

The Idea of the Passe: Critique and Construction in Psychoanalytic Thinking

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ABSTRACT:

The present contribution seeks to develop the basic determinations of the procedure of the *passe*, invented by Lacan in 1967, in order to investigate the usefulness of this idea for a rethinking of the *productive* dimension of psychoanalysis. This project, which makes use of several concepts developed by Slavoj Žižek, has the collateral effect of also clarifying the constructive dimension of the Žižekian theory of the act.

Keywords:

symptom, analytic act, testimony, transmission

1. What is a clinic?

Though I will be focusing here on the *passe*¹, this strange mechanism invented by Lacan in 1967, I would like to begin with some words about a very important category. Briefly, I would like to address the question: *what is a clinic?*

After all, even though psychoanalysis proposes a radical subversion of the medical setting, it does so in the name of a different clinic, not of a rupture with the idea of clinical treatment. Ultimately, the entry door for psychoanalysis remains, as in any other clinical procedure, the problem of suffering - which is also why the “psychoanalytic apparatus” can not simply disregard the claim that it produces and determines a certain form of subjectivity. Criticisms such as those found in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* or Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* cannot simply be dismissed on the grounds that psychoanalysis has no claim to power or rather that its critical potential lies on its purely negative dimension. The transformation of one’s suffering into a subjectivized question, a necessary step into the transferential setting, indelibly marks the entry point into the clinical work and confronts us with a rather undeveloped dimension of

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¹ This text was based on a lecture presented at the Žižek Conference, in 2014 - the material has been thoroughly reworked, with the help of Yuan Yao, Srdjan Cvjetanin and Agon Hamza. This presentation maps the current stage of an ongoing research about the productive and propositional dimension of psychoanalytic thinking and the possible development of an axiomatization of psychoanalysis - if the reader would like to contribute to the further elaboration of these theses, please contact me at: gabriel.tupinamba@egs.edu

psychoanalytic thinking: the fact - already pointed out by Freud in his pre-psychoanalytic texts - that the engagement with an indeterminate or groundless practice somehow *contributes to the efficacy of the treatment*:

“An intelligible dissatisfaction with the frequent inadequacy of the help afforded by medical skill, and perhaps, too, an internal rebellion against the duress of scientific thought, which reflects the remorselessness of nature, have in all periods (and in our own once more) imposed a strange condition on the therapeutic powers alike of persons and of procedures. The necessary faith only emerges if the practitioner is not a doctor, if he can boast of having no knowledge of the scientific basis of therapeutics, if the procedure has not been subjected to accurate testing but is recommended by some popular prejudice. Hence it is that we find a swarm of ‘nature cures’ and ‘nature healers’, who compete with physicians in the exercise of their profession and of whom we can at least say with some degree of certainty that they do far more harm than good. If this gives us grounds for blaming the patients’ faith, we must yet not be so ungrateful as to forget that the same force is constantly at work in support of our own medical efforts.”²

At the origin of psychoanalysis, there was an insight into the productive dimension of *the patient's engagement with the indeterminate* - and Freud's claim that his scientific project would set about “restoring to words a part at least of their former magical power”³ further reinforces the necessity of considering psychoanalysis not only as a critical process, but also as an affirmative procedure, concerned with the inscription of a novelty in the world. In other words, perhaps the proper approach to the criticism that psychoanalysis produces the subject that it simultaneously intends to treat should be not to resist it, but to take it even further: psychoanalysis has discovered that one's engagement with novelty *has therapeutic effects*. But let us backtrack a bit.

Following Christian Dunker's seminal work, *The Constitution of the Psychoanalytic Clinic*⁴, I would like to propose that the category of the clinic is one which articulates together four components: a *semiology* - a

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2 *Psychic (or Mental) Treatment* in Strachey 1953: 285

3 Ibid: 283

4 Dunker 2010

procedure for reading signs - a *diagnostics* - a procedure for interpreting signs - an *etiology* - that is, a theory of causation and determination - and, finally, a *therapeutics* - which is both a method for intervention and a theory of what it means to have succeeded in doing so, that is, a theory of what constitutes a cure. But perhaps even more importantly, the category of the clinic organizes these four components according to two fundamental rules: a principle of *co-variance* and a principle of *homogeneity*⁵. These two rules allow us to relate the four components as an abstract group:

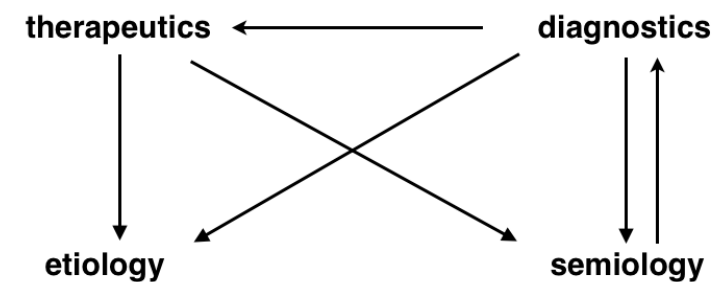


fig.1

This means, first, that a change in any one of the four clinical dimensions will lead to changes in the remaining ones: considering the medical clinic, for example, if we start to consider certain new traits of the patient as significant indicators, this will affect our diagnosis, as well as how we intent to intervene upon the causes of the disease and on what consequences can be considered a sign of a successful treatment. This is the co-variance condition. The second rule, that of homogeneity, is equally important - it states: there must be a material homogeneity between the *site of intervention* and the *intervening principle*. That is, if our etiology singles out chemical imbalances as the cause of a certain condition, then our therapeutic principle of treatment will also be of chemical nature. In other words, the homogeneity rule dictates that the treatment must have the *same ontological consistency* as what it treats.

.....
5 Ibid: 210

I will not go into the precise differences distinguishing the medical and the psychoanalytic clinics. The premises of the modern medical clinic are clearly stated in Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*. In order to succinctly define the analytic subversion of these principles, it suffices to say that, by turning its attention from the physical body towards speech, psychoanalysis found out that, as far as psychic suffering is concerned, the *other who is supposed to know* - supposed to recognize the signs, supposed to tell the patient "you have such and such disease", supposed to include the suffering into a causal chain connecting an early trauma to a current symptom, and supposed to expect the patient to adequate itself to a certain normative criteria of happiness or health - this other is *part of the pathology*. In a certain sense, the frame of the medical clinic falls into what it is supposed to frame, just as the so-called "imaginary body" itself falls into the picture⁶.

Still, throughout this subversive operation, the co-variance rule is respected - given that the analyst must listen carefully to the invariances which characterize the otherness implicated in the patient's speech in order to discern between radically different subjective structures, which, in turn, leads to very different approaches to the treatment, and so on. More importantly, the homogeneity rule is equally maintained: the hypothesis of the unconscious is, first and foremost, a hypothesis about the form of certain psychopathologies - pathologies which are made of an otherness inherent to speech itself, a material otherness that Lacan would later call *enjoyment*. The analytic punctuations, scansions, and interpretations must, therefore, be *of the same form as what they treat*. This is why Lacanian analysis privileges equivocity, non-sense, allusive figures, silences: these are some of the recourses of language which have the same form of otherness as enjoyment and which are, therefore, capable of "dislodging" its fixation.

This is what we must have in mind as we proceed: first, the role of the Other as inherent to the structure of the analytic clinic - that is, this idea that the Other which serves as the fixed-point of correlations of signification, at the semiological level, correlations of identification, at the diagnostic level, of processes of entailment, at the etiological level, and of the criteria for what "normal" means, is now *included* in the clinic. And second, the shared consistency between the cause of pathologies

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6 Lacan 1978

associated with desire and the psychoanalytic act - the Wagnerian principle that "only the spear that inflicted the wound can heal it". The latter is an important materialist principle that we will return to later on.

2. The category of the act in political thinking

The concept of the analytic act - also known as "the traversal of fantasy" - is broadly recognized as a fundamental cornerstone of Žižek's political project⁷.

In the first pages of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek proposes that we must supplement the critique of ideology as Althusserian "symptomal reading"⁸ with a concept of *ideological fantasies*⁹. If, on the one hand, the symptomal reading allows us to render legible what or who is the Other at stake in a given ideological identification - the Other which interpellates us, introducing us to the practical grammar of the different Ideological State Apparatuses¹⁰ - the ideological fantasy, on the other hand, concerns the material construction of this Other itself, as a screen which covers up the inconsistency of social relations¹¹. If the critique based on the symptomal reading is supposed to reveal the symbolic coordinates hidden behind the imaginary naturalizations proposed by a given discourse, the critique of ideological fantasies seeks to disturb the consistency of Otherness as such, that is, it brings into question an irresolvable impasse stabilized by the symbolic function of interpellation. In short, a critique oriented by the ideological fantasy asks not "which Other is implied in your practice?" but rather "how and

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7 Johnston 2009

8 Apropos of Marx's reading of Adam Smith: "a reading which might well be called 'symptomatic', insofar as it divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same movement relates it to a different text, present as necessary absence in the first" in Althusser & Balibar 2006: 28

9 Žižek 1989

10 Althusser 2014

11 "Horror is not simply and unambiguously the unbearable Real masked by the fantasy-screen - the way it focuses our attention, imposing itself as the disavowed and, for that reason, all the more operative central point of reference. The Horrible can also function as the screen itself, as the thing whose fascinating effect conceals something 'more horrible than horror itself', the primordial void or antagonism. (...) The logic of the horror which functions as a screen masking the void can also be illustrated by the uncanny power of the motif of a ship drifting alone, without a captain or any living crew to steer it. This is the ultimate horror: not the proverbial ghost in the machine, but the machine in the ghost: there is no plotting agent behind it, the machine just runs by itself, as a blind contingent device. At the social level, this is also what the notion of a Jewish or Masonic conspiracy conceals: the horror of society as a contingent mechanism blindly following its path, caught in the vicious cycle of its antagonisms." Žižek 2007: 40

why do you contribute to the consistency of this otherness? Where does the efficacious force of its interpellation come from?"¹².

