

DARKEST TIMELINE: PROGRAMMATIC NOTES FOR A LIBIDINAL GENEALOGY OF CAPITAL

Rodrigo Farías Rivas¹

I

In a striking passage near the end of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (from now on, *AO*), the 1972 work states that after an “engagement [...] full of hesitation”, “the death instinct celebrates the wedding of psychoanalysis and capitalism” (1983, 335). Indeed, a main thrust of this first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* deals precisely with the problematic relation between psychoanalysis and capitalism, the latter serving to elucidate the obscure psychoanalytic doctrine. Yet this elucidation is a dangerous one, for taken to mean that the death drive is a product of capitalism, this idea may just turn out to be, as a Reich biographer said in relation to Freud and Jung's imputation of the notion to him, “idiotic” (Sharaf, 1983, 176). One might be allowed to doubt that this is what *AO* says about the death drive—or that it says it for idiotic reasons.

The site of confrontation for *AO*'s critique of the role of psychoanalysis within capitalism is a genealogy of their common discovery, which only makes the reference to the crucial role of the death drive all the more intriguing. For if this common discovery is a subjective, abstract, and universal essence defining desire and production—in the case of psychoanalysis, what Freud would have soon betrayed through the illegitimate metaphysics of the Oedipus complex—, then the psychoanalytic notion of *Todestrieb* becomes rather secondary, a consequence both of production and anti-production within capitalist societies, and of the dead-end with which repression ends up suffocating desire after oedipalizing it into its representational, expressive, and familial form. Furthermore, this latter set of themes—capitalist production and psychoanalytic subjectivation, *not* the key role of the death drive in officiating their wedding—helps compose *AO*'s broader argument,

¹ Ph.D. in Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy, Diego Portales University (Chile), Radboud University (the Netherlands), June, 2020. This article has been written with the support of the Fondecyt Project 1170580 “Crítica, saber y poder en el pensamiento de Blanchot” (“Critique, knowledge and power in Blanchot's thought”), headed by A. Messina.

while also allowing it to explore the theoretico-political question it considers “the fundamental problem of political philosophy”. It is worth quoting Deleuze and Guattari’s classic formulation of this problem:

Even the most repressive and the most deadly forms of social reproduction are produced by desire [...]. That is why the fundamental problem of political philosophy is still precisely the one that Spinoza saw so clearly, and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered: “Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?” How can people possibly reach the point of shouting: “More taxes! Less bread!”? As Reich remarks, the astonishing thing is not that some people steal or that others occasionally go out on strike, but rather that all those who are starving do not steal as a regular practice, and all those who are exploited are not continually out on strike: after centuries of exploitation, why do people still tolerate being humiliated and enslaved, to such a point, indeed, that they actually want humiliation and slavery not only for others but for themselves? Reich is at his profoundest as a thinker when he refuses to accept ignorance or illusion on the part of the masses as an explanation of fascism, and demands [...] an explanation formulated in terms of desire: no, the masses were not innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they wanted fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for. (29)

What drives the genealogy of abstract production that accompanies the critique of psychoanalysis is the political question of the repression of desire not by external forces, but by itself. As it can be suspected, this is not unrelated to the theme of capitalist ideology, and the clear problems with the classic explanation for it help introduce the more subtle ones lying within a psychoanalytic approach to repression, whether psychical or political. Now, on its part, while never equating fascist desire with capitalist desire, one of the main non-psychoanalytical targets of *AO*’s basic theoretical force *is* ideology as a possible answer for the riddle of willful subjection. But while theories of ideological alienation have tended to equate it with false consciousness—the external substitution of an intentional object, say, class interest, that should otherwise belong to non-alienated consciousness as naturally oriented towards truth—, Deleuze and Guattari vehemently oppose such subjectivist and representational approaches. For them, explaining how one may desire one’s own oppression means taking seriously, and without resorting to “ignorance or illusion”, that it is in the immanence of the *explanandum* where its enigma lies. Desire really can *desire* its own oppression, “and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for”. Of course, the very mention of a “perversion” of desire reintroduces the possibility of a “right” or a “true” desire, and in that case little is gained since rejecting false consciousness. Deleuze and Guattari’s references to *The*

Genealogy of Morals—and Nietzschean philosophy in general—as an examination of self-repressing desire demystify much of what will later define the psychoanalytic unconscious, but also provide the possibility of normative critiques and valuations not breaching ontological commitments to immanence. Most important here, however, is that desire desires its own repression not as if the Oedipal law were a condition of possibility for social life, meaning that, for *AO*, it is *not* that the familial structure of unconscious desire is regulated by a complex that desexualizes it into the established social field. Rather, it is in its immanent identity with impersonal production and in its passive anti-production of a recording surface for specifically social reproduction that not only does the “*coextension of the social field and desire*” (30) appear, but that desire *assembles* its own repression. And it is in arguing this, a machinic desire compulsively leading the “subject” to desire what oppresses her, that *Anti-Oedipus*’ essential psychoanalytic reference is not Freud, Reich, or Jung, but Jacques Lacan, “psychoanalysis’ most profound innovator” (268).

