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Deconstructing Capitalism through Perversion: Readings of *The Invention of Morel*

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Abstract: The central argument of this article lies in the intent to think, from a reading of *The Invention of Morel*, about the subversion possibilities, simultaneously discursive and operational, of certain structures of capitalism, carried out by discrete elements of society, regardless of their social standing. Discussing Morel himself and his invention, I postulate the hypothesis that Morel is subversive because he is perverse. As a preamble to this discussion, and in an attempt to turn it into a critique of current times, a reading of Slavoj Žižek's 2009 article entitled "Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses" will be undertaken. Through a comparative analysis of the rational underlying the four antagonisms which, in Žižek's opinion, will prevent the indefinite reproduction of the current "naturalization" of capitalism in the global world, and Morel and his invention, one concludes the latter's obscene perversity causes, through exaggeration, potentially destructive effects (ecological, biological, communicational and of exclusion) of the very mechanisms and capitalist subsystems which generated them, thus deconstructing their significant codes.

Keywords: Žižek, capitalism, perversity, *The Invention of Morel*, obscene, society.

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The central argument of this article lies in the intent to think, from a reading of *The Invention of Morel*, about the subversion possibilities, simultaneously discursive and operational, of certain structures of capitalism, carried out by discrete elements of society, regardless of their social standing. As a preamble to this discussion, and in an attempt to turn it into a critique of current times, a reading of Slavoj Žižek's 2009 article entitled "Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses" will be undertaken.

In the above-mentioned article, Slavoj Žižek discusses the current "naturalization" of capitalism in the global world and enunciates the four antagonisms which, in his opinion, will prevent the indefinite reproduction of this phenomena. These antagonisms are related with Ecology, Private Property, New Techno-Scientific Developments and New Forms of Apartheid.

Before delving into the literary work itself, some preliminary comments should be presented regarding the concept of social evolution which is inherent to Žižek's thought. The Slovenian philosopher seems to portray a conception of social evolution which is characterized by the inevitable introduction of structural changes in society in order to provide a solution for the internal problems which are maximally aggravated in this very same society. According to his opinion, in the contemporary world this conception of social evolution materializes in the overcoming of capitalism. Such a conception is normally the one opposed to a theory of social evolution conceived as an evolutionary causal process. A questioning which seems to be plausible to carry out in this context, is that of the exact relation of Žižek's thought with these two conceptions of social evolution.

By clinging to those specific antagonisms, is not Žižek neglecting the existence of other potential factors, endogenous and exogenous, identifiable and non-identifiable, of the systems that sustain capitalism, which can contribute to its disintegration¹? By considering the fourth

¹ We might enunciate several examples, such as: the subversive action of capitalism carried out in many institutions belonging to what Žižek designates as being a community of the Included; the collapse of the economic system; a nuclear world war; a global natural catastrophe (without an identifiable origin in the action of man upon nature); etc. And, additionally, to consider the imponderable factors.

antagonism as the key element to carry out the destruction of capitalism², is not Žižek implying a well determined causality in, and a macro-temporal vision of, social evolution? By proposing a resurrected notion of communism as a general alternative ideology to capitalism, implemented via very well defined agents – the Excluded – , is not Žižek simply proposing an inverted (as opposed to a hindrance to) capitalism, preserving the teleological³ element in his thesis?

It is hardly excessive to state that Žižek tries to predict the unpredictable, yielding to the idea of evolution as a process which he himself criticizes. Even if the course of history eventually takes a divergent path from the one that capitalist agents are keen in keeping pursuing, that is not a reason strong enough for us to state that Žižek does not conceive evolution as a process. Such is the case because, despite this philosopher's emphasis on the idea of Stephen Jay Gould, who postulates the fundamental contingency of human existence, his premises do not completely represent a rejection of social evolution as a macro-historical and causal process. In other words, he does not reject completely the idea of social evolution as a process subjected to the determinism of a kind of law which postulates as invariable the ideas of necessity, unilinearity, continuity and irreversibility.

These incoherencies which we are able to glimpse in Žižek's thought do not stop us, however, from siding with him in the need to criticize the capitalist ideology nor from recognizing in the antagonisms which he identified a high potential for rupture with such an ideology. For this reason, and as the title of this paper suggests, we shall analyze a pertinent literary work in order to think about the aforesaid problem along with the associated questions. The fact that Žižek writes about contemporary times – he refers to these antagonisms as being specificities of the 21st century – and the fact that *The Invention of Morel* is a work whose publication date is from 1940, leads to the need for a well-founded justification concerning the relevance of its study, as well as the scope of it.

² “(...) in the series of the four antagonisms, the one between the Included and the Excluded is the crucial one, the point of reference for the others; without it, all others lose their subversive edge: ecology turns into a “problem of sustainable development”, intellectual property into a “complex legal challenge”, biogenetics into an “ethical” issue.” (Žižek, 2009: unpaginated)

³ “(...) the “de-structured” masses, poor and deprived of everything, situated in a non-proletarized urban environment, constitute one of the principal horizons of the politics to come.” (Žižek, 2009: unpaginated)

Žižek presents capitalism as the ruling ideology of a dystopian global society, which is precisely what the main character and narrator of *The Invention of Morel* presents as being his own context (despite the absence of any mention to capitalism). On the very first page of the text, he makes it explicit that his effort to survive holds within itself the main purpose for writing, in parallel to the diary-writing project, two books, entitled *Apology for Survivors* and *Tribute to Malthus*. In these books he intends to denounce, and, consequently, to act upon agents and systems responsible for the existence of a dystopian global society⁴.