Furthermore, we can easily recognize here, as the correlate to the two analytic categories of symptom and fantasy, the two concepts of interpretation that intervene upon them: the analytic scansion, or transferential interpretation, as what intervenes at the level of our symptoms, bringing the Other implied in speech into play, and the analytic act, which implies the liquidation of transference, as what intervenes at the level of the fantasmatic screen protecting us from the confrontation with the castration of the Other¹³. Hence, Žižek's thesis implies that there exists a requirement of the *political act* as the necessary correlate to the theory of ideological fantasy. This program gives rise to a crucial extension of the Althusserian critique of ideology, drawing its resources, once again, from psychoanalysis, but this time from the much more complex and unstable theory of the analytical act, as developed by Lacan between 1964 and 1970¹⁴.

However, this is not the complete picture. In order to grasp the full extent of Žižek's supplementation of the Althusserian project, we should divide Žižek's work into two periods. A first one, which we could call the "radical democracy" period, and a second, developed under the rubric of the communist hypothesis¹⁵:

radical democracy (1989 - 1997)	communist hypothesis (1997 -)
Millerian reading of Lacan (act as consistent interruption/openness)	Critique of Miller (the problem of the day after)
Ernesto Laclau (theory of social antagonism)	Alain Badiou (theory of fidelity)
critique of ideology = critique of religion	critique of ideology = critique of religion
political act ≠ its re-inscription	political act ↔ political organization

fig 2.

The first period, which goes roughly from 1985 to 1997, beginning

12 See Mladen Dolar's *Beyond Interpellation* in 1993: 75-96

13 A good introduction to the distinction between these two forms of intervention can be found in Pommier 1987

14 See *Vers un signifiant nouveau: our task after Lacan* in Hamza 2014

15 The first indication of this division has been provided by Žižek himself, in the second preface to *For They Know Not What They Do*.

with his doctoral thesis and ending just before the book *The Plague of Fantasies*, is marked by a clear concern with joining the theory of ideological symptoms with the theory of ideological fantasies. I would like to suggest that the main characteristics of this period are: (a) a Millerian reading of Lacan, based on his canonical seminar *From Symptom to Fantasy... and back*¹⁶; (b) a constant engagement with Ernesto Laclau, specially with his theory of social antagonism¹⁷; (c) a basic agreement with Marx's assumption that the critique of religion is a good model for the critique of ideology. The political act is constructed here in accordance to the Millerian reading of the "traversal of fantasy" in Lacan, as the confrontation with the horror of the non-relation, with the Other's castration, which the fundamental fantasy is constructed to cover up. Žižek's reading of Laclau allows him to find a political correlate to this non-relation: the inconsistency of the social space. The political act would thus allow us to confront the "barred" dimension of sociality and therefore open the space for a radically democratic political experience which does not cover up the irresolvable political antagonisms at its very core. Furthermore, insofar as the critique of ideology shares important traits with the critique of religion, Žižek seems to maintain at this point a certain analogy between the realization that "there is no God" and Lacan's famous statement "the big Other does not exist" - an analogy which suggests that the traversal of fantasy is inherently consistent as an operation: that is, once we cross the threshold of fantasy, recognizing the mechanism which, through our enjoyment, gave consistency to the Other, we would be able to directly relate to the production of mystifications without being duped by them, without assuming that the phantom of an Other agency was at play therein, just like the revelation that there is no God would automatically open a secular or atheistic perspective.

However, each one of these assertions is challenged by the "second phase" of Žižek's work - the properly communist phase. This second period begins with his detailed analysis of the concept of phantasm in *The Plague of Fantasies* and, I believe, remains our horizon of thinking today. First of all, Žižek's "Millerianism" is slowly self-criticized and many aspects of the more orthodox reading of Lacan are

16 Miller 1982-1983

17 Laclau & Mouffe 1985

put into question - including Miller's theory of the traversal of fantasy¹⁸. Secondly, Laclau is no longer considered a privileged interlocutor - instead, we get a consistent and growing engagement with Alain Badiou¹⁹. This new interlocution does not mean that the theory of the real of social antagonisms, developed in the first period, should be discarded, but rather that it must now be supplemented by a theory of the '*day after*'²⁰ - a term which vaguely demarcates the Žižekian response to the Badiouian concept of fidelity. This is the fundamental shift which we will be tracking for the remainder of this investigation: from this point on, Žižek explicitly conditions the effectivity of the political act on our capacity to extract its consequences. The implications of this division of the act into the moment of rupture and its "day after" are profound, and we will explore the structure of this shift by turning our attention back to its conceptual origin in Lacan's teaching itself. But, first of all, we can already see one major consequence of this new position: from this standpoint, we can no longer treat the critique of ideology in the same terms as the critique of religion - in fact, in the Hegelian Christology that Žižek engages with, Christianity becomes a model not for what is criticized, but for the correct form of critique itself²¹. The way that, for Hegel, the act of Christ is internally dependent upon the community of believers that is only made possible because of that very act becomes, from this point on, an important model for his new theory of political acts, one that tries to intrinsically relate the analytic theory of act to Lacan's theory of the analytic social link²².

Still, the mutual dependence of political rupture and political organization seems, to most of us, rather extrinsic to Žižek's theory of the act, which is often opposed to Badiou's sophisticated theory

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18 Žižek 2001

19 Žižek 1999

20 "The success of a revolution should not be measured by the sublime awe of its ecstatic moments, but by the changes the big Event leaves at the level of the everyday, the day after the insurrection" in Žižek 2009a: 154

21 Žižek 2009b

22 "when Lacan introduces the term "desire of the analyst," it is in order to undermine the notion that the climax of the analytic treatment is a momentous insight into the abyss of the Real, the "traversing of the fantasy," from which, the morning after, we have to return to sober social reality, resuming our usual social roles—psychoanalysis is *not* an insight which can be shared only in the precious initiatic moments. Lacan's aim is to establish the possibility of a collective of analysts, of discerning the contours of a possible social link between analysts" Žižek 2006: 305

of the "generic procedures" as if the former would stop short of articulating an affirmative moment of the New, a supplementary step which characterizes the latter²³. This, I believe, is because while Žižek has separated himself from the Millerian reading of Lacan from this first period, we, who have not discerned this break ourselves, still try to extrinsically equate the first theory of the political act with the later concern with the "day after", or - what is worse- resort to criticizing Badiou's philosophy of the Event rather than properly deploying the parallel constructive resources of Žižek's most recent investigations.

What is essential to us is rather to investigate how the critical power of the act, its capacity to touch upon the inconsistency of the big Other, is conditioned by the patient work of organization and construction. To put it quite bluntly: in order to locate the place of the desire of the analyst, the catalyst of this act, within political critique, we must not look for ways of "punching the Other in the face", but rather ways of punching ourselves, ways to restrict ourselves. And constraints are a matter of political organization, of discipline, and, ultimately, a matter of ideas. In this sense, I would like to suggest that in the communist phase of Žižek's work, the problem of organization comes *before* the critique of ideological fantasies, even though it is itself *conditioned* by the political act.

But in order to think the intrinsic interdependence between the constructive and the critical dimensions of Žižek's political project, we must turn our attention back to psychoanalysis, and locate within its own thinking the idea of this paradoxical inmixing of continuity and rupture. This brings us, finally, to the Lacanian theory of the passe.

3. The idea of the passe

To begin with, let me briefly describe the institutional steps which compose the apparatus of the passe. Lacan introduced the passe in his crucial intervention, three years after the foundation of his School, called *Proposition of 9 of October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School*

.....
23 Badiou himself differentiates their positions in similar terms: "My debate with Slavoj Žižek concerns the real. Following Lacan, he has proposed a concept of it, which is so ephemeral, so brutally punctual, that it is impossible to uphold its consequences. The effects of this kind of frenzied upsurge, in which the real rules over the comedy of our symptoms, are ultimately indiscernible from those of scepticism." Badiou 2009: 563

²⁴ - both the schematic abstraction of the moments of the *passe*, as well as all our remaining elaborations will be based solely on this initial presentation. We are, after all, concerned here not with the necessary adjustments made to this mechanism by the different Lacanian Schools throughout the last forty five years, but with the kernel of its *idea*.

An analysand comes to a point in her analysis which seems to her to constitute its limit and, led by this realization, decides no longer to occupy the position of an analysand in order to occupy that of an analyst. This decision is then communicated to the analytic School to which this analysand belongs, formalizing the wish to undergo the procedure of the *passe*. At this point, having crossed this crucial threshold of her analysis, the analysand assumes the position of *the passant*. The passant must then give a testimony concerning the trajectory of her analysis to other two analysts who, being in the same situation of passage, will be able to listen to her and to constitute themselves as *passers* of this testimony. Finally, the passers transmit this testimony to a *jury*, composed of three Analysts of the School (AS) - that is, three members of the School which are supposedly in position to turn the testimony into conceptually productive problems for psychoanalysis. It falls on this jury to authenticate the *passe*, nominating - or not - the passant as an AS herself.²⁵

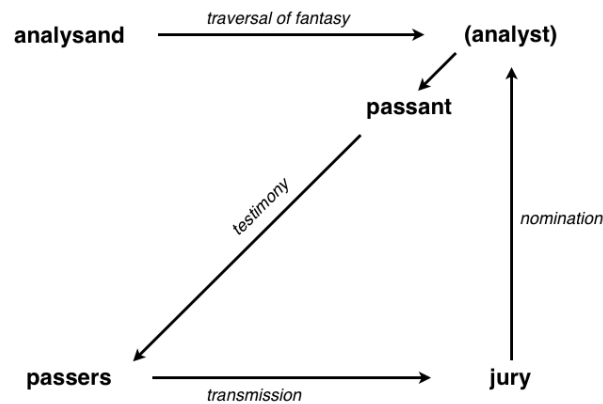


fig.3

²⁴ Lacan 2001: 243

²⁵ Ibid: 255-256. Most of the terms which we will employ in this reconstruction of the theory of the *passe* are in fact extracted from the first dense description of its mechanism contained in these two pages from the *Proposition*.

