

Žižek's Nietzsche and the Insufficiency of Trauma for a *Posthuman Übermensch*

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Abstract: The *Übermensch*, the overcoming of man, is one of Nietzsche's debated concepts to be situated in posthumanism. In Žižek's posthumanism, the human as subject can not only be read in Nietzsche's understanding of the last man, but is inherently tied to the concept of trauma. This is so that trauma, as I exposed before, is a crucial element in advancing a posthuman. This article argues that trauma is, *tout court*, not enough to realize a posthuman *Übermensch*. It faces paradoxes that render it a transitory jolt. First, trauma still relies on the fiction of an afterworld. Second, trauma can be further traumatized and that there is a transitoriness of choice that belies its function between dream and fiction. Later, following from the traumatic standpoint of the Real, I provide a clarificatory corollary why the posthuman project also cannot work as a Lacanian fantasy.

Keywords: *Übermensch*, Posthumanism, Trauma, Nietzsche, Žižek

Žižek's *Nietzsche*, the Last Man, and Trauma: Some rehearsals

It should be noted, first and foremost, that 'Nietzsche is not Žižek's philosopher of choice. Žižek has, in passing, expressed his dislike of Nietzsche (2001), preferring, of course, the masterful thinker of mediation and the dialectic—Hegel' (Zalloua, 2012, p. 53). But Foucault already claimed how, even to become anti-Nietzschean is also to be Nietzschean (1990, 251). Hence, it is not safe to say that Žižek almost ignores and totally abhors Nietzsche. In fact, in the early as much as his later works, Nietzsche is often mentioned that it can be possible as a study in the likes of *Deleuze's Nietzsche* (Perry, 1993), *Heidegger's Nietzsche* (Parra, 2016), or *Derrida's Nietzsche* (Bosteels, 2017). In one of his lectures also, which are backed by his works, Žižek mentions Nietzsche as for instance when he delivered a purely philosophical lecture "Why Todestrieb (Death Drive) is a Philosophical Concept" (2009) where he distinguishes Lacanian ethics from Nietzschean ethics by referring to Nietzsche as "*the* philosopher of immoral ethics." In contrast then to Zalloua's study of 'Žižek with Nietzsche' (2012), which juxtaposes their relationship on *ressentiment*, I merely draw some clarifying points in the possible relationship between Nietzsche and Žižek in discussing beforehand and coupling the idea of trauma for the superman. This is necessary since the act of coupling entails a symmetrical relationship as what Žižek does in coupling Kant and Hegel in *Tarrying with the Negative* (1993). But the study faces a *prima facie* trick since, without pun intended, Nietzsche – 'not God' – is dead and Žižek is very much alive and kicking. There is also the problem of Žižek posthumously imitating Nietzsche – his radical way of critiquing concepts and power structures – particularly in his discussion of human rights (see Abeysekara as cited in Kahambing, 2019a). Žižek, however, clarifies Nietzsche and adds some crucial practical and contemporary insights.

What are then some of the appearances of Nietzsche in Žižek's texts? In undated early literature, Žižek mentions Nietzsche when he employed the thinker's terminology of the "reactive": 'I don't think people are stupid, or with a minimal amount of will, but they voluntarily choose stupidity. Behind populism there's always a minimum of I don't want to know. Even if it's not acknowledged, it is implicit. In Nietzschean terms, populism is a *reactive* strategy' (Žižek, n.d. *Literal* issue 18). This goes in line with, again, employing the will to nothing, as he says of Christianity's dreaming of heaven as 'willing a Nothingness, as Nietzsche would have put it (Žižek, 1998).' In another undated article, Žižek speaks of Nietzsche's understanding of truth and woman. Nietzsche mentions how a woman can be allergic to truth: though Erickson (2008) argues that truth is a woman in the same manner that Petkin (1984) argues how fortune is a woman in Machiavelli, Nietzsche says that 'from the beginning, nothing has been more alien, repugnant, and hostile to woman than truth—her great art is the lie, her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty (Nietzsche, 1997).' Žižek had a different thought in mind when he connects this to the issue of women in Islam wearing their niqab or face veils:

If, following Nietzsche's equation of truth and woman, we transpose the feminine veil into the veil which conceals the ultimate Truth, the true stakes of the Muslim veil become even clearer. Woman is a threat because she stands for the "undecidability" of truth, for a succession of veils beneath which there is no ultimate hidden core; by veiling her, we create the illusion that there is, beneath the veil, the feminine Truth – the horrible truth of lie and deception, of course. Therein resides the concealed scandal of Islam: only a woman, the very embodiment of the indiscernability of truth and lie, can guarantee Truth. For this reason, she has to remain veiled (Žižek, n.d. *Archives of Islam*).

Žižek in another undated piece also used Nietzsche to explain how a doer of wrongdoing or act of violence can justify his or her mistake through invoking another entity that is otherwise the responsible actor why he or she is acting in such manner. Then and there he makes the assertion that

...it is easy to imagine a more theoretically updated version of such a false attitude – a racist, for example, who claims he is not the true author of his violent verbal outbursts against the African-Americans or Jews or Arabs: the charges against him presuppose traditional metaphysical notions which have to be deconstructed; in his performative utterance, which by itself perpetrated an act of violence, he was merely referring to, quoting, drawing from the historically available stock of insults, so that the entire historical tradition, not himself, must be put to trial; the very notion that there exists a self-identical responsible subject who can be held accountable for racist outbursts is an illusion already denounced by Nietzsche who proved that the deed or rather the doing is original, and that the "doer" behind the doing is a symbolic fiction, a metaphysical hypostasis, etc, etc. (Žižek, n.d., From Joyce-the-Symptom to the Symptom of Power).

Žižek (1999) also sees how the predominant form of today's 'politically correct' moralism is that of Nietzschean *ressentiment* and envy: 'it is the fake gesture of disavowed politics, the assuming of a "moral", depoliticised position in order to make a stronger political case.' It is the same case of Nietzsche who explains how the slave morality inverts power relations by virtue of them being powerless. That is to say, as a role play of victimization. In Žižek's reading: 'powerlessness can be manipulated as a stratagem in order to gain more power, in exactly the same way that today, in order for one's voice to gain authority, one has to legitimise oneself as being some kind of (potential or actual) victim of power (1999).' This inversion of power relations seems to be one motif of Žižek's use of Nietzsche, where in the text, Nietzsche mediates. To quote a vital and relevant point when he compares the antagonism between Western and Islamic ideals:

Is this antagonism not the one between what Nietzsche called "passive" and "active" nihilism? We in the West are the Nietzschean Last Men, immersed in stupid daily pleasures, while the Muslim radicals are ready to risk everything, engaged in the struggle up to their self-destruction. (One cannot but note the significant role of the stock exchange in the bombings: the ultimate proof of their traumatic impact was that the New York Stock Exchange was closed for four days, and its opening the following Monday was presented as the key sign of things returning to normal). Furthermore, if one

perceives this opposition through the lenses of the Hegelian struggle between Master and Servant, one cannot avoid noting the paradox: although we in the West are perceived as exploiting masters, it is us who occupy the position of the Servant who, since he clings to life and its pleasures, is unable to risk his life (recall Colin Powell's notion of a high-tech war with no human casualties), while the poor Muslim radicals are Masters ready to risk their life... (Žižek, 2002a).

Do not such statements expose the radical inversions of power that only Nietzsche's masterpiece *Genealogie der Moral* can uniquely point out. As Žižek says '— in Nietzsche's terms, it is simply the passage from Master's ethics to slave morality, and this fact, perhaps, enables us a new approach to Nietzsche: when Nietzsche scornfully dismisses "slave morality," he is not attacking lower classes as such' and that the radical take is that 'rather, the new masters who are no longer ready to assume the title of the Master - "slave" is Nietzsche's term for a fake master (Žižek, 2003).' Žižek indeed sees the parallelism that is at work here:

The power that presents itself as always being under threat, living in mortal danger, and thus merely defending itself, is the most dangerous kind of power – the very model of the Nietzschean resentment and moralistic hypocrisy. And indeed, it was Nietzsche himself who, more than a century ago, in *Daybreak*, provided the best analysis of the false moral premises of today's "war on terror" (Žižek, 2005a).

