

ŽIŽEK AND THE ONTOLOGICAL EMERGENCE OF TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: This discussion utilises the thought of Slavoj Žižek as a departure point to consider the ontological emergence of technology as *techne* in the conceptual encounter of the Abyss in Being. Following Heidegger, Žižek's critique examines the ontical and ontological implications of modern science. His championing of the political Cause makes the social realm essential for Žižek's turn against the possible domination of a deterministic, technical, and scientific rationality. The problem of modern science dominating subjectivity with objectivity, i.e. the reduction of humanity to a biogenetic structure, calls for an opening of the deadlock of rationalist determinism with the facilitation of envaluing Being, lest we be cut off from intersubjectivity by a psychotic breakdown. It is precisely in the lack of control we have of other people, the reliance on others, that we come to revivify our mastery of who we are and our actions. In the Žižekian mode the ethical 'ought' is not an obstacle in the path of modern science but a guide, an epochal constellation of value and understanding occurring in the socio-political realm that emancipates itself from the naïve resignation inculcated by the deterministic causality of rationalisation. The aim of this paper is to explore how Žižek understands this envaluing as the 'mythologisation of technology'.

KEYWORDS: Slavoj Žižek; Martin Heidegger; technology; *techne*; mythologisation; psychoanalysis; ontology

This discussion utilises the thought of Slavoj Žižek as a departure point to consider the ontological emergence of technology as *techne* in the conceptual encounter of the Abyss in Being. Žižek is a thinker steeped in the traditions of German idealist philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis whose considerations of how we value our lives with, through, and by technology explodes into socio-political spaces shunned by the quietism of Heideggerian philosophy and the non-political sensualism of postmodernism. Martin Heidegger provides the initial grounding for Žižek's considerations of technology and modern science, particularly in his work on civilisational malaise: *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997). Technology is both promising and dangerous in the Heideggerian account: promising in its delimiting of physical limitations and expansion of rational understanding and dangerous in its reduction of existence to a wholly rational and objective mode

unable to accommodate for traumatic disruptions. Following Heidegger, Žižek's critique examines the *ontical* and *ontological* implications of modern science. The politicisation of biogenetics in *Organs Without Bodies* (2004) being one such example of how we can look to a future with a purpose even with the paradoxes of knowing the minutiae of our mortality. His championing of the political Cause makes the social realm essential for Žižek's turn against the possible domination of a deterministic, technical, and scientific rationality. In the presentation of the socio-political field Žižek's discussion enters philosophical territory, particularly in his *Tarrying with the Negative* (1993). The opening engagements of this volume entreat us to an exploration of the Cartesian cogito and the way it is "out-of-joint," a break between existence and non-existence. The German philosophical tradition informing Žižek's psychoanalytic approach refers to this as the problem of *Sein* (Being) and the *Abgrund* (Abyss). Of this tradition, the philosopher Friedrich von Schelling informs much of Žižek's work, but Žižek only accepts Schelling up to a point because his idealism is effectively retroactive and in denial of its utopian project. Žižek's fascination with the 'out-of-joint' cogito is articulated in psychoanalytic forms throughout his *oeuvre* but it is at its most 'enjoyable' in the revised edition of *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (2001a): Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* becomes "I think where enjoyment was evacuated." Without disruptive lack the cogito suffers psychotic breakdown as exemplified by the tragedy of Robert Schuman:

His fate was the opposite of a standard lover caught in an unhappy love affair and dreaming about happy unification with his beloved—his deadlock was that his wishes *were* realized—life *spared* him the disappointment of unhappy love—so that his position was that of a lover united forever with his beloved and dreaming about some new obstacle that would make the beloved distant.

In an analogous way the problem of modern science dominating subjectivity with objectivity, i.e. the reduction of humanity to a biogenetic structure, calls for an opening of the deadlock of rationalist determinism with the facilitation of *envaluing* Being, lest we be cut off from intersubjectivity by a psychotic breakdown. It is precisely in the lack of control we have of other people, the reliance on others, that we come to revivify our mastery of who we are and our actions. In the Žižekian mode the ethical '*ought*' is not an obstacle in the path of modern science but a guide, an epochal constellation of value and understanding occurring in the socio-political realm that emancipates itself from the naïve resignation inculcated by the deterministic causality of rationalisation.