II

Along with the immanent and impersonal identity of desire and production as *desiring production*, *AO*’s most basic conceptual category is the *desiring machine*. But even calling it a “conceptual category” already seems to betray Deleuze and Guattari’s constant reminder not to take the machine as a metaphor, for the fact is that even when reading a programmatic invitation to a return to anarcho-libidinal materialism in relation to the question of capital, and as everything that happens within desiring production, something is always “produced: the effects of a machine, not mere metaphors” (2). One is, and perhaps this is not a metaphor either, always *inside* desiring production, always *between* desiring machines. Yet the desiring machine also has an intimate relation with Lacan’s version of psychoanalysis, and with the complex role his own approach to the contemporary apories of desire plays in Deleuze and Guattari’s argument. Consider note 23 of *AO*’s first chapter, the book’s very first reference to Lacan. There, a specifically positive pole of his “admirable theory of desire” is taken to be his discovery of *l’objet petit-a* “as a desiring machine, which defines desire in terms of a real production, thus going beyond both any idea of need and any idea of fantasy” (27, translation modified). Not at all self-evident, this relation between Deleuze and Guattari’s desiring machine and Lacan’s object *a* will insist throughout the book,² yet more interestingly for our

² See 83, 309, and 371.

introductory purposes, it will also insist in the ensuing history and reception of what we may broadly call the *Anti-Oedipus*-Lacan debate.

Perhaps following Lacan's own claims of having come up with the notion of desiring machine and of Deleuze and Guattari having stolen it from his weekly seminar (Roudinesco, 1994, 348), its relation with object *a*, but also between them and closely related notions like *drive* (*Trieb*), has become somewhat of a site of controversy for a general question itself marked by equivocity: that of Lacan's position in relation to *AO*, and that of *AO*'s *also equivocal* stance towards the Lacanian reworking of psychoanalysis. At its worst, the impasse has been additionally hindered by Slavoj Žižek's insistence on reducing some of Deleuze's theoretical achievements—with and prior to his collaboration with Guattari—to just other names for originally Lacanian discoveries. Consequently, the paradoxical object whose non-locality allows for the quasi-causal communication of heterogeneous series in 1969's *Logic of Sense* becomes “the exact equivalent of Lacan's *objet petit a*” (Žižek, 2004, 24), just as, within “a Lacanian reading of Deleuze”, it “fits perfectly” to propose the “direct and brutal substitution [that] whenever Deleuze and Guattari talk about ‘desiring machines’ (*machines désirantes*), we should replace this term with *drive*” (2012, 619). But this proposal does not at all fit perfectly, and it is only on a superficial level that, as disjointed and acephalous circuits of unrelated parts working only by failing, their supposed coincidence can be proclaimed. Nevertheless, Žižek, or even the Deleuzian scholarship that agrees on similarities like these,³ is not entirely at fault here: his proposals are indeed suggested by the text of *AO*, and one could even say he is merely trying out a questionable inversion of Deleuze and Guattari's own idea that “drives are simply the desiring machines themselves” (35). Even more, Guattari's important 1969 essay “Machine and Structure” already develops object *a* as an “infernal machine” (2015, 323)—one of the very same characterizations that *AO* will propose (83)—, and, of course, Deleuze's own pre-*AO* work is populated by paradoxical, virtual, and undecidable singularities, attractors, and objects—in the case of *Logic of Sense*, for example, even in explicit debt to Lacan's *lettre volée*.

But this is not what should interest the project of a genealogy of structurally sacrificial capitalism. To begin, Oedipal questions of influence anxiety, conscious or unconscious debts, or trivial *who-copied-whos* are of little relevance when compared to what the sketched impasse points to: the impasse that *itself* is *AO*'s praise of object *a*. A first problem should then be exactly this. For

³ See Schuster (2016, 162).

