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Lacan after Žižek: Self-Reflexivity in the Automodern Enjoyment of Psychoanalysis

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Slavoj Žižek's writings have been perhaps the most influential of all of the post-Lacanian. In fact, one could argue that virtually no one reads Lacan anymore and that this lack of reading "the original" is indicative of our secondary symbolic culture where most people rely on the pre-reading of original works. Thus, in order to save time and deal with the constant proliferation of new theories and texts which demand our attention, academic thinkers and writers depend on the paraphrased interpretations of original texts that the secondary readers may not have even read themselves. One of the results of this process is that the production of symbolic knowledge is cut off from traditional and modern notions of authorship and authority. Yet, with Žižek, we do indeed find an insightful and creative attempt to read Lacan and respond to his original texts. In fact, Žižek is quite astute at pointing out the diverse ways contemporary critics have misread Lacan; however, I will argue that Žižek's post-Lacanian critique of contemporary culture stays within the logic of the discourse of the university and often functions to repress psychoanalysis and the unconscious.

A central aspect of Žižek's return to Lacan, that he often highlights himself, is an opposition between the early Lacan and the late Lacan. According to this theory, which has its roots in the work of Jacques-Alain Miller, the early Lacan centered his conception of psychoanalysis on the Symbolic order, while the later Lacan is the Lacan of the Real.¹ Moreover, according to the logic of Miller and Žižek, psychoanalytic theory and practice must be judged by the end of analysis (the traversing of fantasy, subjective destitution), and therefore Lacan's early work has to be replaced by his later work. Of special importance to this critique of the early Lacan is the idea that the goal of analysis is to subject one's desire to the Symbolic order of language, culture, and social recognition. Furthermore, in this reading, the early Lacan follows Freud in stressing that the unconscious is structured like a language and all symptoms need to be interpreted by adding Symbolic meaning.

In opposition to this stress on the Symbolic and interpretation, Žižek stresses the late Lacan's emphasis on the Real and the construction of fantasies. Thus, while symptoms are interpreted as unconscious formations, fantasies are constructed as responses to the Real. In turn, this stress on fantasy is linked to the Freudian notion of the death drive and the Lacanian conception of repetition, and by moving away from language and symptoms to drives and the Real, Žižek is able to make an essential Hegelian interpretation of psychoanalysis, which is the idea that the death drive represents the presence of the Symbolic in the Real. In fact, on the level of Žižek's death drive, the Real is Symbolic, and there is--what he likes to say, borrowing from Hegel--a coincidence of opposites. Since the death drive stands for the traumatic break with nature and the initial entry into culture, it is the fundamental gap or rupture in the human world. On one level, Žižek is repeating Hegel's notion that "the Word is the Death of the Thing," but on another level, he posits that the death drive belongs to the Real, and is central to our understanding of the psychoanalytic notions of repetition and enjoyment. For example in *Looking Awry*, we find the following argument:

Lacan's point is that the Real purpose of the drive is not its goal (full satisfaction) but its aim: the drive's ultimate aim is simply to reproduce itself as drive, to return to its circular path, to continue its path to and from the goal. The Real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of the closed circuit. (5)

At first glance, this argument seems to follow Lacan's theories of the drive and repetition, yet doesn't Lacan make a major distinction between the drive, as a structure of

difference, and repetition, as the return of the same?² Furthermore, Lacan posits that the drive moves around the object (a), and thus it is structured by the loss and not the production of enjoyment (*Four Fundamental* 156).³ I would like to posit that this collapse among the drive, the object a, and repetition points to Žižek's own symptomatic repetition of signifiers that have been voided of their original signification.

Throughout his work, Žižek's strategy is often to show how Lacan's concepts should be read from the perspective of the Real, and at the same time, he transforms the Real into the Symbolic. For instance, in the following list of quotes from *Looking Awry*, one finds a gradual series of substitutions, which result in the evaporation of the differences among many of Lacan's major concepts:⁴

- 1) "This music . . . embodies, by means of its painfully noisy repetition, the super-ego imperative of idiotic enjoyment. "Brazil," to put it briefly, is the content of the fantasy of the film's hero" (128).
- 2) "Such a fragment of the signifier permeated with idiotic enjoyment is what Lacan, in the last stage of his teaching, called *le sinthome*. Le sinthome is not the symptom, the coded message to be deciphered, but the meaningless letter that immediately procures *jouis-sense*, "enjoyment-in-meaning"" (128-29).
- 3) "What we must do . . . is to *isolate* the *sinthome* from the context by virtue of which it exerts its power of fascination in order to expose the *sinthome*'s utter stupidity. In other words, we must carry out the operation of changing the precious gift into a gift of shit . . . [a] meaningless fragment of the Real" (129).

The subtle movement of these citations presents a chain of equivalencies, which we can read as: repetition = super-ego = idiotic enjoyment = fantasy = the signifier = le sinthome = the letter = enjoyment-in-meaning = the object a (excrement) = a meaningless fragment of the Real. In other terms, Žižek reduces much of Lacan's conceptual edifice to the pure repetition of the same idea: The superego demands the pure repetition of a meaningless idiotic mode of enjoyment.⁵

What this theory then tends to short-circuit are the distinctions that Lacan makes among Real enjoyment, Imaginary fantasy, the repetition of the signifier, the Symbolic structure of the superego, and the presence of lost *jouissance* in the form of the object

(a). At this level of his rhetoric, Žižek therefore appears to participate in the post-modern process that Jean Baudrillard attaches to the emptying out of all essences from every system.⁶ Of course, Žižek would have a hard time himself arguing with this analysis since he claims in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that his own method serves to get rid of the “fascination” with the “kernel of signification” and replace the search for hidden meaning with a purely formal definition of the subject (14). In this sense, it is not surprising that he empties many of Lacan’s concepts of their specific meanings; yet, what we must pay attention to is what he excludes and how he produces this series of conceptual displacements. For example, what does it mean that he ends up equating pure jouissance with the Symbolic production of the object (a)? Perhaps, one of the possible effects of this substitution is to equate the pre-Symbolic Real (pure jouissance) and the post-Symbolic Real (the object a). This loss of difference allows the Real of existence to become the product of the Symbolic system of representation.⁷ In other words, in a classic contemporary move, Žižek drains the Real of its own realness (that which is impossible to symbolize) and places it firmly within the structure of the Symbolic order (the limit to symbolization). The Real here becomes that part of the Symbolic, which resists signification, and yet it is still a form of meaning or enjoy-meant.⁸

One way of understanding Žižek’s return to Lacan is therefore to interpret the meaning of this division between the early Lacan of the Symbolic and the late Lacan of the Real. From a deconstructive position, we find that this binary distinction sets up a hierarchy by removing the middle term, which in this case would be the theory of the Imaginary, which is often lacking in Žižek’s account of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, Žižek’s and Miler’s interpretations of Lacan’s work tend to employ a reductive linear and progressive model that posits a radical divide between the bad early Lacan and the good late Lacan. Also, as I have noted, this linear structure is reinforced by the emphasis on the end of analysis as the final punctuation point that gives meaning to every analysis and analytic practice itself.

