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Techne and Mysticism: Courting Psychosis?

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In the past few decades debates surrounding the social relation and the human subject have noted how there has been a change in the constitution of psycho-social authority. As a major figure in these debates, Slavoj Žižek has offered many insights into this shift as a move towards perversion as the universal form of the social relation. But what does such a shift mean for the subject who is 'subjectivised' as such by the symbolic universe of this social relation? By developing Žižek's reading of Jacques Lacan, particularly Lacan's analysis of the Lady of the medieval tradition of courtly love, and unfolding the figure of perverse authority, the *jouisseur*, this discussion aims to chart the oscillation of the subject between the two poles of the perverse social relation revealed by Lacan's analysis of the Lady: mysticism and psychosis. While perversion may emphasise *jouissance* (enjoyable suffering), the discussion below aims to show how the subject's encounter with *jouissance* in a perverse social relation entails the invocation of *jouissance*, the sacrifice of this *jouissance* for the satisfaction of the *jouisseur*, and the resuscitation of this *jouissance* for an end that is not altogether clear due to the breakdown of the social relation. We will address this fundamental ambiguity in the forthcoming discussion, however it is important to note at this early stage that the 'subjectivisation' of the subject occurs in a symbolic universe that is marked by the decay of the symbolic Other and the rise of the imaginary other, the small 'o' designating its status as a lesser authority that is more akin to an alter-ego with whom we can imagine ourselves 'in their

shoes'. It will be shown below how the Lady of courtly love aptly captures the rising rule of the *jouisseur*: we move from the phallic Order of the symbolic Other and their constitutive otherness (the right of kings to rule, absolute sovereignty, etc) to an imaginary form of authority that positions the subject as the rival of the phallic place of authority, the *jouisseur*. This shift, noted by Žižek and others, also entails a shift towards a model of radical Otherness wherein the Lady functions as an automaton espousing endless demands on the subject. We will thus explore this formal and structural change in the symbolic universe as an ontological shift that reveals questions of what is pre-Symbolic, what persists before the differentiation and division of the Other. These questions are important because they promise to offer some further insights into the way that the subject can avoid triggering a psychotic break and simultaneously become entangled in a mystical pre-Symbolic unity. The way that the subject avoids psychosis, more specifically their crafting (*techne*) of the social relation, will be the focus of the final sections of this paper; and here, there will be an attempt to rethink how we are to approach a notion such as *techne* given its intimate connection to the idea of automation and the contemporary changes in the social relation which now emphasise *jouissance* therein.

The Jouisseur, the Lady, and Making Sense of Jouissance

The core problem driving this analysis rests on Slavoj Žižek's discussions of the *jouisseur*: all enjoyment is already enjoyed by the symbolic authority when the symbolic universe is conditioned by the rule of the *jouisseur*, suffocating the subject who is 'meant to enjoy' with endless calls to consume pleasure according to the 'Yes!' of this perversely permissive post-modern authority. The enjoyment of the subject can be read as 'enjoy-meant' by this permissivity of the *jouisseur*. Yet, paradoxically, this becomes enjoyment without enjoyment, *jouis-sans*, as the subject is confronted with no pleasure of their own, i.e. even enjoying the most agonising of discomforts are ordained by the *jouisseur's* perverse order of *jouissance* that tries to draw out *jouissance* from 'desolate' reality (Freud 1991: 80-82). Further than this, the substitutive power of the Imaginary shields the subject from this desolate reality, giving the 'post-modern' ego an excess of pleasure, *j'ouis-sens*. Thus the obedience to the rule of the *jouisseur* drives the subject ever closer to what resists their demands for satisfaction. Indeed within this framing 'socialisation' means that reality is ideated under the sway of the *jouisseur* as the subject courts a speculative Ideal that negates *jouissance* because the *jouisseur* enjoys everything. The Symbolic Order of the *jouisseur* therefore drives the subject into the imagined relation between their ego that negotiates their narcissistic self-interest with the demands of the *jouisseur-as-Other* and 'their objects' in which they define their own self-image or *imago*. This imagined relation becomes the axis of *j'ouis-sens* because it substitutes the symbolic

universe that is over-flowing with pathological pleasures perverted by the touch of the *jouisseur's* 'enjoy-meant.' Herein the subject engages in a sublimation of *logos* because of the conditioning axiology of the *jouisseur's* anality: *logos* becomes the speculative Ideal that 'binds' reality, the pre-Symbolic unity of the One (Labbie 2006: 62).

This oblique Ideal asserted by the imagined relation of the subject stands as an anamorphic distortion on the scene of the *jouisseur*, which is not the *jouissance* of the Other and yet is beyond the mere mechanics of the discourses evoked by the symbolic universe. Properly speaking, it is here that we encounter the mystical relation where the subject seeks 'something of the One' beyond the heteronomy of discourse ordained by the *jouisseur*. The subject is therefore composed of a certain '*techne*' in the sense that the mystical relation must be crafted. Yet because the subject has regressed from the exchange and negotiation of their *imago* with the Other to merely the jealous possession of their *imago* this *techne* is not a type of vitalistic self-making. Rather, the subject seeks an authority at one remove from themselves in the shying away from the *jouisseur* because they are no longer 'in' discourse through their foreclosure. The subject herein follows the demands of a radical Otherness instead of obeying the commands of the Other, and the command to 'Enjoy!' is effectively emptied of its meaning. *Techne* thus manifests as the adherence to the Otherness of the imaginary relation that spares the subject from the Other.