examined closely, *AO*'s praise is highly suspect, just as its determination in letting Lacan off the hook of the strictly anti-oedipal critique and its broader, more profound genealogical, political, and ontological objections tend to ring hollow when Lacan's undeniably subversive take on psychoanalysis is continually framed through over-generous interpretations of his idiosyncratic structuralism, symptomatic over-statings of him *not* being a direct theoretical target, or just through the straightforward wishful-thinking of a *Deleuzo-Guattarian* Lacan. This can be seen particularly clear in *AO*'s insistence that Lacan's version of the *reverse side of the structure* is equivalent to a material, molecular, and productive unconscious,⁴ or what amounts to the same, in its blurring of the difference between the "impossibility" defining the Lacanian real and the *machinic* real—the latter being one in which "everything is possible, everything becomes possible" (27), and the former, on its part, one associated with the logical impossibility of "saying it all" (Lacan, 1990, 3), and hence something closer to *AO*'s depiction of the undifferentiated that *representation* constitutes, "the reverse side of the differentiation created by [symbolic] prohibitions" (71). In this specific case, then, what is neglected by rushed correspondences between *AO* and the Lacan it celebrates is that Deleuze's interest in productive, impersonal, and immanent becoming, but also Guattari's interest in the infernal machinery that Lacan glimpsed under the representational impasse that is his version of the unconscious, resulted in a *rejection* of "Lacan's tendencies toward formalism and logic" (Dosse, 2010, 223).

So is that what should interest us, a proper anti-oedipal critique of Lacan? On the contrary, I propose that what may first demand attention—always *towards* a philosophical reflection on the libidinal logic of capital—is *the missed encounter between AO and Lacan on the question of the contemporary production of desire*. For although not clear within *AO*, its rejection of formalism rather points to an ontological deadlock that we will have to bring forth, and that relates directly to the idiocy of the death drive. This means that, beyond pacifying equivalences or any concern with taking sides, what interests us is the very impasse that drives such compromise formations, as well as its consequences for an understanding of the impersonal logic of sacrificial capital that can draw from Lacanian metapsychology, Deleuzo-Guattarian meta-mechanics,⁵ and their perspectives on contemporary capitalism. These preparatory remarks thus serve to sketch the theoretical differences

⁴ *AO*, 308-311.

⁵ The expression appears in the appendix to *AO*, "Bilan-Programme pour Machines Désirantes", specifically page 470 of the French edition of *AO*.

and ontological tensions, but also to advance a hypotheses and to propose a successive argument in relation to the problem of Jacques Lacan's relation to *AO*'s genealogical, ontological, and political critique of psychoanalysis, and its consequences for a genealogy of capital.

III

Let us return to *AO*'s denunciation of psychoanalysis role within capitalist production. It is played on three fronts: as a critical history of its specific repetition of a despotic conception of desire as *lack*, as a philosophical questioning of its ontological focus on a supposed reality labeled "psychical", and as a political accusation of it as a theory and practice aimed at reproducing the private subject demanded by the axiomatic logic of capital. In this context, it is a problem that Lacan's most basic metapsychological distinctions fit rather awkwardly within *AO*'s questioning of psychoanalysis. This may lead to two hypotheses: first, the key role of the (death) drive in making sense of this deadlock, second, the critical consequences of this necessary reference when it comes to a reexamination of Lacanian metapsychology and psychoanalysis in the context of capitalist production.

A first step should thus start with a brief summary of psychoanalysis' role within capitalism according to *AO*, only to backtrack the basic philosophical contours of said characterization to its broader genealogical critique of desire as lack. This negative moment is then followed by a positive account of Deleuze and Guattari's meta-mechanics of desiring production: the role of desiring machines, their three passive syntheses, and in particular the way they serve to denounce both psychoanalytic desire-as-lack and the specific Oedipal operation that—in the name of the actual productive machinery of impersonal desire—*AO* disentangles from Lacan. A brief reference to Nietzsche's influence in *AO*'s wider ontology of productive becoming and specific genealogy of nihilistic desire will have to be introduced, yet the essential point will be Lacan's disentanglement from the Oedipal double-bind. For not only did *AO* acknowledge the criticism of Oedipus already present in Lacan's reconceptualization of psychoanalysis,⁶ the latter will itself be approached by examining note 23 and the "two poles" *AO* finds in Lacan's "admirable theory": desire-as-lack and desire as the immanent production of its object-cause. One should then proceed with the actual machine that Lacan described as the compulsive enjoyment underlying the insatisfaction of desire:

⁶ On this topic, Van Haute & Geyskens (2012).