The focal point of this discussion is the 'mythologisation of technology' in our epoch of modernity. Žižek's analysis of the contemporary subject and their milieu understands mythologisation as the guarantee for "our horizon of meaning." Meaning as a 'horizon' emphasises the lack of control we have over the interpretation of our words and actions by other people. This lack of control is prefatory to the existence of a fundamental meaninglessness—"domain of the Unexplained"—giving mythologisation its need to function, its *raison d'être*. In *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003) Žižek discerns the function of mythologisation as the projection of our imaginings, motives, and reasons into this 'dark spot' of fundamental meaninglessness. This dark spot is the Abyss of freedom

that precedes the subject as both Self and subjectivisation. Following Schelling, Žižek reveals a sense of awe accompanying the understanding of ourselves as a Self: our self-understanding. This awe is derived from our apparent existence as self-understanding subjects in the midst of aeons of non-existence, as though to be a Self is to paradoxically gain a distance from existence and become aware of our fleeting selfhood, our being-in-the-world. Mythologisation is thus the horizon created by the convex curve of this existential distance, the meeting of *something* and *nothing* where the best answers seem to be mystical ones, i.e. Christianity's 'creation *ex nihilo*'.

When we turn our gaze toward this *something*, toward Being, we are subjectivising the world experienced with our senses; coordinating the value generated by mythologisation with our fantasies. Subjectivisation is the attempt to gain a purchase on this appearance, the troublesome wanting of organic life "in becoming without being," prior to any demarcation of temporality—past, present, or future. Becoming unveils the Abyss haunting the subject as the dread of death/finitude in the establishment of temporality, i.e. whether or not doing something differently in the past could have changed our present situation as our life ends one minute at a time.

The difference between mythologisation and the fantasisation emphasised by Žižek is effectively the difference between 'demand' and 'need' in the psychoanalytic clinic. Within psychoanalytic theory, demand functions at the level of fantasy, a coordination of our relations with other people in their symbolic constitution—Otherness. Need, on the other hand, operates with mythologisation, the very organic want of a *raison d'être* to offset the vacuum of an existence without purpose. While fantasy may coordinate the value of mythologisation, it does not consume it entirely because it is interrupted by the fundamental difference between the modality of ontical demand and ontological need.

The pivot-point of this turn from ontical demand to ontological need is the Lacanian Real or 'thing-in-itself'; the very blind spot or antinomian stain of the subject on the screen of perception. The subject as thing-in-itself presents us with its antinomy between the exteriority of ontical demands and the horizontality of ontological need: it is simultaneously the impossibility of seeing our Self seeing and the interminable processes of perception (perceiving, mythologising, doubting, etc) or willing. Such an antinomy is a stain on the otherwise explainable and ordered reality of Reason. The term 'stain' is here used to emphasise the unsettling disjunction between, to figure along the lines of Žižek's discussion of Alain Badiou in *Think Again* (2004), "the pure multiplicity that beings present insofar as they belong to a situation ... and their re-presentation according to the prevailing state of that situation." For Žižek the Real has two sides, "that of purification and that of subtraction," that offer some hint as to the limits of the modality of the ontical and ontological.

On the one hand, the Self is isolated in the purification of the Real. Here self-understanding is led to the mystical brink of transcendental Selfhood and is blocked from outright mysticism by the opacity of the Real, its 'teflon-coating' against mythologisation. The ontological priority of this is emphasised even at the basic level of physical need wherein the process of satiation is thwarted by the antithesis contained in its com-

partment: lack.