The Invention of Morel, of course, merely intends to portray a phase in a man's life, a man who, despite having been violently repressed by such dystopian global society, is able to escape from, and in a way subvert that repression by sheer force of his desire. The aforementioned writing projects end up not being carried out because the desire of the protagonist simply turns to the immediate and objective reality⁵. Thus, how can we justify the need to resort to this literary work in order to analyze Žižek's article? Well, the truth is that the antagonisms which this philosopher enunciated are all present therein in a quite obvious way. The protagonist moves through a scenario of biologic, ecologic, and communicative crisis as well as of violent exclusion. One can thus argue that *The Invention of Morel* can be read as the simulacrum of a situation where the simultaneous aggravation of some of the issues associated with the capitalist system presents itself at the threshold of rupture.

I shall begin by reflecting, in the context of the works of Adolfo Bioy Casares, upon the fourth antagonism (New Forms of Apartheid) postulated by Žižek, which this philosopher deems primordial in relation to the other three⁶ antagonisms. And he does so in terms which should be immediately explained, so that they can be read at the light of the novella. As mentioned above,

⁴ "Atacaré, en esas páginas, a los agotadores de las selvas y de los desiertos; demostraré que el mundo, con el perfeccionamiento y las policías, de los documentos, del periodismo, de la radiotelefonía, de las aduanas, hace irreparable cualquier error de la justicia, es un infierno unánime para los perseguidos." (Bioy Casares, 1989: 1) ["My books will expose the men who violate the sanctity of forests and deserts; I intend to show that the world is an implacable hell for fugitives, that its efficient police forces, its documents, newspapers, radio broadcasts, and border patrols have made every error of justice irreparable." (Bioy Casares, 2003: 9)]

⁵ "Con puntualidad aumento las páginas de este diario y olvido las que me excusarán de los años que mi sombra se demoró en la tierra (*Defensa ante Sobrevivientes y Elogio de Malthus*)." (Bioy Casares, 1989: 11) ["Although I have been making entries in this diary at regular intervals, I have not had a chance to work on the books that I hope to write as a kind of justification for my shadowy life on this earth." (Bioy Casares, 2003: 20)]

⁶ See note 2 of the present study.

Žižek considers the slum inhabitants from great metropolises to be the only ones who are able to embody a revolutionary project based upon a resurrected notion of communism capable of replacing capitalism as a ruling ideology on a global scale. Žižek's reasons are the following:

It is effectively surprising how many features of slum dwellers fit the good old Marxist determination of the proletarian revolutionary subject: they are “free” in the double meaning of the word even more than the classic proletariat (“freed” from all substantial ties; dwelling in a free space, outside the police regulations of the state); they are a large collective, forcibly thrown together, “thrown” into a situation where they have to invent some mode of being-together, and simultaneously deprived of any support in traditional ways of life, in inherited religious or ethnic life-forms.(Žižek, 2009: unpaginated)

By resorting to a Kantian argument, Žižek (2009: unpaginated) regards these conditions of “freedom” as holding a potential for universality, in opposition to the “private” order of capitalist society – where he includes the States:

What one should add here, moving beyond Kant, is that there is a privileged social group which, on account of its lacking a determinate place in the “private” order of social hierarchy, directly stands for universality: it is only the reference to those Excluded, to those who dwell in the blanks of the State space, that enables true universality. There is nothing more “private” than a State community which perceives the Excluded as a threat and worries how to keep the Excluded at a proper distance.

In what aspects is the protagonist and narrator of *The Invention of Morel* akin to, and different from this Žižekian notion of Excluded?

A first affinity lies in the fact that he is someone who is trying to escape from the absolute control which society wishes to exert on itself. The fact that he quotes the goals he intends to reach with his writing projects fully proves it.

A second common trait is the fact that the protagonist of this novella represents a menace to society – he considers himself a fugitive from the judicial system on a global scale, an émigré to whom, like a Žižekian Excluded, no State in particular is willing to offer political asylum. This force of the law is felt in such an intense way by the protagonist that he starts showing signs of paranoia, seeing as a threat the mere presence of the supposed vacationers on the islet⁷.

A third affinity lies in the features of the space where both reside. Just like the Žižekian Excluded⁸, one can notice that the attempt of the protagonist from *The Invention of Morel* to cross the boundaries of that State of absolute control simply drives him towards a frontier zone, since such a State is nothing but, in terms of territory, the whole world and not a regime or a particular country. This frontier zone presents two features which Žižek refers as being typical of the slums: in there, State Law is not applied (which is why the narrator runs away towards it, and it is in there that the perverse invention of Morel “perpetuates” itself): in there, the inhabitable space is felt by the narrator as being reduced, overpopulated, oppressive and highly precarious⁹.