the Freudian drive as a montage of heteronomous parts, “in the sense in which one speaks of *montage* in a surrealist collage” (Lacan, 1978, 169). Accordingly, here it should be argued that what *AO* considers to be the two poles of Lacanian desire—one reactive and one productive—rather constitute the two Moebian faces of one immanent structure: the compulsive circuit of the drive. Bringing into play this Lacanian machine thus allows us to *question* *AO*’s implicit assertion that it is in one of the two poles where lack, law, and signifier result in the “theological cortege [of] insufficiency of being, guilt, [and] signification” (111)—this cortege, on its part, being what would mark the psychoanalytic subject with the deadly anxiety that results from transcendent despotism and the infinite debt it commands. Against this characterization, and from a Lacanian perspective, what *AO* would fail to apprehend is that the instance of the signifier does not lie in the symbolic, but in the *real*, meaning that Lacan’s admirable theory is, indeed, more complex than what Deleuze and Guattari seemed to grasp. This reappraisal of *AO*’s negative and positive versions of Lacanian desire through the idea that the latter is less caused by the external imposition of the law than by the immanent mechanics of the drive leads to a subsequent argument. For although *AO* also acknowledges the despotic character of contemporary desire as a theoretical merit of Lacan’s, it restricts desire as the Other’s desire to something in need of genealogical critique instead of accounting for the metapsychological reasons for such a *constitutive* mirage. Consequently, having *AO* overlooked *Lacan’s* metapsychological mechanics and hence the way the immanent logic of the drive reintroduces precisely what the productive unconscious was supposed to banish, this missed encounter should be zoomed in in pursuit of the one that *defines* the drive, that is, failure as the logical structure making of *every drive a death drive*.

Before introducing what I propose should be this subsequent argument, the end of the first should make clear that *AO* takes psychoanalytic “drives” not as a metapsychological structure—the drive—but as zones of erogenous intensity closer to Leclaire’s para-phenomenological interpretation of Lacan,⁷ or to their own wider interest in the infrastructural Nietzschean-Klossowskian “forces” through which the totality of the social field is immanently invested, and hence produced, by desire.⁸ Yet having *AO* overlooked the metapsychological circuit of the drive, what will also be missing will be the deadly impasse repeatedly launching it into the defiles of desire, meaning the project should

⁷ And one of *AO*’s basic theoretical intermediaries in relation to the latter: see *AO* (27, 309, 310, 323-324), also Collet (2016).

⁸ See *AO*, 63, also Klossowski (1997).

have to present the death drive according to *AO*, and then an exploration of the elusive Lacanian approach. But the latter seems to encompass the drive's empty and repetitive injunction *and* the aporetic experiences of what can be broadly termed "jouissance", how then to make sense of this double-sidedness? Is it possible to take its death seriously while avoiding Freud's reification of self-destructiveness into a conservative tendency internal to (psychical or organic) life? And how might this relate back to *AO* on the question of psychoanalysis and capitalism?

IV

A following step should start with a brief analysis of the death drive in Deleuze's pre-Guattari work: its relation to maternal desire as a perverse subversion of the paternal law in 1967's *Coldness and Cruelty*, its identity with the eternal return of difference defining intensive onto-hetero-genesis in 1968's *Difference and Repetition*, and its character as a pure metaphysical surface of sense-event in 1969's *Logic of Sense*. Echoing a previous background attention to Nietzsche, these perspectives should add up to a Nietzschean twist on a doctrine whose regressive Freudian account Deleuze rejected in his postulation of it as a *transcendental* principle instead of an entropic movement. Now, in the case of *AO*, Nietzsche's influence is clear in both its negative and positive versions of the death drive. According to the latter, it coincides with the body without organs as the impersonal death stalking organization from within with self-overcoming revolutionary creativity, while for the former, it equals a personal death that *turns* instinctual only within modern asceticism, that is, in its becoming a cog of immanent social reproduction in the axiomatic effort to register capital as its miraculous cause. Yet it is here, in a "machinic death drive that is opposed to regressive [...] psychoanalytic euthanasia" (*AOF*, 477, my translation), that the death drive's depiction as the logical structure of every drive is, at least, missed. This is the exact approach a Lacanian examination should then follow. For Lacan too criticized Freud's idea of a teleological striving of life towards death, although not out of some Nietzschean liberation of inorganic life from its organic contingency like Deleuze after him, but by rather proposing the death drive "as a function of the signifying chain" (1997, 211), and later on, of the incompleteness that is immanent to its structuring of the unconscious. Yet it is a certainly singular effect of the signifier—much different than, say, desire—, and perhaps claiming the death drive to be not an entropic movement but a transcendental principle only obscures one of its defining mysteries: why would the confusion in need of that distinction appear in the first place. Lacanian

theory offers several elements for a reconstruction and characterization of the concept that may illuminate such a fundamental problem.