This also has a link in Žižek's 'Some Politically Incorrect Reflections on Violence in France & Related Matters' (2005b), where he mentioned Nietzsche as having a shared association to Freud on 'the idea that justice as equality is founded on envy – on the envy of the Other who has what we do not have, and who enjoys it.' He says that the demand for justice is 'ultimately the demand that the excessive enjoyment of the Other should be curtailed, so that everyone's access to jouissance should be equal.' Žižek now equates this move as a Last Man maneuver:

This, perhaps, is what Nietzsche had in mind with his notion of the Last Man – it is only today that we can really discern the contours of the Last Man, in the guise of the hedonistic

asceticism... Nietzsche thus does not simply urge life-assertion against asceticism: he is well aware how a certain asceticism is the obverse of the decadent excessive sensuality (Žižek, 2005b).

What can be concluded from these sporadic mentions of Nietzsche in some selections of Žižek's early and later works is that Žižek uses Nietzsche in a certain way – more particularly, midway in his discussions as a reference – and proceeds to explain a central tenet. In *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight, Power in the Era of Post-Humanity*, he mentions Nietzsche (as responsible who 'demystified the very basis of our morality': 2018) and then moves on to his main point, almost as if Nietzsche acts as a vanishing mediator² for his idea to emerge. The critical nexus that ties this Nietzschean backdrop – the discussions on nihilism, ascetic hedonism, truth and the woman – lies in the structural embodiment of the human as the last man for Nietzsche to Žižek.

Žižek in *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (2019) talks about humanity as a "failed passage to a higher stage, a thwarted progress," which for him can, "of course, also be read as the Nietzschean notion of man as the passage from animal to overman" (156). Even in *Hegel in a Wired Brain* (2020), he acknowledges this passage as the crucial link to the technological trends for future humans today. Says Žižek: "Nietzsche's idea that we are the "last men" laying the ground for our own extinction and the arrival of a new Overman is thereby given a scientific-technological twist ..." (2020, 22). Although it is under current debate whether Nietzsche really endorses it, the very passage that situates this overcoming in our contemporary constellation points to the process of transhumanism towards posthumanism – the overriding term that captures the image of man beyond. Skowron (2013) leads on to ask in his article 'Posthuman oder Übermensch. War Nietzsche ein Transhumanist?' and tends to interpret it on the negative. There are other scholars, however, on the side of the positive in varying degrees (Bamford, 2017; Blackford, 2017, More, 2017, Sorgner, 2017; Woodward, 2017), so this paper acknowledges them and works on this possible link of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* being posthuman. The context of the question centers on the idea

that humanity stands as a subject that is capable to pass itself as an overcoming. However, for Žižek, this subject has to be read psychoanalytically in terms of its traumatic relation to itself. Žižek understands this subject as necessarily inherent with trauma. As he says, “subject not only constitutively relates to some trauma, haunted by some primordial trauma, subject IS the trauma, a traumatic cut in the order of being” (Žižek, 2019, 356). The Lacanian subject is, of course, “not objectless” but its existence for Žižek means that “it retains its identity, only insofar as part of its psychic content – its traumatic core...” (Žižek, 2019, 370). Wolfe (2010) expounds that this subject is “explored by Žižek under the thematics of trauma, that never arises as a problem or possibility for animals” (324). Appraising this into Žižek’s posthumanism, the “passage of man in becoming a posthuman is traumatic” (Kahambing, 2018a, 10).¹ It is an intrinsic part of the human that fundamentally reveals its vocation. More importantly, there is a parallel to the Jewish-Christian tradition in this (Žižek, n.d.) when the disturbance that a human experiences becomes a necessary trauma that fuels the universality of the human condition. The human asks for the necessary disturbance to set his path for life as can be explicated in a few lines of Sir Francis Drake’s prayer:

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show Your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.
We ask You to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love