Of course, one can respond to my criticism that much of Žižek’s work is dedicated to critiquing deconstruction and other postmodern theories, and yet, I want to show how Žižek’s own work pushes us to rethink our own sense of postmodernity. For example, if postmodernism represents a cultural period where the universality and neutrality of modern science, capitalism, and democracy are called into question, then we can see Žižek’s work as falling squarely into this tradition. However, we still need to distinguish between this critical conception of postmodernity and an anti-critical backlash

that now dominates much of contemporary academic discourse and the larger cultural order.

The Subject of Automodernity

To account for this split between a critical and anti-critical mode of postmodernity, I have coined the term “automodernity,” which argues that we now live in a period where individual autonomy and technological and cultural automation are often united in seemingly seamless circuits of subjectivity and social order.⁹ From this perspective, Žižek’s work is automodern because it not only rejects postmodern theory and criticism (deconstruction, multiculturalism, feminisms), but it also combines Hegel with Lacan in order to produce a discourse of mechanical repetition and self-referencing.

What then is at stake in Žižek’s interpretation of Lacan is the conflict between the postmodern stress on social construction (the early Lacan of Symbolic determinism) and the automodern emphasis on an anti-social mode of dispersed enjoyment (the late Lacan of the *sinthome*). In other words, we can understand the early Lacan as being centered on the notion that the unconscious is structured like a language and that language itself determines the social order. Furthermore, the early Lacan posits that the end of analysis requires the subject’s submission to the Symbolic order of knowledge, history, and castration. In this de-centering of the subject, we encounter the postmodern stress on the social construction of social reality and the submission of the subject to the structure of Symbolic differences. Žižek’s emphasis, then, on the later Lacan, is in parallel with his general criticism of postmodernism theory; in both cases, he is moving away from the notion that the subject is defined and determined by the Symbolic order of social constructions. Žižek’s version of the late Lacan then points to a post-postmodern discourse, or what I would call an automodern discourse.

Self-Reflexivity in Žižek and Automodernity

To further understand this notion of automodernity in the late Lacan and Žižek’s work, we can look at a series of arguments Žižek presents in his 2008 preface to his *For They Know Not What they Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. I have chosen to concentrate

on this text because it shows Žižek re-reading his own early work from a later perspective, and central to this self-reflexive gesture is the very notion of self-reflexivity within Lacan's discourse. As a strong example of automodern subjectivity, self-reflexivity provides a mode of resistance to an individual seeking to find freedom outside of the Symbolic social order of social determinism and social commitment: "this resistance to full commitment, this inability to assume it fully, which is just not an empirical psychological fact but a resistance inscribed into the most elementary relationship between the subject and its Symbolic representation/identification" (xiii). Žižek here posits that the fundamental trait of the unconscious is the subject's resistance to all social and Symbolic identifications, and I would argue that this definition feeds into the libertarian desire to place the self outside of any social commitment or collective action. In other words, resistance in this context defends against the postmodern stress on social determination that also, according to Žižek, dominates in Lacan's early work

Žižek, in turn, ties this self-reflexive mode of resistance to the subject of the unconscious, who is represented as being a void within the Symbolic order: "The gap is not simply external to language, it is not a relationship between language and a subject external to it; rather, it is inscribed in the very heart of language in the guise of the irreducible (self) reflexivity" (xiii). Žižek's argument here is not the early Lacan's theory that the subject is born into a world that is already structured by the Symbolic order of social norms and customs; rather, his argument is that the fault of the subject is internal to language, and yet, this subjective void results in the generation of self-reflexivity:

When Lacan repeats that "there is no meta-language," this claim does not *imply* the impossibility of a reflexive distance towards some first-order language; on the contrary, "there is no meta-language" means, in fact, that *there is no language* –no seamless language whose enunciated is not broken by the reflexive inscription of the position of the enunciation. (xiii)

This interpretation of Lacan's distinction between the enunciated statement and the subject of enunciation allows Žižek the ability to clear a space for self-reflexive subjectivity, and by placing the subject outside of the Symbolic order, Žižek can point to a place for ironic self-distance. Within this structure, every social commitment and Symbolic utterance is rendered suspect, while the reflexive individual is able to re-center him or herself as both the empty ground and the fulfilled meaning of social interaction. To be precise, since there is always a distance between the speaker and the speech act, one is able to both affirm and deny one's relationship to the social order.

In one of his many politically incorrect examples, Žižek shows how his theory of linguistic subjectivity feeds into an anti-social, anti-progressive, libertarian ideology:

Language, in its very notion, involves a minimal distance towards its literal meaning – not in the sense of some irreducible ambiguity or multiple dispersion of meanings, but in the more precise sense of “he said X, but what if he *Really meant* the opposite” -- like the proverbial male-chauvinist notion of a woman who, when subjected to sexual advances, says, “No,” while her real message is “Yes” (xiii).

One of the interesting aspects of this example is that one does not know where Žižek stands in relation to this sexist insult: is he arguing that chauvinistic men are wrong to assume that when a woman says no, she really means it, or is he positing that people may always be saying the opposite, and therefore when a woman says “no” to a sexual advance, she really means “yes”? Like so many of Žižek’s examples, at first glance, they seem to prove his theoretical point, but on closer example, they can be read in a multiple and contradictory ways.

No matter how we read the example above, we see how the gap opened up in the relation between the speaker and language reverberates in the gap between the statement and the interpretation, and it is this freedom within the Symbolic order of language that helps us to understand how in new media and other forms of automodern culture, the focus of language and representation moves from the social to the individual. In fact, we can read Žižek’s own writing style as dedicated to placing his own self in the middle of every cultural and theoretical conflict. Like Zeilg or Forest Gump, Žižek is able to enter into diverse areas of contemporary discourse because he both denies the possibility of any stable relation to language, while he uses language to re-find his own work and interpretations. In other terms, if meaning starts with me, it is in part because the gap between the statement and the enunciation creates a space for individual appropriation.

One way of therefore understanding the role of sampling, re-mixing, bricolage, and collage in contemporary automodern culture is to see how the appropriation and re-working of previous representations stems from our desire to overcome our sense of being subjected to the Symbolic order of mass culture. From this perspective, we can read Youtube videos and social networking homepages as indications of the desire to personalize the media and create a space for self-reflection and self-reflexivity. Yet, Žižek is not content to just highlight the eternal distance between the subject and language as the cause for self-reflexivity; instead, he wants to argue that self-reflexivity

is also caused by the failure of the Symbolic to attain the Real: “The self-reflexivity of language, the fact that a speech act is always a self-reflexive comment on itself . . . bears witness to the impossibility inscribed into the very heart of language: its failure to grasp the Real” (xiv). By positing this fundamental crisis within representation, Žižek is able to place his discourse in the paradoxical position of pointing to its own impossibility from a position of possibility; in other words, like all ironic discourses, Žižek keeps on communicating about the impossibility of communication.