What should then be shown is that the Other lacking its *own* Other makes Lacan's appropriation of the death drive appear as opposed to Freud's conservative biologicism as it is to some ineffable bodily *jouissance* that the symbolic order would later come to pacify. Priority always belongs to the signifier—if not chronologically, at least logically, for it is the drive's constitution *ex nihilo* by the signifier that which insists in the abyssal emptiness of its imperative. Yet on its part, a pre-symbolic version of the (death) drive has become commonplace among a certain Lacanian orthodoxy that has taken *substance jouissante* not as a radical anti-philosophical suspension of ontology, but as its confirmation.⁹ A necessary regard for Lacan's interest in formalism and logic should be maintained in order to, as the eleventh seminar says, “give body to psychic reality without substantializing it” (1978, 72, my translation). That being said, the substantialist impasse within Lacanianism answers not so much to follower betrayal as it does to the sort of apories that emerge when the hole of incompleteness that drives desire is examined for conceptual positivity. Similarly, it also sheds light on Lacan's own caution when facing the question of ontology, as well as on his own conceptualizations of the paradoxical *motérialism*—his term—associated with the avatars of the death drive. Let me make this problem perfectly clear: if the death drive refers to the very *impossibility* of the drive's demand for pure *jouissance*, and if the logical possibility of pleasure lies with the differential function of the signifier, then desire—and the dissatisfaction that defines it—appears as a *defense*. Desire, therefore, is not opposed to the law, but in a symbolic identity with it as an immanent limit barring *jouissance*, a pleasure-regulating logic forbidding “access to a fundamental horror” (Lacan, 2006, 654). And it is when this defense fails, when that which is lacking is the very lack with which fantasy dialectizes the hole within symbolic immanence, that the full force of the death drive can be seen—just as, inversely but exhibiting the same underlying logic, the impossible void of object *a* ensures the only (negative) consistency that may be granted to the subject of the signifier, as it can be seen in the controlled setting of the cure and its dialectical exhaustion of fantasy. No wonder then that analyses of the Lacanian death drive are marked by the abject materiality of the extimate, traumatic, unspeakable, uncanny, petrifying, or just plainly, the destructive. Fanged noumena, to use an inspired formula wasted on a lesser philosophy that—having missed the Nietzschean event for

⁹ For a denunciation of the surprisingly widespread interpretation of Lacan according to which the signifier falsifies a previous singular *jouissance* whose subjectivation would constitute the proper analytical goal, see Eidelsztein (2015).

some Mäinlanderian acceleration of Freud's most misguided notions, or having missed Lacan and/or Deleuze's critiques of the death drive as a thanatropically regressive movement—reifies as some sort of Lovecraftian Otherness, and in a pathetically human all-too-human gesture, the very logic whose undeniably self-sustaining reification should be genealogically traced, acknowledged, and voluntarily abandoned as part of a paradoxically non-anthropocentric life-affirming project.¹⁰ Be that as it may, as the just-quoted “Kant avec Sade” says in relation to pure deadly desire and its sacrificial object-cause: “It is a case of necrophilia” (Lacan, 2006,658).

The undead “death” of the death drive should then be distinguished from subjective, physical, personal, or impersonal death, even if possibilities like these can derive from the impossible structure of the drive as subjectivity-mortifying clinical vicissitudes. Accordingly, the key lesson of both Deleuzian and Lacanian critiques of Freudian *Thanatos* should be confirmed, and within Lacan's mature theory no angle will justify the death drive to equal a suicidal striving¹¹—not even the postulation of some Moebian duplicity between the drive's imperative and thanatropic regression, and at best an *analytic a posteriori* relation that, as Johnston (2005) has analyzed it the context of the radical singularity of *every* unconscious, merely confirms the distinction. Yet this only sets the stage for the more important philosophical problem that a discussion of *Todestrieb* should bring forth: the specific nature of the *repetition* defining the ultimate ontological horizons of Lacanian and Deleuzian thought. Is it the repetition of a mythical past jouissance that, while impossibly demanded by the drive, insists in the extimate kernel of desire as the missed encounter that constitutes it? Or is it the repetition of futural time as that which un-grounds the unconscious from *any* determining form, however “logically impossible” it may be negatively hypothesized? Both alternatives populate Lacanian and Deleuzian literature as the ultimate meaning of the problematic transcendental status they give to the death drive, and attending to the role that Deleuze gives to eternal return in his reassessment of the Freudian doctrine will demand a parallel treatment of the exactly opposite use of Nietzsche with which contemporary Lacanianism interprets it.¹² More important, Lacanian versus

¹⁰ See Land (2012), Negarestani (2011).

¹¹ I say “mature theory” insofar Lacan's earlier reflections on the paranoid structure of the ego, continuing his 1932 discovery of self-punishing paranoia, point to a close relation between imaginary aggressiveness and the death drive as a suicidal movement. See the *écrits* “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis”, from 1948, and especially “Presentation in Psychic Causality”, two years prior. The classic study on Lacan's early imaginary characterization of the death drive is Boothby (1991).

¹² See in particular Johnston (2005, 288-297).