Trauma then is capable of jolting a human being as a necessary disturbance, ‘a universal human condition.’ That is to say, Žižek’s trauma ontology (Yang, 2012) works beyond the usual understanding of trauma in empirical and psychological studies, which mostly analyze an internal awakening from a past episode or event. In the universality of this condition, Nietzsche can well strike a point of contrast. The human, within this posthuman frame, is contrasted to the

overhuman, which supports Nietzsche's distinction between the last man and the overman. Moreover, the passage that speaks of man as a bridge brings back the context to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 1969), where the human can be read as the last man, metonymically overcome by the jester or the buffoon that is himself (Kahambing, 2014; 2020a). One of the vital contributions of Zimmerman (1968) is that he clarifies that there are three stages in this passage towards the superman. There is the stage of the master, then the stage of the Christianized master, and finally the stage of the superman. If man mediates himself as a kind of mastery in the first stage, the jester overcomes this, making him the last man in contrast to the superman. The Christianization of this man finds similitude in the traumatic subject for Žižek in its link to Christianity. The callings of several characters in Christianity's sacred texts were revealed to them in a traumatic light (Noah, Saul, etc.). Using this frame to unravel the true vocation of a posthuman and combining this to Nietzsche's overman (Zarathustra also describes him as *lightning*, apart from the meaning of the earth), trauma, in other words, enables the transport of man into becoming both – a Posthuman *Übermensch*, whose lifeworld is always-already disturbed by the processes that engender it, namely, transhumanism and self-overcoming. This paper argues, however, that this traumatic element is not enough or insufficient. It makes use of the hermeneutic method to fuse the concepts of trauma that is said to provide a necessary jolt for the transhuman process into posthumanism, and Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*. As such, the paper applies the insertion of trauma within the process as a modality of overcoming. And this necessitates paradoxes. Consequently, the paper argues two paradoxes that problematize the reliance on trauma in overcoming.

Transitory Jolt, or why trauma is not enough

The rejoinder about why trauma is not enough has to return to the idea of the last man and how it would be difficult to rely simply on trauma to jolt him. There

are two main reasons why trauma *simpliciter*, or the subject that can turn the human into a posthuman, cannot make the last man into the *Übermensch*. On the outset, trauma is a jolt – it again disturbs the life-world of the human into attaining its true potential or its true vocation. The character of this trauma is not in a sense confined as an internal struggle with oneself, but as an external constituent that is necessary, rather than accidental, for the human. But this exposes two simple paradoxical problems if it should be applied to Nietzsche's understanding of overcoming the last man into becoming an *Übermensch*.

To understand the first paradox, it must first be stated that Nietzsche not only attacks the culture of Christianity, but a specific mode of reaction, which is *ressentiment* – the untranslatable French Nietzschean term that denotes more than mere resentment – that is found in it. This *ressentiment* is the reaction of the last man towards life, “expressed in the reactive manner of valuing” (May, 1999, 105). Rehearsing some conjunctions of this to the alter-identification of the last man as the jester (Kahambing, 2020), it can be interpreted both as the attitude that reacts or deflects life that is suffering and motivating survival mechanism (see Reginster, 2006, 62). From this fear of living life that fuses with anger towards it, a certain hatred emerges aimed at life and deems it as nihilistic. Here, Deleuze says that Nietzsche “calls the enterprise of denying life and depreciating existence *nihilism*, and the whole of nihilism and its forms he calls the *spirit of revenge*” (1983, 34; Italics mine). A culture of this hatred to life treats others, especially the strong, as stumbling blocks to the affirmation of existence (Nietzsche, 1969, II, 7). Such fundamental hatred constitutes an essence – the essence of herd and slave morality (Nietzsche, 1974, I). Nietzsche quite directly sums it up: *Ressentiment*: “this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal... an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life” (Nietzsche, 1996, III, 28).