Moreover, Žižek’s claim that language cannot attain the Real results in a paradoxical obsession with representing the Real and the limitations of the Symbolic order, and we find this ironic take on the Real reflected throughout contemporary culture. For instance, in his discussion of virtual Reality, Žižek is quick to point out that “the Real is *not* the hard kernel of reality resisting virtualization. Hubert Dreyfus is right to identify the fundamental feature of today’s virtualization of our life-experience as a reflective distance which prevents any full engagement . . . ” (xv). Here Žižek posits that the problem with virtual reality is not that it fails to represent the resisting Real; rather, virtualization results in the production of subjective distance and self-reflexivity. Once again, Žižek returns to the notion of the subject’s distance from Symbolic reality in order to posit a mode of self-reflexivity that calls for an impossible access to the Real.

Re-Thinking the Death Drive

Žižek’s self-reflexive rhetoric can be attributed partially to his need to give a presence to the empty subject of modernity. According to this paradoxical logic, the subject is a self-relating negativity in relation to both the Real and the Symbolic orders, and this positioning of the subject as a product of and a resistance to language defines for Žižek the later Lacan’s emphasis on both the Real and the death drive: “The Freudian notion of the “death drive” points precisely towards a dimension of human subject which resists its full immersion into its life-world: it designates a blind persistence which follows its path with utter disregard for the requirements of our concrete life-world” (xvi). In this revision of Freudian theory and rejection of the early Lacan, the death drive stands for the subject’s resistance to both the Symbolic order of social commitments and the full immersion in the natural Real. What is so seductive about this theory is that it feeds into our automodern, libertarian desire to not be defined by our social relations and identifications, and it also gives us a sense of freedom in relation to our natural instincts and environmental circumstances: “‘Death drive’ is this dislocated soul without body, a

pure insistence that ignores the constraints of reality” (xvi). Like Descartes’ cogito, Žižek posits an “I” that is void of materiality and fits in easily within our virtualized world of self-reflexive distance.

While it would seem that Žižek’s representations of the impossibility of language to represent its referent would place him within the postmodern academic framework of post-structuralism and deconstruction, much of his work is based on his desire to reject these other European theories. In fact, one can argue that his backlash against the Symbolic order of social construction is tied to his refusal to accept the deconstructive theory of social determination. For instance, in Žižek’s critique of deconstruction, we see that a key difference for him is the way that post-structuralists posit that the decentering of the subject is a result of language:

all the postmodern-deconstructionists-poststructuralist variations on how the subject is always-already displaced, decentered, pluralized . . . somehow miss the central point: that the subject “as such” is the name for a certain displacement, a certain wound, cut, in the texture of the universe, and all its identifications are ultimately just so many failed attempt to heal the wound. (xvi)

The first thing that has to be pointed out about this passage is how Žižek equates postmodernism with post-structuralism and deconstruction, and then he differentiates his own discourse from these other academic discourses by distinguishing the de-centering of the subject from the de-centered subject. While this difference seems to be small, for Žižek, this distinction is predicated on the postmodernists’ refusal to distinguish Symbolic social “reality” from the Lacanian Real. Thus, Žižek wants to argue that the subject is decentered already in the Real before the subject enters into the Symbolic order, and this means that we can never turn to language in order to heal the wounds of the subject.

The separation of Symbolic reality from the Real also plays into Žižek’s desire to oppose the early Symbolic Lacan and the later Lacan of the Real: “in the opposition between reality and spectral illusion, the Real appears precisely as “irreal,” as a spectral illusion for which there is no room in our (Symbolically constructed) reality” (xvi). Here we see how the opposition between the bad early Lacan of the Symbolic order, and the good, later Lacan of the Real, doubles the opposition between the postmodern deconstructionists and the post-postmodern Žižek. What is important from this position is not the social construction of Symbolic reality; rather, what defines the end of analysis

and the ends of Žižek's discourse is the irreal encounter with the impossible Real: "Therein, in this Symbolic construction of (what we perceive as our social) reality, lies the catch: the inert remainder foreclosed from (what we experience as) reality returns precisely in the Real of spectral apparitions" (xvi). In this debate between the postmodern theory of social construction and the Lacanian notion of the return of the spectral object in the Real, we not only encounter Žižek's automodern move away from the Symbolic order, but we also see how his conception of the later Lacan of the Real really deals with the production of an object that is produced within the Symbolic order itself. In other terms, Žižek equates the pre-Symbolic and the post-Symbolic Real, and this conflation causes many theoretical confusions.

One way of thinking about this distinction between the pre- and post-Symbolic Real is to posit a logical time before language and a logical time after language. Of course, we can only discuss things through language, but we still need to claim a mode of existence that is external and prior to linguistic imposition because without this pre-Symbolic Real, there is no boundary or limit to symbolization. Furthermore, in most theories and practices of the post-Symbolic Real, what we are dealing with is the attempt of the Symbolic order to posit its own limit or other. Thus, marketers sell Imaginary forms of Real freedom, rebellion, individuality, and violence as anti-social forces within a social economy.

Žižek's celebration of the return to the Real turns out to be a return to an impossibility produced by the Symbolic but experienced in the Imaginary. The difference then between Žižek's conception of the effects of the Symbolic order of social construction and the deconstructive notion of the de-centered subject is that Žižek holds on to the Imaginary self-presenceing of the subject. Furthermore, Žižek's theory uses the Symbolic order to colonize the pre-Symbolic Real so that the entire natural world of experience and sexuality can only be experienced as a lack or a resistance within the realm of language. This absorption of the Real into the Symbolic is illustrated in the following way:

It is not only that every Symbolic system is a system of differences with no positive substantial support: it is crucial to add that the very difference between the (self-enclosed) Symbolic system and its outside must itself be inscribed within the system, in the guise of a paradoxical supplementary signifier which, within the system, functions as a stand-in for what the system excludes; for what eludes the system's grasp. (xx-xxi)

Žižek's appropriation of deconstructive theory reveals here how he affirms and denies the logic of the social construction of social reality as he wishes to valorize a space both inside and outside of social determinism. According to Žižek's argument, everything that resists our social order is contained within the order, and thus there is no escape from the system, and yet, the only thing we desire is to be outside of the system. Likewise, we can understand the automodern backlash against postmodern social commitments and social construction as a desire to transcend Symbolic reality by denying the power of Symbolic mediation even when we stay within the Symbolic structure.