These affinities contain, however, the elements which differentiate such Excluded and which are fundamental to be brought up to the collation. In the first place, although the type of threat that the protagonist of the novella represents for society is not strictly known, it is nevertheless known that it is of a distinct nature from the threat of the Žižekian Excluded. And it is known due to the type of oppression that is exerted by each one of them, because although the former is, in Žižek’s own words, *kept at bay* by the so-called community of the Included, the latter is *persecuted* by that same community. Secondly, and notwithstanding the already underlined common features of the frontier zone, the differences of context where each one

⁷“En este juego de mirarlos hay peligro; como toda agrupación de hombre cultos han de tener escondido un camino de impresiones digitales y de cónsules que me remitirá, si me descubren, por unas cuantas ceremonias o trámites, al calabozo.” (Bioy Casares, 1989: 3) [“Perhaps watching them is a dangerous pastime: like every group of civilized men they no doubt have a network of consular establishments and a file of fingerprints that can send me, after the necessary ceremonies or conferences have been held, to jail.” (Bioy Casares, 2003: 11)]

⁸“While today’s society is often characterized as the society of total control, slums are the territories within a state boundaries from which the state (partially, at least) withdrew its control, territories which function as white spots, blanks, in the official map of a state territory.” (Žižek, 2009: unpaginated)

⁹“Son [los veraneantes] inconscientes enemigos que, para oír *Valencia* y *Té para dos* – un fonógrafo poderosísimo los ha impuesto al ruido del viento y del mar –, me privan de todo lo que me ha costado tanto trabajo y es indispensable para no morir, me arrinconan contra el mar en pantanos deletéreos.” (Bioy Casares, 1989: 3) [“They [the tourists] are my unconscious enemies who, as they corner me against the sea in the disease-infested marshes, deprive me of everything I need, everything I must have if I am to go on living. The sound of their very loud phonograph – “Tea for Two” and “Valencia” are their favorite records – seems now to be permanently superimposed on the wind and the sea.” (Bioy Casares, 2003: 11)]

moves about also accentuate the differentiation of the type of exclusion: in the ghettos there is a community of the Excluded with a dynamic social organization, in a state of becoming, whereas in the novella the protagonist suffers from a phenomenon of insularity, a phenomenon which, according to Gallagher (1975: 249)¹⁰, is an immanent feature of the work of Adolfo Bioy Casares: “For Bioy every human being would seem to be an island, the gulf between one human being and another being as relentless as the sea that separates two islands.”¹¹

These differences lead to the questioning of the validity of Žižek’s assertions about the Excluded. *The Invention of Morel* leads us to consider the possibility of the existence of some Excluded whose features diverge from those mentioned by Žižek, but, more importantly, to consider the possibility of subverting capitalism through individual action and to start from a different positioning in society¹². The dialectics of the Slovenian philosopher does not seem to

¹⁰ Besides Gallagher (1975: 247-66), in “The novels and short stories of Adolfo Bioy Casares”, Henighan also defends (2012: 89-112), in “Every man is an island: Bioy’s fiction”, the existence of this phenomenon of insularity in the work of Bioy Casares.

¹¹ We want to leave it registered at this point that this phenomenon of insularity in the work of Bioy Casares will be taken into account in this study in Batailleian terms. Based on an analysis of the phenomenon of reproduction in living beings, Georges Bataille postulates, in *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, a fundamental discontinuity of each human being, constituting the space (the sea) which interposes itself between the human beings, thus being considered the abyss of death. This abyss of death exerts a common fascination in all the human beings, since it is in there that resides the possibility for them to abandon the isolation to which they are destined as individuals, meaning, to accede a state of continuity: “Chaque être est distinct de tous les autres. Sa naissance, sa mort et les événements de sa vie peuvent avoir pour les autres un intérêt, mais il est seul intéressé directement. Lui seul naît. Lui seul meurt. Entre un être et un autre, il y a un abîme, il y a une discontinuité. / (...) / Mais je ne puis é voquer cet abîme qui nous sépare sans avoir aussitôt le sentiment d’un mensonge. Cet abîme est profond, je ne vois pas le moyen de le supprimer. Seulement nous pouvons en commun ressentir le vertige de cet abîme. Il peut nous fasciner. Cet abîme en un sens est la mort et la mort est vertigineuse, elle est fascinante.” (Bataille, 2011:14-5) [“Each being is distinct from all others. His birth, his death, the events of his life may have an interest for others, but he alone is directly concerned in them. He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity. / (...) / But I cannot refer to this gulf which separates us without feeling that this is not the whole truth of the matter. It is a deep gulf, and I do not see how it can be done away with. None the less, we can experience its dizziness together. It can hypnotise us. This gulf is death in one sense, and death is vertiginous, death is hypnotizing.” (Bataille, 1986: 12-3)]

This problematic of the tension between the discontinuity and continuity of the human being, with death and passion operating as central concepts in the discussion, is, as we shall see further ahead in this article, strongly evidenced in *The Invention of Morel*.