The trajectory of the *passe* involves, therefore, one *passant*, two *passers*, three *jurors*, and the School. Furthermore, it articulates three different functions: (1) it gives rise - through a depuration that goes from *passant*, to *passer*, to *juror* - to a theoretical production about the singular and enigmatic passage of the subject from *analysand* to *analyst*; (2) it is also the institutional mode of nomination of an *Analyst* of the School; and, finally, (3) the *passe* sets the conditions for a new social link within the analytic community of the School, constituted by the transmission of the testimony of the *passant* to the remaining *analysts*, and the elaborations that this transmission ensues - for example, contributing to a renewed understanding of what the end of an analysis *can* be.

Let us now shift the presentation of this diagram, from the institutional instances towards the transformations that bind them, in order to bring to light the four different logics which together compose this idea:

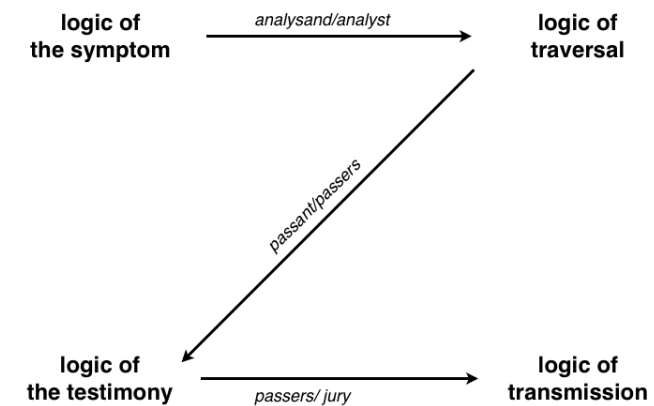


fig.4

We have, therefore, four logical moments: the logic of the *symptom*, of *traversal*, of the *testimony* and of *transmission*. Before we analyze each of its moments in some detail - an investigation which should provide us with important new information regarding the idea of the *passe* as such - we can already discern some interesting properties of this general schema.

The first aspect of this construction which is worth mentioning

is that we have, quite clearly, a division in the diagram between the instances articulated around an *impasse* (the first two) and those around the *passe* (the last two).

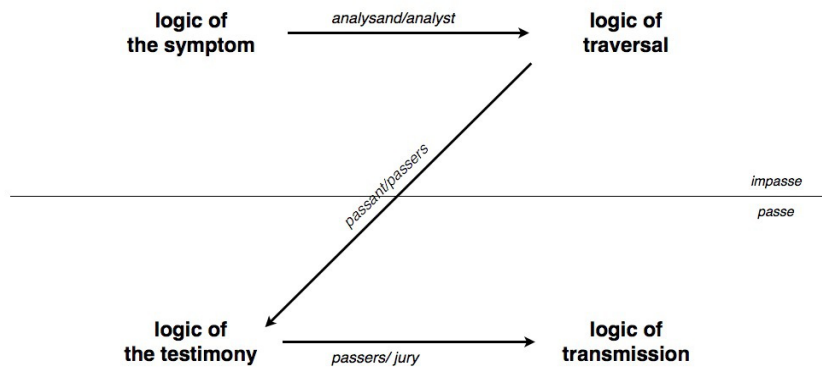


fig.5

The repetition of the deadlock of enjoyment, characteristic of the symptomatic repetition, and the assumption of a constitutive impasse of sexualization, at stake in the traversal of fantasy, are the two markers of a transformation which takes place between the analysand and the analyst, within transference and at its limit or liquidation. It is at this point that the division, previously proposed, between two Žižekian theories of the act, gains its Lacanian underpinning, because it is precisely the inconsistency of the traversal - the fact that it is not, by itself, an efficacious or verifiable process - that requires this first transformation to be supplemented by two other moments. The consistency of the act at the limit-point of analysis is therefore conditioned by, and divided between, these two other logics - the assumption of an impasse conditioned by what passes through it: the testimony, which challenges the ineffability of the act (through narration from *passant* to *passers*), and the transmission, which tests if the effectivity of the act survives beyond the singular position of enunciation of the subject at stake (through the transmission between *passer* and *jury*). The division between analysand and *passant* - the latter substituting the former as the logic of the *passe* comes to supplement the logic of the *impasse* - demarcates precisely this dependence of the desire of the analyst on these two new logical moments:

Another remarkable property of this schematism, properly

noticeable once we have divided it in two, is that, while on the upper side of the diagram we move from a sequential logic to a limit-point, on the lower one we have a totalizing operation first, the fiction of the testimony, and a sequential one afterwards, with the procedure of transmission. As we investigate each logic in more detail, this inversion will reveal itself to be quite rich in consequences, suggesting inter-relations between the two sides of the schema as well as an important result concerning the two principles of the clinic - co-variance and homogeneity - which we introduced at the beginning of this investigation. Ultimately, the complete presentation of the idea of the *passe* should clarify why it is that *the constructive practices of the passe condition the efficacy of the critical practices of the impasse*.

3.1 Logic of the symptom

The logic of the symptom is, at its core, a sequential logic, a process constituted by the relation between a series and a repetition. The very structure of failed signification - different attempts to grasp and signify a certain repeating elusive point - seems to give us its principle traits: woven out of the analysand's speech, the symptomatic logic is first and foremost one of *displacement*, of a return - within the themes of speech, within the scenes of one's life, and, ultimately, within the same analytic couch - of certain deadlocks, always repeated under different guises.

However, the crucial determination of this logic is precisely its indetermination: the *negative* rule which conditions it, the rule of free association, which suspends any extrinsic characterization of what should be said in analysis. The rule of free association is called "the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis" because it has the effect of promoting another rule, *one immanent to the analysand's speech*. Whatever repeats in analysis, given that it cannot be credited to a pre-established criteria of what should be said, becomes interpretable²⁶. This also allows us to define transference as such: the suspension of a clear rule of what is analytically significant transfers to the speaker the responsibility over the constants of her discourse, while, from within this indetermination, the speaker orients herself by supposing in the analyst a listener who would retain, in his silence, the true criteria of what is a significant speech. "Transferential interpretation" is precisely the name of an

.....
26 "only repetition is interpretable in analysis, and this is what we call transference" in Lacan 2006: 338

intervention that brings this *other criteria* into play, including it into the setting which was supposed to be framed by it.

An example. A young girl tells an analyst of her suffering: she has spent two years preparing herself to get a highly-esteemed job at a law firm and now that she has been accepted, she has missed several days of work, and finds no joy in it when she is there. In her explanations and elaborations, she addresses the analyst as someone who would find her position that of a spoiled girl, ungrateful for the opportunities that are given to her. She therefore reasons in accordance to this presupposition, driving her arguments and excuses as if the one listening to her identified her as someone who consistently threw away chances at a better life. After several sessions, not having found any explicit confirmation from the analyst that her discourse in fact signifies what she supposes it does, the analysand concludes a reasoning about the consequences of her behavior in the law firm by saying “this way I will never make a *desirable partner*”. The analyst’s intervention simply refers her statement back to her, a scansion which marks the ambiguity of her saying - partner in a law firm or partner as in someone’s companion? And, if so, desirable *according to whom*? This punctuation does nothing more than to include into the analysand’s speech the determination of an Other which is immanently implied in the series of her statements, thereby opening the space for a renewed elaboration - if the analysand in fact pursues its consequences. A different alterity demands signification now - namely, the question of what makes one a desirable partner - instead of the previous form of the impasse, which appeared as a desubjectified failure to enjoy her work, “as one should”.

This brief fragment is enough to demonstrate that the logic of the symptom is (1) defined by the displacement of symptoms, (2) and by the repetition of certain deadlocks or impasses (3) driven by the indetermination introduced by the rule of free association, which allows for a different rule to make itself legible and (4) marked by the scansions of the analyst which, intervening at the point of repetition, make the existence of this ungraspable other-rule legible to the speaker.

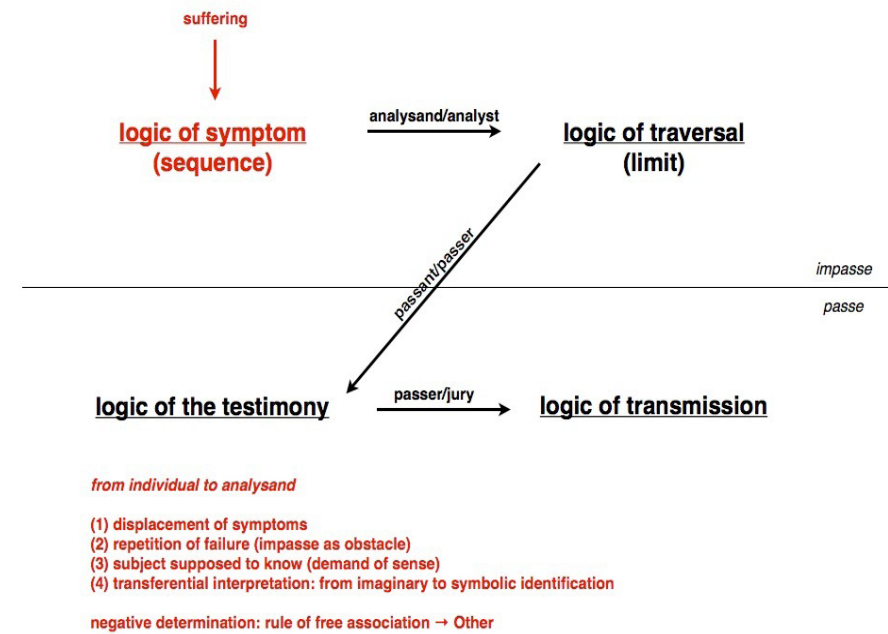


fig.6

Finally, it is crucial to note that pointing out this elusive second series of meaning - suddenly short-circuited by the term “desirable partner” in no way constitutes a *revelation* of a fully-constituted unconscious rule: the transferential interpretation goes far enough to include in our speech an other sense in which we do not recognize ourselves, but stops before any assertion of the consistency of this otherness, therefore implicating us in its promotion.