Deleuzian repetition also relates to the *meta-theoretical impasse* that results when a negative parontology of the drive is approached from the standpoint of an immanent ontology of productive becoming. In this sense, something like the anti-oedipal critique can only be ignored by Lacanianism, for the reason that the primacy of the signifier makes ontologies like desiring production appear as mere pre-critical (and pre-psychoanalytical) metaphysics in need of, precisely, a Lacanian critique. This is also why an insistence on the drive's impersonal character in Lacanian attempts to distance it from the subjective form cannot but stop short so as not to lose psychoanalysis itself. Hence the need to specific an *aporetic materialism*, the exact point where, as Zupančič accurately explains, "Lacan and Deleuze seem to be the furthest apart: whereas for Deleuze materialism of thought implies radical de-subjectivation, for Lacan (the effect of) subjectivation is the very instance of the materialism of thought" (2017, 176). The philosophical stakes here are so high that, while reading the Lacanian death drive as *the* central category of a metaphysics able to consummate the supposed apex of modern philosophy that is German idealism,¹³ Žižek's own take on the undead impasse of desire has been charged with Deleuzianism, that is, with illegitimately granting movement to the stubborn inertia of the death drive.¹⁴ This invitation, however, is to continue in a different direction in order to gain a new perspective on this ontological deadlock, by returning to the question of psychoanalysis and the capitalist production of desire.

V

Having argued what appears as the irreducible nature of the Lacanian (death) drive to Deleuzo-Guattarian machinic production, a following step should introduce capitalism as the final element in need of examination. This should begin on a general note, by showing how both *AO* and Lacan's attentiveness to impending neoliberal financialization allowed them to have clarity on the differential nature of capitalist production.¹⁵ We should thus begin with surplus-value in *AO*, where it appears as the differential relation between deterritorialized labor and deterritorialized wealth—themselves differential magnitudes with no absolute limit—, while on the other hand, following Tomšič recent study on Lacan's approach to capitalism (2015), the latter appears in close resemblance to the logic of the signifier, meaning that the autonomous exchanges of monetary and signifying

¹³ Carew (2014).

¹⁴ See Chiesa (2016, 64-75).

¹⁵ See Sibertin-Blanc (2016, 14, 166-167, 205, 210, 220, 303); Tomšič (2015, 221).

values produce their own sublime objects-cause of desire—surplus-value in capitalist production, surplus-enjoyment in unconscious production.¹⁶ That being said, just as the dialectical logic of desire points to the idiotically mortifying logic of the drive, this differential aspect of capitalist production implies a more fundamental dimension, what with Lacan we could label its *real* cause. And indeed, echoing a gesture like that which finds an abyssal emptiness at the aporetic limits of desire, this would lead to capitalism as considered from the perspective not of the fetichisized effects of the autonomous circulation of value, but of the apparently miraculous character that ultimately grounds this differential movement. The issue, then, will be *constitutive*, and not constituted, fetichisation, and thus also the primary abjection it implies as well as its logical consequences within the immanent real. This is the passage from capitalist production to the libidinal production *of* capitalism.

I mentioned that a first approach should begin with a brief analysis of psychoanalysis' relation to capitalism according to *AO*. This much later moment, however, should proceed not with the genealogical critique of desire as lack, but with the universal history through which *AO* elucidates capitalist society. At this moment the secondary attention to Nietzsche should continue, by referring to the key role that the text of *AO* gives to *The Genealogy of Morals* and to the extra-textual relation between *AO*'s basic historical distinctions and both the 1887 work and Deleuze's own Nietzsche interpretation in 1962's *Nietzsche et la Philosophie*. Moving onto an analysis of the capitalist regime of production, an essential concept here will be the body without organs, understood as an unproductive machinic failure where the exclusive disjunctions out of which forms appear are inscribed as if it had "caused" them. Consequently, from the primitive to despotic socius, codification and over-codification inscribe social reproduction on the bodies of the earth and the despot respectively, meaning specifically economic production is kept *dependent* on external codes. It is only with modernity, after the death of the transcendent despot and the recording surface it provided as the limit to social reproduction, that strictly economic production can appear as its cause—as a Deleuzian has said in relation to the first sovereign debt held in 1694 by the Bank of England: "It is this deed which caused the murder of God" (Goodchild, 2002, 30). This immediately relates to the already-discussed anti-oedipal take on the original *Freudian* death drive, since it is in order to sustain this self-engendering cause that death as a personal limit becomes immanent and is commodified as an (unconscious) object of consumption in the desiring field constituted on the body of capital. And

¹⁶ Tomšič has thus rigorously developed the parallel first proposed by Lacan's seventeenth seminar and made popular by the first chapter of Žižek (1989).

this, for Deleuze and Guattari, is the proper discovery of political economy: a subjective essence for abstract wealth, *money creating money* as the driving force of social reproduction. Of course, it is part of Deleuze and Guattari's argument that just as psychoanalysis betrays abstract desire by alienating it under subjective representation, political economy betrays its own discovery by alienating it in private property and the commodity form, hence the basic lesson of a *critique* of political economy: capital can only be sustained as the positive cause of production by the active repression—and this word here possesses every meaning from the most concrete to the most abstract—of its constitutive negativity.