From Symptom to Fantasy

To further understand what is at stake in Žižek's return to Lacan, we can look at his text, "Desire = Truth: Knowledge" from 1997, which ties the distinction between the early and late Lacan to the difference between the Symbolic realm of the statement and the Real realm of the subjective position (enunciation) within analytic practice. This binary opposition is introduced in the following way:

As Jacques-Alain Miller has pointed out, the concept of "constructions in analysis" does not rely on the (dubious) claim that the analyst is always right (if the patient accepts the analyst's proposed construction, that's straightforward confirmation of its correctness; if the patient rejects it, this is a sign of resistance which, consequently, again confirms that the construction has touched on the truth); the point, rather, is the obverse-- *the analysand is always, by definition, in the wrong*. In order to get this point, one should focus on the crucial distinction between construction and its counterpart, interpretation, correlative to the couple knowledge/truth. That is to say, an interpretation is a gesture that is always embedded in the intersubjective dialectic of recognition between the analysand and the analyst, it aims at bringing about the effect of truth apropos of some particular formation of the unconscious (a dream, a symptom, a slip of tongue). The subject is expected to "recognize" himself in the signification proposed by the interpreter, precisely to subjectivize it, to assume the proposed signification as "his own" (Yes, my God, that's me, I Really wanted this). The very success of interpretation is measured by this "effect of truth," by the extent to which it affects the subjective position of the analysand (stirring up memories of the hitherto deeply repressed traumatic encounters, provoking violent resistance). In clear contrast to it, a construction (exemplarily, that of a fundamental fantasy) has the status of a knowledge which can never be subjectivized, assumed by the subject as the truth about himself, the truth in which he recognizes the innermost kernel of his being. A construction is a purely logical explanatory presupposition, like the second stage (I am being beaten by my father) of the child's fantasy "A child is being beaten" which, as Freud

emphasizes, is so radically unconscious that it cannot ever be remembered.

Žižek here posits a radical division between the Symbolic realm of interpretation, truth, and intersubjectivity on the one hand, and the Real place of knowledge, construction, fantasy, and logic on the other hand. From this perspective, psychoanalysis is not about Symbolic interaction; instead analysis involves the confrontation with an unconscious fantasy that can never be assimilated into the Symbolic order.

This privileging of fantasy over the Symbolic order is tied to Freud's notion that the middle phase to every fantasy formation includes an absent unconscious fantasy that the analyst can only assume but is not present to the patient's own consciousness:

The fact that this phase "never had a Real existence," of course, indexes the status of the Lacanian Real; the knowledge we have of this phase is a "knowledge in the Real," i.e., it is an "acephalic," non-subjectivized knowledge. Although (or, rather, for the very reason that) it is a kind of "Thou art that!" which articulates the very kernel of the subject's being, its assumption *desubjectivizes* me, i.e., I can only assume my fundamental fantasy insofar as I undergo what Lacan calls "subjective destitution." Or, to put it in yet another way, interpretation and construction stand to each other like symptom and fantasy: symptoms are to be interpreted, the fundamental fantasy is to be (re)constructed. This notion of "acephalic" knowledge emerges rather late in Lacan's teaching, after the relationship between knowledge and truth underwent a profound shift in the early seventies.

Once again, Žižek returns to a linear and progressive account of Lacan's theories in order to argue that within an individual case of analysis, the stress on symptoms and their interpretation has to be replaced by an emphasis on fundamental fantasies and their construction. Furthermore, this focus on the construction of the analyst presents knowledge as being Real and no longer Symbolic.

Žižek is not only saying here that it is the analyst who always knows, but, more radically, the patient can do nothing but submit to a fantasy that can never be conscious. Žižek extends this theory in the following manner:

In the "early" phase, from the 1940s to the 1960s, Lacan moves within the coordinates of the standard philosophical opposition between "inauthentic" objectifying knowledge which disregards the subject's position of enunciation, and the "authentic" truth by which one is existentially engaged, affected. . . . Beginning in the late sixties, however, Lacan focuses his attention more and more on drive as a kind of "acephalic" knowledge which brings about satisfaction. This knowledge involves no inherent relation to truth, no subjective position of

enunciation-- not because it dissimulates the subjective position of enunciation, but because it is in itself nonsubjectivized, or ontologically prior to the very dimension of truth (of course, the term ontological becomes thereby problematic, since ontology is by definition a discourse on truth). Truth and knowledge are thus related as desire and drive: interpretation aims at the truth of the subject's desire (the truth of desire is the desire for truth, as one is tempted to put it in a pseudo-Heideggerian way), while construction provides knowledge about drive.

In this radical reading of Lacan, the entire psychoanalytic process of Symbolic interpretation and the subjective affirmation of desire through speech is replaced by the imposition of a knowledge that is void of subjectivity and takes the form of a drive in the Real. It is also important to stress here that Žižek equates this replacement of truth, subjectivity, and Symbolic intersubjectivity with the discourse of science:

Is not the paradigmatic case of such an "acephalic" knowledge provided by modern science, which exemplifies the "blind insistence" of the (death) drive? Modern science follows its path (in microbiology, in manipulating genes, in particle physics) heedless of cost--satisfaction is here provided by knowledge itself, not by any moral or communal goals scientific knowledge is supposed to serve.

What Žižek is positing here is that psychoanalysis is indeed a science, and this discourse involves placing knowledge in the position of agency in the form of a headless and heedless drive.

Once again, it is important to emphasize that Žižek's strategy for reading Lacan is equivalent to his theory of psychoanalytic practice: in both cases, he seeks to replace the Symbolic order of conceptual differences and intersubjective relationships with the imposition of a knowledge that is imposed and void of subjectivity. In this conflation of drive and knowledge, we find Lacan's own difficult argument that knowledge in the form of a signifying chain (S2) represents the enjoyment of the Other. Thus, Žižek posits the following: "Within psychoanalysis, this knowledge of drive which can never be subjectivized assumes the form of knowledge of the subject's "fundamental fantasy," the specific formula which regulates his or her access to *jouissance*." Since the knowledge of the drive can only come from the Other, and this knowledge controls the subject's access to enjoyment (*jouissance*), we must conclude that the subject's enjoyment is the enjoyment of the Other, just as the subject's knowledge can only be the knowledge of the Other.

From the Analyst to the University

We now appear to be a long way from any type of self-reflexivity since knowledge is presented as coming from the Other and void of subjectivity, and I would argue that in order to understand this major conflict in Žižek's work, we need to articulate the difference between the discourse of the analyst and the discourse of the university. In short, I will posit that Žižek's return to Lacan absorbs psychoanalytic practice into academic theory by voiding the essential structure of psychoanalytic treatment. To help formulate this argument, I want to first describe a simple way of thinking about the analytic process.

Psychoanalysis begins when a patient free-associates about unconscious representations to an analyst whom does not take advantage of the transference relationship. In turn, the central duty of the analyst is to help prevent the resistances to free association. Of course, the first complication to this problem is that free association is very hard to do since it requires speaking without thinking about the Other. This means that to free associate, one cannot censor oneself and that one has to literally speak without thinking. From this perspective, we can see that Žižek is right to stress the non-subjective aspect of psychoanalytic knowledge; however, we can quickly see that the turn to self-reflexivity represents the opposite of free association. Also, it is important to separate free association from the drive because the latter concept entails an active relation with another person that combines sexual enjoyment with cultural representations.