3.2 Logic of traversal

The logic of the symptom, as we have already seen, is operative from the moment that, through the analysand’s engagement with the rule of free association, an absence starts to count within the clinical setting: we suspend any positive determination of what is significant in the analysand’s speech, and in this absence the contours of another significance start to appear. The rule of free association *introduces an absence* into our speech, an absence which *renders legible* certain surprising regularities in what we say and the way we say it, regularities which are themselves the product of the analysand’s attempt to answer to a demand that she supposes in the analyst. Lacan conceptualized the conclusive moment of an analysis as the moment when the analysand would be able to let go of this absence as a consistent referent point,

an ideal point which organizes a “plane of identification”²⁷ - that is, as the moment “once desire has resolved who it was that sustained the psychoanalysand in his operation”. At this point, the analysand “no longer wants to take up the option, that is, the remainder that as determining his division brings about his fall from fantasy and makes him destitute as a subject”. The traversal of the plane of identification is the traversal of this absence as a frame for the significance of one’s speech - the traversal is articulated as a logical limit-point²⁸.

The whole problem is the following: how can one let go of one’s position regarding an *absence*? A quick example of this difficulty should suffice: consider the statement “there is no big Other”, this famous Lacanian formula for the traversal of fantasy - well, if there is no big Other *why are we negating it?* To position oneself as being “outside” or “without” the big Other is still to use it as a point of reference. Furthermore, as it is quite common in analysis, the experience of being “suddenly” struck by the inexistence of the big Other might very well be a way to remain identified with what we suppose an analyst wants from us (that is, to conclude that the big Other does not exist). Cynicism is born of nothing else²⁹.

This is why the traversal of fantasy is not simply a process of negation, but a *process of naming at the point of negation*. That is, the traversal of identification through the Other - of identification through the displacements of signification - can only be attested to by the formulation of a scene in which our position is tied up with the consistency of the Other. This is what the “construction of fantasy” stands for: the reduction of the repeating failure to signify, which spans throughout the sequential trajectory of analysis, into a formula which associates this failure - that is, the agalmatic “x” which remains enigmatic or lost in our speech - to the Other which has been constituted in its absence:

.....
27 Lacan 1978

28 A complete, but ultimately unsatisfactory, presentation of the traversal of fantasy in terms of sequence and limits is provided by Miller 2010: see classes 25/04, 09/05, 16/05 and 23/05/1990.

29 “The Ecole freudienne cannot fall into the humourless tough-guy attitude of a psychoanalyst whom I met on my most recent trip to the D.S.A. ‘The reason I will never attack the established forms’, he told me, ‘is that they provide me with a routine with no problems, and this makes me comfortable.’” in Lacan, J. (2001) p.259. For an innovative analysis of these closing remarks from the *Proposition*, please refer to Yuan Yao’s *Desire as a Fact of Reason*, available here: www.scilicet.com

“In this change of tack where the subject sees the assurance he gets from this fantasy, in which each person’s window onto the real is constituted, capsize, what can be perceived is that the foothold of desire is nothing but that of a *désêtre*, disbeing.

In this *désêtre* what is inessential in the supposed subject of knowledge is unveiled, from which the psychoanalyst-to-come dedicates him- or herself to the *agalma* of the essence of desire, ready to pay for it through reducing himself, himself and his name, to any given signifier.

For he has rejected the being that did not know the cause of its fantasy, at the very moment at which he has finally become this supposed subject of knowledge.”³⁰

An example: an analysand presented several symptomatic formations - dreams where he would rescue dead relatives, symptomatic vertigo of seeing others on the edge of balconies and stairs, an obsessive concern with sexually transmitted diseases and a series of failed relationships in which he always positioned himself as someone capable of taking care of his partner’s problems better than themselves. In analysis, he remembers a scene in which he appeared, as a two year old child, laying on top of his father, who was singing a song about the angel of annunciation (with whom the analysand shares the proper name) - the analysand further recalls that the vibration of the father’s voice made the contours of the child’s body palpable. This scene - regardless of whether it actually happened - only gained its importance when considered in the light of his symptoms, offering a meaningless name, rather than a signification, to bind them together: to speak in the place of a *silence* (over dead relatives), to experience vertigo *for another*, to provoke/avoid sexual *transmission*, to position oneself as the Other’s *spokesperson* - the elements in this sequence revealed themselves to be bound together in a scene where the child identified as the one who *announces* the Other - “annunciation” being a word which both registers the subject’s position as a messenger for the Other (for the alterity that is characteristic of the father, of the woman, etc) as well as the one who *makes the Other public* (publicizes, markets, makes consistent its semblance). In announcing the difference in the symbolic, the subject would never be implicated in the real of what is announced.

The formulation of this fantasy - “being the Other’s spokesperson”

.....
30 Ibid: 254

- also points to the traversal of this identification: after all, *from which position* could this scene be named if it remained the outer frame of the analytic process? If the rule of free association makes the absence of the Other the rule of signification, the traversal of fantasy formulates a scene in which signification itself is suspended by an *equivocal name* - here, “annunciation” - which is able, simultaneously, to mark a certain common thread binding together the sequence of symptomal displacements *and* to mark the point of its repeating failure: the speaking being announces the Other (passes on the message), but, there where there is no Other, he announces (publicizes, “markets”) it. The subject could not signify himself in his speech if not through the Other (the impasse at the level of the symptom), but now the equivocity fixated by the formula of the phantasm attests to the same impossibility at the level of the Other (the impasse at the level of fantasy) - at the cost of the subject’s localization therein, and its appearance as a remainder, destituted from its place in the Other and reduced, in its act, to a voice which, not carrying forward the message of an “Other difference”, is a voice and nothing more. At this point, reduced to what is left outside of identification, the analysand has effectively traversed for the first time his place in the absent Otherness that kept the transferential relation at play, and the possibility has arrived from him to occupy the position of indetermination that is proper of the analyst - insofar as it is defined, precisely, as that of *not positioning oneself on behalf of the Other*³¹.

In short, the logic of traversal is composed by (1) a figuration of the repeating impasse of signification through a formal act of naming that preserves its equivocity; (2) a traversal of the fantasy of a consistent Other ruling the signification of the impasse through the depositing of the equivocity of the name in the Other itself, (3) the separation of the impasse at the heart of speech from the supposition of this consistent Other - thereby liquidating the condition of transference and (4) the movement from symbolic identification to subjective destitution:

.....
31 “The schema that I leave you, as a guide both to experience and to reading, shows you that the transference operates in the direction of bringing demand back to identification. It is in as much as the analyst’s desire, which remains an x, tends in a direction that is the exact opposite of identification, that the crossing of the plane of identification is possible, through the mediation of the separation of the subject in experience. The experience of the subject is thus brought back to the plane at which, from the reality of the unconscious, the drive may be made present.” in Lacan 1978: 274

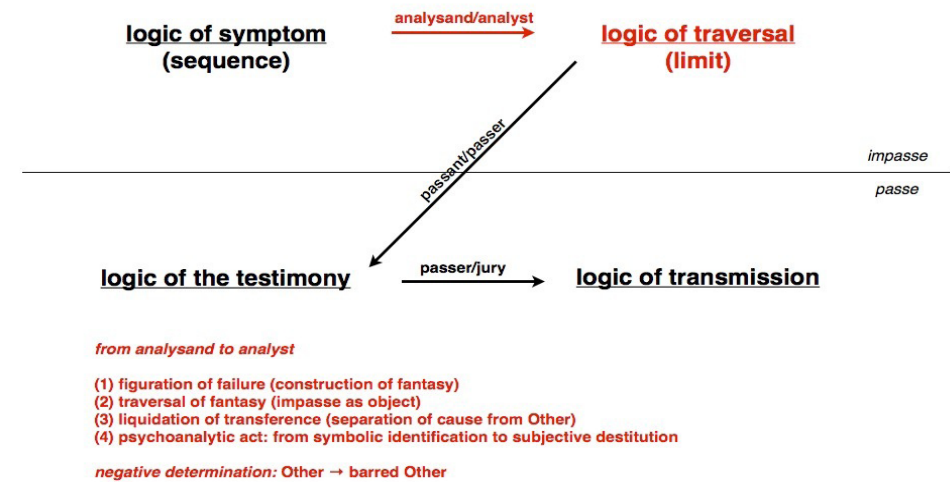


fig.7

However, insofar as this process suspends a certain fundamental relation between desire and the consistency of the Other, two questions are at hand: first, if the traversal of fantasy deposes the Other as a guarantee of meaning, does it mean that, as a meaningless naming, it is an *ineffable* or *exceptional* experience? Second: if the traversal of fantasy shifts the guarantee away from the Other back to an elusive dimension of the analysand’s speech, the real which infuses it with its equivocity, does it mean that the cornerstone of the traversal, that which emerges as beyond the consistency of the Other, is solely the *position of enunciation* of the subject?

If the answer is positive on both accounts, then the process of separation from our grounding on the Other³² is essentially a private experience - and, in fact, the very impossibility of *verifying* it would be its proof: after all, the traversal of fantasy would produce something that does not register in the shared symbolic space, and the impossibility of sharing it would be one of its defining properties. At best, we could hint at it, perhaps with the use of the same equivocal means which allowed for the traversal itself. On the positive side, this would make the limit-point of analysis the conclusive end of the analytic trajectory - to be able to maintain that something that does not inscribe itself in the Other has taken place would already be the production of a singular desire (one

.....
32 Ibid: 218-219

that does not rely solely on the Other's determining coordinates). The capacity to bear absolute loneliness would be one of the markers of this experience - a loneliness further confirmed by the position of the analyst, which the subject now takes up, of a desire that keeps itself at a distance from identifications³³.

The idea of the *passe*, however, is, first and foremost a *negative* answer to both questions and a wager that the end of an analysis can be verified without (a) being guaranteed by the Other and (b) without being a mere local convention established by a School.