The other side of the Real, subtraction, removes “all determinate content, and then tries to establish a minimal difference between this Void and an element that functions as its stand-in.” The removal of ‘determinate content’ suspends what we perceive as the normal run of things in the universe (causal necessity) requiring non-existence become the minimal difference or ‘empty set’ that has no place within the physics of the cosmos, i.e. the surplus of possibility lost when something happens. Alenka Zupančič observes a similar case with Kasimir Malevich’s painting *White Square On White Background*; the way a minimal difference “enables us to see ‘white on white.’” In the work of both Zupančič and Žižek, thanatos phobia and abyssal freedom function as the elements standing-in for the Abyss/Void that are, by virtue of their mediator status, different from the Abyss.

In an analogous way we can observe that the stain of surplus possibility is different to the ‘possibility’ of determinism. Herein surplus possibility retroactively emphasises the groundlessness of existence, the abyss of freedom. We come dangerously close to the aphasic’s absence of overt (spoken) purpose if we do not observe the dread of death in the face of abyssal freedom. With Zupančič, to not suffer is to err in the art of living by forgetting the existence of a subject “*always* presupposes negativity or nothingness.” Žižek suggests this allows us “to become ‘passionately attached’ to some Cause—be it love, art, knowledge or politics—for which we are ready to risk everything.”

It is Arthur Schopenhauer, however, who remarks of such abyssal freedom that it must not be “determined by grounds.” The stand-in freedom—a spectral surplus—is “determined by nothing at all;” it is groundless and ghostly. Thanatos phobia and abyssal freedom appear as spectres haunting the horizon of meaning *vis-à-vis* phenomenal representations of the Abyss, omens of its dangerous contingent reliance on the meaning-thwarting groundlessness of the Abyss and the suffering inculcated therein. As Žižek reveals of the work of Badiou, there is a gap between the situated subject with their multitude of possible courses of action and the subject of the situation whose representation by the parameters of the situation limits this possibility itself. Hence the opposite of one appears as a spectre to the other: the situated subject experiences the abyss of freedom, the subject represented in their situation opens onto the dread of there being no surplus possibility. Yet the haunting of these miserable spectres around this pivotal lacuna also promises to excite humanity.

Following the Indic wisdom of the *Upanishads* (1965), Schopenhauer reveals the fear of the Abyss—in both its dread of finitude and anxiety to act—to be something *constitutive* to the well-being of the Self. Cyclically passing through the Abyss, reducing the Self to its infinitesimal kernel of ‘is-ness’ and then bursting forth with the apprehension of existence in its totality as Being, revivifies the Self in its dare to exist/act and overcomes the restrictive phobic response. In the darkest nihilistic hour of reduction to the ontical ‘is’ Schopenhauer reveals the promise of change and order, of reaction and revitalisation. In the stupor of ontical existence it is the intellect—a type of self-relating negativity (Fichte), *a la* the Real—that switches from the danger of complete annihilation to the

promise of *something*. This ‘something’ is the choice of existence in the groundlessness of existing; we do not shed our treasured kernel of ‘is’. Here Schopenhauer is following Kantian spontaneity, “reasons ultimately count only insofar as I “incorporate” them, “accept them as mine””

Human existence errs by choosing to exist in the cycle of perpetual need, today exemplified by “hedonism combining [sic] pleasure with constraint ... the very thing that causes damage should already be the remedy.” This immediate coincidence of opposites is erroneous and unstable because of the human condition’s susceptibility to misery. To build on the earlier discussion of desire and need, even at the highpoint of attaining what one desires we become dissatisfied:

As soon as they are attained, they no longer look the same, and so are soon forgotten, become antiquated, and are really, although not admittedly, always laid aside as vanished illusions.

Here it becomes clear that Schopenhauer’s metaphysics are an attempt to negotiate our existence through a process of endlessly breaking the *mâyâ*, the illusion, we construct for ourselves against the horror of having nothing to will/mythologise in the meaningless Real kernel of the Self that we refuse to give up to the Abyss/Void simply because we *exist*.