¹² In *A Plan for Escape*, Bioy’s subsequent novella to *The Invention of Morel*, the governor Pedro Castel is considered a subversive by the community due to the fact that he maintains proximity relationships with the political prisoners: “Pero Castel era un subversivo, quería estar solo con los presos... La señora acusó también a Castel de escribir, y de publicar en prestigiosos periódicos gremiales, pequeños poemas en prosa.” (Bioy Casares, 2012: 94) [“But Castel was a subversive, he wanted to be alone with the prisoners. The lady also accused Castel of writing, and of publishing in prestigious trade union newspapers, short prose poems.” (Bioy Casares, 1975: 4)]

contemplate such cases as Edward Snowden or Julian Assange¹³ – just to mention a few high-profile media cases of individuals who acted subversively from their position, and as a consequence became Excluded¹⁴, thus suffering retaliations which have put their own lives at stake.

We must also evoke the positioning at the frontier, unfindable, of the intellectuals able to introduce revolutionary changes in the ways of thinking and living of the societies and who do not necessarily identify themselves with the old role that Marx destined to them¹⁵ – that of propagating the enlightening word throughout the agent of the revolution: the proletariat. For example, Jacques Derrida, in spite of having been subjected to several attacks from the Western Academy during his life, to the point of being granted the moniker “Nero of Philosophy”, held a position within that same Academy and found in it the place that best welcomed his way of thinking. The political thought of the Maghreb thinker diverges from both the paradigms of modern democracy and communism, as he advocated a messianism without religion and a messianic without messianism, with the receivers of his discourse not being a specific existing community, but a community yet to come.

Will Žižek also claim that, precisely because these discrete elements are found within the “private sphere” of society, their discourse does not hold a (Kantian) potential for universality? These questions inevitably generate a discussion which contemporary philosophy and humanities in general have been raising and which concerns the usage of generalizations and closed and absolute systems in order to find valid abstract tenets for thinking about the problems related with human beings. Certain thinkers, such as the aforementioned Jacques Derrida or Gilles Deleuze, have put much of their effort into proving the inapplicability of such generalizations and systems, defending, conversely, that the potential for universality of a tenet can be found in its singularity, its testimonial aspect, its differentiated nature and its differentiating force.

¹³ Although Žižek has showed support to Julian Assange, he was never clear on how Assange’s actions play or not a revolutionary role. In a 2015 debate, Žižek simply stated (109’) that Wikileaks is important because it brings a global awareness on how empowered people make use of unauthorized global mechanisms of surveillance and control. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4glhXERFepo>

¹⁴ Nonetheless, their condition as Excluded is absolutely distinct from the one postulated by Žižek.

¹⁵ And which Žižek (2009: unpaginated) merely reiterates: “If the principal task of the emancipatory politics of the XIXth century was to break the monopoly of the bourgeois liberals by way of politicizing the working class, and if the task of the XXth century was to politically awaken the immense rural population of Asia and Africa, the principal task of the XXIth century is to politicize – organize and discipline – the “de-structured masses” of slum-dwellers.”

In short, we believe that it is opportune to admit the widening of the sphere of the agents potentially subversive for capitalism which were postulated by Žižek, increasing concomitantly, and in accordance to the critique of the Žižekian perspective on social evolution mentioned above, the number of potential factors for the deconstruction of capitalism as well as the combinatory possibilities of their articulation. Moreover, such widening could be a way to respond to the undoubted dynamics of growing complexification upon which rests capitalist society. The latter leads to the creation of sub-systems, which tend to head simultaneously towards the autonomization and to the establishment of labyrinthine relations of interdependence between themselves.

Within this scope, the reading of *The Invention of Morel* reveals itself as very profitable, especially by discussing Morel himself and his invention rather than the protagonist.

In his study “To love in the infinitive: time, image and the powers of the false in *La invención de Morel*”, Karl Posso comments a study by Geoffrey Kantaris (2005) where the latter identifies Morel as the product of a liberal socio-political context which allows for the figure of the inventor to have the chance to shuffle the significant codes of the speech of the technocratic power. Posso (2012:167) presents a counter-argument, by stating that:

Morel, however, simply confirms that any desire to “shuffle the code” ultimately leads back to the perennial commandeering of science for political or economic gain. His machine consumes the real in order to replace and control it: his technological discovery enables the autocratic institution of a utopian community which will prevail in a (limited) version of eternity.

Taking into account these two visions, I propose a third reading interpretation. I believe that Posso’s analysis does not consider the possibility that in Morel and in his invention might reside a potential for subversion by a principle of exaggeration. I thus postulate the hypothesis that Morel is subversive because he is perverse, in accordance with the definition of Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze (1975: 43) of this figure of desire in relation to (capitalist) society:

“Le pervers, c’est celui qui prend l’artifice au mot: vous en voulez, vous en aurez, des territorialités infiniment plus artificielles encore que celles que la société nous propose, de nouvelles familles infiniment artificielles, des sociétés secrètes et lunaires.”[“The pervert is someone who takes the artifice seriously and plays the game to the hilt: if you want them, you can have them – territorialities infinitely more artificial than the ones that society offers us, totally artificial new families, secret lunar societies.”(Félix Guattari / Gilles Deleuze, 1977: 35)]

In order to proceed to the analysis of the Morelian perversity, let us pay attention to the target-object of the subversive act: the capitalist society. It was stated above that there was not an explicit mention of the word capitalism (or of any word of the same family) in the novella. However, this does not prevent us from observing in it the implicit and explicit mentions to the concepts, paradigms and systems which support this society. We have not done anything else so far in this study, and it is not in regard to any other society that the interpretations of Posso and Kantaris concerning Morel and his invention refer to. But let us underline some more passages from the book which can aid us in supporting this argument in an unequivocal way.