This figure of radical Otherness is announced by Jacques Lacan in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1992) as "the Lady" of courtly love. It is more than curious that we may observe the structural similarities between the subjective relation inculcated by the logic of the perverse order of the *jouisseur* and the mystic courting the beloved Lady whom s/he can never have but through service to the Lady (Lacan 1992: 152-153). The Lady, according to Lacan, "is never characterized for any of her real, concrete virtues," and her negation goes further still, "if she is described as wise, it is not because she embodies an immaterial wisdom or because she represents its functions more than she exercises them" (Lacan 1992: 150). Lacan states that the Lady is "as arbitrary as possible in the tests she imposes on her servant," which has been revised by Žižek in his *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (1994) to read:

The Lady is thus as far as possible from any kind of purified spirituality: she functions as an inhuman partner in the sense of a radical Otherness which is wholly incommensurate with our needs and desires; as such she is simultaneously a kind of automaton, a machine which utters meaningless demands at random (Žižek 1994: 90).

It is significant to our discussion that Žižek here turns to the term 'automaton' where there is the *techne* of the subject involved because both allude to the manifestly sublime nature of technology in post-modernity. As we shall see, the escape from a retreat to mysticism is also an escape from the sublime technologies of the *jouisseur* that are structured akin to the Lady: 'I experience her demands, but I know nothing about them,' or 'I experience the prompts of the interface, but I know

nothing of the material existence behind it.ⁱ *Inter-alia*, those that do know something of the material existence behind the interface seem bent on its fetish-like worship, as with the proliferation of Internet forums for techno-culture ‘enthusiasts’ such as *BoingBoing.net*. What is of the essence here is that the Lady beloved by the mystic is not one of the Freudian Fathers, as in the case of the *jouisseur*, and hence retains a different structure.ⁱⁱ

To escape mysticism, the perverse social relation constituted under the *jouisseur* must be cleared. Hence this discussion will propose that the subject must undergo (Symbolic) nihilism to redeem *techne* from its sublimation because it offers an illegitimate *jouis-sens*, enjoy-meant without the enjoyment of the Other. *Techne* opens the possibility of restructuring the paternal function maintained by the *jouisseur* and negates both the over-determination of this paternal function as an archetype and the potential psychotic collapse in the Real.ⁱⁱⁱ Nihilism thus becomes a moment of redemptive affirmation alongside *techne* as the art of making and unmaking. The nihilist realises that the worship of the Lady in the theatre of the Imaginary is tainted by her manifestation as a terrifying Thing that can ultimately destroy the subject, wherein the duty to the Ideal becomes the farcical acquittal of the ideation of the subject:

Lacan quotes a poem about a Lady who demanded that her servant literally lick her arse: the poem consists of the poet’s complaints about the bad smells that await him down there, about the imminent danger that, as he is fulfilling his duty, the Lady will urinate on his head (Žižek 1994: 90).

As our further discussion of the nihilist will illuminate, here we encounter the three levels of *techne*: Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. And it is through these three Lacanian registers that we can observe the structural change of enjoyment for the subject in the redemption of *techne*: *j’ouïs-sens*, *jouis-sens*, and *jouis-sans*.

The Withdrawal from the *Jouisseur*

As we established above, the relation of the mystic to the automaton of Otherness as manifested by the Lady’s visage is founded in the withdrawal from the authority of the *jouisseur* (Žižek in 2005: 167). Underlying this relationship between mysticism and the *techne* involved in escaping from the *jouisseur* is the supposition made by Lacan in his *Écrits* (2006) that the Symbolic has primacy over the Imaginary but fails to overwrite it completely (Lacan 2006: 17, 39-40, & 79). This is observed in the way the wild play of the Imaginary is overwritten with the logic of the Symbolic, only to find that the abstract symbolic universe needs to be grounded in the concrete relation epitomised by (the hysterical) imagining of what the Other wants. Herein a two-fold problem arises in the fundamental relation of the subject to the Other of the symbolic universe. Firstly, the unity of the subject brought together by the inscription of the symbolic universe is predicated upon a *méconnaissance*: the

dispersal of self-images are mistaken for having only the effects recognisable in the field of the Other (symbolic universe) (Lacan 2006: 80). When I receive the approval or disapproval of the Other my *imago* enters into a process of hierarchical structuring, an overwriting where previously libidinally charged relations are given a new locus at the price of my naïve innocence (Lacan 1998: 46-50). Lacan gives us an example of this overwriting from early childhood, the enjoyment obtained by sucking the thumb is transferred to the genital organs in a negation described as 'taboo' (Lacan 2006: 231). This is articulated by Lacan in his Rome report of 1953 as: "Symbols in fact envelop the life of man with a network so total that they join together those who are going to engender him "by bone and flesh" before he comes into the world..." (Lacan 2006: 231). That is to say, we enter cultural and social relations by taking on the belief in the paternal function where this authority pre-figures, codifies, and ultimately exceeds our own existence (Lacan 2006: 76; Fink 1997: 88). Hence the emphasis on the *jouisseur* performing the paternal function for post-modernity is not merely social but also eminently hermeneutical for the 'ontology' of the subject because of the human being's mysterious emergence through symbols. Herein we are set on the path toward alienation because the self-interest of the ego is invested in the precious imaginary libidinal objects that have been re-inscribed into a symbolic hierarchy of doing, making, and/or crafting access to these objects.

The second prong of this problem is that the preciousness of these objects relies on the ability of the Other to demand they be taken away, and for this to be enacted by *techne* in a desubjectivised form. Taking this logic of the instantiation of the subject in the symbolic universe to its end, even life itself may be stripped from the subject, the subject's 'being' is deprived of any capacity to exist (Žižek 2002: 191-198). While such mortification is a clear danger, this logic is particularly problematic for the mystical relation inculcated by the order of the *jouisseur*. Given the way the symbolic universe 'authenticates' the *imago* of the subject, the very vestige of their self-experience, by over-writing the imaginary relation the mystic finds that this symbolic knowledge of their mystical experience will overwrite the mysticism of the experience. This over-writing is an attempt to re-inscribe the mystical experience into a symbolic universe accessible by other alter-egos rather than being held in its imagined speculative position wherein the subject does not know but only experiences something of a pre-Symbolic unity (Lacan 1992: 150). It is precisely this inaccessibility of mystical experience for the symbolic universe that elevates its value for the subject under the rule of the *jouisseur* (Lacan 1998: 76). Moreover, this signals that the mystic holds tightly to the theatre of the Imaginary and, in doing so, impedes their interpellation by the Symbolic order of the *jouisseur*.