3.3 The logic of testimony

One of the most common forms of expression of neurotic suffering is the grammar of exceptionality: to delimit our place in the Other through a trait that distinguishes us from everybody else, positively or negatively. To be “too perfectionist”, to enjoy things that “no one gets”, and so on - the grammar of exception offers a way to “include ourselves out” of the Other, to negatively locate our place in the Other without thereby confronting us with the Other's own exclusion from itself³⁴. Such is, after all, the ultimate role of the neurotic fantasy: to allow us to engage in the public shared symbolic space, where nothing uniquely distinguishes us in our “very being” while, privately, constructing a frame through which we are able to locate ourselves as exceptionally positioned in the Other³⁵. The logic of the testimony is a necessary supplement to the analytic act precisely because it allows us to distinguish the traversal of fantasy from the private fantasy of exception which precedes it.

Furthermore, the testimony of the *pass* operates a strange dialectical twist upon both the logic of the symptom and that of the traversal: if the sequential logic was characterized by the *alienation* of the subject in the Other and the logic of traversal by its *separation*, the logic of the testimony requires the presentation of *separation as alienation*. To put it bluntly, the testimony requires us to place ourselves precisely at the spot which the traversal has ungrounded: if there is no big Other, *then nothing prevents us from producing a consistent fiction of one's analysis*,

.....
33 Alemán 2012

34 Miller 1998 - unpublished translation available at: www.scilicet.com

35 McGowan 2013: 126

tying the sequence to its limit point. This is, perhaps, a productive way to understand Žižek's recent theory of the “self-erasing Event”³⁶: an event which marks such a radical suspension of causation that *its only effective vestige is the establishment of a self-causation by the subject in the guise of an external causation*.

This torsion of the sequence and limit, into a “sequence-limit”, a fiction which binds the series and the conclusion, places the testimony as a substitute for something which does not exist: an Other capable of discerning the immanent rule of the analysand's speech. In a certain sense, the supposition that the analyst would be capable of judging our trajectory in analysis is now confirmed - but the analysand is herself the one who occupies that place, both as the one determined by a certain formula and as the one who alone guarantees its consistency. The testimony attests to our unconscious determinations by providing the passers, to whom this narration is addressed, with a selection of symptoms, dreams and scenes that are shown to be tied together by a certain reduced formula, but it also attests to our determination of the unconscious insofar as it requires decisive selection from the vast material that composed the sequence of analysis, as well as the *forcing of entailment* there where there was none: at the point between sequence and limit, between signification and naming, as if the construction of the fantasy, which was a product of analysis, was *always already* at play in the material that preceded it. Lacan calls this the “hystorization” - a hysteric history - of analysis³⁷: a sort of return to transference which has not an analyst as reference, but *psychoanalysis itself*.³⁸

The production of this narrative plays yet a third and fundamental role: not only does it demonstrate that the subject can return to the unconscious formations of her analysis from the position of a minimal distance, speaking about them without being implicated therein, not

.....
36 Žižek 2007b: 28-33

37 See the preface for the english edition of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, available in Lacan, J. (2001). See also Miller 2007 - available at: http://www.lacan.com/symptom/?page_id=226

38 “We thought, with Freud and after Freud, that once this parenthesis was closed, one nevertheless had to continue to be analyzed, without the analyst, in solitude. One would go back to it, occasionally—regularly, Freud wished—for a period of time. To taste again a little of the transference unconscious. The other solitary one, Lacan, imagined another route, that of establishing a relationship to the analytic cause. Designed as the second pass, oriented in the opposite sense. Attention! Not a new transference for the analyst. The transference to analysis.” Miller 2007

only does it exercise itself at the point of a hole in the Other, which, incapable of guaranteeing the truth of fiction, is equally incapable of guaranteeing its falsity, but the narrative of the testimony also attests to one's "relationship with the analytic cause"³⁹. The testimony offers itself as an example of the Freudian categories - a local proof of the hypothesis of the unconscious - but it also includes, on account of the singularity of the subject and of the socio-historic determinations of its specific context, *new challenges for psychoanalytic thinking*.

A good example of this third aspect (the other two being already exemplified by our summary account of the end of analysis in the previous section) can be seen in the case of a recent passant who concluded his analysis in Brazil. In his testimony to the passers he retold a scene from his childhood in which his grandfather killed a chicken in a religious ritual as an offering to a spirit. Now, from the standpoint of "civilized" France, where his testimony would later also circulate, the reference to sacrificial rituals and spirits would be read as a clear indication of his grandfather's psychotic delirium and of a foreclosure on the side of the subject, were this situation to reverberate for him as a reality - but this was clearly not the case, if one considers the particular culture in which this subject was brought in, and especially if one considers the singularity of the subject in question - for whom this scene had the metaphorical role of condensing a certain relation to the Other sex. So, even though the testimony did produce a sequence-limit, binding this and other scenes and unconscious formations around the figure of a "chicken man" (both a coward, a man curious about death and women, etc), it also posed a problem for thought: what are we to do about religious beliefs from the standpoint of psychoanalysis? To be even more precise: what does psychoanalysis think when it confronts the enigmatic fact that pauperized populations of the third-world are prone to narrate the experience of religious visions without this thereby constituting a psychotic structure?

It is crucial to note that the testimony is not the narration of a segment of analysis to one's analyst (who, within transference, we supposed to be in a position to assess the truth of this retelling) nor to an aleatory audience: the two passers compose the minimal form of an audience whose principal interest is to *recognize* if analytical work has

.....
39 Lacan 2001: 229.

taken place. To be able to provide this audience with an *example* - in the full sense of the term: a particular case of a universal that nevertheless says more than the universal itself⁴⁰ - is a way to *simultaneously be recognized by other analysts* (one's analysis confirms the hypothesis of the unconscious) *and to make existing analysts not recognize themselves* (insofar as psychoanalysis now includes a new problem).

The logic of the testimony (1) affirms separation through a minimally-different alienation: returning to the symptomal sequence, but (2) at the same time it affirms the Freudian theory of alienation at the points of the separation permitted by the traversal: it attests to the inexistence of the big Other by producing a fictional construction that takes its place. Furthermore, (3) the dialectical fold of alienation onto separation and of separation onto alienation, bound together in the narration of the passant, turns the constructible, fictional and entailed properties of the testimony into a proof of the act's truth and lack of causation. And, finally, (4) the testimony also opens up the question of the passant's engagement with psychoanalysis, of his transference not with the analyst, but with the analytic apparatus itself⁴¹, from which the passant both demands recognition and reinvention.

Considering these four characteristics of the testimony - as well its interdependence on the two logical moments which preceded it - we can add a new qualification to our general schema of the Idea of the passe:

.....
40 "the example is characterized by the fact that it holds for all cases of the same type and, at the same time, it is included among these. It is one singularity among others, which, however, stands for each of them and serves for all. On one hand, every example is treated in effect as a real particular case; but on the other, it remains understood that it cannot serve in its particularity." Agamben 2007: 9-10

41 See the preface for the english edition of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, available in Lacan 2001. In *La Passe Bis*, Jacques-Alain Miller considers this "return to the transferential unconscious", after the confrontation of the "real unconscious" at the end of analysis, as a shift from the transference with an analyst to the transference to psychoanalysis as such in Miller 2007

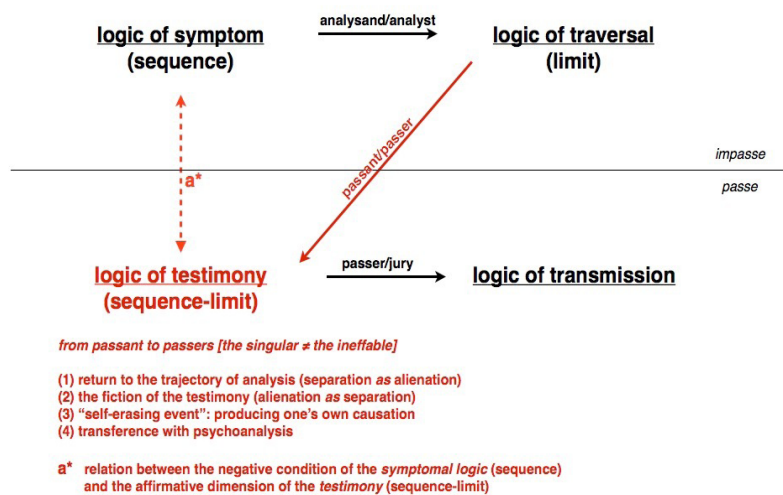


fig.8

This is our first glimpse at an "affirmative" condition of the act: the logic of the testimony is responsible for reintroducing the fiction of causation there where there was none, for attesting to the reality of the unconscious from its hypothesis, and to inscribe new phenomena and problems into psychoanalysis - a practice of inscription upon which the very existence of what preceded it - a ceaseless lack of inscription - is conditioned. There will not have been an analytic act if the subject cannot pass at the point of the Other's impasse (reconstructing a sequence whose internal entailment is indiscernible), force the Freudian truth into the world (turn a fragment of her life into an example) and cause psychoanalysis to reinvent itself.

But if the logic of testimony depurates the analytic act from its ineffability, substituting it for a complex engagement with psychoanalysis, one problem remains: the testimony remains tied to the position of enunciation of the analysand-turned-passant - that is, if the analytic act has produced a name that finds no signification in the Other, then is its inscription solely supported by the position of enunciation of the passant?

3.4 Logic of transmission

The fourth moment of the trajectory of the passe - the second one to supplement the analytic act - takes place in the absence of the passant: it is the task of the two passers to transmit to a jury composed of three members of the School something of the traversal of the analysand's fantasy. However, following our basic insight concerning the relation

between the procedure of the passe and the analytic act, it is crucial to note that the logic of transmission *participates in the consistency of what it transmits*.