The first one is contained in the speech through which Morel enlightens his “friends” / victims about the situation they are involved in, at the moment where he points out that the only effective support earned for the conception and development of his invention came from elements which belong to the part of society which is most committed to obtain profit – the industrialists¹⁶. These industrialists are not only the funders of a project, they provide every resource which feeds the perversity of the inventor no matter what the consequences. Immediately after Morel’s announcement, one of his victims addresses him, and the others also intervene, thus becoming clear in this conversation that one of the aforementioned industrialists had lent his employees to Morel to be used as guinea pigs in his experiments¹⁷.

¹⁶ » Quiero señalar mi gratitud hacia los industriales que, tanto en Francia (Société Clunie), como en Suiza (Schwachter, de Sankt Gallen), comprendieron la importancia de mis investigaciones y me abrieron sus discretos laboratorios. / » El trato de mis colegas no tolera el mismo sentimiento. (Bioy Casares, 1989: 58) [“I should like to express my gratitude to the companies that, in France (Société Clunie) and in Switzerland (Schwachter, of Saint Gallen), realized the importance of my research and put their excellent laboratories at my disposal. / “Unfortunately, I cannot say the same of my colleagues. (Bioy Casares, 2003: 69)]

¹⁷ Stoever preguntó: / – ¿Puedes mostrarnos esas primeras imágenes? / – Si ustedes me lo piden, cómo no; pero les advierto que hay fantasmas ligeramente monstruosos – contestó Morel. / – Muy bien – dijo Dora –. Que los muestre. Un poco de diversión nunca es malo. / – Yo quiero verlos – Stoever continuó – porque recuerdo unas muertes inexplicadas, en la casa Schwachter. / – Te felicito – dijo Alec, saludando –. Hemos encontrado un creyente. /

In these passages we start to glimpse a limit-situation of the current practice of the capitalist industrial system. Namely, the limit-situation where the exclusive criterion for the transformation of the natural good into a manufactured product is profit. The quotation from a speech by Morel shortly before the passages mentioned above provides further elements for analysis which allow us to follow this intuition:

“Cuando completé el invento se me ocurrió, primero como un simple tema para la imaginación, después como un increíble proyecto, dar perpetua realidad a mi fantasía sentimental...

“Creerme superior y la convicción de que es más fácil enamorar a una mujer que fabricar cielos, me aconsejaron obrar espontáneamente. Las esperanzas de enamorarla han quedado lejos; ya no tengo su confiada amistad; ya no tengo el sostén, el ánimo para encarar la vida.” (Bioy Casares, 1989: 56)

[“When I finished my invention it occurred to me, first as a mere exercise for the imagination, then as an incredible plan, that I could give perpetual reality to my romantic desire.

“My belief in my own superiority and the conviction that it is easier to make a woman fall in love in me than to manufacture heavens made me choose a spontaneous approach. My hopes of making her love me have receded now; I no longer have her confidence; nor do I have the desire, the will, to face life. (Bioy Casares, 2003: 67)]

Morel chooses to make a personal use (of a loving nature) of his invention in detriment of accepting a technical fate as a manufacturer of heavens. The plural in the word “heavens” leads us to understand that it refers to a manufacture in large quantities, continuous, thus being in force under the sign of the producing efficiency. This possibility of life, which Morel rejects, expresses

Stoever respondió con seriedad: / – Idiota, ¿no has oído?: Charlie también fue tomado. Cuando Morel estaba en Sankt Gallen empezaron a morirse los empleados de la casa Schwachter. Yo vi las fotografías en revistas. Los reconoceré. / Morel, tembloroso y amenazador, salió del cuarto. (Bioy Casares, 1989: 61) [“Can you show us those first images?” asked Stoever. / “If you wish, of course, but I warn you that some of the ghosts are slightly monstrous!” replied Morel. / “Very well,” said Dora. “Show them to us. A little entertainment is always welcome.” / “I want to see them,” continued Stoever, “because I remember several unexplained deaths at the Schwachter Company.” / “Congratulations, Morel,” said Alec, bowing. “You have found yourself a believer!” / Stoever spoke seriously, “You idiot – haven’t you heard? Charlie was taken by that machine, too. When Morel was in Saint Gallen, the employees of the Schwachter Company started to die. I saw the pictures in magazines. I’ll recognize them. / Morel, trembling with anger, left the room.” (Bioy Casares, 2003: 72)]

the correspondence between the maximum appreciation of the effective use of the manufactured objects and the maximum depreciation of the enjoyment of natural goods. Such a correspondence creates the paradigm of sterility in all the enjoyment, with such natural goods losing their inalienable character. The value of these natural goods becomes measurable.