It is also important to note that this immersion of the mystic in the imaginary realm of experience works to displace the Lady as an object of desire. Because the Lady is devoid of any particular content on the virtue of which she becomes an Ideal the Lady contains her 'becoming' rather than the flux of her appearance in the chain of signification determining the ideation of her

as an Ideal (Labbie 2006: 99). The Lady's perfection thus has the peculiar twist that her position as an Ideal is inhabited by the *jouissance* of the mystic because it is 'beyond' the Symbolic Order of the *jouisseur*. Herein the mystic affirms their enjoyment, *j'ouïs-sens*, in the very ideation of the Lady as an Ideal that negates the heteronomy of the symbolic universe regulated by the order of the *jouisseur*.

We may therefore contend that the ideation of the Lady is the mystic's art, their craft or *techne*. Herein the speculative construction of the Lady as an automaton purifies her of the formalities of the symbolic universe, and yet she still remains differentiated from the subject as an Otherness. This can be noted in the way a mystic takes their joy from ephemera instead of phenomena. Yet it is the fantasmatic quality of these imaginary objects that displaces the Lady from the regular positive order of ontic objects and shifts her to the domain of ontological meaning.^{iv}

Such a displacement of the Lady suggests that it is the descriptive content of the Lady that is immanent, wherein this immanence reveals her functionality more than her embodiment of a particular description. As we saw above, Lacan states this as: "if she is described as wise, it is not because she embodies an immaterial wisdom or because she represents its functions more than she exercises them" (Lacan 1992: 150). Yet herein the foreclosed rule of the *jouisseur* remains in the bowels of the Imaginary theatre as a speculative order coordinating the Lady's visage because it is only by the refusal of the *jouisseur's* command to 'Enjoy!' that the ideation of the Lady becomes possible. Take the common example of courtly love for instance: a knight is fulfilled by fulfilling the Lady's demands in such a way that it exceeds regular abstract/polite pleasure, the hallmark of the pervasiveness of the *jouisseur*. In the Arthurian romance cycle we find incredible objects such as Arthur's sword "Escalibore" legitimated by the dignity of the Lady (of the Lake) and made into a fantastic semblance of the ordinary sword which gives Arthur the extraordinary 'divine' right to rule but which he then refutes by choosing a round table so that no one of his knights (including he) may be greater than another (Bulfinch 1991: 347-348). This point is crucial in understanding mysticism because it flags that the mystic is always minimally technical in their ideation of the Lady. From the twelfth and thirteenth century German poets of the *Minnesang*, the French *troubadours* to Italo Calvino's *The Nonexistent Knight* (1962), it is the '*techne*' of imagining the Lady's functions that facilitates the courtly relation. And one may go further to suggest that this technical locus is at the heart of the Lady's codification as an automaton, and therein she is not an automaton because of ideation *per se* but of the *techne* that grounds her ideation.

This minimum of technical crafting in the ideation of the Lady also invites the observation that the subject's escape from the *jouisseur* rests on a fundamental relation with *techne* through the automaton, the Lady. The mystical subject's transition from the Symbolic to the Imaginary through foreclosure therefore rests on the withdrawal from the authority of the *jouisseur* and the art of ideating the Lady. Yet this transition also points us to the way that the pre-Symbolic Ideal that the

mystic seeks necessarily relies on the refutation of the Symbolic Order of the symbolic universe. This refusal therefore bespeaks the conditioning of the mystical relation and therein its inconsistency: despite the mystic's best efforts to escape the *jouisseur* they are still plagued by the mortifying touch of the 'dead' Symbolic Order in the formalism (*techne*) of their ideation.

The Destiny of the One

Thus far it has come to light that the mystic's beloved Lady is the result of an antagonistic crafting by the mystic that ideates her as an automaton, wherein this *techne* of her ideation is an excessive remainder of the comportment of the mystic themselves that puts the mystic anamorphically 'out of joint' with the symbolic universe by severing the social link. Herein 'mysticism' means that the subject follows the beloved Lady (the Ideal) into the Real through a fissure in the symbolic universe. Upon a closer examination of Žižek's writings on Lacan and politics it may appear that we have arrived at the totalitarianism of the mystic, given that the Lady "who, herself not bound by any Law, charges her knight-servant with arbitrary and outrageous ordeals" (Žižek 1995: unpaginated). However, this construction of the Lady bespeaks the critical point that Žižek tends to treat the Lady as a masculine fantasy *par excellence* by situating her within the (Imaginary) libidinal economy of needs which the *jouisseur* is predicated upon (Žižek 1994: 108-109). The Lady as the automaton of the mystic thus involves a shift in the understanding of *techne*, a leap from Lacan's ethics of pure desire to Žižek's ideology-critique which allows the critical gaze to locate the fragmentation of mysticism's construction of a messianic Beyond and, additionally, to account for nihilism.