While Žižek often stresses the autoerotic nature of drives, Lacan posits in his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* that, "the genital drive is subjected to the circulation of the Oedipus complex, of the elementary and other structures of kinship. This is what is designated as the field of culture . . ." (189). Thus, as Freud showed in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the drive is the place where the subject is introduced to culture, and Lacan will later add that through the drive, the subject is forced to replace the enjoyment of the One (masturbation) with the enjoyment of the Other.¹⁰ What then tortures obsessional subjects is that their super-ego demands that they find their enjoyment in external objects mediated by the desire of Others, and yet, obsessionals do not want to give up the control that is generated out of self-stimulation. This need to avoid the desire of the Other also makes it hard for the patient to stop trying to control his or her own discourse during analysis.

This opposition between drive and free association is stressed by the fundamental rule of the analyst not satisfying the demands of the patient. This form of

analytic neutrality means not only that one cannot have a relationship with one's patients, but also more radically, one must break the usual Imaginary relation between the ego and the other. Freud moved in this direction by first giving up hypnosis and then by placing the patient in a position where he or she could not see the analyst. In fact, Freud argued that he made this move because he could not stand being stared at by someone for a long period of time, but what he discovered in this process was the shift from an Imaginary relationship of mirroring and interaction to a Symbolic relationship of projection and identification, and Lacan later uses this movement away from the Imaginary mirroring relation to articulate his theory of the gaze, as the object which has no specular reflection.

I bring up these practical matters to stress that if one reads virtually all of Žižek's texts, one gets very little sense of how analysis actually works. In fact, I would argue that Žižek's method of reading is precisely the opposite of psychoanalysis because it does not allow for the over-determination of the signifier and the production of a knowledge that calls into question the subject who is supposed to know, which Lacan defines as the essence of transference. Lacan himself tried to avoid this problem of being the idealized Other of the transference by forcing his audience to deal with his multiple allusions, word plays, and mathematical elaborations. However, I am not arguing that Lacan was difficult simply to be obscure; rather he tried to both slow down the audience's time for understanding, while he replicated the Symbolic multiplicity of unconscious formations.

Lacan also developed a new theory of interpretation that helped to intervene in both his teaching and his analytic work. At the most basic level, we can understand this form of intervention as an effort to interrupt the resistances to free association. For example, just as Freud noticed, many patients come to analysis, and they spend a lot of time talking, but they do not seem to say anything new. Freud at the end of his career tried telling several of his patients that he would have to end the analysis at a certain date, and he hoped this would stop the patients from engaging in obsessional procrastination.¹¹ Freud also noticed that many obsessional patients would affirm an unconscious discovery on an intellectual level, but they would not make what he called an affective affirmation. In fact, Freud posited that a central cause for obsessional neurosis is the splitting of affect from intellect, and so the only way to get an obsessional subject to change would be to transform this defense that he called "negation."

Lacan took Freud's ideas about the obsessional neurosis and applied them to what he saw as the obsessional rituals of psychoanalytic practice. Thus, instead of just

respecting the traditional fifty minute hour that forced analysts to listen to patients who were saying nothing new and who were failing to free associate, Lacan started to vary the time of sessions, and I can report from my experience as being both an analysand and analyst, one of the central effects of ending sessions early is that one learns to speak very quickly without censoring in order to avoid being cut off. While this may seem like a brutal process, it can be practiced in a very subtle way.

This act of ending the sessions can also be considered an interpretation, and it shows how the analyst needs to interpret not from a position of ultimate knowledge, but from a position of desire and equivocation. In this sense, the analyst should never intentionally feed the idealizing transference, and this refusal to be the one who knows can only be done if one interprets from a position of desire and not knowledge. For desire entails an awareness of a lack and incompleteness, and so the analyst's desire shows that the Symbolic Other is not complete or all knowing.

For academic thinkers and writers, this notion that interpretation does not entail meaning or knowledge is shocking and off-putting. After all, a central aspect of the discourse of the university is a placing of knowledge in the position of agency, and this structure is supported by the teacher who becomes the ego ideal in the form of the ideal subject who knows. Yet, Lacan posits that the discourse of analysis conflicts with the discourse of the university because the analyst puts knowledge in the position of truth, and this truth entails that we can never know all and that analytic knowledge must be separated from idealization and identification. Furthermore, this structural opposition between psychoanalysis and academic discourse helps to explain why analysis has had such a hard time finding a place within universities: the psychoanalytic theory of knowledge as being unconscious and non-idealizing conflicts with the celebration of knowledge and mastery at our institutions of higher learning.

While Žižek's success in academia seems to counter this opposition between the discourse of the analyst and the discourse of the university, my argument is that he is able to fold the former into the latter by changing the status of psychoanalytic knowledge. Therefore, in Žižek's hands, psychoanalytic concepts become interpretive tools that hold out the Imaginary fantasy of understanding, and this process is aided by both the diversity of topics he appears to explain and his use of several defensive mechanisms that Freud ascribes to the obsessional subject. For instance, in the Ratman case, Freud stressed how the obsessional prevents the discovery of unconscious material by isolating different representations and preventing the process of free association. We find this defense not only in Žižek's over-all strategy of dividing Lacan

into a bad early Lacan and a good late Lacan, but also in his failure to use of the distinction between two notions of the Other. To grasp this latter opposition we can look at his book *How to Read Lacan*, where we gain many insights into how he interprets Lacan from an obsessional academic perspective. In fact, his reflections not only help us to understand the obsessional foundations of the discourse of the university, but as Lacan insists, since this discourse of the university now dominates the general culture, an understanding of this discourse enables us to reflect on our own contemporary world.

12

How Žižek Says We Should Read Lacan

The first radical move that Žižek makes in this work is to place Lacan in the position of being a “reader “ of texts, and this identification is produced by Žižek’s insistence that by not dealing directly with matters concerning what goes on in psychoanalytic treatment, he can best examine Lacan’s clinical concerns:

Lacan was a voracious reader and interpreter; for him, psychoanalysis itself is a method of reading texts, oral (the patient’s speech) or written. What better way to read Lacan, then, than to practice his mode of reading, to read other’s texts *with* Lacan. This is why, in each chapter of this book, a passage from Lacan will confront another fragment (from philosophy, from art, from popular culture and ideology). The Lacanian position will be elucidated through the Lacanian reading of the other text. Another feature of this book is a sweeping exclusion: it ignores almost entirely Lacan’s theory of what goes on in psychoanalytic treatment. Lacan was first of all a clinician, and clinical concerns permeate everything he wrote and did. Even when he reads Plato, Aquinas, Hegel, or Kierkegaard, it is always to elucidate a precise clinical problem. This very ubiquity of these concerns is what allows us to exclude them: precisely because clinic is everywhere, one can short-circuit the process and concentrate instead on its effects, on the way it colors everything that appears non-clinical - this is the true test of its central place. (5)