What has been exposed thus becomes complicated when we take into account the necessary condition for the manufacturing efficiency: the experimentation. Experimentation which lives from error and from waste and that the capitalist system, in order to raise the profit, always intends to minimize. The sacrifice of Charlie and the employees of the Schwachter Company, plus the materials and the human labor put in the experiments of Morel's invention form what in industrial language is called the cost price.

However, it so happens that the object manufactured by Morel's invention always presupposes the immutability of its use: the repetition of the projection of that week at the side of Faustine and the common friends works, for Morel, as the simulacrum of eternal happiness, of the perpetuation of an emotion or of a voluptuous feeling. Even if the invention of Morel was industrialized, the efficacy of the manufactured object would manifest the very idea of enjoyment which intends to be the denegation of the principle of the effective utility of the capitalist system. At the same time, since the effective manufacturing of the simulacrum of the eternal happiness is made at the expense not only of wasteful experimentation, but also from the waste of the very bodies which are the origin (the natural goods) and the purpose (the beneficiaries) of the manufactured object, it becomes clear that there is a paradoxality in a system which, in the limit of its utilitarian obsession, becomes stuck in the dilemma which Pierre Klossowski (1970: unpaginated) enunciates:

L'acte intelligible de fabriquer porte en lui-même une aptitude différentielle de représentation, qui provoque son propre dilemme: ou bien il ne gaspille que pour s'exprimer par le fait de construire, détruire, reconstruire indéfiniment; ou bien il *ne* construit *que* pour *s'exprimer par le gaspillage*.

[The intelligible act of fabricating requires a differential aptitude for constructing representations, which gives rise to its own dilemma: either its waste is expressed in

repeated acts of construction, destruction and reconstruction that can continue indefinitely, or else its constructions themselves become *expressions of waste*. (Klossowski, 2017: 46-7)]

The waste and the sterile enjoyment which are at the centre of Morel's invention are emphasized by Morel's disinterest in sexual activity. The seduction attempt of Faustine is always made in a context of chastity. But that does not prevent Morel from falling into an erotic drift, in the Bataillan sense of the word. For Bataille (2011: 13), “(...) l'érotisme (...) est l'approbation de la vie jusque dans la mort.” [“Eroticism (...) is assenting to life up to the point of death” (Bataille, 1986: 11)], and its domain is the domain of violence, since “Le plus violent pour nous est la mort qui, précisément, nous arrache à l'obstination que nous avons de voir durer l'être discontinu que nous sommes.” Bataille (2011: 18) [“The most violent thing of all for us is death which jerk us out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous being.” (Bataille, 1986:16)]

The violence which the acts of Morel imply resides in the fact that he takes for himself, by effect of a ruse and an artifice which transforms, through death, the discontinuity between him and Faustine into an illusion of continuity, someone who does not choose to be a part of such project. Even if Morel attempts to impregnate his acts with lightness, giving the illusion that everything is done without setbacks, that same violence does not cease to be, since acceleration towards death is imposed upon another life, by a movement which separates it from its life-source. In the context of modern western societies, the violence is as evident as is the will, conscious or unconscious of the person(s) to whom death is imposed upon, to oppose that condition of submission, with the acts of Morel thus being configured as a crime of “assassination”.

Let us open a parenthesis at this point in order to speculate a bit about this matter. The criminal act would only cease to be one if Faustine and the other friends of Morel fully accepted (that is, without reservations, both exterior and interior) this condition imposed by him, that is, if Morel's wish was so irresistible to them, that it could transfigure their repulsion into an attractive will of equal intensity. In other words, if in each of the entities there was a coexistence with the

possessor and the possessed, the dominator and the dominated, to the point that these qualities stopped making sense – if there was a psychic fusion in each of the lovers / friends, simultaneously with a fusion of these very lovers / friends as individuals. But this is not what happens. What we are given to see is, on the contrary, the sovereign passion of an entity which unilaterally appropriates itself of other entities, independently of any other will.

Morel believes himself to be superior, that is, he sees the concession of his invention to the capitalist system as an alienation of his individuality. By avoiding the appropriation of his invention by the industrialists who had supported the development of his project¹⁸, he believes to be refusing the *role* which society wants to assign to him, by refusing the neutralization of his wish – initially, his project already is intended to be an exercise for the imagination, an escape from boredom. Morel and the application of his invention to his personal purposes configure, without any doubt, the pathologic symptomatology of the bourgeois society, as we might regard it in accordance to Derrida (1999: 57):

Il y a une affinité, en tout cas une synchronie, entre une culture de l'ennui et une culture de l'orgiasme. La domination de la technique favorise l'irresponsabilité démonique dont la charge sexuelle ne n'a pas à être rappelée. Et cela sur le fond de cet ennui qui va de pair avec le nivellement technologique. La civilisation technique ne produit une crue ou une recrudescence de l'orgiasme, avec ses effets bien connus d'esthétisme et d'individualisme, que dans la mesure où elle ennuie, parce qu'elle «nivelle» et neutralise la singularité irremplaçable ou mystérieuse du moi responsable. L'individualisme de cette civilisation technique repose sur la méconnaissance même du moi singulier. C'est un individualisme du *role* et non de la *personne*.