The product of the testimony is not only a narrative composed of selected scenes of the sequential and limit-points of analysis. What turns the report of one's analysis into something more than the convenient confirmation that the universal categories previously elaborated by psychoanalysis apply to this particular case - a confirmation which would justify the Foucaultian critique of psychoanalysis as a control-apparatus - is that the testimony is also the testimony of a new problem, of something that, having no place in the Other, *can possibly have a place in psychoanalytic thinking*. This is what characterizes the testimony with its *exemplary* dimension:

"the way to overcome an idea is to exemplify it, but an example never simply exemplifies a notion; it usually tells you what is wrong with this notion. This is what Hegel does again and again in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He takes a certain existential stance like aestheticism or stoicism. Then how does he criticize it? By simply stating it as a certain life practice, by showing how the very staging actualization of this attitude produces something more which undermines it. In this way, the example always minimally undermines what it is an example of".⁴²

The question that now must be dealt with - and which justifies the absence of the passant in the process of transmission - is the following: is the excessive dimension of the example the uniqueness of the subject which produced it or is this excessive dimension a constitutive part of the example? The separation of the testimony from the position of enunciation of the analysand in the logic of transmission confronts the mechanism of the passe with a fundamental challenge: to condition the inconsistency of what is transmitted - the inconsistency that marked the place of the subject in the testimony - on something other than speech. This means that that fundamental wager of the logic of transmission is to produce a form of *thinking* that carries over certain properties of speech (the "determinate indetermination" of the subject in the signifying chain) into a new working hypothesis - a passage that Lacan

.....
42 Žižek & Daly 2004: 44

calls “transference of work”⁴³. This wager gives rise to the main task of the jury: to assess if the transmission of the passant’s testimony by the passers, a transmission which transforms the content of the sequence-limit narrative, can remain indeterminate in a singular way *by being organized around a challenge for psychoanalytic thinking*.

This passage from speech to thought turns the name which localized for a given subject the inconsistency of the big Other - that is, which named something which does not write itself - into the pivot of a new inscription, no longer guaranteed by the Other, but by the community of analysts. This is why the passage from the logic of traversal to the logic of transmission is fundamentally the shift from the thought implicated in the analysand’s speech to the thought that might influence a *new way of listening* - a passage that, impossible to be impartially attested to or verified, can nevertheless be verified by *anyone engaged with the hypothesis of the unconscious*. It completes a process that, beginning with the exceptional point (the symptomatic sequence) ends up with the construction of a common indetermination.

The logic of transmission conditions the efficacy of a singular analytic act on its capacity to motivate a common work, which forces new determinations at a point without external guarantee. This work, which qualifies this logical moment as a “limit-sequence” - that is, a sequence which carries forward a limit-point, the challenge to rethink psychoanalysis anew - ultimately conditions the act, and its capacity to produce an analyst, a position “warned” against identifications, on the challenge to organize a community around a problem.

The nomination of an analyst by the jury - instead of being directly tributary to the traversal of fantasy itself - is an *enrichment* of the determinate indetermination proper of the desire of the analyst. Rather than defined solely by the analysand’s newfound capacity to assume the ontological inconsistency of the Other, the position of the analyst is now constituted as being a complex composite of (a) personal analysis

43 “The teaching of psychoanalysis can only be transmitted from a subject to another through the path of a transference of work (...) No doctrinal apparatus, most notably our own, as useful as it might be in orienting our work, can preconceive or determine the conclusions which will be its remainder” in Lacan 2001: 236

(traversal), (b) subjective engagement (testimony) and (c) collective work by the analytic community. The corollary of this conception of the desire of the analyst is that, if there is no analytic community, there can be no analysts.

The affirmative work of transmission, which forces itself at the point of impasse unveiled by the traversal, and the conditioning of the desire of the analyst on the complete circuit of the passe allow us to return to our schema of the passe and add to it two new determining arrows:

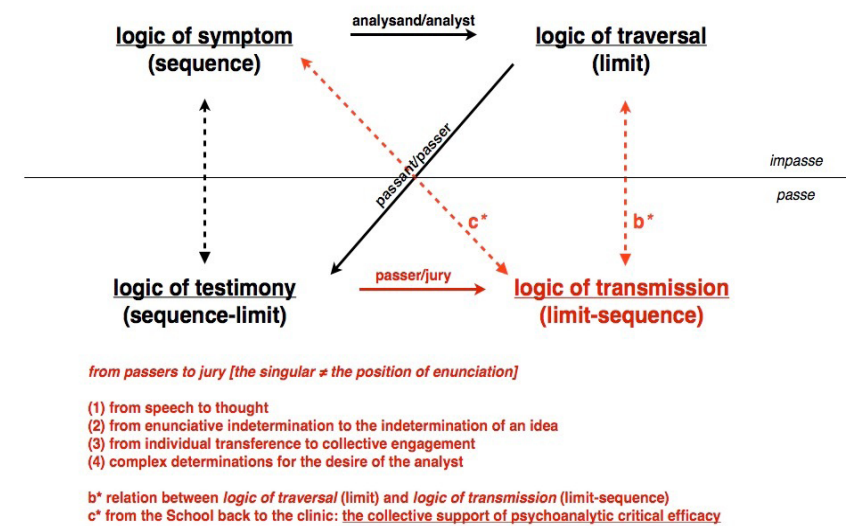


fig.9

Let’s now consider some properties of this schema when considered as a whole, and then proceed to relate it, at least tentatively, to the critical and constructive dimensions of the Žižekian theory of the political act.

3.5 General determinations of the idea

We began the analytic of the passe by following the three shifts in the number of people involved: two (analysand, analyst), then three (passant and two passers) and then five (two passers and three jurors). These shifts led us to discern four different logics which compose the trajectory of one’s analysis: from analysand (symptomatic logic), to “potential” analyst (traversal), to passant (testimony) and to nominated analyst (transmission).

In the description of this circuit, we came to discern certain internal relations between its moments, of two kinds: supplementary and speculative relations. The supplementary relations (a* and b*) bind together the suspension of extrinsic rules, at the level of the impasse, with the construction of new rules, at the level of the passe - the relation between the negative determination of the symptomal logic (rule of free association, which suspends entailment) and the affirmative determination of the testimony (the narrative which forces entailment *because* there is none), or the negative determination of traversal (there is no big Other to serve as addressee of one's singularity) and the affirmative dimension of transmission (the School can be the addressee of these novelties *because* there is no big Other).

The speculative relation (c*) is the one that appears as the completion of the circuit, and takes the form of the speculative judgement "the analyst is the analysand". Throughout the circuit of the passe, which conditions the separative act that constitutes the position of the analyst on the separation from the ineffable (testimony) and the separation from the speaking body (transmission), the form of the desire of the analyst *is enriched with new determinations*. So that the analyst who, having gone through the process, now permits a new analysand to speak under the rule of free association is not the same as the analyst who first allowed him to turn his suffering into a question. The local shift from analysand to analyst, if it goes through the complete circuit of the passe, *brings with it a minimal difference into the position of the analyst itself*.

The consideration of the speculative relation which binds the suffering of an analysand with the desire of the analyst is the nodal point of this whole apparatus.

First, from the standpoint of the challenges posed by one's suffering - in its socio-historical dimension as well as the level of the imponderable indetermination of any given subject - the speculative relation is responsible for the *porosity of psychoanalysis to its time*: by conditioning the analytic act on its capacity to produce new transmissible determinations for the analytic technique or new problems for the theory, the mechanism of the passe attests to the fact that the global orientation of psychoanalysis is locally conditioned by its "real

teachers", the analytic masses⁴⁴. We could say that the circuit of the passe constantly reinvents psychoanalysis not by adding determinations to the unconscious (as if the unconscious was the product of a given culture), that is, not by teaching psychoanalysis *what to listen to*, but rather *how to listen* - by transforming the scope of what an analyst can do in order to locate the effects of the subject and to produce subjectivization. We could call this the *co-variant* dimension of the passe.

Second, the closure of the circuit of the passe is also *the process in charge of the constant production of a homogeneity between the dimension of the symptom - of the site of intervention - and of the desire of the analyst - the intervening principle*. The logics of traversal, testimony and transmission, as we have seen, condition the consistency of the act on certain practices, introducing different levels of otherness into it (the otherness of the passers, of the jury and of the School) - our hypothesis is that this is precisely the process which qualifies the desire of the analyst, sustained at the impasse of the Other by the School, to be *of the same consistency as the otherness of enjoyment*. In other words, it is not simply the silence, the punctuation or the short session which is responsible for analytic effects: it is the position of the analyst, forced into existence by the institutional circuit which gives body to the hypothesis of the unconscious, which infuses such technical strategies of interpretation with their efficacious dimension. Furthermore, the consequences of an interpretation - not only the effects it produced on the space of the analysand's speech, but also the capacity of the analyst to deal with the anguish and the 'horror' of the analytic act - should also be conceived as a consequence whose weight is not really the analyst's sole responsibility to carry, but rather something distributed across the entire analytic field. The efficacy of interpretation would therefore be conditioned on the institutional practice of the passe, the critical powers of psychoanalysis conditioned on its constructive capacity.

The superposition of our first group-schema, in our preliminary considerations of the clinic, with our diagram of the passe could perhaps reveal an important resonance not only at the level of the two basic principles we have established (covariance and homogeneity), but also at the level of each logic that we have discerned:

.....
44 Althusser 1996

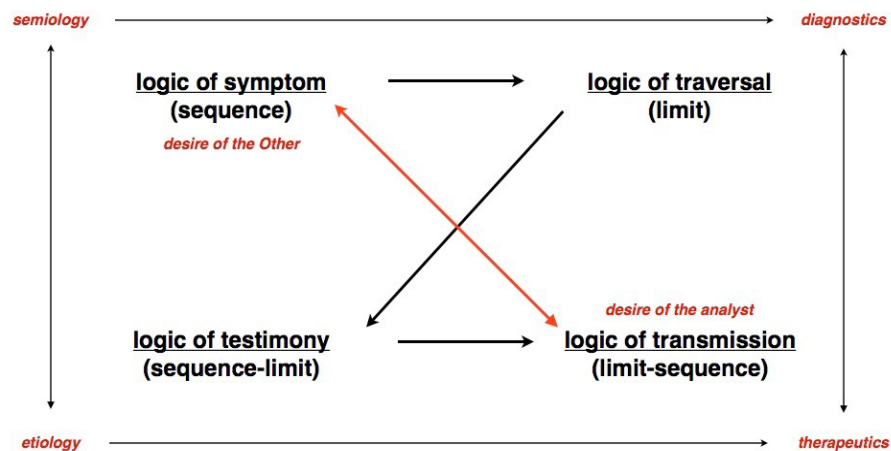


fig.10

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the analytic community appears here as *a community with no inside*⁴⁵. That is, the analysand that undergoes the *passe* only becomes part of the community of analysts *by contributing to a new definition of what it means to belong to the community* - the analysand is recognized only if she introduces an unrecognizable point into the community that comes to recognize her.