The last man operates within the stage of the Christianized master. Nietzsche says that in the state of modern civilization, “only a fool: a fool would succeed” (Nietzsche, 1969, IV, 5). This fool is the last man, the jester, the buffoon

in the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, whose spectacle relates easily to the modern mindset of quick resolutions. In the *Prologue 6* of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche introduces man (the tightrope walker: ‘man is a rope over an abyss’) and the buffoon (the last man: the jester): “the *tightrope walker* had begun his work: he had emerged from a little door and was proceeding across the rope (but) [...] the little door opened again and a brightly-dressed fellow like a *buffoon (jester)* sprang out and followed the former with rapid steps (Nietzsche, 1969, prologue 6).”

Here, the logic of Zimmerman can again be applied in that man is also the jester, and vice-versa, since the stages are not entirely separate. The jester is the same caricature of modernity who commands things swiftly: ‘forward, lame-foot!’; and who is also an overcoming of man: ‘you are blocking the way of a better man than you!’. However, the overcoming of the last man is merely fictional, and may again return back to the same problem of romanticism in the abyss (Kahambing, 2020b), namely, that if a last man encounters the abyss, he might overcome it by simply romanticizing its tragic character. The problem regresses the predicament about trauma: if a last man is traumatized of the virulent intrusion of the process of transhumanism into becoming a posthuman, he might simply overcome it with fiction, which in Nietzsche’s case pertains to the conjecture of the Christian ideal. That is to say, simply the jolt of ‘dying as man’ to become posthuman will not shock him. Instead, he might argue in the same manner as Silenus’ wisdom: “Not to be born is best, the next best thing by far is to go back - back where we came from, quickly as we can (Sophocles, 358)” – elucidated simply as *resignation* by Schopenhauer (1969, 573) – or of blind optimism, which simply goes on in fictionalizing matters using unconditionality and other-worldly hopes. But since *Zarathustra*’s words speak of horror and suffering (Hemming, 2002, 232), the last man or the jester would not like it and would certainly opt for blind optimism (see *reckless optimism* in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, 2005, 4) or operate in fiction. The last man resorts to a form of *fictionalism* that “consists in creating fictions and acting ‘as if’ they really do exist” (Reginster, 2006, 62).

The first paradox exposes that Žižek's understanding of trauma becomes problematic when coupled into the last man's lifeworld since trauma has a parallel notion within Christianity. That is to say, 'trauma' still lies subject under the tribunal of Nietzsche's critique of morality. Its connection to the Judeo-Christian perspective makes it suspect. In the middle stanza of Sir Francis Drake's prayer, one can well demonstrate an eyesore in Nietzsche's view:

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.

It is not only the term Lord, which subjugates the one who prays under a master (Latin: *magister*), that Nietzsche might find irksome, but the asking of disturbance for a specific phrase, namely, 'we have fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity,' the basic premise being that an eternity, a life after this life, is more important than to fall in love with the very life that one is in. Hence, trauma becomes a transitory jolt in the face of the last man's fictionalizing of an afterlife. The thematic of trauma that disturbs one's lifeworld into becoming posthuman becomes suspended or shortened, becoming only transitory in a momentary fashion when as jolt, humanity realizes that even if one has already become posthuman, the *ressentiment* towards this life still remains. In which case, the posthuman remains to be a transitory event only.

The second paradox lies *at the moment* of jolt, when one has realized one's vocation, and thereby becomes disturbed and awakened – indeed, traumatized – to become a posthuman and knows already what to do. There are two important transitoriness that regain the character of the jolt under this second paradox. First, during the moment of trauma, that is, during the process of transporting the human into the posthuman – which equally can occur within a dream-like transfer of

consciousness into the world of dreams (cyberspace) – the process can well be further paradoxically disturbed and will then be rendered transitory. The problem of *ressentiment* above makes the situation relapse into a dream-state where the last man as the jester daydreams of overcoming e.g. the daydream of an afterlife or some other fictionalized utopian position. But for Žižek, this acquires a further disturbance of the dream. It is often conceived that a dream covers reality: “the topic of a dream as a way to derealize the Real (of a disturbance in external reality) through its inclusion in the dream narrative” (Žižek, 2017, 162). However, Lacan, says Žižek, adds a twist, namely, that even in a dream, reality can also disturb. That is to say, that the function of disturbance can happen both ways – the real is enchanted in the dream, but the real can also disenchant within the dream. In Žižek’s words:

yes, we construct a dream to prolong our sleep by integrating into its texture the external disturbance; but we awaken not when this external disturbance gets too strong—we awaken in order to escape the horror of some traumatic Real upon which we stumble in the dream, which means that there is an “it” that resists symbolization also in the dream. Reality itself (awakening into reality) can be an escape from the Real that we encounter in the dream (2017, 162).