As a beautified feminine Master, the Lady's specular position situates her as seeing through the 'ether' of the mystic's worship which construes an Other of the Other, a 'Beyond' inasmuch as she is an idealisation of the regulation of difference in the symbolic universe. This regulating principle is the negation of the abstract signifiers around a fundamental antagonism that refuses to be domesticated by the symbolic universe. Here we again encounter the triad of ideation, negation, and abstraction, this time constituting the activity of *techne* in the symbolic universe: the image of the Lady is idealised while negating her contingent material features, and her imaginary status is further abstracted to remove her from the wild play of phantasmatic object-decoys while still regulating the minimum of difference dividing these phantasmatic objects (Žižek 2000: 214). This suggests that the mystical Beyond is an imaginary semblance of this symbolic universe (Other) because, as Lacan tells us: "the Other, that is, the locus in which everything that can be articulated on the basis of the signifier comes to be inscribed, is, in its foundation, the Other in the most radical sense" (Lacan 1998: 81). In the interpellation as a particular alter-ego/person the Lady is

not the Lady proper because this would entail a shared realisation on the basis of a social link between the mystic and their beloved. Such a link is missing in the mystical relation because the mystical relation lacks a symbolic inscription, one 'experiences' rather than 'knows.' Instead, we find here an emasculated world of regular living beings reduced to bare life and an ontological realm of the Ideal where the excess that stands out is simultaneously *techne* and a Lacanian *objet petit a*, a quasi-transcendental remainder that enlists our desire by virtue of an opaque *je ne sais quoi*.

If *techne* is presented with this feature of opacity then it is also interminable and indeterminable because it is not bare life and yet it is Real and spared definitive epistemological articulation. Fundamentally, this means that *techne* is not the analogue of bare life but rather its disproportionate, anamorphic remainder. This disproportional relation reveals *techne* as activity without purpose, only a semblance of (Aristotelian) artistic practice. In this mode *techne* fascinates the subject through the inculcation of mysticism prevalent in its comportment of semblance (in post-modernity). Moreover, as such an abstract semblance *techne* reveals the Lady in her speculative identity. This formulation is identical to that of post-modernity as a problematic epoch faced with technical objects arranged under the authority of the *jouisseur*: the so-called 'digital revolution' cannot authoritatively control the use of *techne* due to its opacity, even though the structure of symbolic authority demands an assertion of subjective autonomy which it itself cannot immediately access. That is to say, 'technological simulacra' are therefore an effect of the Imaginary order that antagonises the subject. To frame this in a Žižekian-Spinozist way, 'everything is permitted, but...' (Ayerza 1992: unpaginated).

This 'but' is a stutter or gap that stands between the mystic's *imago* and the speculative identity of the Lady forming a type of speculative relation. Following Lacan this is the formulation of the fetishist's object, the excess of *a* is correlative to the gap left by symbolic castration, the gap between my *imago* and my abstract identity in the symbolic universe. The mystic's courtly love of the Lady as both *techne* and *objet petit a* is problematic because, as an automaton, the Lady is formulated as a fetish object. It is not that the mystic is a fetishist *in toto*, but rather that the courtly relation to the automaton is fetishised. As a fetish object, the Lady bears witness to the mystic's foreclosure on symbolic castration (Žižek 2005: 174). The foreclosure on the castration imposed by the order of the *jouisseur* means that *jouissance* becomes spectral, a kind of floating organ with no place.^v Akira Kurosawa's retelling of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, *Hakuchi* (2006), provides a good demonstration of the mystic's relation to castration. Here we find the doe-eyed Kinji Kameda, played by Masayuki Mori, enraptured with mystical experience at moments where social reality threatens him. Kameda's life-world appears to be commensurate with the symbolic universe in which he finds himself, but as the story unfolds we find that his excessive passivity and rapture are at once too much for the symbolic universe to integrate and too minimal for the register of the Symbolic to overwrite. Kameda's passivity is ridiculed as a mark of shame by others, something

irreducible in himself, and at the same time his mystical episodes of rapture silence these alter-egos by thwarting the regular run of (cynical) reason by the raptures' transcendental-ontological excessiveness.

What we have in *Hakuchi* is the understanding of mysticism as something in the register of the Imaginary encountering the Real, something that the Symbolic Order of the Other/Father fails to overwrite. Thus Kameda enters the throws of a mystical rapture whether the rapturous experience is triggered by a picture in a window, a knife being thrust at his chest, or a memory of these things because his passivity and rapture constitute his relation to the One as an ideation and not an 'abstract' association. Kameda's beloved Lady is his '*Y'a de l'Un*,' something of the One (Lacan 1985: 166-170). However, this resistance also seems to bespeak a regression of the triad of ideation-negation-abstractation merely to the point of ideation, e.g. the concrete becomes phantasmatic and everything becomes part of a primal unity (the One). That the Lady presents the mystic with something of the One and not the Other is to say that the imaginary semblance involved in mysticism proposes an original unity which remains beyond what the Other can authoritatively reconstitute under the guise of the 'discursive logic' of the symbolic universe.^{vi} But we should avoid thinking this Beyond to be outside the symbolic universe. As Žižek goes to great pains to demonstrate, particularly in his discussions of Saint Paul and Schelling, this sense of a 'Beyond' is the lack of the Other around which the symbolic universe circulates and therein does not enter into the vicious circle of the symbolic law where prohibition solicits its transgression (Žižek 2003: 110-113; 2001: 143-144; 1996: 42-46). For the mystic, however, the Beyond is an imaginary scenario staged in the Real because the law of the Symbolic Order invokes a symbolic/abstract horizon where mysticism involves a speculative messianic horizon. This imaginary semblance in the Real reduces *techné* to meaningless activity, a mere semblance of *techné* as it manifests in the symbolic universe. Encountering such a semblance leaves the mystic wanton for the arrival of the One to clear away useless *techné* and its 'junk' objects.

