structure the relationship between these two distinct levels. In particular, the One that continues to generate itself as an empty set is, for Lacan, an example of the logical necessity.

[...] what I meant, is that if the One is subtracted, this whole edifice of numbers ought, if you understand it as the product of a logical operation, specifically that which proceeds from the position of the 0 and from the definition of successor, the whole chain be undone, and return to its start. (Lacan 2011: 171)

For Lacan, the logical operation that produces natural numbers as a reiteration of the One demonstrates a necessity. Lacan would later call this logically necessary generation of the One “that which doesn’t stop being written.” At that point, in 1971, Lacan called this nothing “inexistence.” It is not nothing (*néant*), as it is a number that generates the series of natural numbers; instead, the supposition of inexistence is only the consequence of the production of the necessity (Lacan 2011: 50–55).

For that reason, Lacan, in remarking that Freud and Frege were contemporaries, described a “grand design” for the logical necessity of the discourse of analysis. Both Freud and Frege illustrated the functional usage of inexistence. Frege was led to ground the number 1 on the concept of inexistence, while Freud saw logical necessity as a grammar of discourse that is able to interpret the symptom, such as detumescence in the male.

## **11: Toward Lacanian Henology: As a Logic of Sexuation and Logical Contingency**

Lacan’s mathematical logic aimed to construct a logic of the Id, and it finally turned into the logic of Lacanian “sexuation.” In his seminar “...ou pire” (1971–1972), Lacan referred to the contradiction discussed in *Parmenides*. According to Aristotelian logic, which is



based on the intuition of the real individuality, the law of non-contradiction has absolute dominance; thus, trivially, the law of the excluded middle is also necessarily true. As Lacan said, “Everything that is not man...is it woman? It might tend to be admitted. But since the woman is not all, why would everything that is not woman be man?” (Lacan 2011: 178). Lacan thought that, with Cantorian set theory (the One as the empty set, or his *yad’l’un*), the universe of discourse becomes undecidable; thus, law, both the law of the excluded middle and the law of non-contradiction, would naturally become inapplicable. In the case of *Parmenides*, Lacan referred to the Platonic Idea, for whom the notion of “horse” is based on the ideal horse, in contrast to Aristotle, for whom the notion of “horse” is based on a real horse. Therefore, the law of non-contradiction is not always applicable.

The common thread between set theory and *Parmenides* is that on both sides, the One is treated not as All, but as something that emerges (Lacan 2011: 134). Lacan called this characteristic “not-all.” Because of this, the One cannot be the Being, and the function of the existence (arranged by Lacan as “*ex-sistence*”) is based on this impossibility. Lacan found this movement, from the One to “*ex-sistence*” in *Parmenides*. He explained,

There is no existence except on a foundation of inexistence and reciprocally, *ex-sistere*, to only have your support from something outside which is not. And this indeed is what is involved in the One. Because in truth, from where does it arise? At a point where Plato manages to circumscribe it. You must not believe that it is, as it seems simply with respect to time, he calls it to *exaiphnes*. You can translate that as you wish. It is the instant, the sudden. This is the only point at which he can make it subsist and it is indeed in effect always where every elucidation of number. (Lacan 2011: 135)

In *Parmenides*, this “instant” was described as a contradictory moment, in which “Being” and “non-Being” were superposed and indeterminate. Of course, in Aristotelian logic, this is a contradiction and therefore impossible. However, in this paradoxical moment, in *Parmenides*, the theoretic possibility of movement, which contradicts famous Zeno’s paradox, arises. In Lacanian terminology, this moment was called “contingent.”

The not-all means, as it was earlier in the left-hand column, means not impossible, it is not impossible that the woman should know the phallic function. What is the not impossible? It has a name that the Aristotelian tetrad suggests, but arranged differently here, just as the necessary was opposed to the possible, to the

impossible it is the contingent. It is in so far as the woman, presents herself to the phallic function in the manner of an argument in contingency, that there can be articulated what is involved in the sexual value woman. (Lacan 2011: 48)

As Lacan suggested, the name of this contingency in Lacanian psychoanalysis is “woman.” In her case, what is indeterminate or undecidable is whether she deals with the phallic function or not. The essence of woman is not castration, so “starting from the Real, namely, apart from a little insignificant nothing—I am not saying that by chance—they are not castratable” (Lacan 2011: 47). What is this “little insignificant nothing [*un petit rien insignifiant*]”? Lacan appears to have chosen this expression intentionally. He last used the expression “*petit rien*” in 1962 when he referred to the case of Freud’s famous patient, “the butcher’s beautiful wife.” “The only thing that interests the butcher’s wife is her husband fancying the little negligible amount, the nothing [*son mari ait envie du petit rien*], that she keeps in reserve” (Lacan 2013: 50). The Lacanian name of this “*petit rien*” is “object a” and, perhaps for Žižek, “less than nothing.” When a woman decides to give her nothing to someone, she gives the impossibility of the perfect superimposition of the void and signifier. It is simply “undecidable.” Lacan called this contingency “that which does not stop being written.” For Lacan, “Not all” (*Pas toutes*) is nothing other than the expression of contingency.