This is possible given that in the second reason for transitoriness, the second paradox which lies at the moment of jolt, also lies in between the borderline of the dream and fiction. The second paradox exposes that the last man, upon realizing that he has a choice to overcome the nihilism of reality through his own tactics, also acknowledges his position of whether he succumbs to the dream (in which case, to go on in the process of disturbance – trauma – that relapses into cyberspace with transitory jolts of reality) or to fiction, which is already far imaginative and different from a dream. Here, Nietzsche’s distinction of the fiction and dream in the *Antichrist* comes to mind:

This *world of pure fiction* is vastly inferior to the *world of dreams* insofar as the latter mirrors reality, whereas the former falsifies,

devalues, and negates reality. Once the concept of “nature” had been invented as the opposite of “God,” “natural” had to become a synonym of “reprehensible”: this whole world of fiction is rooted in hatred of the natural (of reality!); it is the expression of a profound vexation at the sight of reality (Nietzsche, 1976, 15).

A dream – whether conscious or unconscious [albeit Žižek does not think of this Freudian concept as an inner backdrop] – still has connection to reality, as its mirror, but fiction is already an aversion from reality. The moment of trauma then is transitory in this second sense, because it lies in between the world of fiction and the world of dreams. Within this state of in-between, the last man only has a split-second choice and most of its moment is quickly in passing. It is in this frame that even the cognitive scientist Tom Griffiths, for instance, is wrong when he suggests that the logic of computers – or to think like machines – would be the logical answer for humans to make good decisions (Griffiths, 2017). In his TedxSydney talk *3 ways to make better decisions – by thinking like a computer*, he emphasized that even petty choices as going to restaurants that are suggested by machines in computer science can help understand how human minds work. This is simply a transitory moment and trauma does not work merely by *thinking like*, but *becoming like* machines. The process of transhumanism, which will able the transport of man into becoming posthuman, should simply rely not on a transitory jolt that is traumatic.

Corollary: *Is posthumanism just a Lacanian fantasy?*

Perhaps yet another relevant question can come to mind here in matters of fiction to fantasy and further to Lacanian fantasy. For Žižek, ‘Lacan accomplishes the passage from theoretical to *practical anti-humanism*, that is, to an ethics that goes beyond the dimension of what Nietzsche called the “human, all too human,” and confronts the inhuman core of humanity’ (2009, 159). The posthuman project, viably traceable to the transhumanist process that began in the Enlightenment with the prospect of bioengineering the future of humanity (Gomel, 2019), is

psychoanalytically questionable as to its actuality. Are not the coordinates of synthetically maneuvering the future substantial mere reflections of a desire that aims to transgress and address what is lacking in the human? The contemporary human whose subjectivity can be read through Lacan as an empty signifier that simultaneously resists its signification of the Master in the real precisely stands for the barred subject (\$) i.e. that subject that exists through the very lack of its existence. This lack for Lacan sustains, as it were, the subjectivity of the subject whose Thing has been lost and tries to recuperate in itself through desire – of a fantasy that supplements its loss. The symbolic universe in which this subject is situated stands in between subjectivity itself and the desire of a fantasy that can never be attained: this universe placed at the helm of the real allows the subject to be inarticulate about its lack so that the very language in which it tries to understand itself limits its own subjectivity. The crucial distinction that differentiates the subject from the barred subject is that *strictu sensu*, there is none except that the self-consciousness and self-identification of the subject will always be barred: the subject can never escape the symbolic universe that supplants the lack and its insatiability. This is why fantasy has to supplement the very loss that the subject experiences. In Lacanian terms, this fantasy-object that supplements the inherent lack of the subject is of course the object a, or *objet petit a* (object small a).