The philosophico-mystical endless return to Being is a return of thought to existence *in its existing* (ontology), and yields the impossible question of ‘why something rather than nothing?’ Reading Heidegger’s philosophy in *The Ticklish Subject* (1999) Žižek considers this question unanswerable because in contemplating Being and the Abyss we are thinking through the *sui generis* origins of what we call ‘reality’, the horizon or limit of the conditions of possibility. While Being is the ‘order of the cosmos’ (the existence of objects to be thought and thinking itself), in Gödel’s mathematical theory the Abyss is the empty set that must be counted before counting can begin. To put this in Žižek’s favoured Lacanese: Being is the Imaginary register in its ontological dimension that excites meaning, and the Symbolic Order in its ontical appearance of causal necessity. The Abyss qua Real is “on the side of virtuality” against the ‘real reality’ (causality) presented by the Order of the Symbolic, further emphasising its spectral mediation by dread and anxiety. Thus the Abyss clears a space in reality to allow something to appear (be symbolically recognised) and be mythologised with a name, while at the same time thwarting the sufficiency of this mythologisation and ensuring the changing world that manifests before us. Or to put it another way, Žižek is suggesting that we can never really satisfy desire in-itself because our relation to it is one of self-conscious reflection; we always already desire, there is no choice to cease the decay and dissatisfaction categorised by the Abyss in Being. One might even go so far as to say that the Abyss is the ‘bone in the throat’ of Being marking mythologisation as a vain procedure that is inevitable in lieu of the forced choice of existing-in-the-world.

Heideggerian philosophy considers science to be an essential mode of existing-in-the-world, or, *Dasein*. This position allows for the philosophical acceptance of the life-enriching potential of the products of science, of ‘letting be’ so truth can ‘take place’ rather

than be obscured by mechanical reproduction and fabrication. It also allows for the serious consideration of science as a critical project in and for modernity following Rousseau's considerations of the arts and sciences; in the very sense that we cannot return to a mythic natural harmony by simply ceasing technological development because we are entwined with the technological development constitutive of our historical situation. Science as a mode of *Dasein* grants it a place within the conditions limiting the possibilities of how we make our lives meaningful, how we mythologise the world.

According to Heidegger, modern science attempts to negate the Abyss in attempting to 'explain away' and rationalise the universe, therein closing upon the Unexplained. Technology enables science to proceed with its project of practical understanding by facilitating experimentation. The content of scientific judgement is technologically derived, and therein scientific advancement becomes coextensive with technological advancement in Heidegger's critique. Crucial to this critique is the historical-etymological argument that the term 'technology' derives of the Greek '*techne*', a coming together of 'crafting' and 'making'. Fusing 'crafting' and 'making' the concept of *techne* successfully connects the *raison d'être* of being human with the processes of being/existing-in-the-world or, to use Heidegger's term, *Dasein*. Heidegger considers thinking a form of *techne*, with the important qualification that "thinking is the thinking of Being." Within Being technological advancement affects the human condition through the senses *and* through thought. Therefore it is not only technological engagements that are changed with scientific development but our social and political experiences also, "for there is no such thing as a man who exists singly and solely on his own." Heidegger ominously refers to this as "the sway" of *techne* and its modern effect as a 'setting-upon nature' that enframes our understanding of our human condition. This enframing carries over the scientific demand for objectivity to the other modes of living our lives, and encroaches on terrain usually expressed as subjective. For instance, the experience of pain is measured and resolved through an external prosthesis such as analgesia rather than incorporating this feature of experience into the basis of our daily lives, for improving ourselves as the Stoic philosophy of Seneca—much admired by Schopenhauer—would have us do. *Techne* closes on ontology in the comportment of modern science, tasking mythologisation to literally make sense of the ontical world. The danger of *techne* is thus the fall into the vicissitude of excessive rationalisation because we are tyrannised by the naïve comfort given by the accumulation of facts in scientific research and experimentation. Rationalisation mirrors the forced choice of existence in Schopenhauer's metaphysics, it is a species of mythologisation peculiar to the scientific mode; a 'mythologisation of technology' covering over the unconscious limit of the known—the "unknown knows."

