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Symptomatology of Spirit : the Curve of Intentionality and Freedom.

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My paper will tackle a concept which Lacan reinterrogated in his *Seminar* in such a way that he radically displaced not only its meaning, but also its relevance. This concept is intentionality. Intentionality, which stems from phenomenology, is the object of nearly constant criticism in Lacan's work. His critical attitude can be explained historically by Lacan's suspicion where phenomenology was concerned, particularly in its Sartrean version where the Imaginary Ego and the illusions of consciousness were always only a step away. But not only was there a historical explanation, there also was a conceptual one. In fact, as we will see, while Lacan gave some credence to the notion of the object of desire as the object of a desiring aim in *Seminar VIII*, he became much more cautious in *Seminar X*, as his thought evolved, about the possibility of placing the *objet petit a* in the coordinates of an intentional correlation. Although Lacan decided against the model of correlation, relegating it to the illusions of the Imaginary, he did preserve the idea and the structure of the aim.

The question remains, however, of what became of the idea of aim in Lacan's work, once it was no longer linked to the *objet petit a* as its correlated object, as it may have been in the first phase of Lacan's thinking. It will become clear that this question in fact allows us to understand Lacan's theoretical evolution regarding the

notion of the *objet petit a* which, after 1964 and numerous transformations, was to become the definitive name for a pure logical consistency which could be situated topologically. Thus, after *Seminar XI*, the *objet petit a* was freed from any vestiges of the intentionalism which still weighed upon Lacan's first theoretical elaborations. After this date, the *objet petit a* is deprived of any substantial character and is, henceforth, theorized by Lacan as belonging to a pure geometrical plane within which the notion of aim once more plays a crucial role, only this time under the influence of a topological distortion of its trajectory. Drive, in the Lacanian sense, consists in this formal distortion. I shall focus my attention, therefore, on the topological character of the drive, in three different stages. First, I shall insist on what I call the intentional paradox of the *objet petit a*, before putting forward, secondly, the hypothesis of intentional desire becoming a symptom through drive. Finally, surprisingly, I will demonstrate what seems to me to allow an understanding of a new Freedom reshaping the contours of the topological deformation of the trajectory of desire which is effected in the Lacanian drive. Lacan criticizes the idea of intentionality in depth, by unsettling the presupposition on which it is based, and which as such feeds the intentionality of phenomenology, namely the assimilation of the goal of the aim with its object. In fact, if Lacan criticizes the intentionality of phenomenology, at the same time, he offers the means for subverting it through the topological distance engendered by the impulsive device between the object of the aim (*Aim*) and its purpose (*Goal*). Thus Lacan's critique of Sartre's theory of Freedom could be taken further, by using Lacan and Žižek to propose a new post-Sartrean conception of the idea of Freedom.

1. ***The intentional paradox of the objet petit a***

The paradox of the *objet petit a* belonging to a topological space/curve means that the object-cause makes desire fail as soon as it provokes it, at the very same moment as the desiring aim nevertheless manages to obtain what it is aiming at. The object-cause *simultaneously* provokes the aim of desire, allowing the desirability of the targeted object or situation in the form of fantasy to exist at the same time as its failure *at the paradoxical moment when this aim is fulfilled by achieving its aim. The*

objet petit a is just as much the cause of desire as it is simultaneously the cause of the preservation of desire in a state of a paradoxical lack, where the subject persists in lacking what it desires at the precise moment when it obtains what it desires. This is why lack is constitutive of desire, which ceaselessly searches for the lacking object-cause at the paradoxical moment when desire obtains what it desires.

Therefore, the *objet petit a* is the object-cause of desire only when it is not identical to the object targeted by desire. However, the paradox of this non-coincidence is all the more disturbing, since the aim is stimulated only by obtaining/satisfying the object which causes it as a desiring aim. That is why the *objet petit a* as the correlate of the desiring aim is illusory, and it is the reason why Lacan classes phenomenological intentionality in the category of the Imaginary. Access to the *objet petit a* needs to be placed elsewhere than in the coincidence of an intentional aim with its fulfilment. The *objet petit a* coincides, on the contrary, with the paradoxical *non-coincidence* of the fulfilment of the aim (obtaining what it is looking for) with the satisfaction of the aim, which is unthinkable in standard phenomenology. In other words, the obtention through the aim of what it aims at and the obtention of the object by the desirous aim of the desired object, leaves the aim in a state of *dissatisfaction of its aim* which is paradoxical and unthinkable for phenomenology. It is this paradox which allows Lacan to reject the assimilation of the *objet petit a* with the correlate object of phenomenological intentionality at the same time as he lays the foundations for reforming aim through the concept of drive.

The *objet petit a* always appears as the irreducible remains of the operation of fulfilment *which it in fact enables*. It causes the aim of desire only by robbing it of its goal. In other words, it appears as non-coincidental with the goal of the aim. As the residue of the intentional operation of desire – in other words, as the principle of the non-coincidence of the object having caused desire with the object aimed at and obtained by desire - it begins the never-ending metonymic quest for the lost object of desire. The *objet petit a* is defined by its coincidence with its own loss, as it never stops losing itself in *its very obtention*.

To put it differently, the meaning of the *objet petit a* in the formula of the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$), is totally the opposite to what is suggested by certain hasty presentations of Lacan's thought. It is not a question of aiming at an object or at a situation which is shaped by an unrealistic fantasy and thus always keeps us at a distance from the object of our dreams. Lacan's analysis heads in the other direction.