Object a can be understood other than desire and its object. While object of desire can be of a value that warrants the function of a drive fueled by desire, object a is different in a sense that it doesn't disappear the moment the object is attained. Object of desire, in other words, supplants the drive and devalues itself the moment the subject acquires it. The true name of object a, which fundamentally thrives the more there is desire and drive, is object-cause of desire: the very reason why there is desire in the first place. This is the fantasy object that supplements the lack of the barred subject. As Žižek says, the object-cause of desire is 'the chimerical object of fantasy, the object causing our desire and at the same time – this is its paradox – posed retroactively by this desire' (1989, 174). As such, 'it is this object which keeps the gap of desire open' (Žižek, 2002b, 151).

It is in this background that the claim about questioning the posthuman project within the thematic of Lacan's fantasy object is brought to the fore. Is posthumanism merely a Lacanian fantasy? The prospect of the posthuman centers around the current lack that prevails in humanity, a reduction of its actuality into a possibility: what if we can still go beyond the human in terms of cognitive, physiological, and mental enhancement (Bostrom, 2008)? The claim is well accommodated in the real symbolic universe in which human subjectivity is embodied but its futuristic component still ramifies the registers of the real. This is crucial because "the register of the *Real* is associated with the traumatic nature of our entry into language and the abiding feeling that there is something missing in our own subjectivity" (Shehan, 2012, 28).

This is to say that to answer the question, one must still proceed with Lacan's three registers of the real, which are the symbolic, real, and imaginary. Drawing some insights from Žižek, this is explained through the marketing aesthetics of selling an object, say, the latest flagship phone. A good marketing agent knows that for the target customers to be enticed into buying the phone, he has to go over the three registers of the real. Using the symbolic register, the focus can be done through the phone's status symbolism: buying the phone can be appealing because it is used by the higher class in society. Using the real register, the focus can be on the real components and features of the phone e.g. its durable battery, high-end processor specifications, and so on. Using the imaginary register, the customer is led into thinking that the experience of buying the phone will make his life easier and more manageable. Through these registers, one encounters a subject that is altogether posed with a traumatic insertion that never goes at the heart of what is lacking: determining the fantasy-object remains to be a remainder, a leftover that is continually being supplanted by the Real. While Žižek uses the example of a man who lost his wife with a hamster, perhaps a link to film studies can explain this idea of the *object a* as a leftover through *John Wick*. In the case of the 2014 film *John Wick*, a story is told about a resigned renowned assassin who lost her wife from a disease. He was at a downfall and what is keeping him from

relapsing into absolute despair is the dog that his wife gave that kept him going. The dog here assumes the devotional object that is likened to the psychoanalytical notion of fetish, such that when it was killed, he suddenly reverted into the legendary killer that he was. The dog then was the last leftover of this scenario, even if he cannot fully articulate this consciously; it was the object-cause of desire reference to his dead wife, something he can no longer attain. It was the love of his life, defining the cause of all desire – when this vanishes, one can well imagine the tremendous end result that will happen: a heartless soul, an apathetic fool, a dead man walking, a person devoid of humanity, a retard allergic to love.

This analysis of being a remainder in the thematic of trauma, although it is really not part of the real, makes the whole of reality function; which is to say that to argue whether the posthuman prospect supplements the very lack of current humanity would mean that without this crucial remainder that enables the human to progress and enhance itself, the whole symbolic universe will crumble on its own. However, a careful look must be distinguished between *object a* again and other notions of fantasy. For the posthuman fantasy to work, it needs to consistently supply a constellation in which patterns of choice and concrete presuppositions underlie its being the cause of desire. The gist is that this is also traumatized by other registers and they do not form a consistent whole. Also, as C.S. Lewis tried to warn, “mere” is a dangerous word. And that the acknowledgment of posthumanity as *merely* a fantasy can be jeopardized by a further *Lacanian* interpretation of it that veers away from simple desire but object cause of desire. This is the real trauma here, knowing full well that the object has been lost in the first place, and that even the last man is an empty signifier only poised with fictional overcoming like its alter-identification in the jester.