We can say that this statement shows in itself how Žižek’s return to Lacan represents a repression of the process of psychoanalytic treatment in favor of a model of cultural and philosophical reading, which is in its essence self-reflexive. In turn, by avoiding the messy details of actual cases and experiences, we enter into a metaphysical discourse where Symbolic knowledge is placed in the position of agency above the Real of actual existence. We can also read this stress of reading over practice as an indication of how the repressed master of the discourse of the university is the ideal reading subject who is certain of his knowledge.¹³

We can compare this repression of the clinical and the experiential to the obsessional splitting of the representation from its affect. In this structure, psychoanalysis becomes a field of representations that do not have to deal with their grounding in the Real or in subjectivity, and this splitting of the subject helps to account for one of Žižek's major themes, which is the division of the symbolic Other into the ego ideal and the super-ego. While Lacan himself does articulate this distinction, with Žižek, it becomes a major theme and reflects on his way of dividing Lacan. In fact, with the early Lacan, the ego ideal or ideal of the Symbolic Other represents the essential way that others recognize me. Also, for Freud, this ego ideal centers on the child's desire for parental approval, and for Lacan, this agency verifies the ego's expression of narcissism. Thus in his extension of the mirror stage theory, Lacan shows how a child will look in the mirror and see his reflection, and then the child will look back at the parent who is holding the child to see if the parent recognizes the child's own externalized ideal ego.

Freud posited that this imaginary relation between the ideal ego and the ego ideal is later transformed by the resolution of the Oedipus Complex and the internalization of the super-ego, which derives its influences from both the id and larger cultural influences. Lacan later develops this notion of the super-ego in order to account for how the id is shaped by specific social demands and how the super-ego commands the subject to find enjoyment in the Other. Žižek's re-reading of these structures can be found in the following passage:

The Ego-Ideal is the agency whose gaze I try to impress with my ego image, the big Other who watches over me and propels me to give my best, the ideal I try to follow and actualize; and the superego is this same agency in its revengeful, sadistic, punishing, aspect. The underlying structuring principle of these three terms is clearly Lacan's triad Imaginary-Symbolic-Real: ideal ego is imaginary, what Lacan calls the "small other," the idealized double-image of my ego; Ego-Ideal is symbolic, the point of my symbolic identification, the point in the big Other from which I observe (and judge) myself; superego is real, the cruel and insatiable agency which bombards me with impossible demands and which mocks my failed attempts to meet them, the agency in the eyes of which I am all the more guilty, the more I try to suppress my "sinful" strivings and meet its demands. (80)

Not only is the division between the pacifying Symbolic ego ideal and the tormenting super-ego of the Real essential to Žižek, but it also functions to structure his reading of Lacan and his obsessional discourse. For Žižek posits that what we find today in our so-called "permissive society" is the dominance of a super-ego that constantly bombards us with impossible demands, and the central demand is to find our enjoyment in the Other. Within

this structure, the signifying chains of the Other replace the Symbolic ego ideal, and thus, the Symbolic order no longer represents and pacifies our desires; rather, we feel that our sexual desires have become a duty shaped by consumer culture in the Real.

Žižek's rendering of the ego ideal and the super-ego reflects the obsessional's inability to resolve the Oedipus complex through the castration complex, which according to Lacan entails the Real father's imposition of a Symbolic law through the threat of imaginary dismemberment. Since the obsessional subject does not want to face this threat of castration, the Real father becomes replaced with the ideal father (ego ideal), and the Symbolic law is eroticized by becoming attached to the primitive id. In turn, the Imaginary fragmentation of the body is replaced by the Imaginary unity of the object. Furthermore, as Freud posits, this splitting of the ego ideal from the commanding super-ego is indicative of an obsessional neurosis because what occurs is that the ethical demands requiring a repression of sexuality are themselves sexualized so that the demand for repression takes on a compulsive and intolerant voice. Moreover, this impulsive super-ego results in the eroticization of thinking and the replacement of sexual sadism with the drive for intellectual mastery.¹⁴ In short, thinking itself becomes a sexual activity. To further complicate things, Freud argues that the reason why it is so hard to get obsessional subjects to free associate is that they use thinking as an activity that protects against the emergence of unconscious fantasies, memories of infantile sexuality, ambivalence, and split-off affects. In fact, a central way that these unconscious affects are defended against is by the process of undoing where one first thinks or does one thing and then follows it by the opposite.

In Žižek's case, the splitting of the Other between the neutral symbolic ego ideal and the obscene super-ego demand functions to undo the ambivalent relationship between authority and the Other that is required by psychoanalysis. We can see how this undoing functions in the following description of the super-ego: "What follows from these precise distinctions is that, for Lacan, superego "has nothing to do with moral conscience as far as its most obligatory demands are concerned": superego is, on the contrary, the anti-ethical agency, the stigmatization of our ethical betrayal." While Žižek divorces the ethical from the super-ego in order to clearly differentiate the idealizing ego ideal from the cruel and demanding super-ego, Freud insists on representing the super-ego as a contradictory and ambivalent agency dedicated to both affirming sexual impulses and prohibiting these same desires.¹⁵

For Žižek, what always undoes the neutral symbolic Other of the law and social regulation is the perverse Other who binds people together by getting them to participate in

obscene social actions: "While violating the explicit rules of community, such a code represents the spirit of community at its purest, exerting the strongest pressure on individuals to enact group identification. In contrast to the written explicit Law, such a superego obscene code is essentially spoken. (88). The Symbolic Other is here split between the explicit written law of the Symbolic ego ideal, and the perverse obscene code of the super-ego that provides an eroticization to social order, and in this division, we refine the opposition between the early and late Lacan. Thus, from Žižek's perspective, the late Lacan reveals the obscene underside of the early Lacan by stressing the perverse commandment to find one's enjoyment in the Symbolic Other.