Yet as I said, a focus of attention should here be less political economy and its critique than the specifically miraculous quasi-causality of capital, or in other words, not its characterization as mere surplus-value, but as the movement by which capital itself is created through the abyssal depth of an “infinite debt”. Crediting Bernard Schmitt, *AO* describes the process as the hollowing out of a negative debt and parallel outcrop of positive money for production, an operation happening on the surface of a full body as “an instantaneous creative flow that the banks create spontaneously as a debt owing to themselves, a creation *ex nihilo*” (237). Interestingly, and for all its fascinating analyses of capitalism, this process encompasses less than a single page within *AO*, yet it encapsulates the key aspect that makes such analyses absolutely relevant for our current situation. This key aspect is not only the becoming-infinite of debt that has driven the history of economic activity, but also the *fictional* character that—from Marx's critique of anticipated valorisation to the financial abstractions of contemporary capitalism—has shown to define the parlor trick that fuels, but does not necessarily coincide with, the logic of profit.¹⁷ Furthermore, it might already be perceived that this creation of productive differential positivity out of an infinite debt with an impossible void recalls the Lacanian logic of the drive—and this, by highlighting the undead compulsion defining the latter, in a more radical way than the mere analogy between the elements of the drive circuit and the structure of neoliberal biopolitics.¹⁸ This perplexing parallel should then be followed avoiding the postulation of any sort of substantial identity or causal relation. Instead, on a final moment, the specific libidinal rationality this obscure complicity between capital and the (death) drive suggests should be analyzed, as well as the topological unity they might share within the immanent production of the real, and finally, the consequences of such a libidinal perspective for the logic of capital in the context of a

¹⁷ Graeber (2011), Durand (2014), and Nitzan & Bichler (2009).

¹⁸ Dean (2009).

final recuperation of Deleuze and Guattari's Nietzschean concern with the broader *life-weakening movement* in which psychoanalysis and capitalism find their historical place.

VI

Derrida once suggested that

there are other possibilities in Nietzsche which are not programmed by a history of metaphysics, [...] moves which are stronger, which go further than what Heidegger calls the history of the completion of metaphysics; moves which actually put in question Heidegger himself [...]. Briefly, there exists a reserve in Nietzsche which allows one to read Heidegger's own thought genealogically. (In Schrift, 1995, 12-13)

Agreeing fully with this claim, *AO's* explicit and implicit Nietzscheanism should be approached insofar it is *Deleuze and Guattari* who have pursued it the furthest, but also the *strictest* thanks to their disinterest in conceiving this Nietzschean reserve as if it were a remainder of the Heideggerian gesture, where the latter equals "the content of the Nietzschean discourse being almost lost for the question of being" (Derrida, 1997, 19). For idiosyncratic as it may be, one rigorous consequence opened by Deleuze's Nietzsche interpretation is that said reserve and its radical potential does not *survive* Heidegger—as the Nietzschean *écriture* that for Derrida would allow to deconstruct Heideggerian logocentrism—, but rather precedes, and hence weakens in advance, the very possibility of submitting his discourse to the question of being. I have criticized Nietzsche readings like that of Derrida and defended a reappraisal of the will to nothingness as a *natural* history of nihilism in this very journal.¹⁹ What is essential here is that *AO's* specific Nietzscheanism opens the possibility of a repetition of the book's critical evaluation of Lacan, *to read his thought genealogically*, but only after a more rigorous treatment of Lacanian metapsychology has brought *AO's* theoretical limits into view.²⁰ The interest in Deleuze and Guattari's appraisal of Lacan thus becomes the staging of a conflict. And a future result should not be a mere genealogy of psychoanalysis nor a more precise *common* genealogy for capitalism as a regime of production and psychoanalysis as a theory and practice of the unconscious—both things that *AO* already attempts, and with a success that, while limited for reasons I have begun to introduce, far surpasses Michel Henry's attempt (1993). Finally,

¹⁹ Farías (2020).

²⁰ I am currently in the midst of this latter particular enterprise in my own research. If the reader has arrived at this point, may this paper count as an invitation to collectively pursue the project here proposed.

and although not following *AO*'s specifically Nietzschean references, a study like Adkins (2007) sketches a genealogy of speculative and transcendental death that, in proceeding from a Deleuze and Guattari-inspired historico-machinic materialism, is sufficiently oriented in the direction of the actual genealogy of the Lacanian death drive that should interests us to merit being mentioned as an interesting precursor.