Going to the paradoxes before, one can note that this fantasy operation still cannot work since the trauma that is bumped into language goes with the Christian ideal of the genesis of everything in the *Word* who is with God and who IS God. The notion of fantasy also becomes further disturbed, as what was shown, by the Real and that this setup reverts to the transitoriness of freedom that is allowable for

the subject which cannot escape its being barred. How does this relate to the posthuman superman that is possibly extracted by trauma? For Loeb in 'Nietzsche's Futurism' (2018), these differences must be transcended by moving beyond the last man – including the characterizations that Žižek utilizes it in the future that Nietzsche did not experience – so that a Nietzschean future, from a past vantage point, can take place (recall how Primo Levi claims that the future has an ancient heart). Loeb says:

We have thought a lot about his retrospective gaze into the past—for example, his insights about the ancient Greeks or the early Christians—but not so much about his forward-thinking vision of the future. And yet I think I speak for many when I say that this visionary aspect of his philosophy seems especially interesting and compelling. We are curious about what he means when he points us toward a philosophy of the future. We are fascinated by his alter-ego's proclamation, set in some future age, that it is time for humankind to create something superhuman beyond itself (Loeb, 2018).

This goes hand-in-hand with the fundamental definition of the superman: 'An *Übermensch* (loosely translated as "superman") is one "who transcends", strives passionately and creatively to go beyond, lives life to the fullest, constantly combats and overcomes obstacles to be a greater person, and rejects comfort and security. (Nettleton, 2009, 1; cf. MacIntyre, 1998, 225).' It seems that the relationship of the future and the Real will be more permanent than the momentary jolts that trauma induces to forward some speculations about the posthuman project. One can even go further to claim that trauma as the subject and the Real that supports its environs can never circumvent that lack that ideals such as posthumanity and the superman both offers. Both posthumanism and the superman or as a fusion, a posthuman superman, cannot find a panacea in the thematic of trauma alone. The human will have to undergo some crucial albeit short moments of freedom but those are not enough to ground the very Real that demarcates ideals and choices that are at present not able to hinge on a concrete future. There will be other interventions, born out of the registers of the real that can traumatize one's conscious notions of superhuman fantasy – or even if it does

reside in a dark corner of the *Ich*, it still won't be able to fully articulate what specific register will this posthuman superman be.

What the paper tries to expose is that trauma alone is not enough. Trauma can once again be healed through the monotony of things. That is to say, that experiences with trauma dissolve slowly with the normal course of quotidian experiences. Traumatic experiences may change a person but some residues of the past still reside (his former dispositions, his former ways of overcoming like the last man who overcome through fiction). But again, this is paradoxically intertwined with (1) the Christian ideal of an afterworld and (2.1) its jolt is equally interrupted with reality, hence, making its disturbance also disturbed (the paradox of trauma), along with (2.2) the character of transitoriness that belies the choice of the last man to confront the world of dreams and the world of fiction. Trauma still needs something to vanquish the moral ascendancy that goes with its present form. It needs reality not as interruption but paradoxically as its necessary element, and it needs the permanency of transitoriness that can fuel the world of dreams against fiction. In short, trauma can openly find complementarity in the Nietzschean notion of the abyss.

Acknowledgment

The author is grateful to Prof. Joselito Galendo of Holy Name University for letting me emphasize on the dream-like element of the process of the posthuman in this paper.

Notes

- 1 Some reflections of this can be gleaned from my previous take on posthuman sexlessness through Nietzschean ethics. This comes as a corollary of an ethical nihilism in hedonistic posthuman sex. See Kahambing (2020c; 2019b). The asexual argument of posthumanity is recently acknowledged by Žižek (2019): "with the prospect of posthumanity...the scientifically engineered asexual reproduction

- 2 cancels sexuality, which is also threatened by the prospect of asexual symbolic identifications” (p. 159).
- Žižek’s take on the concept mostly caters on an emergence framework as I drew, for example, in some connections to it to the indigenous (Kahambing, 2018b; 2019c; 2019d). Pacaol (2020) also adopts this framework in post-man literature.

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