It is 'modern science' that concerns Heidegger because it appears to spill beyond the boundaries of its essence, rendering it meaningless and infecting mythologisation with a degree of impotence. With Heidegger, Žižek emphasises this impotence of *mythos* in the psychologism of 'ego psychology': the rationalisation of all the fantasies (organisations of sense-value apropos of mythologisation) we project into the Abyss, and the further categorisation of these fantasies as 'knowable' within the cold light of Reason where

no unexplainable mystery can abide and the psyche becomes a pathogen against the background of a given/determined external reality. Such a delimiting and ‘explaining-away’ of the world has a two-fold consequence. Formerly, modern science impinges on the other modes of *Dasein*, i.e. poetry and religion, and troubles the existential project of *Dasein* coming-to-grips with the Abyss and Being by over-determining Reason and dominating the horizon of meaning, wrongly reducing the *many modes* of existence to *a mode* that cannot admit the domain of the Unexplained in its ambiguity—the way a neurotic is frozen by the uncertainty of whether their act will be successful, or the obsessive’s deferral of Life itself. Substantively, this movement beyond the essence securing the horizon of meaning of modern science within *Dasein* produces a metaphysical nihilism typified by “man, investigating, observing, pursuing [sic] nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.” Standing-reserve, *Bestand*, falsely traverses the dreaded Abyss reducing Being to a mechanism that functions per the phobic response: ordering objects to be at hand to shield the subject from the feared thing of the mechanistically repressed phobia. Yet these objects are destined to collapse into objectlessness because blindly traversing the Abyss with ‘demystifying’ mythologisation ensures *techne* closes on the ontological horizon of meaning with the deadlock of subjectivity and objectivity. The phobia thus appears inescapable and mitigating everyday ontical existence.

Herein the Abyss and Being reappear as an objective trauma to the subject’s worldliness because the Abyss and Being hold a non-subjective non-objective categorical position. The dilemma of modern science and the human condition is therefore how to experience “the call of a more primal truth” when faced by the danger of *techne* as a challenge to the *eidōs*—idea attained with experience (Plato)—of the human by bloating the value of mundane everydayness. This is especially problematic to the vital ancient Greek underpinning of Heidegger’s account of worldliness in *Being And Time* (1996) because “*eidōs-morphe-hyle*, afterall, come from *techne*,” effectively making the human condition and its socio-historical metamorphoses a ward of *techne*. Thus the challenge to the *eidōs* of humanity, e.g. the reduction of the social phenomena to statistics, is a violence of *techne* against itself.

Taken in light of the mythologisation of technology, the *eidōs* of the human condition is the conception of the experience of being human as we negotiate our mundane everyday lives within a particular epoch or historical situation. ‘*Eidōs*’ is a blending of the ‘is’ and ‘mythologisation’, of gaining a self-understanding within our epoch by using its outward representation of humanity and imagining the barrier of our contingent existence as well as transcending this contingent boundary, of being part of the many. An epoch is defined by its beliefs and practices, the historical situation that configures the limits of existing possibility, the understanding of these boundaries, and their transcendence. Epochs also carry the spectre of value (mythologisation), ordering the different ways one can live their life and therein making some methods qualitatively better than others.

The ordering of the beliefs and practices of an epoch known as its *technics*, and the genealogical locus of modern science emerges from such a thing. We can locate the

initial arbitrary grounding of the *technics* of the epoch of modernity in the tradition of Western philosophy; specifically in Rene Descartes' meditations on existence leading to the cogito and radical doubt, and Francis Bacon's treatises on scientific method and knowledge production which propound ideas of progress and a progressive understanding of accumulated information/knowledge. In both these cases the 'epoch' notion must presuppose a self-making energy, *autopoiesis*, animating the ways of living within the *technics* of an epoch. This energy is sublimated to fit within the epochal moment and its *technics*. Žižek openly states of such sublimation that its central Abyss/Void, "seems to be increasingly under threat; what is threatened is the very gap between the empty Place and the (positive) element filling it in." The ('sacred') ontological difference between the open ontology of the 'horizon of meaning' instated by mythologisation and the ontical 'objects of technology'—what technology facilitates and the technology itself—is threatening to collapse from the impact of *techné's* violence against itself. Already we have self-replicating robots, replacing the 'humanity' Ernst Jünger relied on in his analysis of machines in the First World War where authenticity derived of seeing oneself as an 'objectification of reality' wherein the human becomes a prosthetic extension of determinism with input from a nature-machine. With the *eidos* of humanity thus endangered sublimation becomes the promise of an open universe that still has its mysteries.