[There is an affinity, or at least a synchrony, between a culture of boredom and an orgiastic one. The domination of technology encourages demonic irresponsibility, and the sexual force of the latter does not need to be emphasized. All that occurs against the background of this boredom that acts in concert with a technological leveling effect.

Technological civilization produces a heightening or mobilization of the orgiastic, with the

¹⁸ This is apparently confirmed by the discourse of the narrator subsequent to Morel's discourse, in which the former manifests surprise by the invention not being public knowledge.

familiar accompanying effects of aestheticism and individualism, but only to the extent that it also produces boredom, for it “levels” or neutralizes the mysterious or irreplaceable uniqueness of the responsible self. The individualism of technological civilization relies precisely on a misunderstanding of the unique self. It is the individualism of a *role* and not of a *person*. (Derrida, 2008: 36-7)]

The reasons which lead Morel’s behavior to configure a case of individualism, and not of singularity, are quite clear in this quote. He does everything in order for the people whom he appropriates of, including him-self, to perform a role (of natural happiness) pre-determined by him in the economy of his representation. All care is taken to avoid friction, dissension, misunderstanding, entropy, even in the preparations for the disclosure to their victims of the situation in which they are involved. But it is unsuccessful. The point of view of the narrator of this novella – the only human being who has to coexist with the projections – is not more than an attestation to this fact, since it can be translated as the explicitness of several practical problems, confusions and misunderstandings (where all the antagonisms postulated by Žižek are present in a rather clear way) which arise as a consequence of the interaction with the invention, either in the form of its final product or in the exploitation of its potentialities. Of course, we do not have the pretension to neglect the difficult context of the narrator, a context which certainly emphasizes these problematic matters, but, if we dwell on the whole of the dialogue which we partially quoted above, we will quickly conclude that another kind of contingencies (the friends of Morel are spending a week of vacation, in a comfortable and relaxed environment) do not necessarily create any less entropy.

Morel’s perversity reaches its peak precisely at this point in the narrative, when he clarifies his “friends” / victims on the situation they are involved in. This happens because such perversity becomes cynical, with cynicism manifesting itself in a limitless crescendo. Firstly, Morel’s explanation of the irreversible implications of his invention to the victims of the latter is cynical, since this very explanation would be easily avoidable¹⁹. Secondly, Morel recognizes his

¹⁹ » Había resuelto no decirles nada. No hubieran pasado por una inquietud muy natural. Yo habría dispuesto de todos, hasta el último instante, sin rebeliones. Pero, como son amigos, tienen derecho a saber.» (Bioy Casares, 1989:54) [“At first, I decided not to tell you anything. That would have spared you a very natural anxiety. We would

lack of shame in registering the personal life of the victims, during a week, without their consent, in a physical support which perpetuates the reproduction of that very same record²⁰. Thirdly, the obscenity of this act is aggravated by the fact that Morel records it, thus preserving the memory of the terrible impact that such explanation has on his victims, and is further aggravated because Morel is fully aware of that very same impact beforehand, relying on the perverse functioning of his invention as a means to keep the situation under his control²¹. Lastly, the very concept of immortality inherent to the invention, which forms a background under which the cynicism of this discourse unfolds, is obscene, in accordance to one of the meanings postulated in Žižek’s 2017 study, “The Obscene Immortality and its Discontents”. Morel’s invention works with the same concept of Sadean immortality that Žižek (2017: 2) borrows from Lacan, which is characterized by a closed circularity that, as it succeeds in many of today’s computer games²², tends to deprive of value and even to discredit the subjective experience of death²³, thus fueling a fantasy which unites both the comical and the terrifying:

(...) the fantasy of another, ethereal body of the victim, which can be tortured indefinitely and nonetheless magically retains its beauty (recall the Sadean figure of the young girl sustaining endless humiliations and mutilations from her depraved torturer and somehow mysteriously surviving it all intact, in the same way Tom and Jerry and other

have enjoyed ourselves up to the very last instant, and there would have been no objections. But, as all of you are friends, you have a right to know.” (Bioy Casares, 2003: 66)]

²⁰ En silencio [Morel] movía los ojos, sonreía, temblaba; después siguió con ímpetu: / «Mi abuso consiste en haberlos fotografiado sin autorización. Es claro que no es una fotografía como todas; es mi último invento. Nosotros viviremos en esa fotografía, siempre. Imagínense un escenario en que se representa completamente nuestra vida en estos siete días. Nosotros representamos. Todos nuestros actos han quedado grabados.» / – ¡Qué impudor! – gritó un hombre de bigotes negros y dientes para afuera. / – Espero que sea broma – dijo Dora. / Faustine no sonreía. Parecía indignada. (Bioy Casares, 1989: 54-5) [He [Morel] paused for a moment, rolling his eyes, smiling, trembling; then he continued impulsively: “My abuse consists of having photographed you without your permission. Of course, it is not like an ordinary photograph; this is my latest invention. We shall live in this photograph forever. Imagine a stage on which our life during these seven days is acted out, complete in every detail. We are the actors. All our actions have been recorded.” / “How shameful!” blurted a man with a black moustache and protruding teeth. / “I hope it’s just a joke,” said Dora. / Faustine was not smiling. She seemed to be indignant. (Bioy Casares, 2003: 66)]