With *techné* annihilated, the mystic clings to the Lady through the strict bounds of courtly love because this structure appeals to speculative predestination. While the mystic forecloses on the principle of universality (symbolic law), they retain a sense of singular destiny to which the entire of the Lady's demands acquiesce at the same moment that they are wiped from the particular concrete historical frame in which these demands are made. The paradox here is that mysticism becomes the search for the Other at one remove, the Other as some pre-symbolic unity; the One (Žižek 2000: 23). So while the mystical relation appears to seek something of the One, it remains within a cycle of seeking to experience the speculation on archetypes (imaginary others) as the preconditions of historical development (endless iterations of dealing with this antagonism) in the concrete sense of *logos* as an unfolding of the One *qua* Being. This typifies the mystic's timeless encounter with *techné* as a repressed antagonism of reality, an eternal struggle to resolve this antagonism. Moreover, this speculative ideation of the mystic is necessitated by the unfolding of

logos through the preconditions set by the series of archetypes.^{vii} The Lady is thus a conflation of two different guises of the Other-in-the-Real: the Symbolic Real-Other as the ordering of meaningless *techne* into a 'natural system' and the Imaginary (pre-Symbolic) Real-Other as a stand-in for the archetypes of all possible ordering, the conclave of imaginary others. The mysticism of the mystic therefore confronts the Lady as a nascent Third always on the verge of becoming the incestuous maternal Thing and throwing the mystic into a psychotic break.

Herein the Lady can suddenly become that remainder of the (real) Real excluded in the overwriting of the Symbolic by the mystical disavowal, as with the close of Kurosawa's *Hakuchi* where Kameda refuses to marry his beloved so she can give him the loving maternal care his socially debilitating passivity and rapture demands at the level of symbolic-ethical commitment. Kameda's refusal bespeaks the mystic's choice to persist in mysticism because he apprehends all too well that his beloved will ruin him. Kameda cannot bear such ethical care because it is a symbolic simulacra which will mortify his imaginary scenario where his beloved promises something of the One. Alternately, the figure of the Lady unveils the archetypes (structuring principles) as merely the wild play of the Imaginary in an abyssal vortex. Here the Lady reveals the series of sublime imaginary others as merely perverse totalitarian agents set on the profane enjoyment of the subjugation and suffering of the subject through the constructed belief in the coming of the One; the 'band of brothers' who seek to usurp the position of the anal Father.^{viii}

This betrayal of the mystical relation recalls the rivalry with the *jouisseur*. However, here the subject has already lost and encountered an undead *jouisseur* who uses *techne* to elicit the mystic's *jouissance* for their own pleasure. Literally, the *jouissance* of the mystic's pains makes the *jouisseur* come for the mystic. The *jouisseur* arrives, the mystic believes, to recognise the activity of the mystic because they have access to all *jouissance* 'beyond the pleasure principle.' But, instead, the monstrous *jouisseur* evacuates and profanely consumes mystic's sacred *jouissance*, in the process annihilating the cycle of the relation/recognition with the One. What Žižek notes as the 'anticapitalist edge' of the *Alien* films succinctly demonstrates this monstrous leap from the sacred to the profane: "What ultimately endangers the lone group on a spaceship is not the aliens as such but the way the group is used by the anonymous earthly Corporation, which wants to exploit the alien form of life" (Žižek in 2005: 169). The anonymity of the 'earthly Corporation' is here more than a coincidence: it is required for the exploitation of the subject, as demonstrated above in the structure of the relation of the mystic to the Lady. Thus the mystic's relation to the Lady, and therein the One, is always threatened by a subreption from within the bounds of the beloved object itself, and this subreption owes to the performative contradiction that marks the mystical Lady. Which is to say that the antipathy of the 'anticapitalist edge' of the *Alien* films is not 'to go against' the prevailing order and propose a new order, but to reveal the Other and its beholden loyalists as mystics who are merely beholden to an Ideal image rather than having 'a,' that little bit of something extra.

Departing from Mysticism

The dynamics of betrayal and subreption discussed above rest on a fundamental principle that 'posits' being. Yet, if we take a moment to examine this grounding principle it becomes clear that while both this betrayal and subreption seem to radically alter the coordinates of the mystical relation to the Lady, this reformulation finds its terminus in a psychotic collapse of this relation. This is so because both betrayal and subreption are predicated on the conservative principle of being held within the categories of positivism: the betrayal of the mystic belies the totalising consumption of the *jouisseur* wherein there is no untainted *jouissance*, all the subject enjoys is enjoyment directed by the *jouisseur* (enjoy-meant), and the subreption from within the very bounds of the Lady's ideation by the mystic points to the anonymous exploitation of the subject in there very 'positive principle' of being — they exist to be exploited. Moreover, this problem suggests that the erection of the symbolic universe grounds itself in being and yet the laying bare of being by the decay of the anamorphic relation of the mystic to the Lady must refer us to existence in some way that is not 'posited' by the symbolic universe given that its over-determination is clearly dubious in both the instances of betrayal and subreption. If being is not to be treated within some type of positivity then let us turn to its negation: that which persists in spite of the thwarting of the positing of being by the Symbolic Order.

As was elsewhere indicated above, *techné* is the precondition for the ideation of the Lady. Yet here *techné* also functions as the extra-Symbolic element that fills out the space of the subject in the symbolic universe, i.e. my subjective negotiating of the Symbolic Order. We are therefore presented with the opportunity to consider *techné* as the basic element of the 'negation' of the symbolic universe insofar as this negotiation requires something beyond the over-determination of the positive principle of being that accompanies, although is not reducible to, the being of the subject. Thus it will be argued that, while it is differentiated, *techné*'s crafting of being retains a formal character of negativity.

We can observe the 'swerve' of *techné* through the way *techné*, in its negativity, confronts the theatre of the Imaginary with its clearing and overwriting by the Symbolic to the end of constituting a symbolic universe and therein a social relation. The psychoanalytic lesson that this overwriting teaches is that in its negative mode *techné* excludes the subject by evacuating subjectivity in the guise of desire. Following Lacan, this evacuation of subjectivity-as-desire (in the Imaginary) situates the return of subjectivity proper as the illegitimate product of barred subjectivisation (in the Symbolic) (Lacan 1998: 214, 235-236, & 275). This is why the split in the subject engendered by symbolic prohibition persists, even when the *jouisseur* is resurrected by the failure of the mystical relation in its overdependence on the imaginary scenario of courtly love: it is because the Other does not exist that the subject comes to be. To put it another way, the subject crafts their ontological existence through *techné* while they are embedded in the symbolic universe of social

reality.