As in Freud's metapsychology, sublimation goes beyond the borders of the human *subject* whilst being included in the human *condition*—the philosophical understanding of humanity in *technics*. Sublimation is the process of internalising unpleasant outcomes so we can find socially acceptable satisfaction for autopoietic energy. Such internalisation and redirection appears in the disjuncture between the *eidos* of human condition, or Self, and the personal sense of ownership over our experience as subjects of perception, or subjectivisation. The sublimation of *autopoiesis* becomes distinguishable after experience takes place; the 'wisdom of hindsight' reveals a process of mediation between what we want to ideally be and our place within social networks and so forth, our 'worldliness'. Sublimation is therefore always in a relation to what is, to Being, and finds its counterpoint in the turning back of consciousness on itself as critical self-consciousness. Žižek's discussions of the Cartesian *cogito*, the minimal difference of Self (an 'out of joint' self-critical 'I'), in *Tarrying With The Negative* makes it clear that critical self-consciousness unearths sublimation initially through the *contemplation of mythologisation and the phantasmagoria of value enacted therein*, and successively in *the doubt of this mythologised fabula mundi*—fabulous world—and then in *the radical doubt of doubting this doubt itself* (Descartes). The space between Being and critical self-consciousness is thus the minimal difference of the Abyss which is inherent to consciousness and our understanding of (coming-to-grips with) any object or idea. Without such a distancing effect the Abyss would act as a Void blotting out all contemplation of what 'is' and manifesting as an ontological aphasia—the horrifying vacuum of an existence without a purpose.

Responding to the danger of the Abyss, mythologisation and fantasy create and instantiate an intangible world of value—phantasmagoria. When we fantasise we engage in an 'imaginary identification' with our epoch; we pour coordinated (fantasised) mean-

ing/myth into the Abyss. Such identification is the motion *Bestand* attempts to capitalise upon to similarly offset the dread and anxiety of the Unexplained. Imaginary identification is the solipsistic procedure of *autopoiesis* acting for-itself, and as such defunctionalises and alienates the Self so the capacity to fill the Abyss can become actualised. That is to say, while the dread of thanatos phobia maintains a position in grounding the subject for existing-in-the-world (*Dasein*), it can be falsely traversed and covered up by representation. Žižek explains Badiou's "*mieux vaut un désastre qu'un désêtre* [better a disaster than a lack of being]" in this way:

Better the worst Stalinist terror than the most liberal capitalist democracy. Of course, the moment one compares the positive content of the two, welfare-state capitalist democracy is incomparably better—what redeems Stalinist 'totalitarianism' is the formal aspect, the *space* it opens up.

To be grounded in *Dasein* is not to attain certitude but to realise the Abyss and its function in the ideation of the human condition.

The reflex of imaginary identification is symbolic identification. Imaginary identification alienates subjectivisation and creates the fantasy of a once stable self-conscious past. This fantasisation orders the value already introduced to the perceived world by mythologisation to co-ordinate the desire or metonymic 'stand-in' of the Other (Cause) sustaining the comportment of the subject—it literally "teaches us how to desire." Symbolic identification traverses fantasy's alienation to reveal the nihilism hidden in its normativity, i.e. the egalitarian right of every citizen to vote in the ideological discourse of welfare-state capitalist democracy does not emancipate denizens living and working in such a nation-state. This nihilism is propounded by the inescapability of the Abyss. When the Abyss is blindly traversed by *Bestand* we find the horror of something resisting mythologisation/symbolisation as an external trauma which we have no control over—'trauma' becomes one of the names of the Real. When migrant workers in the Netherlands maintain their beliefs, practices, and language without heeding the tenets or learning the language of the country they are in it stirs the liberal-democratic egalitarian sensibility into a state of confused denial. *Bestand* functions as a mirror for the Abyss, its objectlessness co-opts the *raison d'être* of the human condition. Herein democratic citizenship becomes synonymous with a way of mythologising 'the human' that shifts from merely being another metaphor for the subject to metonymically standing-in for the subject—access to the 'is' becomes invalidated. The mirrored Abyss condenses the effect of nihilism on mythologisation, magnifying the fundamental thwarting of sufficiency by the Abyss proper which is veiled by the *Bestand* of *techné*, and swallows the meaning of citizen/denizen into nothingness.