While Žižek constantly returns to the commanding presence of this Other who demands that we enjoy, he also obsessively discusses the other Other of the symbolic order, and it is this Other, which he ties to transference and the ego ideal. For example, in his theory of inter-passivity, he shows how we experience things through the neutral gaze of the Symbolic order:

The obverse of interacting with the object (instead of just passively following the show) is the situation in which the object itself takes from me, deprives me of, my own passivity, so that it is the object itself which enjoys the show instead of me, relieving me of the duty to enjoy myself. Almost every VCR aficionado who compulsively records movies (myself among them), is well aware that the immediate effect of owning a VCR is that one effectively watches *fewer* films than in the good old days of a simple TV set. One never has time for TV, so, instead of losing a precious evening, one simply tapes the film and stores it for a future viewing (for which, of course, there is almost never time). Although I do not actually watch the films, the very awareness that the films I love are stored in my video library gives me a profound satisfaction and, occasionally, enables me to simply relax and indulge in the exquisite art of *far'niente* - as if the VCR is in a way watching them for me, in my place. VCR stands here for the big Other, the medium of symbolic registration. (24)

In this extension of the concept of the ego ideal, we find that the Symbolic Other takes the place of my own enjoyment and activity by watching in my place. This notion of the Other acting in my place can be tied to the idea that in our secondary culture, the Other reads and interprets in our place so that all we have to do is read someone like Žižek in order to understand Lacan and the whole history of philosophy. This symbolic Other, which is the Other of the early Lacan, will be directly attached by Žižek to the psychoanalytic notion of transference:

Such a displacement of our most intimate feelings and attitudes to some figure of the Other is at the very core of Lacan's notion of big Other; it can

affect not only feelings but also beliefs and knowledge - the Other can also believe and know for me. In order to designate this displacement of the subject's knowledge onto another, Lacan coined the notion of *the subject supposed to know*. (27)

It is interesting that in order to develop his notions of interpassivity and transference, Žižek has to return to the early Lacan of the Symbolic order; moreover, this use of ego ideal represents a radical reworking of the psychoanalytic conception of transference. For Lacan uses his concept of the subject supposed to know in order to explain why a patient falls in love with the analyst because the patient believes this Other knows the truth of the unconscious. In Žižek's extension, we have the development of what Freud called the obsessional sense that the other knows the subject's thoughts. Moreover, as Lacan stresses, for the obsessional subject, the ideal Other is the dead father who verifies the subject's ideal ego, but who cannot interfere in the subject's existence.

Žižek's use of the ego ideal and the interpassivity of the Symbolic Other thus reverses psychoanalysis by replacing the unknowable desire of the Other with the idealization of the subject who is supposed to know. One of the results of this obsessional transference is, as Žižek himself remarks, a use of activity in order to prevent anything from happening:

This brings us to the notion of false activity: people do not only act in order to change something, they can also act in order to prevent something from happening, so that nothing will change. Therein resides the typical strategy of the obsessional neurotic: he is frantically active in order to prevent the real thing from happening. Say, in a group situation in which some tension threatens to explode, the obsessional talks all the time in order to prevent the awkward moment of silence which would compel the participants to openly confront the underlying tension. In psychoanalytic treatment, obsessional neurotics talk constantly, overflowing the analyst with anecdotes, dreams, insights: their incessant activity is sustained by the underlying fear that, if they stop talking for a moment, the analyst will ask them the question that truly matters - in other words, they talk in order to keep the analyst immobile. (26)

In this notion of activity in order to prevent any real change, we find that the obsessional subject not only enjoys through the Other, but the subject uses the Other in order to do nothing, and it is precisely this final theory of obsessional activity that shows why the obsessional discourse of the university is in direct conflict with the discourse of the analyst. Therefore, what represses psychoanalysis is the use of speech in order to not discover the unconscious, and in this sense, obsessional activity is a defense against the unconscious. For example, we can argue that Žižek's constant elaborations concerning Lacan's theories

and statements represent an obsessional attempt to think around the object of analysis. Therefore, one reason why he constantly repeats the same examples, concepts, and phrases is that he is trying to reach an understanding of psychoanalysis without actually dealing with analysis itself. In turn, this representation of psychoanalysis without the experience of analysis and the unconscious is very seductive to an audience that wants to use this discourse to understand the world but not to discover their own unconscious formations.

To better grasp how this obsessional academic discourse functions, we can apply Žižek's fundamental theories to Lacan's discourse of the university:

Super-ego (S2)-----→(a) Self-Reflexivity
 Ego Ideal (S1) // S Self-Division

In this structure, knowledge in the form of signifying chains (S2) is founded on the super-ego's demand that we find enjoyment in the Other. This knowledge then results in the self-reflexive process where thought itself becomes the displaced object (a) of the drive. In turn, what supports this structure is the ego ideal (S1), which Lacan indicates represents the place where the subject locates itself in the Symbolic order. Furthermore, not only is the Other divided between being the cruel super-ego and idealizing ego ideal, but the subject is divided between the statement of symbolic representations and the unconscious affect (the enunciation) that is split off from the statement. Thus, in Freud's classic example of negation, the obsessional subject affirms the discovery of unconscious representations but does not make a subjective affirmation of the affect and effect of this discovery.

By mapping out this structure in Žižek's thought, we learn that is what is often dominant in the obsessional discourse of the university is a fragmenting of the network of signifiers that enables the splitting of representations from their affect and their relation to other unconscious representations. This need to map out the synchronic relation between representations is crucial to not only Lacan's own method of producing conceptual diagrams but also to the very process of analytic free association, which entails the constant ordering in the present of past events and representations. In turn, Freud posited that a key to the defensive strategies of the obsessional is the fragmentation of discourse, which blocks free association and the access to the unconscious. What we then find in Žižek's discourse, and in contemporary culture in general, is a fragmentation of the Symbolic order and the appropriation of signifiers in the Imaginary fantasy of self-reflexivity. For example, since Žižek breaks Lacan's work into different parts, he is able to deny the

synchronic network of Lacan's signifiers, and this enables Žižek to become the ego ideal, or ideal reader, who gives signification to each isolated object of discourse. In turn, readers identify with the ideal reader and experience Lacan and contemporary culture through his mastering eyes. In contrast, psychoanalysis is centered on the analyst's desire to maintain an absolute difference between the signifier and the object, and it is only by maintaining this opposition that knowledge can be placed in the position of truth.

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Notes:

¹ During the 1980s, Žižek and I studied with Miller, and were both influenced by his way of returning to Lacan. Unfortunately, very little of Miller's work has been published.

² Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* centers on differentiating the structures of transference, repetition, the drive, and the unconscious. In many instances, Žižek refers to these conceptual differences, but at other times, he equates these diverse concepts.

³ The term "jouissance" is a French word for orgasm, but Lacan expands its meaning to indicate the presence of a Real experience that exists beyond Symbolic discourse. He then uses this term in his seminar *Encore* to talk about four central modes of experience: the pure jouissance of existence, phallic jouissance, the jouissance of the Other, and surplus jouissance. Here we see how Lacan's method is the complete opposite of Žižek's: Instead of breaking down the differences among diverse concepts and experiences, Lacan constantly attempts to clarify conceptual distinctions. In fact, Lacan begins his discussion of jouissance in precisely the way that Žižek ends most of his arguments, and that is by highlighting the impossibility of defining this type of Real experience.

On its most basic level, Lacan claims in his seminar *Encore* that pure jouissance is not gendered or regulated by social determinations: "But being is the jouissance of the body as such, that is as, asexual " (6). In other words, Lacan is claiming that unconscious sexual enjoyment is not determined by the Symbolic construction of sexual difference. In this way, pure jouissance indicates the impossibility of symbolizing the Real of sexual experience, and Lacan indicates this impossibility by claiming that: "There is no sexual relation" (7). Furthermore, this mode of enjoyment is equivalent to Lacan's original definition of the subject (S) as being determined by a stupid and ineffable existence (*Écrits* 194).