The resurrection of the *jouisseur* means that the reality principle sustaining the minimum of structure needed to function in social reality is reintegrated into the pleasure principle as excessive, undead, life. It is not enough to say the subject is human insofar as their humanity resists total symbolic transparency (Žižek 2004: 124). We must go further than this and argue that the assertion of life as a supreme value in the perverse order of the *jouisseur* is excessive and awry because living subjectivity becomes disconnected from subjectivisation (*jouis-sans*). In the imaginary scenario of confronting this anal Father, the subject is thrown into the categorical abyss outside the symbolic universe where the *objet petit a* resides. This builds on a nascent point contained in the betrayal of the mystic's ideation that the last line of symbolic relation sustaining a defence against the fall into this psychotic non-space is mysticism because it is a regression to libidinal ideation. But what if, as suggested by the point of subreption, the abyss is already present in the relation to the Lady because the Lady's function as a stand-in for the Other opens the Ideal to the inconsistency of the Other? On the one hand, in mysticism *techne* appears as the imaginary lure of the automaton that hides this inconsistency. In this instance *techne* negates this gap in the Other by covering it over with the semblance of the One. On the other hand, we should note that this negation of lack does not redress this antagonistic element and this clearly contributes to the difficulties of betrayal by the *jouisseur* or the subreption of the Ideal because the mystic's attempt to return to the symbolic universe is a regression to ideation that cannot negate the abstract effects of the symbolic universe, i.e. they become akin to the protagonist of the aforementioned *Hakuchi* whose moments of rapture incapacitate him. Herein *techne* brings out the destitution of the subject, the nihilistic gap that separates the symbolic universe from their libidinal ideation.

It is therefore curious to note that Žižek's treatment of nihilism is contained within the Lacanian accounting for the signifier and the Symbolic. The effective point here is that the order of the Symbolic contains a founding moment of nihilism, a symbolic nihilation. When the Symbolic attempts to overwrite the (libidinal) order of the Imaginary there is a moment of rupture followed by a disavowed puppeteer. In his Rome report Lacan refers to the ancient Greek '*danaï*' to demonstrate the promise and danger of the signifier (Lacan 2006: 225). As Žižek explains in his reading of this particular passage of the *Écrits*, '*danaï*' is Homer's term "for the Greeks who laid siege to Troy. The gift was the Trojan horse, which enabled the Greeks to penetrate Troy and destroy it" (Žižek 2006: 7n). We may therefore extrapolate the suggestion that the portent of the Symbolic is at once attractive to the libidinal theatre of the Imaginary and also its mortification.

Upon accepting the formalisation of the imaginary relation established under the guise of the ego, as in the 'demystification' of mysticism by the symbolic universe, the imaginary scenario finds itself being overwritten by this formalisation. This overwriting displaces the appearance of objects, or as Lacan puts it: "It is still not saying enough to say that the concept is the thing itself, which a child can demonstrate against the Scholastics. It is the world of words that creates the world of

things" (Lacan 2006: 229). The subject's entry into the Symbolic bestows on them the gift (*danai*) of language, but this gift allows the Other, as an agent of the Symbolic, to intervene in the imaginary relation between the fantasising ego and the appetitive body. In its founding moment mysticism attempts to disavow this intercession of the Other by introducing the Lady as an imaginary stand-in for the Other. A semblance of the One is produced in this mystical movement because the process is fielded within the Imaginary where ideation takes priority over function/purpose (Žižek 2002: 156). Another very subtle point thus emerges that if the mystic does not succumb to psychosis by resurrecting the *jouisseur* but is still to depart mysticism then the Other must be cleansed of the One of archetypal meaning because this One is merely a stand-in for the Other (Žižek 2006: 182-187). Thus if the subject is to achieve some kind of symbolic reintegration then it is this cleansing that opens the subject to nihilism in the transition from the non-discourse of mysticism to the discourse of knowledge in the field of the Other.

A propos this 'cleansing' nihilism presents the subject with an inverted mysticism because the subject is emerging from the conditions under which mysticism operates. Here the permeation of the One in *logos* is short-circuited to shift focus toward the effects of *logos* on the Other. This is qualified by the crucial point that we do not have to 'believe' in the Other for the symbolic universe to still perform its formalising function. In Žižek this presence or absence of belief permits two resolutely distinct relations: ideology and nihilism. On the one hand the ideological disposition is to cynically assume some (false) distance to the Other, for example giving money to charity makes us appear outwardly charitable but we simultaneously claim the charitable donation as a tax expense, that is, we play by the rules of the symbolic universe established by the Other (Žižek 2006: unpaginated). Nihilism, on the other hand, fully assumes the function of the signifier but refuses its arbitrary self-designation of differentiation (the heteronomy of discourse) (Zupančič 2003: 66-67). The passive operation of nihilism thus casts aside symbolic hierarchy and ideological beliefs by disclosing the 'covering over' of this meaningless by *techné* and revealing the bare Abyss.