It is at the moment of reaching the object of our dreams that we are the most disappointed: we do not miss the *objet petit a* unless when we have to satisfy ourselves with objects substitutive to it, but we suffer from its lack *especially when we reach it as we wished to* and it turns out to correspond fully to our fantasmatic expectation. In other words, the *objet petit a* is the other name of this paradoxical void which appears at the paradoxical moment when the breach of desire seals. It is the topological principle of the reaffirmation of an insoluble lack at the very heart of the fulfilment of the desiring aim. Nevertheless, this lack never results from the failure of synthesis, but contrary to cognitive logic, *from its success*. The *objet petit a* lacks at the precise moment when the attained object completely satisfies our expectations: it is while obtaining the object aimed at that desire *misses its object the most*. As Žižek's formula efficiently summarizes it: "the *objet petit a* exists (or rather insists) in a kind of a curved space in which, the more you approach it, the more it eludes your grasp (or the more you possess it, the greater becomes the lack)" (Žižek 1999, 100).

It is for that reason that far from ensuring the link between the unconditional Thing and the objects of sense experience, the *objet petit a* is nothing other than the operator of their *irreducible un-bond*; it is in the sense that this object is linked not directly with desire, but rather with the drive as *death drive*. In other words, the mistake would be to believe that lack emanates from the failure of the desiring synthesis which results from the failure to reach what is aimed at. It is rather the opposite: we experience the lack of the object of our desire only when our desire *is filled with what it desires*, that is, the object it aims at when it reaches it. It would be missing the irreducibility of the Lacan's theory to any analogy with a philosophy of classical knowledge if one minimized the coincidence of the failure of the synthesis with its success. In other words, as long as we do not grasp that it is only when desire obtains what it desires *as it desires it* that the synthesis *fails*, according to the *pattern* of its aim (calibrated by fantasy), we are unable to understand what, in Lacan's view, determines the difference in regime between desire and drive. We end up flattening everything out onto the same level, into a single phenomenology of all-compassing, reductive desire which Lacan had unceasingly criticized. The *objet petit a* is a principle of a synthetic connection just like *the un-bond/failure of this very synthesis*. The paradox means that the *objet petit a* makes us miss what we desire

when we obtain what we desire. So the status of the *objet petit a* within desire is characterized by the fact that even though *we would have reached it* as the object at which our desire aimed (through the content that fantasy refashions), the ordeal of lack which should have been eliminated by obtaining the object targeted by desire, according to its pattern of expectation, not only does not stop, but in fact increases and is, therefore, paradoxically worsened. The *objet petit a* means that there is no *jouissance* of the Other. The *jouissance* of the Other would be the adequacy of the expected *jouissance* with the obtained one (in an Imaginary coincidence).

Nevertheless, if the expected *jouissance* is never obtained it is *at this very moment that what is desired is obtained*. Thus, the Lacan's idea is not that we never obtain what we desire, but rather that it is *when we obtain what we desire that we miss it most. I never fail to reach what I desire as much as when I reach it*. It is for this reason that obtaining the *objet petit a* coincides with its loss. We lose what we desire only when we have obtained it. This is what an analogy with cognitive synthesis would make us lose sight of since, according to the latter, the coincidence of the obtention of what is aimed at with the loss of what is aimed at remains unthinkable. Herein lies the meaning of Lacan's comment that the *objet petit a* cannot be specularized, so that we could say the following: *no sooner specularized by the aim of desire than lost*, so that a non-synthetic tension emerges, a persistent hiatus inherently causing the intentionality of desire to fail at the paradoxical moment of its accomplishment. The subject seeks the lost object of its desire insofar as the latter *gets lost* in the fulfilment of the aim of desire. It is therefore lost in that it cannot be found in the place where desire imagined that it was (that is, on the level of the fulfilment of the aim); but neither is it elsewhere, *because it is identical to its loss* according to the principle of *dissatisfied satisfaction* of desire. This non-coincidence of the satisfaction of desire with the fulfilment of its aim is key to understanding the meaning of Lacan's criticism of Husserlian intentionality in *Seminar X*. Let me emphasize, to start with, that his criticism of Husserl enables us to understand the real meaning of reforing the dimension of the aim of desire in the drive. In these pages of *Seminar X*, Lacan appears to be laying the foundations of his own theory of drives which he would develop a year later, in *Seminar XI*. Before dealing with the problem of the noetico-noematic correlation in Husserlian phenomenology, Lacan insists on the inadequacy of any theory of correlate objects for clinically situating the *objet petit a*, attacking the characterization of knowledge as a relation of identity

between the thought of something and its reality. To put it differently, placing the object in Imaginary or specular coordinates is not sufficient to situate the *objet petit a*: "The object of knowledge is built, fashioned, in the image of the relationship to the specular image. This is exactly what is insufficient in the object of knowledge." (Lacan, 2004, 73, my translation).

This enables us to understand Lacan's later criticism of the Husserlian noema, since, for Husserl, the noema represents *the correlate object of a noetic aim*, that is, the object *as it is targeted by an act of aiming*. Nevertheless, the *objet petit a* is not isomorphic to the object *as it is aimed at by desire*. Such isomorphism inevitably arises from the Imaginary/Specular illusion: the object-cause of desire is not *facing* the aim, but is *behind* it, as Lacan claims:

The function of intentionality makes us prisoner of a misunderstanding concerning what should be called object of desire. Indeed, we are taught that there is neither noesis nor thought which is not directed toward something. It seems to be the only point which allows Idealism to find its way towards the real. But can the object of desire be understood in this way? Does the same go for desire? (...) To fix our aim, I shall say that the object *a* is not to be situated in anything similar to the intentionality of a noesis. In the intentionality of desire, from it which must be distinguished; this object is to be understood as the cause of desire. To repeat the metaphor I used earlier, the object is *behind* desire. (Lacan, 2004, 120, my translation).