Because of its pre-ontological position the Abyss is unavoidable. It follows then that if *Dasein* (being-there) retains an ontological position that affords us a 'horizon of meaning' it must unfold within the Abyss. The horizon of meaning stands in the gap between the pre-ontological Abyss of freedom and the particular ontic content of everyday life—the objects *Bestand* reduces to objectlessness. In this way mythologised value becomes ontologised and spectral, inviting groundlessness.

It is at the level of mythologisation in the ontic content of our daily lives (i.e. everyday activities like working, eating, sleeping, etc) that the groundlessness of *Dasein* manifests. Following Seneca, Schopenhauer, and Žižek, we cope with this uncertainty of how to act by sublimating autopoietic energy in the attempt to establish an impossible homeostasis; to find a sufficient ground for existing, for our *raison d'être*. As Žižek notes apropos of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1976) the latent content constructed by mythologisation, the value we sense in the world, is brought together after sublimation has introduced the 'essence' as a really existing distortion to the understanding of beings, of what exists; therefore giving meaning and sense a deficit of sufficiency. For instance the blueness of blue—the Being of blue—distorts the eidetic appearance/dwelling of blue. That is to say, there is a difference between the existence of an existant (a thing), the qualities attributed to it (morphology) through the relations of its situated worldliness (*hyle*), and the mediation between these ontological and ontical horizons respectively (*eidos*). In its worldliness colour is reduced to a relative relation because blue-in-itself punctures the sufficiency of relativism with the limit of symbolisation, an ontological lack in its very founding: the call to mythologise. This dissatisfaction with eidetic appearance (the congruent idea of something within an historical epoch) keeps relativism functioning, keeps imagination from becoming transcendentalised, and also keeps open the possibility for change and metamorphosis.

The angst-inducing danger of this fundamental dissatisfaction/lack incites a covering over of what is in us more than ourselves, the very locus of existing in and with Being. Schopenhauer locates this locus as the thing-in-itself, most closely represented as the *will* of the human creature that affords us both the freedom to act against our inclinations and the ability to remain in service of the perpetual dissatisfied cycle of animalic desire. In lieu of Heidegger's critique of modern science the disjuncture between Self and subjectivisation in our epoch of modern scientific-technological civilisation must attempt to resolve the objectlessness of *Bestand* as a response to the thanatos phobia inculcated by this lack. Objectlessness does not provide the strength of spirit we need to master our freedom. Leaving this lack covered will manifest un-mythologisable trauma, as was made painfully obvious by the mystic/melancholic resistance of villagers to return to their destroyed island homes in the wake of the Asian tsunami on the 26th of December, 2004. Recourse to the covering over of the Abyss endangers freedom and reduces humanity to inescapable servitude, mere *automata* devoid of Self.

In a socio-political frame the danger of the Abyss for democracies is to let irrational dread dominate our democratic ideology and weaken the very spirit of the people, *Volkgeist*, this ideology relies on. As Rousseau and others have shown, when a society is weakened enough social psychosis will intervene because we cannot return to a natural state of harmony as such harmony is itself a myth *we create* to protect ourselves from the Abyss. Without the anxiety of the Abyss democracy forgets the essence of freedom and can but wither until its state of affairs becomes so symbolically deficient it collapses into a psychosis of alienated mythologisation lacking causality (tyranny), even after sublimation—the high rate of return to office for a ruling party from democratic elec-

tions held during wartime. While alienated mythologisation (*autopoesis* acting for-itself) introduces an incredibly energetic phantasmagoria for the psychoses, it lacks the points of understanding to allow successful social interaction. Žižek articulates this danger as the very societal mass or *demos* of democracy losing its promise of political communication, slipping into totalitarianism or mere formal legalism such that ‘Democracy’ means “whatever electoral manipulation takes place, every political agent will unconditionally respect the results,” as in the US presidential elections of 2000 where “a couple of hundred Florida votes decided who would be President.”