²¹ «Tendrán que disculparme esta escena, primero fastidiosa, después terrible, La olvidaremos. Esto, asociado a la buena semana que hemos vivido, atenuará su importancia. (Bioy Casares, 1989: 54) [“You must forgive me for this rather tedious, unpleasant incident. We shall try to forget it! Thoughts of the fine week we have spent here together will make all this seem less important.” (Bioy Casares, 2003: 66)]

²² “when I am immersed into a game, I dwell in a universe of undeadness where no annihilation is definitive since, after every destruction, I can return to the beginning and start the game again...” (Žižek, 2017: abstract)

²³ The same is not true of the alternative concept of immortality presented by Žižek in this same article. This concept is the Badiouian, being an ineffable contingent experience, lived in an unique and unrepeatable moment of the duration, and thus comprising a tension with the subjective experience of death, valuing it.

cartoon heroes survive all their ridiculous ordeals intact). In this form, the comical and the disgustingly-terrifying (recall different versions of the “undead” — zombies, vampires, etc. — in popular culture) are inextricably connected.

Not being, therefore, a responsible singularity, Morel does not fail to be exemplary insofar as he demonstrates to where leads the kind of extreme individualism which the capitalist society tends to produce. Morel is authoritarian, Morel gives orders, Morel plots, calculates, acts, and pretends to be observing an axiology²⁴, however, when confronted with the deadly effects of his actions, he resigns from assuming his responsibility²⁵. Free will as a way of life shows its failure in the logical impossibility of assuming the responsibility for everything and, in a particularly significant way, by giving death or taking it away (in other words, to give immortality) to whoever it is:

Chacun doit assumer, et c'est la liberté, et c'est la responsabilité, sa propre mort, à savoir la seule chose au monde que personne ne peut *ni donner ni prendre*. (...) Même si on me donne la mort, au sens où cela reviendrait à me tuer, cette mort aura toujours été la mienne et je ne l'aurais reçue de personne dès lorsqu'elle est irréductiblement la mienne – et que le mourir jamais ne se porte, ne s'emprunte, ne se transfère, livre, promet ou transmet. Et de même qu'on ne peut pas me la donner, on ne peut pas la prendre. (Derrida, 1999: 67-8)

[Everyone must assume their own death, that is to say, the one thing in the world that no one else can *either give or take*: therein resides freedom and responsibility. (...) Even if one gives me death to the extent that it means killing me, that death will still have to be mine, and as long as it is irreducibly mine I will not have received it from anyone else. Thus dying can never be borne, borrowed, transferred, delivered, promised, or transmitted. And just as it can't be given to me, so it can't be taken away from me. (Derrida, 2008: 45)]

²⁴ See note 19 of the present study.

²⁵ See note 17 of the present study.

It is through this impossibility that Morel's supposedly responsible cynicism reveals its irresponsibility, its indifference and its absolute axiological relativism that allows everything. Precisely when this terrifying limit is reached, is when irony and black comedy are felt in that very same cynicism. The latter begins to express a critical attitude towards the dominant forms of commercialization and nihilistic opportunism, proposing, even if implicitly and in backlight, a different set of values. The act of the narrator of delivering him-self to the invention of Morel at the end of the novella seems to be aimed at that direction: the valorization of appearance as being real and, in general terms, of indetermination, which allows for an escape line from, and a questioning of, a straightforward, determined and apparent reality (emptied of life, of humanity).

In sum, Morel and his invention are, therefore, an expression of the height of capitalist society - where everything tends to be cynically privatized, consumed, manipulated and turned into something artificial. This obscene perversity causes, through exaggeration, potentially destructive effects (ecological, biological, communicational and of exclusion) of the very mechanisms and capitalist subsystems which generated them, thus deconstructing their significant codes. It is thus evident how capitalism forces the extension of its own limits and enters, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1975: 41) tell us, within the scope of schizophrenia:

Le décodage des flux, la déterritorialisation du socius forment ainsi la tendance la plus essentielle du capitalisme. Il ne cesse de s'approcher de sa limite, qui est une limite proprement schizophrénique. Il tend de toutes ses forces à produire le schizo comme le sujet des flux décodés sur le corps sans organes – plus capitaliste que le capitaliste et plus prolétaire que le prolétaire.

[The decoding of flows and the deterritorialization of the socius thus constitute the most characteristic and the most important tendency of capitalism. It continually draws near to its limit, which is a genuinely schizophrenic limit. It tends, with all the strength at its command, to produce the schizo as the subject of the decoded flows on the body without organs – more capitalist than the capitalist and more proletarian than the proletariat. (Gilles Deleuze / Félix Guattari, 1977: 34)]

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