It can be noticed in this quotation that Lacan does not exactly reject intentionality; he distinguishes the intentionality of desire from that of noesis. This is why the reference to a certain *Aim* is maintained in the topology of the drive at the same time as it is differentiated from its *Goal*. Lacan criticizes phenomenological intentionality by asserting, following Freud, the necessity of topologically releasing the object (of the aim) from the goal of the drive, whereas in phenomenological intentionality, the object is identified with the goal of the aim:

In the same way, the structural topological novelty required by the function of the object is clearly noticeable, particularly in those concerning the drive (...) the distinction between the *Ziel*, or goal of the drive, and its *Object*, is very different from what it might first appear, that the goal and the object would be in the same place. (Lacan, 2004, 121, my translation)

This is also the sense of the important passages of Seminar X where Lacan dissociates himself from the key notion of his first seminars, namely that of desire, understood in its intentional tendency to place the *object-cause* in position of *object-aim*, ending in mistaking them for the intentional illusion of their identity. Lacan thus adopts the assertion of Buddhism, declaring that "desire is illusion" (Lacan, 2004, 266).

According to Lacan, drive is beyond fantasy precisely to the extent that it locates aim within coordinates which are no longer specular: desire aims to fill itself with what it obtains by aiming at it, while drive immediately places itself within the coordinates of a quest which is no longer *specular from the very beginning*. In other words, it comes from an aim which no longer aims at obtaining what it aims at, because in obtaining it, it loses it; instead, it immediately works at making *obtention fail*, via a topological displacement of the *goal* of the aim in relation to its *object*. Thus, drive could not answer to the same criteria of aim as desire in its articulation to fantasy insofar as the latter feeds the illusory identification of the fulfilment of the desiring aim with what Lacan, as early as *Seminar VII*, calls "the realization of desire". Nevertheless, for Lacan, the fulfilment of the aim of desire never corresponds to "the realization of desire", which would involve "traversing the fantasy" that feeds the desiring aim. As we have just seen, drive does not derive from desire, it is not deductible from the intentional economy of desire, but rather, on the contrary, it situates itself in the hiatus resulting from the failure of the synthesis of desire.

Drive appears as a way of making desire succeed despite its own inherent failure, which explains the reason for its topological nature, and its relation to jouissance. Indeed, a paradoxical *jouissance deriving its satisfaction from this very failure* attaches itself to the renewal of the failure of the fulfilment of the desiring aim to coincide with its paradoxical satisfaction. In order to achieve this, drive topologically modifies the criterion for the fulfilment of the aim. The latter no longer stems from a synthesis of the identity of the aim of desire with its targeted goal (the *objet petit a*): success no longer lies in the coincidence of what is obtained with what is aimed at, because such a coincidence turns out to be defective *at the very moment when it is accomplished*, and the topological distortion of the drive imposes the failure to reach its goal fixed in the *objet petit a* as the criterion for the success of

the aim. This displacement of the criterion for success by failure can be explained by the topological distortion of the drive between its *Aim* and its *Goal*. In this sense, drive follows on from desire, not by looking for new more effective means of obtaining its object, but by making of *the failure of desire* to obtaining its object *its very goal*. The failure of desire is now replaced by a topological deformation of the space of desire the essential function of which is to convert the failure of desire into a form of a paradoxical success, enabling it to avoid undergoing failure; but rather to discover in failure the conditions of a paradoxical satisfaction otherwise known precisely as *jouissance*. That is why *jouissance* is, as such, haunted by *the death drive*, and why this same indelible *jouissance* starts off the formation of the *symptom* as the archetypal manifestation of the fulfilment of the trajectory of the drive. I would like to pause now to consider this paradoxical mechanism of drive. But first, I would like to mention an important passage from *The Parallax View* where Žižek develops his own reading of Lacanian drive against the formalization proposed by Jacques-Alain Miller. In a short passage, Žižek recounts a difficulty close to the one that we have identified in an overly synthetic description of how the *objet petit a* works, in other words, a logic which would reduce the logic of drive to a displaced logic in relation that of desire. Žižek refers to Miller's article entitled "Angoisse constituée, angoisse constituante" (Miller, 2004) and suggests a response by stressing the irreducibility of the relation to the *objet petit a* in the drive compared to desire. Žižek prevents any confusion between the logic of desire and that of drive.