While the subject of the unconscious is defined by this mode of Real idiotic enjoyment, which is so central to Žižek's general conception of subjectivity, Lacan is quick to point out in *Encore* that in contrast to this anti-social foundation of pure enjoyment, the superego commands the subject to find all of his or her enjoyment in the place of the cultural Other of social relations (*Encore* 3). The superego is thus opposed to the unconscious in the same way that the realm of the Real is opposed to the Symbolic realm of the Other. In fact, Lacan defines the Symbolic Other as a place that marks the evacuation of enjoyment, and it is this lack of enjoyment

that defines the production of the object (a) within the structure of the Symbolic drive. Furthermore, this notion that the object represents the production *and* loss of Real enjoyment (the plus-de-jour) is often neglected in Žižek's and other theorists' appropriation of Lacan. One of the results of this mis-reading is that the drive becomes confused with the production of enjoyment, and thus the differences between the Real and the Symbolic becomes muddled.

In another important theoretical clarification, Lacan posits that it is the role of the phallus to provide the Imaginary illusion that the Real and the Symbolic are "One" and that the sexual relation does indeed exist (7). Thus, in *Encore*, it is often impossible to distinguish Lacan's theory of the phallus from his theory of the symptom because both are based on the repetitive presence of the enjoyment of the "One." This jouissance of the One implies that the phallic subject seeks to be the One for the Other in an act where two people become "One." However, Lacan turns to the field of mathematics to show that this "One" is only a pure signifier produced out of an arbitrary act; furthermore, this "One" does not lead to unity but only to the repetition of itself. Thus, at the same time that the master signifier renders this unity symptomatic, the same signifier or sign supports the Imaginary construction of unity. For example, in Žižek's work, we can relate his use of repetition and the recycling of his own writings as an attempt to posit an Imaginary sense of unity and enjoyment through the reiteration of the same empty form.

⁴ One of the significance of the collapsing of conceptual differences is that Žižek is able to affirm subtly the postmodern position that all reality is socially and Symbolically constructed. In this definition of Reality, we lose the Lacanian notion of the Real is that which resists all efforts at symbolization.

⁵ In fact, it is the realm of popular culture that Žižek most often equates with his symptomatic notion of idiotic enjoyment (*Looking* viii). We must therefore question whether Žižek follows the academic tradition of turning to popular culture only to mock it and use it as an example to prove theories concerning the meaninglessness of social representations.

⁶ In the first chapter of his book *The Transparency of Evil*, Baudrillard argues that we live in a post-liberation period, "where all goals of liberation are already behind us" (3). This argument, in part, stems from his idea that all forms of sexual, political, and economic oppression have been overcome or at least have been challenged. Baudrillard also insists that every system expands

until it outgrows its own original meanings, values, and essences. In many ways, Žižek's own writings show how Lacan's original insights about sexuality, language, and the unconscious have lost all meaning by being absorbed into a highly abstract and generalized philosophical discourse.

⁷ One of the results of Žižek's translation of Lacan's notion of the Real into the realm of the Symbolic is that we lose the importance of Lacan's early claims concerning the existential foundation of Real existence. For one of Lacan's central claims is that the Real resists being absorbed into language. This notion of the Real of existence in Lacan's work is discussed in my *Between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Chapters 1-1).

⁸ In the logic of automodern society, Symbolic culture is often naturalized, while nature itself is considered to be a social construction. Žižek is aware of these dynamics, yet he continues to replicate them.

⁹ A detailed account of automodernity can be found in my article, "Automodernity: Autonomy and Automation after Postmodernity."

¹⁰ However, what complicates this formula is that Lacan uses the term "Other" to refer simultaneously to language, the social order, the other sex, and the other person.

¹¹ This question of temporality is a major focus of Freud's, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable."

¹² To understand this connection between Žižek's rhetoric and what I have been calling obsessional academic discourse, we can turn to Lacan's seminar *L'envers de la psychanalyse* (the other side of psychoanalysis) where Lacan spends a great deal of time defining the central aspects of the discourse of the university and differentiating academic discourse from the discourse of psychoanalysis. Moreover, Lacan argues that we now live in a period that is dominated by the discourse of the university. Central to Lacan's argument in this seminar is the idea that academic discourse and traditional philosophy are very much in opposition to psychoanalysis, and thus any attempt--like Žižek's--to ground psychoanalysis in philosophy will only work to rid analysis of its radical foundations. In order to make this point in his seminar, Lacan posits that the central elements of academic discourse are the following:

- 1) Symbolic knowledge is placed in the position of dominance (34);
- 2) Humans become the object of knowledge (35);

- 3) Knowledge is directed towards objects of consumption and human resources (35)
- 4) There is a movement away from the discourse of the master (34);
- 5) The absolute signifier underwriting the university is the transcendental "I" (70);
- 6) The disjointed knowledge of the unconscious is rejected (104);
- 7) The father no longer is a master, he works for the Other (114);
- 8) Science places abstract knowledge in the position of dominance (119);
- 9) The hidden master demands that we create more knowledge (119);
- 10) The subject of science is barred from discourse (120);
- 11) Science is based on a strict combination of signifiers in a signifying chain (185);
- 12) The hidden truth of the university is the pure fact of language (103);
- 13) Knowledge becomes separated from its origins (21);
- 14) Knowledge is directed toward an impossible object (112);
- 15) The barred subject is the product of the university system (119).

These diverse statements all relate to the fact that in the discourse of the university, the Symbolic structures of science, technology, and capitalism become dominant and are directed towards the objectification of human beings and the world around them. Moreover, this ascendancy of Symbolic knowledge is tied to a loss of older forms of cultural mastery. However, these masters do not disappear; rather, Lacan insists that they continue to play their role but in a more hidden and repressed way.

As one can see from this list of elements concerning the discourse of the university, Lacan's theory of academic discourse is not limited to an analysis of questions concerning education. Just as knowledge circulates in the university without a sense of mastery or authority, the social structure in contemporary culture combines the production of Symbolic systems of information with a loss of patriarchal and social control. Thus, when Lacan affirms that the father now works for the Other, he is describing the ways that language overcomes every subject's power and sense of subjective mastery. The result of our increased dependence on abstract Symbolic systems (computers, post-industrial capitalism, mass media, etc.) is the production of a subject who is barred from mastering and

controlling the discourses that surround him or her.

¹³ I would add that Lacan most often turned to external texts not to read them but most often to contrast them with a psychoanalytic model of subjectivity

¹⁴ This elaboration of Freud's theory of the obsessional neurosis is taken from his "A Case of Obsessive-Compulsive Neurosis."

¹⁵ Later on his text, Žižek acknowledges this relation between prohibition and eroticization in the super-ego, but he still continues to make a strict division between these two versions of the Symbolic Other.