In the opening revealed by this clearing nihilism begins to achieve a reactive status when it attempts to reconstitute the field of the Other by reconstituting a new master-signifier for the subject (Žižek 2006: 83-85). Herein the two-fold movement of nihilism contains the clearing away of the Order of the Symbolic and entry into the Real because (Imaginary) appearances have been dismissed as illusory by the overwriting of the Symbolic in the 'reality' of its meaninglessness. In the Real the nihilistic subject must pay attention to the drifting of drive to reconstitute the master-signifier that quilts together the field of the Other because the register of the Real, of drive, reveals the constellations wrought by *techné* in the symbolic universe as meaningless. For example, my words are not my own despite the phenomenological immediacy of my voice because language itself must be part of a shared hermeneutic community to sustain any level of meaning and yet I am nevertheless required to participate within this 'community belief' for my words to have any meaning otherwise they become meaningless (Dolar 2006: 107). It is nihilism that aims at

cultivating this meaninglessness through the suspension of the 'conservative' hermeneutic community and revealing the arbitrary designation of meaning that antagonises the 'egalitarian' sharing of language. In the formalisation imposed by the function of the signifier (the bond of the hermeneutic community) this meaninglessness manifests as an impenetrable antagonism that nevertheless threatens its formal bonds with annihilation and reformulation through the cultivation of this meaninglessness.

We are therefore presented with two avenues of departure from mysticism: either the mystic nihilistically moves toward constituting a social bond or they risk the (self-) knowledge provided by the discourse of modernity becoming a Thing that plagues their life-world with the threat of their annihilation as a speaking being, *aphanisis* (Žižek 2006: 55). The entry into nihilism therefore presents the mystic with the minimum of structure necessary for reconstituting the master-signifier and entering the discourse of knowledge. That is to say, nihilism holds out the promise of fully assuming the consequences of *techne* as a sense of enjoyment, *jouis-sens*.

The alternative to nihilism is to confront the agent of the Symbolic as it appears in the Imaginary: the *jouisseur*. The confrontation with the *jouisseur* presents the mystic with the Thing invading their imaginary scenario as it is formalised by the overwriting of the Symbolic. Here the subject is forced to confront the fantasmatic stuff of their subjectivity, the '*étoffe du moi*,' as the Thing which Lacan tells us leads to *aphanisis*, the loss of self (Lacan 1998: 218). This may lead into a psychotic break where the ontology of the subject is fragmented as they are cast off in the wild play of the ideation, e.g. paranoid delusion (Freud 1991: 44). In this break the subject becomes the excess that eludes signification. Psychosis herein means that the subject no longer has a grip on the motility of the symbolic universe afforded to it by *techne*, and thus the confrontation with the *jouisseur* is not necessarily an alternative to nihilism so much as the counterpoint that gives nihilism a sense of danger.

Jouissance: Jouis-Sans, Jouis-Sens, and J'Ouïs-Sens

As Žižek demonstrates, while the nihilistic gap between the symbolic universe and the ideation of the subject is partial to the symbolic universe, the onset of nihilism in the field of the Other is through a kind of fissure where pure life (being) refuses to be assimilated by signification or the contrived imaginings of ideation (Žižek 2006: 7n). The threat of the *jouisseur* consuming the minimum of bare life that binds the subject to being is reformulated by this encounter, and the undead *jouisseur* is no longer held up as the Other/Father who can consume this kernel of the subject's existence. However, this desublimation of the lewd imaginary rival does not take away pure life. In *Seminar XX* Lacan clearly demonstrates that this excess of the Real that sticks out as pure life in the Symbolic and Imaginary is *jouissance*, pleasure in pain (Lacan 1998: 90-100). For

Žižek *a propos* Lacan,

The lesson of drive is that *we are condemned to jouissance*: whatever we do *jouissance* will stick to it; we shall never get rid of it; even in our most thorough endeavour to renounce it, it will contaminate the very effort to get rid of it (Žižek 2000: 293).

Obviously, this implies that there is some *jouissance* of the symbolic universe. Nihilism neatly presents this excessive feature in the anal fascination with clearing value. That is to say, the attentive character of nihilism, its persistent insistence, writhes in *jouissance*.

Following Lacan, Žižek does not present the reconstitution of the master-signifier as a better choice for the mystical 'bad infinity' derived from the elevation of the Lady. In the vein of *jouissance*, this reconstitution of the master-signifier after nihilism has cleared the symbolic universe shifts *jouis-sans* to *jouis-sens*, *jouissance* without the designation of the Lady *qua* automaton to a subjectivised *jouissance* returning to the root of *jouissance* in the Real.^{ix} Herein the Lady presents *jouissance* as what Lacan calls "*j'ouis-sens*" (Chiesa 2006: 350-351). As a figure of radical Otherness the Lady invokes the mystic's perverse suffering for the Other through the promise of the One in the sadistic messages the mystic believes (Chiesa 2006: 350-351). Outside the mystical relation (within the bounds of discourse), the Lady's demands appear as a distortion of the subjectivisation of the subject in the symbolic universe. The mystic is therefore outside the range of knowledge but able to suffer for the Lady who promises something of the One. The nihilist, however, returns us to *jouis-sens*, *jouissance* intent on the reconstitution of the master-signifier, an 'enjoy-meant' (Laurent 2007: 237).

The path through nihilism doubles the alienation the mystic undergoes on the side of knowledge. But the price for this is the reconstitution of the master-signifier, the remaking of the Other so the field of symbolic universe appears consistent. Such a doubling (tripping into consistency) is precisely the interplay that subjectivises *jouissance*, rendering it *jouis-sens*. But this directing of *jouissance* comes under the rule of the letter formulated by Lacan in his study of Joyce (Žižek 1997: unpaginated).

According to Lorenzo Chiesa, Lacan's reading of James Joyce, "far from being a literary-clinical case study, represents his most mature formulation of a psychoanalytic ethics and politics" (Chiesa 2006: 348). The inventiveness of Joyce's language, especially in *Finnegan's Wake* (1957), carries within it a kind of raw violence: we *must* interpret the text otherwise it is un-readable (un-conscious). Nihilism recapitulates this negotiation of Joyce's inventiveness in the point where the cynical clearing of the symbolic universe is overcome and nihilism becomes doubled: we must clear the clearing of the symbolic universe otherwise life will become too much, excessive, psychotic. The danger of nihilism is thus that its initial revelation of the Abyss hidden by *techne* threatens the subject with their dissolution that is negated by the persistence of the subject as a kind of raw violence. The choice of nihilism is therefore to move from the mystical 'bad infinity' to

the even worse infinity of interminable *jouissance*. The nihilist returns to *jouissance* as *jouis-sens*.