In his text, Miller suggests a distinction, inspired by Walter Benjamin, between "constituted anxiety" and "constituent anxiety", which for Miller would be central to the transformation of desire into drive. The former, and I quote Žižek's commentary, "designates the standard notion of the terrifying and fascinating abyss of anxiety which haunts us, its infernal circle which threatens to draw us in, the second stands for the "pure" confrontation with *objet petit a* as constituted in its very loss" (Žižek, 2006, 61). For Žižek this implies that, for Miller, "constituted anxiety" is linked to the status of the object as it appears in fantasy, while "constituent anxiety" comes from an anxiety self-produced by the subject when it "traverses the fantasy" and "confronts the Void, the gap, filled in by the fantasmatic object" (Žižek, 2006, 61). According to Žižek, Miller "remains within the horizon of *desire*" to the extent that he defines the *objet petit a* as the object whose appearance coincides with its loss. For

Žižek, however, the link between the *objet petit a* and its loss is *not at all the same in desire and in drive*. Indeed, Žižek asserts that "in the case of *objet petit a* as of the object-cause of desire, we have an object which is originally lost, which emerges as lost; while in the case of *objet petit a* as the object of drive, the "object" is directly loss itself- in the shift from desire to drive, we pass from the *lost object to loss itself as an object*" (Žižek, 2006, 62). This is why, according to Žižek, an extra dimension should be added to Miller's analysis relating to the post-fantasmatic status of the *objet petit a* "between the lost object-cause of desire and the object loss of drive". In other words, if it is true that traversing the fantasy provokes the anxiety of the subject insofar as it is asked, beyond any imaginary identification with the object-cause of its desire, to face the void which underlies this fantasmatic formation, or, in other words, that it is a question, for the subject, of experiencing the object-cause of desire at the scene of its identity with loss, rather than the desired content which reveals it, then the status of the drive commits the subject to going even farther, according to Žižek, and to replace the logic of the lost object with the logic of *the loss itself as object*. If this solution enables the relational logic of the drive to be freed from its reduction to the relational logic of desire, both of which are articulated around the same lost object in two different ways (fantasmatic and post-fantasmatic), it seems to me, however, that the Žižekian solution ends up by identifying the relational modality of the drive (loss) with the object itself (which in his theory becomes object-loss), while I would tend to maintain that the difference between the fantasmatic logic of desire and the post-fantasmatic logic of drive is more a question of an irreducible difference of approach to the *objet petit a* where drive follows on from desire in order to invert the criteria of success.

The idea being to "resolve" the deadlock of desire; it is more fundamentally a question for the drive of turning *the problem (the deadlock of desire) into the solution*. And it is only in this inversion of the relation where the failure of desire is transformed into success that the logic of the drive is to be found. It is in this sense that we can understand it as a topological curve of the space of intentional aim. The drive is a *machine for transforming failure into success*, and it is in this sense that we need to understand the meaning of the Lacanian notion of "*la passe*", as converting the deadlock (*l'impasse*) of desire into a symptomatic resolution that the subject has to adopt. Certainly, it is not a question of removing desire from its deadlock; which

would mean resorting to a regressive Imaginary wish, it is rather a question of *converting* the deadlock of desire in a form of a paradoxical achievement with which the subject ends up identifying, via the drive and the symptom which it engenders. This is why I am not sure that it is necessary to identify the *objet petit a* with the loss of the drive itself. Rather, it seems to me that it is necessary to move away from a logic of loss in desire - which dooms any attempt to overcome it via Imaginary fantasmatic substitutes to failure, since it forces desire to repeat the infinite quest of the lost object-cause - towards a logic of *self-produced loss*, implying the realization of a kind of intentional monster consisting in finding a remedy in something even worse (le pire) - and no longer in the Father (le Père) – according to which the only means of attaining the lost object consists in acephalous and repetitive activity, in endlessly losing it over and over again. This is what I would like to call the symptomatology of spirit, or the becoming-symptom of intentionality. The paradox of such symptomatology means, therefore, that the *jouissance* of drive closes the wound of the non-coincidence of the fulfilment of the aim with its satisfaction.

2. Symptomatology of Spirit

Drive, in Lacan, is characterized by a certain capacity to resolve the infinite tension of metonymic desire towards its object-cause (the *objet petit a* as the remainder/substitute of the lost inaccessible and impossible Thing of desire). Seen as a "Real object", the *objet petit a* is for Lacan, as we have seen, the operator for maintaining the gap which separates desire from the object it aims at and tries to reach. Drive is a kind of a paradoxical response to the endless metonymy of the object causing desire, via an infinite repetition of its aim and its failure, including when the aim attains its target. Indeed, drive appears in Lacan as the short circuit of this indefinite aim which is unable to end its search. A short circuit of this kind entails a subversion of the intentional aim of desire: It is no longer a matter of aiming for the object to reach the *jouissance* anticipated in fantasy because such an aim would entail the unlimited evasion of the intended object. Drive consists in bending the trajectory in order to aim directly at *the failure to reach this object as a goal*, until *jouissance* is placed in the domain not of success but of self-engendered failure. It is a question of replacing the failure of desire, as the repeated inability to reach the goal

at which it aims, with failure as a paradoxical form of *the achievement of the aim*, insofar as its goal becomes topologically disconnected from its object.

It is apparent that the goal of the drive is not in the object but in the *deformation* of the aim targeting the object: the drive sets as its goal not the object but the *return of the trajectory* around the object back to its starting point of initial satiety, and thus aims at the realization of an *unsatisfactory* relational route (where dissatisfaction comes about as the aim of the trajectory). To put it differently, it is *when the goal of the aim no longer lies in the object but in making the aim directed towards the object fail that the goal of the drive is paradoxically attained*. This is how a Lacanian formula summarizes it: "By snatching at its object, the drive learns in a sense that it is precisely not the way it will be satisfied" (Lacan, 1978, 167).