We have now some powerful conceptual tools, derived from a different reading of Lacan, with which to construct a consistent presentation of Žižek's second theory of the political act, one in which *the construction of the political idea conditions the critique of ideology*.

3.6 Additional remark: the joke as a formalism

Before we move back to the problem of the political act, let us briefly turn to a theme that is also very dear to the Žižekian critique of ideology: the joke. Lacan himself had already pointed out that the *passe* is structured like a "witz"⁴⁶. And we can now better grasp why: the circuit of the *passe* does in fact include the point of the *sinthome* (testimony) and of the *matheme* (transmission), but *in its totality* it is the joke which is able to articulate itself in all the logical modalities at stake in this idea. To help us visualize this, I suggest the following comic quartet:

⁴⁵ On this point, please refer to *Vers un Signifiant Nouveau: Our Task after Lacan* in Hamza 2014

⁴⁶ Lacan 1975

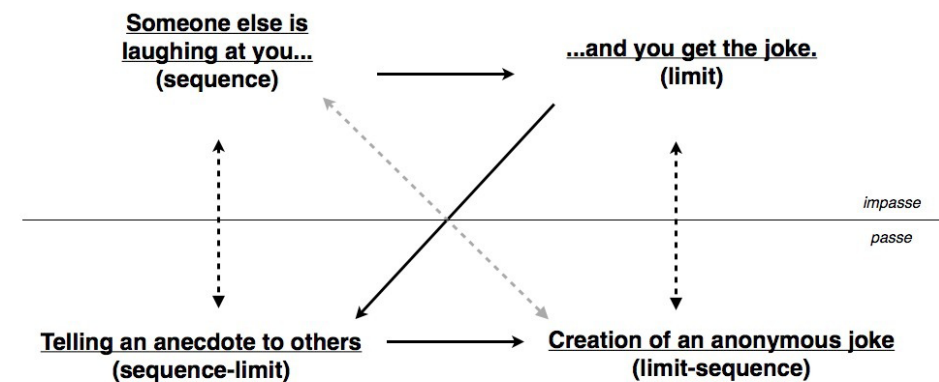


fig.11

At the level of the symptom, it seems like the joke is on me: there is an Other who enjoys at the expense of my suffering, someone else who has access to the consistency which my own identity lacks. At the limit-point of analysis, the unknown frame of the joke (which others could laugh about, but I couldn't) suddenly "falls" into the joke - the joke is still on me, but I get the punchline which, until then, was solely accessible to an unknown enjoying Other. At the point of the laughter, the analysand and the Other have something in common. The logic of the testimony puts this joke, which is woven out of my suffering, to the test of a first transmission, still made effective by the fact that the analysand (the *passant*) is the one to tell it: the joke takes the form of an anecdote, a fragment from one's life which is able to produce in others the same laughter that it produced first on the supposed Other (symptom) and then on the analysand (traversal). Finally, the logic of transmission separates the joke from the anecdotal character of being told by someone who has personal investment in it: the joke *becomes anonymous* - that is, it becomes a joke proper, one that can be told by anyone to anyone, without losing its power. It is crucial to note, furthermore, that the anonymous joke produced at the end of the process is *homogenous* with the joke at the entry point of the circuit - the joke invented by I-don't-know-who and enjoyed by an unknown other, even though I am trapped in the middle of it.

Comedy is not only "plastic" enough to mold itself into each one of the four logical moments of the *passe*, it is also quite special in its capacity to think the last and most fragile of these moments - the passage where the singular novelty produced by an analytic process

manages to detach itself from the guarantee provided by the body of the analysand:

“what is at stake [in the comic spirit] is not simply the universal value of a statement (of its content), but the universalizability of the place of enunciation itself. In this case, the place of enunciation does not undermine the universality of the statement but becomes its very internal gap, that which alone generates the only (possible) universality of the statement.”⁴⁷

Neither the matheme nor the sinthome allow us to articulate this paradoxical inversion: they both hide the productive dimension of psychoanalysis proper under the auspices of science (the universal transmissibility of the matheme) or of literature (the singular narrative resistance of the sinthome), and neither one of these two approaches manages to think the proper psychoanalytic circuit which binds the subject as *supposed* (symptom, traversal) to the subject as *support* (testimony, transmission), and therefore to highlight the strange (and mostly unexplored) movement through which a form which parasitized someone’s body can come to be a new thought which anybody can engage with. The joke, on the other hand, circulates not only between the critical and the constructive, but also between the subject as encrusted in the body of a speaking being and the idea of a subject supported by the body of the School - a circuit which alone justifies the psychoanalytic claims to universality:

“A new joke acts almost like an event of universal interest: it is passed from one person to another like the news of the latest victory”⁴⁸

4. The political act is the greatest obstacle to its own consequences.

The concept of “parallaxian shift” is perhaps the most complex one in Žižek’s work - to the point of the philosopher himself stating that the relation between dialectical and parallaxian logics might very well be

47 Zupančič 2008: 60

48 Freud 2002

understood as the limit of his philosophical thinking⁴⁹.

In *The Parallax View*, the parallaxian operation is defined as a *bracketing which produces an object*⁵⁰: a cut which separates, within a space, that which is reality and that which frames it, while, through this very process of framing, producing a fundamental impasse to this division - an object that is neither reality nor fantasy, but *real*. However, the crucial point is that the field in which this cut has been introduced could have been “bracketed” in a different way, producing a different totality and a different impasse - while, at the same time, *remaining materially homogeneous with the previous, but ontologically heterogenous bracketing*. In this sense, the concept of parallax requires us to think an operation which ties together *two spaces with no outside* - that is, two spaces which overdetermine the very “space of spaces” in such a way that the other space simply has no ontological dignity from the standpoint of the first, and therefore makes it impossible for the two to be thought together. We are not talking about a “point of real” - in the sense of Derrida’s *difference* or the Lacanian *non-relation*, something like “pure difference” - but rather of the confrontation of two totalities structured by different *forms* of such an irreducible difference.

Perhaps the best example of this impossible space is the one composed of psychoanalysis and politics. In his brilliant text *Freud and the Political*⁵¹, Mladen Dolar suggests precisely such a model: psychoanalysis thinks its own act as always coming *too soon* - that is, as the act of opening the space for the subject to take a step at her own risk - while politics thinks its act as always coming *too late* - the act of naming something which already took place, of intervening within the structure of the mass to extract from it the new consistency of a political organization. The crucial point, once more, is that these two acts *cannot co-exist*: psychoanalytic and political thinking *map the same material point of impasse*, the break with the symbolic order, *through different forms of impasse*: the former, as the (im)possibility of inconsistency, as an object which is both cause and product of the Other’s constant suturing of the the place of the subject, the latter, as the (im)possibility of consistency,

49 Žižek 2010: 58

50 Žižek 2006: 56

51 Dolar 2009

as a political body which is redoubles the place of the Other without relying on the law or on the vicissitudes of identification.

Psychoanalysis and politics cannot be put in relation because they are simultaneously too close, to the point of coinciding in the locus of their acts, and too far away, to the point of rendering each other invisible from the perspective of their respective concepts of totality. The concept of parallax was developed in order to account for this *impossible* shift of perspective between incommensurate totalities - an operation which is impossible in the strict sense, given that, from the standpoint of where we begin from, the space to which we turn next is simply not an ontologically consistent destination.

Consider, for example, the form and content of fantasy in psychoanalysis: it matters little in the analytic practice that the scenes of exclusion or exceptionality which usually abound in the phantasmatic space are quite commonly articulated out of the same “stuff” as the political discourse. The phantasm is the locus of the *private transgression* which sustains the *public observance of the law*, but, even though it is ultimately an obstacle to true political change⁵², the scene of fantasy *does in fact* testify to the vocation of politics to articulate an exceptional life, a life “at the risk of the law”. The problem is that, for the analytic treatment, this fact is simply irrelevant - from the standpoint of the analytic position, politics is a particular “cultural formation”, devoid of its singular status. If an analyst were to recognize the political potential of fantasy - its utopian character, for example - it would simply get in the way of actually accomplishing the act which could open the space for a true political potential. On the other hand, from the standpoint of political thinking, the juridical, social or rebellious tonalities of the Other scene could tell us a lot about the sort of political intervention which would be capable of engaging subjects in a new form of political organization - but this potential shines through in the precise measure that we “bracket” the concern with the form of fantasy, with the role of the Other in the maintenance of the singularity of the subject's enjoyment and so on⁵³. Furthermore, while both psychoanalysis and

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52 As Todd McGowan has brilliantly put it, the greatest obstacle to (public) revolutionary activity is to already consider oneself (privately) revolutionary - see chapter 8 in McGowan 2013

53 A great example of such treatment of the phantasm can be found in Santner 1997, where the material of Schreber's delirium is considered from the standpoint of a different “bracketing”, that of the

politics recognize in this exceptional phantasmatic point, at the edge of the symbolic space, their common point of intervention, the former measures the success of its interventions by the dislodging of symbolic identifications towards a self-different non-identity (inconsistency), while the latter does so by the establishment of new forms of identification without identity (new consistency).