Conclusion

The above exploration of the mystic's relation to the Lady demonstrates how the ontology of the subject is problematised by the realignment of being in the frame of *techne*. In the mystical relation to technology there is no knowledge, only experience. This peculiar position does not constitute a discourse. Rather, mysticism is where the subject *qua* mystic believes yet the mystic finds their social link severed because this belief is 'beyond' the symbolic universe. Detached from social reality the mystic appears at once too excessive and too minimal for symbolic re-inscription: their mystical experience is enigmatic and their belief is ephemeral in its speculation on the One. It was noted that this is what Lacan calls '*jouis-sens*,' agreement with the direction designated by the imaginary scenario of the Lady that severs the social link. It was also shown that by maintaining the belief in their foreclosure the mystic is confronted with the Thing and the threat of psychosis.

Against the advent of a psychotic break in lieu of this encounter with the Thing it was suggested that the activity of nihilism offers the subject a way of reconstituting their social link by clearing away the valuation imposed by their courtly love for the Lady. The clearing 'nihilation' accords with what psychoanalysis refers to as the law of the Symbolic overwriting the wild play of the Imaginary. And this formulation in psychoanalysis raises an important point in Žižek's ideology-critique: that the transition from mysticism into nihilism to the end of reconstituting a social link deprives the world of appearance (Žižek 2004: 136). Where in mysticism *techne* is sublimated and wrought as the sublime appearance of 'something of the One' against the foreclosure on the paternal function of the Other, in nihilism no such sublimation of *techne* takes place. Instead, *techne* is desublimated in the wake of the ideation of mysticism. Where sublimation imposes some positive dignity on *techne*, the desublimation of *techne* by nihilism reduces the 'human, all too human' to an anal object to be manipulated; made and unmade. The above discussion revealed these two features of *techne* in Žižek's treatment of desublimation in two important, definitive ways for contemporary society: "the elevation of enjoyment into a central ethico-political category" whose homeostatic balance is threatened by "the attraction exerted by some excessive *jouissance*" (Žižek 2006: 188). And, secondly, the "full scientific-technological naturalization of man" (Žižek 2006: 188). The subject thus becomes subject to *techne*, and becomes the object of *techne* when the subject negotiates *techne*. Here the *jouissance* of the subject becomes *jouis-sens*, a *jouissance* redeemed by *techne* rather than exploited by the *jouisseur*.

To close, in the above discussion we have charted the subject's escape into mysticism from the perverse ordering of the symbolic universe by the *jouisseur* and the subsequent return to the symbolic universe from this mystical position. This return was marked by a betrayal of the subject's

'being' (*jouis*) because the anality of the *jouisseur* is predicated upon a 'positive principle of being' that posits the existence of the subject (*j'ouis-sens*) rather than the subject's existence (*jouis-sens*) being understood for its antagonistic excessiveness that negates (*jouis-sans*) its symbolic demarcation. It was shown that the logical outcome of this ideological positing was psychosis if the subject did not overcome this positing of existence. However, it was also revealed that psychosis must be endured, at least initially, before the subject could overcome their positing by the symbolic universe. That is to say, there is a speculative identity between the authority of the symbolic universe (the *jouisseur*) and the subject that mutually supplements what the Other presupposes and disavows: the symbolic universe presupposes the totality of being while disavowing this pre-Symbolic unity through the signification of difference and the conceptual formulation of the subject presupposes a differentiation from psychotic Nothingness while disavowing this proto-Real separation through the symptom of existence. It is precisely this speculative logic that nihilism takes aim at in the clearing of the symbolic universe and the overcoming of the principle of being through the transformative affirmation of the negativity of *techné* in the crafting of being, now released from its positing by the signification of the symbolic universe. The reintegration of the subject into the symbolic universe is therefore both a return to and a departure from the symbolic universe that reveals the antagonistic gap between ideation and signification that is the clearing of being revealed through *techné*.

- ⁱ Video game auteur Peter Molyneux's recent comments (Hew video 2009: unpaginated) about Microsoft's Project Natal are particularly indicative of this mystical relation between the subject and technology.
- ⁱⁱ Žižek vouches for the Lady when he reads Lacan's 'the father or worse' and takes up the worse. In this sense the Lady is a worse alternative to the Other/Father (Žižek 2005: 167).
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Lorenzo Chiesa's essay 'Lacan with Artaud' (Chiesa 2006: 336-364) for a demonstration of the structural similarities between mysticism and psychosis in the later period of Lacan's work.
- ^{iv} Žižek raises a similar criticism of the Thing in the ethics of Derrida and Habermas (Žižek 2002: 152-160).
- ^v One is reminded here of the old treatment for women suffering hysteria from the time of Hippocrates to Freud's teacher Jean-Martin Charcot: the hysterectomy.
- ^{vi} For more on this notion of primordial unity in an idealist philosophical context see Žižek's engagements with Schelling, *The Indivisible Remainder* (1996) and *The Abyss of Freedom / Ages of the World* (1997).
- ^{vii} Various best-selling 'civilisational/cosmic analyses' accede to this mystical compartment such as Jared Diamond's *Collapse* (2004) and Paul Davies' *The Fifth Miracle* (1999).
- ^{viii} One might consider this the underbelly of political economy of the trilogy of *Matrix* films.
- ^{ix} Here Lacan is playing on 'sense' and 'direction' as doubly instantiated in the French 'sens.'

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