In other words, for the drive, it is a matter of aiming not at the object but of *aiming at the failure of this aiming at the object*, via a torsion of the trajectory of the aim, in other words, via a kind of inversion of values, to aim *directly* at failure - the return at the starting point - and indirectly at the object through this failure. To the extent that the object remains unattainable, the shortest topological route to reach it is no longer to aim at it intentionally (in a horizontal way), but to curve the intentional trajectory in order to surround it. In other terms, the intentional circuit needs to succeed under the influence of a topological short circuit, where the Goal dissociates from the targeted object (Aim). In this sense, the only means of enabling the aim to reach its goal is to *twist* the trajectory, so that the failure to snatch at the object comes along with a paradoxical enjoyment (a pleasure in pain) which, according to Lacan, is none other than *jouissance* itself. This *jouissance* is central to the formation of the symptom in the real. The drive builds the acephalous symptom, that is, a symptom which cannot be deciphered exhaustively within a signifying structure, because it is made at the point of failure of the big Other (S of barred Θ which is where drive is situated on the second level of the graph of desire). The symptom represents this *paradoxical form of adequacy to the object in inadequacy*, through the *successful* reproduction of the failure to seize it. As such, it represents a paradoxical, oblique, indirect and in short non-specular seizure of the *objet petit a* as a *non-specular object itself*. Lacan defines the drive as a successful relational provision to its object, once it no longer has the goal of attaining it, rather to cause the failure of the intentional aim of the desire trying to reach it. Thus, the drive designates interference in the intentional aim of desire as well as the paradoxical outcome of its

trajectory. I would like to support this hypothesis by referring to a number of striking passages where Žižek compares the mechanism of the Lacanian drive with Einstein's theory of relativity:

What Lacan did with the notion of drive is strangely similar to what Einstein, in his general theory of relativity, did with the notion of gravity. Einstein 'desubstantialized' gravity by reducing it to geometry: gravity is not a substantial force which 'bends' space but the name for the curvature of space itself; in an analogous way, Lacan 'desubstantialized' drives: a drive is not a primordial positive force but a purely geometrical, topological phenomenon, the name for the curvature of the space of desire-for the paradox that, within this space, the way to attain the object (*a*) is not to go straight for it (the surest way to miss it) but to encircle it, to 'go round in circles' (Žižek, 1996, 173-174).

From this perspective, the position of the subject is not before the act of aim, to start with, but becomes identified *with the activity of distortion of the aim itself*. In other words, it is necessary to identify the subject prior to the intentional act as being the symbolic/imaginary subject which Lacan says the passage from fantasy to the drive is called upon to "depose", so that the subject "resubjectivizes" itself as *the barred subject of the drive*. It is thus necessary to think of the Lacanian barred subject (\$) as, in a sense, a "new subject"¹, which is neither before the act (the commencement of its aim), nor after (on the side of its identification with the object of desire of the Other), but *in the middle, on the level of the curvature itself*. It is at this level of the reversibility of seeing and being seen, that it, on the level of the trajectory which turns around the *objet petit a* that the subject of the unconscious has to be (re-) situated.

This is what Lacan himself claims when he shows the to-and-fro movement which structures the drive and incurs the emergence of "a new subject" in Freud's thought. This new subject (*ein neues Subjekt*), "which is properly the other, appears in so far as the drive has been able to close its circular course" (Lacan, 1978, 178, modified). This is why Lacan can also call this process "a headless subjectification, a subjectification without subject" (Lacan, 1978, 184), in other words, a new subjectification contemporaneous with the *dismissal of the symbolic/imaginary subject as appointed by the Symbolic big Other*. The headless/acephalous subject appears only at the level of the separation of the subject with the desire of the Other, when the subject disconnects from "alienation" (Lacan 1978, chap. XVII). The acephalous subject, situated at the level of the deformation of the aim by the drive, becomes the subject which occupies the reversible position of activity and passivity,

and is conjugated in the mode of "making himself be seen, be heard, etc." beyond his subjective "alienation" from the Symbolic Order. In this sense, the acephalous character of the Subject of the circuit of the drive can be reduced to a topological twisting, a grimace which Lacan, in *Television*, calls the "grimace of the Real", like the grimace of Sygne de Coûfontaine at the end of Claudel's *Hostage*, of which Lacan provides a commentary in *Seminar VIII*. In the case of both the drive and the *Versagung* of Sygne de Coûfontaine, we witness the advent of a *symptom* which coincides with the paradoxical advent of the barred subject (\$). According to the same paradox, as the works of Žižek (Žižek, 1996, 155-169) and Zupančič (Zupančič, 2000, 200-245) on the meaning of Sygne de Coûfontaine's final act have shown, paradoxically, it is only possible to remain faithful to the cause of desire *by sacrificing it*. The topological paradox indeed means that the only way to remain *faithful to the Cause/Thing of desire is to sacrifice it; the act of sacrifice of the Thing paradoxically becomes the last representative of this fidelity towards the Thing*. The ethical realization of the impossible/Thing relies on a double movement consisting at first in sacrificing everything for the fantasmatic representative of the unconditioned Thing of desire, then secondly in sacrificing this unconditioned Thing *in the name of the Thing itself*. Thus, if we follow Žižek's interpretation of Lacan, there is a profound ethical echo in the act of "traversing the fantasy". In this sense, the realization of desire shares a common structure with the drive insofar as both involve the paradoxical coincidence of *the realization of desire by making desire fail in its relations with its object-cause*. From here on, the aim of the drive can reach its goal only by paradoxically separating its aim from its intentional goal, in other words, *by making its goal an obstacle to the realization of its aim*. Thus, once the fantasy has been "traversed", the aim accepts to "live the drive (*vivre la pulsion*)" (Lacan, 1996, 276, modified) as a self-opposed aim, whose *goal* is to give up the object/goal targeted by desire, following the topological paradox according to which the shortest road for reaching the lost object-cause of desire, is not to reach it at all, but to *agree to lose it over and over again*.