For a philosophical project so profoundly conditioned by both of these fields of thought, it would inevitably become necessary to develop a concept capable not only of rendering legible the productive passage from these extra-philosophical procedures into philosophy proper, but of conceiving of the *immanent incommensurability* between them. The problem, however, is that this linkage would most likely have to reflect itself within philosophy in one of two ways: either it requires philosophical thinking to alternate between the conditions at stake (i.e. “reminding” psychoanalysis of its political surplus, and then politics of its analytic effects) or it requires us to maintain that the concept of parallax has no theoretical power, given that the novel legibility it allows for can never be verified or thought within the field it operates (since it relates un-relatable fields which have no ontological “closure” from the standpoint of the other). In order to avoid these two limitations, the parallaxian shift must be able to demonstrate its operative value within *one single field of thought* - which is precisely the merit of many of the great insights of *The Parallax View*. For example, the concept of parallax allows us to simultaneously preserve and traverse the incommensurability between politics and economy within Marxist thinking itself:

“Is not the ultimate Marxian parallax, however, the one between economy and politics— between the “critique of political economy,” with its logic of commodities, and the political struggle, with its logic of antagonism? Both logics are “transcendental,” not merely ontico-empirical; and they are both irreducible to each other. Of course they both point toward each other (class struggle is inscribed into the very heart of economy, yet has to remain absent, nonthematized—recall how the manuscript of *Capital* volume III abruptly ends with it; and class struggle is ultimately “about” economic power relations), but this very mutual implication is twisted so that it prevents any direct contact

theological impasse at the heart of modernity's political project.

(any direct translation of political struggle into a mere mirroring of economic “interests” is doomed to fail, as is any reduction of the sphere of economic production to a secondary “reified” sedimentation of an underlying founding political process).”⁵⁴

The tremendous insight to be gained from this presentation is derived from its capacity to locate the two “transcendental” logics within one sole field, so that the philosophical apprehension of this parallaxian shift is not conditioned by the two deadlocks we have mentioned above. A careful reader of *The Parallax View*, however, will note that the book leaves us in want of an equivalent presentation of psychoanalysis. We lack a complete psychoanalytic thinking of the parallax, one that would provide us with a consistent picture of the analytic act and the analytic procedure thought in their own incommensurabilities - and, in fact, the first obstacle in the way of such presentation is that we usually do not even consider such an incommensurability to take place within psychoanalysis to begin with. Nevertheless, if we are to seriously consider the requirements for a renewed theory of the political act that appear with the “second period” of Žižek’s work, we simply cannot do without a presentation of psychoanalysis which strives to immanently locate therein both of the dimension of the act and the dimension of its “day after”.

What I would like to suggest, in the guise of a conclusion, is that the idea of the *passe*, whose basic components have been sketched above, could help us situate the parallaxian shift within strictly psychoanalytic considerations. The complex schema that we have presented in this text allows us to structure the “critical” and “constructive” dimensions of psychoanalysis precisely as two mutually-excluding movements which map the same point of *impasse* in different and incongruous ways.

Our investigation began with the division of the four “logical moments” of the *passe* into two greater sections⁵⁵: those which revolve around the *impasse* of the Other, and those which pass through it.

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54 Žižek 2006: 55

55 We have purposefully avoided exploiting certain direct resonances with Lacan’s own presentation of this division, for example, when he proposes the distinction between “psychoanalysis in intension” and “psychoanalysis in extension” - see Lacan 2001: 246

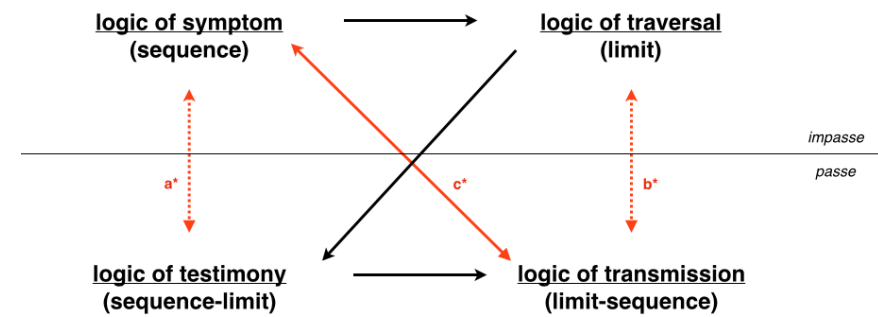


fig.12

On the one hand - the one which is most clearly associated with the everyday practice of analysis - we have the sequential process which is framed by transference, both in its symptomal formations and in its punctuations, and the limit-point of the traversal of fantasy. On the other - the side which depends most clearly on the analytic School - we have the operation which gathers together the previous sequence and its limit-point under a delimited testimony, and the sequential and infinite task of transmitting the novelty presented by this fragile fiction as a challenge to the renewal of analytic thinking. The central question that could be posed at this point - one that we have purposefully avoided until now - is the following: *but where is the analytic act to be situated in this schema?*

A first answer is that the analytic act belongs to the moment of the traversal of fantasy, to the point of being equivalent to it. This solution, which is perfectly adequate to the conceptual framework of the “Millerian” period of Žižek’s work, implies that the analytic act belongs strictly to the clinical framework and that the process of construction which follows from it - the testimony of one’s analytical trajectory and the moment of transmission within the School - is ultimately extrinsic to the phantasmatic scene interrupted by the act. In his seminar on Lacan, from 1994, Alain Badiou proposes an interesting characterization of the anti-philosophical nature of Lacanian psychoanalysis based precisely on this way of locating the act: reduced to a singular mediation between a “knowledge that does not know itself” (symptom, fantasy) and the “mathematic knowledge” (testimony, transmission), the analytic act *does not contribute to thought*⁵⁶. The act remains a purely negative

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56 Badiou 2013: 171

vanishing mediator that does not divide psychoanalytic procedure between knowledge and truth, but between two forms of knowledge, with two different relations to truth: at first, there is a repetitive failure of knowledge to know truth, and then, after the act, the very absence of truth in knowledge, marking their disjunction, serves as the proof of the act's efficacy. This is, at its most basic, the ground for the criticism that psychoanalysis (and, consequentially, Žižek) can only think a destructive and essentially negative theory of the act, a rupture whose only possible destiny is to be re-intergrated in the symbolic.

However, considering the resources that were developed through this presentation of the *passe* in psychoanalysis, I believe that have now the means to propose a different solution to the problematic localization of the analytic act.

When we crossed the threshold dividing the first from the second part of the diagram, the driving force and the measure of effectivity behind the two later logical moments was that of *divesting the singularity of the act from its uniqueness* by separating it from the ineffable (through the testimony) and from the unicity of the speaker (through transmission). The concept of parallax becomes central here because it allows us to describe the “constructive practices of the *passe*” as a process of re-actualizing the “critical practices of the *impasses*” from the standpoint of a different *bracketing* of the act.

In short, both the testimony and the transmission of the *passe* treat the analytic act that takes place at the limit-point of analysis as *being itself fantasmatic* - that is, as carrying a surplus which, from the previous standpoint, that of clinical work, was simply invisible. From the perspective of the logic of traversal, there must be a moment of pure withdrawal and rupture with the symbolic order, but from the perspective of the logic of the testimony, which is opened by this act of withdrawal, the necessary “depth” and exceptionality of the act becomes an obstacle to its proper efficacy and the dissolution of this spectre becomes part of the criteria of success of the analytic act itself. In other words, what the circuit of the *passe* requires us to think is a parallaxian shift that intervenes twice, and in a twofold way, at the same point: first, the act locates the intervention at the point of inconsistency in the Other, but from the standpoint opened by this very act, the act comes to stand in for everything that must be worked through and emptied out in

order for psychoanalysis to confront the truly novel kernel produced by the analytic process. To paraphrase the famous text by Laplanche and Pontalis - *Fantasme originaire, fantasmes des origines, origines du fantasme*⁵⁷ - we could say that the parallax shift at the heart of the analytic procedure marks the shift, at the point of the act, from the *traversal of fantasy* to the *fantasies of traversal* - a *collective* fantasy (given that it concerns the current criteria of what the analytic School considers to be the end of analysis) that must be traversed once more, but whose traversal points no longer towards the real of speech, the singularity of the subject, but towards the real of thinking, and the singularity of an idea.

This second solution is one which immanently ties together the theory of the act as traversal and the theory of the “day after” without falling prey to two serious dangers: the first, that of treating the analytic act as something positive or driven by a particular aim, the other, that of improperly importing Badiou's theory of fidelity into analytic considerations. We avoid the former, because we maintain the act as a vanishing mediator, but supplement it with a contradictory clause: that the negative moment of the traversal *be itself negated* and its singularity confronted with a common, affirmative dimension. We avoid the latter, because the Žižekian theory of affirmation, unlike the Badiouian concept of fidelity, is not concerned with forcing an indiscernible mark into the world, but rather with *effacing it* - as we have seen, this is what the operators **a*** and **b*** in our diagram actually articulate⁵⁸. In a certain sense, the first lesson that can be extrapolated from our purely psychoanalytic presentation of the *passe* to a political theory of the act in line with Žižek's later developments is that *the political act is the greatest obstacle to its own consequences*.

Finally, the last operation included in the schema - the arrow **c***, which we have previously called the “speculative relation” - binds together these two opposing or contradictory sides of the act (as traversal of fantasy and as a fantasy of traversal). As we have attempted to show, it is this last “vector” leading from the School back to the clinic which is responsible for the constant reinvention of psychoanalysis, for the necessary actualization of its otherness, so that the clinic

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57 Laplanche & Pontalis 1998

58 We propose that this *affirmation as effacement* was already known by Hegel under the name of *reconciliation*.

might also keep itself effective and homogenous to the otherness onto which it seeks to intervene. And, insofar as this speculative return is indispensable to the complete presentation of the analytic procedure, it is also the vector which forces us to conceive of the two un-related spaces of analytic critique and construction as intrinsically connected - two incommensurable totalities touching at the point of a parallaxian act.

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