I will not advance the consequences of such a Nietzsche-mediated, Deleuze and Guattari-inspired, Lacan-informed genealogy of the libidinal logic of capital here—this article is but the invitation to carry out such a program. Instead, let me return to the basic problem with which we started. For raised to its nth power, the *explanandum* in need of clarification may no longer be how people can fight for their own servitude. Rather, as contemporary capitalism overtly parades the sacrificial logic that drives its resilience and expansion in the face of extinction, an updating of the fundamental problem of political philosophy seems to demand to be posed not as a question on self-repressing desire, but on actively self-*abolishing* desire. Which means that a proper renewal of the problem may do well to begin on the acknowledgement of a basic meta-political tenet that is held by *AO*, but also by Žižek's most interesting moments: that capital is, for the former, the full machinic body quasi-causing the production, inscription, and consumption of contemporary subjectivity, and for the latter, the real of our times resisting the truly political act as its self-engendering point of impossibility. In the end, and considering how the logical consequences of capital relentlessly continue their actualization in this darkest of timelines, perhaps a proper return to the *Anti-Oedipus*/Lacan debate will find that *the true discovery of psychoanalysis*, the lethal discovery it itself represses in order to constitute itself with complicitly centrist politics as the symptom of its untraversed fantasy,²¹ *coincides with its genealogical significance*, precisely the one that, in its own symptomatic Lacanian oversights and under-developed Nietzschean insights, *AO* failed to grasp: not psychoanalysis' late wedding with capitalism by means of the death drive, but *the previous, constitutive intimacy of capitalism and the death drive themselves*.

²¹ For example, Tupinambá (2019, 344-345).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adkins, B. (2007). *Death and Desire in Hegel, Heidegger and Deleuze*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Boothby, R. (1991). *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Carew, J. (2014). *Ontological Catastrophe: Žižek and the Paradoxical Metaphysics of German Idealism*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press.
- Chiesa, L. (2016). *The Not-Two: God and Logic in Lacan*. Cambridge & London: The MIT Press.
- Collett, G. (2016). *The Psychoanalysis of Sense: Deleuze and the Lacanian School*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dean, J. (2009). *Drive as the Structure of Biopolitics*. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1460759> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1460759>
- Deleuze, G. (1983). *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. (1990). *The Logic of Sense*. London: The Athlone Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1991). *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*. New York: Zone Books.
- Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and Repetition*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1972). *L'Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1983). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, J. (1997). *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dosse, F. (2010). *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Durand, C. (2014). *Fictitious Capital: How Finance is Appropriating our Future*. London & New York: Verso.
- Eidelsztein, A. (2015). *Otro Lacan: Estudio Crítico sobre los Fundamentos del Psicoanálisis Lacaniano*. Buenos Aires: Letra Viva.
- Fariás, R. (2020). *Mundus est Fabula: Reflections on the Nihilism of Maurice Blanchot's "Reflections on Nihilism"*, *Das Questões*, 9 (1), 155-182.
- Goodchild, P. (2002). *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Graeber, D. (2011). *Debt: The First 5.000 Years*. New York: Melville House.
- Guattari, F. (2015). *Psychoanalysis and Transversality: Texts and Interviews 1955-1971*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Henry, M. (1993). *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Johnston, A. (2005). *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

- Klossowski, P. (1997). *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Land, N. (2011). *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Falmouth & New York: Urbanomic.
- Lacan, J. (1978). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Lacan, J. (1990). *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. New York: WW Norton & Company.
- Negarestani, R. (2011). Drafting the Inhuman: Conjectures on Capitalism and Organic Necrocracy. In Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (Eds.). *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism (192-201)*. Melbourne: Re.Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (1998). *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Nitzan, J. & Bichler, S. (2009). *Capital as Power: A Study of Order and Creorder*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Roudinesco, E., (1997). *Jacques Lacan*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schrift, A. (1996). *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Schuster, A. (2016). *The Trouble with Pleasure: Deleuze and Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge & London: The MIT Press.
- Sharaf, M (1983). *Fury on Earth: A Biography of Wilhelm Reich*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Sibertin-Blanc (2016). *State and Politics: Deleuze and Guattari on Marx*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Tomšič, S. (2015). *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*. London & New York: Verso.
- Tupinambá, G. (2019). "Pandora's Box Has Been Opened": Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Politics after 2017, *Crisis and Critique*, 6 (1), 340-363.
- Van Haute, P. & Geyskens, T. (2012). *A Non-Oedipal Psychoanalysis? A Clinical Anthropology of Hysteria in the Works of Freud and Lacan*. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
- Žižek, S. (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London & New York: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2004). *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Žižek, S. (2012). *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. London & New York: Verso.
- Zupančič, A. (2017). The death drive. In Boštjan Nedoh and Andreja Zevnik (Eds.). *Lacan and Deleuze: A Disjunctive Synthesis (183-179)*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.