3. The “abyss of freedom”: beyond agalma

Lacan defines drive according to its topological and formal character. It indicates the *pure deformation* of an intentional aim. There is drive, in the Lacanian sense, every time an intentional act, whatever its nature, theoretical or practical, *transforms its aim into an obstacle paradoxical to the realization of its aim in its goal* (it is indeed only within a curved space that the goal of the aim can be transformed into an obstacle to its realization). The unconscious, *in its radical sense*, is another name for this incurvation of the space of the aim, in other words, what distinguishes the intentional consciousness from the unconscious does not lie in the fact that only consciousness is intentional because intentionality would be a manifestation coming exclusively from consciousness, but it is rather the unconscious that indicates fundamentally *the formal modification* by which what represents the criterion of the *success* of an intentional aim, that it reaches its goal, becomes that of its *failure*, so that the failure of the aim coincides paradoxically with the realization of its intentionality in the obtaining of its goal/object. In this paradox, drive transforms *the aim of the goal* into an obstacle to *the realization of the goal*, which remains unthinkable in classic intentional theory: only topology can enable such a paradox to be understood. By way of conclusion, I wish to suggest that we view this formal modification of the aim in relation to its object/goal, as the symptom of the *death drive* engaging the notion of *freedom*, that is to say, as a possible Lacanian response to Sartre. Of course Lacan never put forward any suggestions in this direction, and he often totally rejected the idea of freedom as stemming from an imaginary and illusory spontaneity, itself proceeding from an equally illusory supposed for which Sartre's thought would represent a model *par excellence*. Does the Lacanian view of drive definitively break with the question of freedom, or might it enable us to reconsider the question from an entirely new perspective? I would like to suggest as a hypothesis a counter model inspired by Lacan in objection to Sartre. It is a matter of taking the opposite view of *any determinist interpretation of drive* and understanding *the topological deformation of drive as a place of freedom and of its abyss*.

The question, therefore, is in what can Lacanian thinking on drive represent an answer to Sartre's theory of freedom. Two points need to be emphasized: first of all, that drive is only a formal modification, in other words, there is drive whenever there

is a modification, which nothing motivates in the chain of signifiers, in the relation that desire maintains to its own goal, or to put it differently, every time the aim distorts its relation to its object/goal and a "curvature of the space of desire" (to use Žižek's expression) takes place. Drive is just another name for a rupture in the relation of an aim to its goal where the goal, once fixed by the aim, becomes the obstacle to the realization of its goal. The sudden appearance of the *Real* as the incurvation of the desired aim, thus, should be understood as an entirely unheralded event in the Symbolic/Imaginary course of desire, and more generally in the course of any intentionality towards its goal. This epistemic friction should be understood as the possibility of radically moving an object from its position as the goal of an aim to a paradoxical position of obstacle to the realization of the same aim. In other words, *the Real* of an aim is not its objective correlate, contrary to its phenomenological theorization, but is rather meant to be situated as the inconvenient intervention of a rupture in the link between the aim and its own correlate: the Real indicates the impact point of a formal deformation, where what occupies the position of the goal of an aim, that is its goal, occupies at the same time the position of an obstacle to the realization of its goal. While a formal modification intervenes, it does not consist in hindering the course of the determined aim towards a goal with obstacles of every kind, but more radically in turning *the goal of the aim into an obstacle to the realization of the aim, i.e. obtaining its object-goal is the best means to miss its goal*. The Real is the other name of this pure formal modification/rupture of the intentional economy of desire. It is quite clear that Lacan gave a name to the object/goal of desire, or rather, this is precisely what he was concerned with in *Seminar VIII*. This object is *agalma*, which, in *Seminar X*, Lacan opposed to the object-cause of desire, seen as belonging not to the sphere of love, but to that of *palea*, anxiety. While we have seen why the object-cause does not lend itself to an aim, we need to understand how the object of love, *agalma*, once under the influence of this oblique rupture of drive, can end up incarnating *both* the object-goal of the aim and the object-obstacle to the goal of this aim

Drive, as a pure formal modification of the space of desire, changes the status of the object *agalma*: from a focusing and a structuring point of desire, it becomes the thing the desiring aim takes as a goal of separation. But isn't it one of the aspects of what Lacan calls "living the drive" beyond desire ending the trajectory of desire on the level where the *object/goal absolute of desire* is transformed into an *absolute*

obstacle to the end of this same desire? The sudden appearance of the barred subject means that the aim only reaches its goal when the aim abandons its *object-goal*, that is to say, *ends up in a place beyond desire*. The fact that the aim of the goal becomes an obstacle to the realization of its goal can only result from a modification translating the liberating potential of the drive in its capacity not only to bar its way towards its goal of obstacles and pitfalls, but to put *its proper agalamic goal* in the position of an obstacle *to the realization of its trajectory towards its aim*.