It is against this pathology that the possibility of automata can be therapeutically asserted by modern science. For example, if the successful function and structure of democracy can be ascertained then the justified method of social stability is to put this structure in place and keep it fully functional—utopian democracy. At this point modern science reveals its ahistorical turn, “the *way* in which human being *is*” is separated from “the historical context of its development” by the objectlessness of *Bestand*. To continue with the previous example, the function and structure of democracy is separated from its historical situation (epoch) and immanent development (*technics*) by the utopian assertion that democracy can be imposed on any social situation that is not democratic. The idea that such an imposition on a nation-state is *progressive* leads to the absurdity of determinism; that one can accurately determine a nation, a people’s future or ontological horizon whether they take up democracy or not.

The inherent determinism of automation-as-therapy reveals the double possibility of science as a mode of *Dasein*: uncovering human societies as automata of the nature-machine *or* covering over the Abyss of freedom, the incursion of chaotic anxiety, with the fantasy of a possible return to pre-industrial societies’ mythical harmony. Following Žižek’s reading of Heidegger, this double possibility is asserted within the frame of *technics* linking *Dasein* and the epochal moment in such a way that historical context is spuriously made a scapegoat—a Monstrous Thing—plaguing the sanguine operation of *Dasein* with the meaninglessness of determinism thus rendering all sacrifice senseless and partial. That is to say, the Situation from which democracy emerges in a scientific-technological civilisation is a matter for historical theorisation ahead of technological experimentation. In ascertaining historical context the dominance of technological *praxis* breaks down because it has an ahistorical mode, as both Schopenhauer and Foucault have emphasised. The hermeneutics of historical objects (the reading around their contingent margins to understand the mythologised ‘why’ not merely the practical ‘how’) concerns us with the ontological horizon of meaning that the *Bestand* of modern science negates (according to Heidegger) in favour of the forgetfulness of the ontical, the slowing of critical thinking by an almost bestial attention to everyday living.

Modern science has a promise and a danger. It promises to lift the veil of mystery, what the Greeks called *lethe*, and reveal the world as it really is: its truth or *alethia*. This promise is alluring because it is dangerous. The danger of modern science and technology comes from their processes of revealing, or unconcealment. In the Heideggerian mode this is understood as the pathos between dominating nature and letting nature be.

For millennia mystical, religious, and poetic experiences have all engaged with the latter through modes of contemplation, denial of self (self-abnegation), and enjoyment respectively. Mythologisation too lets the world take place, filtering and envaluing experience. Modern science and technology set upon nature, manipulate it. This understanding is exemplified by quantum mechanics' understanding of electrons: once these objects are no longer observed they cease to exist. The adage 'seeing is believing' has explicit worth here because it would appear that the representation of the electron in the algebra of physics is more real than reality itself. The emphasis on the filtering of reality gives reality a sense of consistency. It stands to reason, then, that the mythologisation of the world is what makes the world bearable, because it opens reality to an understanding of the subjective and objective that is open. And yet mythologisation relies on there being *something* other than itself, the categorical closure of the Abyss, to invigorate the purpose of enchanting perception and thought in today's era of tiresome secularism, metaphysical nihilism, and anti-hermeneutic fundamentalism. In a 1947 published response to Jean Beaufret Heidegger wondered when we would begin to think existence in its existing as Being. The question of the position and state of mythologisation today is a crucial step toward this thought, and further insight into the cultural and philosophical implications Žižek's work for contemporary scientific- technological consumer societies.

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