Namely, that on one side we have the Universal founded on a necessary relationship to the phallic function and on the other side a contingent relationship because the woman is “not all.” (Lacan 2011: 105)

Here it can be understood that Lacan finally set two vectors of the movement of the One. As seen in this section, Lacan first tried to define his “not all” by expanding the universe of discourse by the necessity, that is to say, the generation of natural numbers. However, at the end of this seminar in 1971–1972, he renounced this definition and instead tried to explain the term using the Cantorian notion of the transfinite. He also made aleph-zero equal to the One on this occasion. Miller would later identify the Lacanian “object a” with the pure difference (that is, an element corresponding to no element in the enumeration of elements from an infinite set) used in Cantor’s famous diagonal argument (Miller 1992). Lacan himself once said somewhat jokingly that this element is the virgo because she is not numerable as she situates herself, contrary to the One that is on the side of the father, between the One and the Zero (Lacan 2011: 204).

Our simplified hypothesis now becomes clear. There are two vectors: “drive—Id—non-Being—empty set—Frege—necessary— $\Phi$  or S1”; and “desire—unconscious—unessential—transfinite—Cantor—contingent—object a.”

## 12. Conclusion

For Lacan, the significance of henology is that, by virtue of its theoretical presupposition, he can suppose “absolute nothing.” Yet, this nothing is not simple nothing. First, the Being and non-Being are in it at same time, and it tolerates this contradiction in Aristotelian logic, because in *Parmenides*, it is simply the indeterminate “instant” that makes possible the movement against Zeno’s paradox.

According to this understanding of henology, the One is ineffable—not the illogical, intouchable mystical One, but something to be clarified by logic. This was declared by both Gilson and Lacan. For Lacan, the logic from *Parmenides* to Cantor is a means of demonstrating, not only the generative, productive aspect, but also the undecidable aspect of the co-product, which both are found in psychoanalysis.

In early Lacan, the henological superposing of the Being and non-Being is the very nature of his concept of “the Symbolic.” In one of its aspects, it can annihilate everything with its force as the death drive, but it can also make non-Being into Being, which was the psychoanalyst’s task for Lacan in that decade.

In middle Lacan, when he was interested in mathematical logic, his main concern was the logic of the Id, particularly its generative, productive aspect, compared with the generation of the natural numbers in mathematical logic. In this case, the inaugural nothing was compared with the empty set that enables the series of natural numbers with necessity. However, at same time, Lacan found another vector of the One, that is, the production of the co-product. The former corresponds to the Id in psychoanalysis (or the subject of *jouissance* in Lacanian terms), and the latter corresponds to the unconscious (or the subject of the *signifiant*).

In late Lacan, he tried to include the problem of “the universe of the discourse,” which can integrate the problems of the production of the One and the contradictory nature of the One. This is because, due to this generative nature of the One and its co-product as “object a,” the One becomes indeterminate and undecidable (“not-all” in Lacan’s terminology), and it tolerates the contradictory nature of the One, in which Being and non-Being are compatible. In late Lacan, with the introduction of modal logic, these two vectors are attributed to the relationship (or non-relationship) between man and woman that he

called “sexuation.” “The necessary” means the logical generation of natural numbers through the notion of the One and the empty set (Lacan said that the numbers are real for this reason). “The impossible” means the logical contradiction of the One, but sometimes, by virtue of the generative movement of the One and its co-product, the universe of the discourse becomes indeterminate, undecidable, and “not-all,” which means for Lacan “the contingent.”

Thus, with Gilson as a silent partner of Lacan, it becomes possible to conclude that Žižek’s opposition to Neoplatonism is not the opposition to Lacanian henology, rather they converge into the one, because both of them use the same logic. This logic is that the One has two vectors, first is the necessity that produces the Being, and second is the contingency that produces the Unessential.

But there still remains an ambiguity. Regarding two vectors in Lacanian henology, which is the subject of *jouissance* and which is the subject of *signifiant*? This article proposed that the former is on the vector of the necessity, and the latter is on the vector of the contingency, because what is emphasized in this article is not the product of the movement of the One, but its process. Of course the contrary is also possible if the accent is given to the product of this movement. This possibility of alternance itself will be our future theme.

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\*For Lacan's seminars not translated into English, the author relied heavily on the translations provided by this site: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/published-works/seminars/>. Accessed January 2018.