Drive contradicts the goal of desire with the goal of its aim as desire, so that under the influence of such an operation the agalamic object, *made absolute* by desire, eventually ends up showing itself in the guise of losing its absolute character through drive: from the point of focalization and attraction of the desire, in drive the object/goal becomes the point of identification/obstacle to the completion of the trajectory of desire. Furthermore circular avoidance is the only route aim can take in order not to fail in attaining its goal, since to reach its goal it must cease to aim towards it. Henceforth, this goal is valuable only when it becomes possible not to reach it, to miss it, and to organize the *jouissance* of this pure inversion of status. The passage from desire to drive corresponds to the moment when *the aim traverses the space of desire*. From that point, what desire represents as its most precious possession, what it contains which is in surplus, the object *agalma*, that precious crutch of desire, becomes, from the viewpoint of drive, the final obstacle hindering the realization of desire. What the topological modification of drive teaches us is that desire never consents to its own end except when it accepts that its greatest obstacle is *its own desired object-goal*.

The object *agalma* fills the empty space in the centre of desire, whereas as object-cause, it is defined as being the operator maintaining the gap between the empty place and the sublimated object which comes to fill it. That is why in the passage from desire to drive, drive occupies the space which separates the object of desire from the empty place that it occupies, that is, the space of the *objet petit a* as an object-cause of desire, beyond fantasy and agalamic sublimation: as the operator of the gap in the principle of the indefinite quest of desire. Drive is situated on the level of this gap, in this sense, *it has always already made it its own; having taken up position in the very hiatus of desire, it has taken it over*. The object-cause of desire, as we have already seen, engenders a gap with the object-goal which desire pursues and attains; drive relates to the object-cause, by transforming the aim of the goal into

an aim of distance from the aim of the object-goal. Drive can be identified with the object-cause of desire only by withdrawing identification from its object-goal. It is certainly the reason why Lacan places "living the drive" beyond the traversing of fantasy and desire that it constitutes; "living the drive" means experiencing the gap between the sublimated object of desire and the empty place that it occupies, which corresponds to the *jouissance* of the *objet petit a*, placed in the position of a partial object of drive. Through its modification by the drive, the absolute object becomes something that drive henceforth "commands" (so to speak) the trajectory of desire to abandon, in other words, to *go beyond*, to transcend the space of its intentional magnetization and therefore to give up the hidden treasure of the agalma. This vexation of intention provides a yardstick for drawing up an understanding of freedom released from Sartrean identification.

It is no longer a question of making intentionality the principle of a disfixation concerning the static order of the in-itself, as Sartre wished, but of going further beyond, by considering the space of a subversion of *intentionality at its commencement where its structure as aim is undone*. For Sartre, the goal fixed by intentionality is the means by which consciousness *is determined* and therefore is shown to itself as freedom. However in the Lacanian operation, such supposed self-determination is only possible to the extent that the imaginary fixation of the aim correlates to the specular fixation to the Imaginary Ego. On the contrary, for Lacan only the destitution of the object/goal of desire to an object/obstacle, in other words the passage from desire to drive, completes the process of "subjective destitution" upon the advent of the barred subject of drive. Contrary to the Sartrean operation, the only true freedom, from our point of view, is if the aim is able to release (itself from) its relation to the goal to which it claims to relate freely, that is, if it is also capable of releasing *its own determining aim*, which only a topological modification can enable. The depth of freedom relates to its ability to place the aim of the goal of desire in the position of *ultimate obstacle* to the realization of the same desire; it represents the moment when what is within the subject that is surplus to itself, its all, the object agalma – the moment when this absolute is *no longer enough* to prevent a desiring aim from transforming it into an obstacle, and therefore from reaching its goal by ceasing to aim for it. As such, the drive is a death drive, that is, a pure acephalous and repetitive activity undoing identification (where the criteria of success of the aim are reversed and the intentional realization of the aim becomes *an*

obstacle to its realization). It is in the sense that drive is situated beyond desire and beyond the Symbolic/Imaginary subjectivation which it causes from the big Other.

The subject only becomes a barred subject (\$), that is, empty from any determination, when this last intentional fixation to the object-cause of desire falls, in other words, at the point of closure of the circle of the drive. We need to keep the Lacanian view in mind, that our attachment to the agalamic object, as it fantasmatically occupies the central place of the space of desire, is the corollary of our alienation from the Symbolic Order. In other words, the more I define myself as a project towards a goal, the more I end up identifying myself with the subjective position which I am appointed by the big Other, that is, the more the subject remains in the coordinates of alienation. This is the core of the devastating argument that Lacan endlessly holds up to Sartre: the Sartrean for-itself *is not* the subject of negativity; it represents the subject of intentional consciousness as it moves towards a goal and claims to define itself in relation to this projective structure, the inevitable hidden side of which being identification with the Imaginary Ego. The subject of negativity (barred \$) takes place only when the subject positions itself and ends up by living the impulsive gap between its object-goal and its goal, that is, in the place where the *topological subversion* of the projective/intentional structure occurs. It is only by the yardstick of this subversion that the barred subject is identified with the subject of drive after the "subjective destitution" has taken place. The subject of negativity coincides then with a pure power of disidentification with regard to any passionate/fantasmatic attachment and at the same time to the subjective identifications which the attachment brought about. This is why the barred subject of drive is echoed by the barred place of the Other (Θ): the subject becomes the assertion of a gap in regard to any definite subjective position (including in its claim to incarnate none, as in Sartre). In this way, the truly ethical act from a Lacanian point of view can only, as Žižek has shown, be a modifying subversion of our own relation to the object agalma. It is such a modifying subversion of the relation to the object agalma which allows the modification of "the co-ordinates of the situation in which the subject finds himself" (Žižek, 2000, 140).

The "traversing of fantasy" and the entrance into the register of drive is illustrated practically, in our view, in Žižek's *Fragile Absolute*. Indeed, Žižek shows that once confronted with a hopeless situation, the agalamic supplement, which

organizes a distance from the given order of things, in fact represents the element which ties us to the power of the situation to which we are subjected:

“in order to liberate oneself from the grip of existing social reality, one should first renounce the transgressive fantasmatic supplement that attaches us to it” (Žižek, 2000, 139). In other words, the only means of recovering real control over a seemingly merciless given situation, specifically consists in short-circuiting our attachment to the fantastical supplement which the object *agalma* represents. The liberating act consists not in opposing a free project to the unchangeable given of a determined situation, a fantasmatic alternative to the actual situation which exerts its power over us, but on the contrary, in freeing ourselves from the transgressive illusion which we mobilize against it, insofar as the transgressive illusion endlessly leads us to return to it. In such a scenario, the radical act consists in getting rid of the illusory alternative which would represent the gap set up by the agalmic attachment:

In what does this renunciation consist? In a series of recent (commercial) films, we find the same surprising radical gesture. In *Speed*, where the hero (Keanu Reeves) is confronting the terrorist blackmailer who is holding his partner at gunpoint, the hero shoots not the blackmailer, but *his own partner* in the leg – this apparently senseless act momentarily shocks the blackmailer, who releases the hostage and runs away (...) Is not such a gesture also the crux of Freud's late book *Moses and Monotheism*? How did he react to the Nazi anti-Semitic threat? Not by joining the ranks of the beleaguered Jews in the defence of their legacy, but by targeting his own people, the most precious part of the Jewish legacy, the founding figure of Moses- that is, by endeavouring to deprive the Jews of this figure, proving that Moses was not a Jew at all: in this way, he effectively undermined the very unconscious foundation of anti-Semitism. Furthermore, did not Lacan himself accomplish a similar act of “shooting at himself” when, in 1980, he dissolved the *Ecole freudienne de Paris*, his *agalma*, his own organization, the very space of his collective life? He was well aware that only such a “self-destructive” act could clear the terrain for a new beginning (Žižek, 2000, 139-140-141).

It is from its detachment, in the passage from a logic of desire to the regime of drive, that the Subject becomes the barred Subject (\$), dispossessed of the substantial influence that the sublime object/goal of its desire still practiced. The act which Žižek calls “shooting at oneself” triggers a real “subjective destitution” where an incredible liberation of the possible emerges. The free act is thus, above all, a liberating act consisting of the self-dispossession of the object / goal which structures the horizon of desire:

In a situation of forced choice, the subject makes the “crazy”, impossible choice of, in a way, *striking at himself*, at what is most precious to himself. This act, far from amounting to a case of impotent aggressivity turned against oneself, rather changes the co-ordinates of the situation in which the subject finds himself: by cutting himself loose from the precious object through whose possession the enemy kept him in check, the subject gains the space of free action. Is not such a radical gesture of “striking at oneself” constitutive of subjectivity as such? (Žižek, 2000, 140).

It is thus a matter of representing the power of wrenching free from a topological modification of the aim of this sort. The acephalous activity proceeds by disidentification of the subject towards its object-goal, i.e. towards its ultimate substantial attachment.

Such an activity proved to be, for that reason, capable of shaking even the absolute of desire *as it represents the ultimate pitfall of identification*. The goal of the aim becomes eliminating our identifying attachment in our object-goal. In other words, the fundamental paradox of this registration of the *objet petit a* in a curved space implies that the more I aim at the *objet petit a* in the intentional mode, the more the imaginary recovery of the object-cause of desire defined as the principle/gap producer of the metonymy of desire works. On the other hand, the more the intentional pressure weakens, and the more the fantasmatical appearance of the *objet petit a* eventually represents the empty place which occupies the object and which drive went through. In other words, the topological modification triggers a phenomenological modification of the appearance of the object; this latter appears as the phenomenalization of the Empty/Gap producer of desire only when the aim *succeeds* to reach as an aim, no longer aiming at it as a goal. There is nothing that desire cannot put in the position of an obstacle to its realization including its own goal. Is it not also a way to foresee and makes sense of what Lacan will call *the “identification with the symptom”* in *Seminar XXIV*? The aim in drive actualizes the *detachment from any object/goal*, the *agalmic* attraction of the object of desire becomes that to which *the aim is no longer subjected*. It is the *real* modification of the aim that dispossesses the subject of what remains of his attachment to the *objet petit a* *under its imaginary/agalmic covering*. It is from the closure of its circuit where the desirous aim enters into contradiction with its object-goal, that the pure barred subject \$ can emerge. The identification with the symptom can, therefore, only

consist in a paradoxical invitation to *freedom as the absolute faculty of disalienation*, where the process of the subjectivation becomes one with the absolute process of *disidentification*, in other words, in a new and practically unthinkable adherence to *drive as the death drive*.

¹ This is the very reason why curvature does not belong to the anonymous domain of Merleau-Ponty's Being as the fold of the invisible and the visible, but rather to the site of an acephalous subject as *distortion of the plane of Being itself*. As such, it constitutes the intervention of a deformation of the Symbolic/conceptual order which is not contained within it (for which the Lacanian matheme is the capital barred Θ), nor predictable in its coordinates: thus, the other name of the unpredictable is not the Derridean Other of the impossible, *but the Subject as the place of the barred Other*, the advent of a distortion at the very heart of the stabilized regime of Being.

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