

The Trojan Castle: Lacan and Kafka on Knowledge, Enjoyment, and the Big Other

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Abstract: There are only three passing references to Kafka in the entirety of Lacan's vast oeuvre. In this article, I scrutinise these passages in their context and show how they can nonetheless throw light on key aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis. More generally, through a comparative reading of Lacan's Seminars and Kafka's *The Castle* and *The Burrow*, I introduce a number of pivotal psychoanalytic notions such as the object *a*, the big Other, the fantasy of absolute knowledge, and surplus-enjoyment. The article closes with an outline of Lacan's epistemological, ethical, and political stance in his visceral opposition to the so-called university discourse, the contemporary late-capitalist Castle.

Key words: Lacan; Kafka; object *a*; big Other; knowledge; surplus-enjoyment

“At the table we were to do nothing except eat, but you cleaned and trimmed your fingernails, sharpened pencils, dug in your ears with your toothpick. Please understand me correctly, Father, these would in themselves have been utterly insignificant details, they only came to depress me because they meant that you, a figure of such tremendous authority for me, did not yourself abide by the commandments you imposed”

Kafka, *Dearest Father*

“Le névrosé veut que, faute de pouvoir – puisqu'il s'avère que l'Autre ne peut rien – à tout le moins il sache”

Lacan, *L'identification*

“[...]Those three words 'as you know'”

Kafka, *The Castle*

1

“For the last time psychology”:² Kafka's resistance to psychoanalysis is well known. The question as to how his verdict should be understood – or as to whether it allows for any legitimate interpretation in the first place – has long been debated. Even limiting ourselves to the views, and respective overall stances on psychoanalysis, of two among the most

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1 This material was first presented as a seminar at Jnanapravaha Mumbai (December 2016), the Freud's Dream Museum, St Petersburg (April 2017), and the Freud Museum, London (October 2017). I wish to thank the participants for their questions and comments.

2 Kafka 2012, p. 198.

influential German-speaking Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century we are faced with opposite assessments. On the one hand, Arendt assumes a priori that Freudian readings of Kafka's work misconstrue it in an even "cruder" fashion than those of the "satanic theological" variety (in brief, those which presuppose that the kernel of his fictions lie in the domination of legal bureaucracy as a transcendent "instrument of lawlessness").³ On the other hand, while being equally suspicious of theological approaches, Adorno goes as far as maintaining that not only should Kafka's own words not tempt us to accept that "Kafka has nothing to do with Freud", but that, by "taking psychoanalysis more exactly at its word than it does itself" – for instance, by highlighting *à la lettre* the dimension of the "incommensurable, opaque details, the blind spots", where the ego is dissolved – Kafka transvaluates his very verdict and "snatches psychoanalysis from the grasp of psychology".⁴

2

In spite of their temporal, geographical, and cultural proximity, Freud did not spend a single word on Kafka. It has often rightly been argued that the father of psychoanalysis had a rather conservative appreciation of literature. The same clearly did not hold for Lacan, who produced refined commentaries on innovative modernist writers such as Duras and, most importantly, Joyce. Lacan dedicated the entirety of one of his last yearly seminars to Joyce, and widely discussed his writing with reference to some of the most important tenets of his psychoanalytic theory and practice: the letter, the Name-of-the-Father, the symptom, and the now clinically topical idea of "not-triggered", or "ordinary" psychosis.⁵ However, disregarding Adorno's recommendations, and thus indirectly supporting Kafka's own aversion to psychoanalysis, Lacan appears to be – and most possibly was – uninterested in Kafka. To the best of my knowledge, there are only three passing references to Kafka in the entirety of his vast oeuvre. They do nonetheless deserve considerable attention. Precisely because of their circumstantial origin – their being "opaque details", if not veritable "blind spots", in a constructive Adornian-Freudian sense – they can symptomatically throw light on key aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially when read together.

3

The first passage appears in Seminar II (1954-1955). It is actually not Lacan who explicitly refers to Kafka, but Hyppolite, in dialogue with Lacan. Due to a somewhat Kafkaesque editorial choice, the sentence in

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³ Arendt 2007, pp. 97-98.

⁴ Adorno 2003, pp. 215-218.

⁵ Lacan 2016.

question was expunged from the official edition of this work – although the rest of Hyppolite's intervention has been preserved. Hyppolite, then a regular participant in the seminars – who incidentally and surprisingly protests: "I'm not Hegelian. I'm probably against" – opposes Lacan's understanding of Hegel's absolute knowledge as a "realization" and "end" of history and as a "more elaborated mastery".⁶ "That depends on what you are going to put under 'mastery'", Hyppolite argues. Hegel must be interpreted. It might very well be that absolute knowledge is experience as such, and not (against Lacan) a "moment of experience" (a final or ultimate moment). That is, Hyppolite specifies, it might very well be that absolute knowledge is "immanent" to every state of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, but consciousness misses it.⁷ In this regard, Hyppolite contends, (a certain interpretation of) Kafka's Door of the Law parable from *The Trial* would provide us with an *incorrect* conception of "a series of stages which are prior to absolute knowledge, then a final stage" – the one the fictional "man from the country" attains only on the verge of death.⁸ Lacan does not mention Kafka in his reply. Probably sensing that the point he has just made on Hegel is naïve, or altogether misleading, he retracts and shifts the focus of his reasoning. What is crucial in Hegel is – Lacan says – first, that absolute knowledge is "embodied in a discourse", and, second, that "discourse closes in on itself, whether or not it is in complete disagreement with itself" – or, as anticipated in Seminar I, that the Symbolic is "a [discursive] order from which there is no exit", it closes in on itself, yet "to be sure, there has to be one [exit], otherwise it would be an order without any meaning".⁹ Such a closure-with-an-exit – i.e. the symbolic order as such – has always been there, "ever since the first Neanderthal idiots" began to speak.¹⁰ Hyppolite now agrees with Lacan.

4

The second – short but lengthier – passage on Kafka can be found in the fourteenth lesson of the as yet unpublished Seminar IX (1961-1962). Lacan discusses Kafka's late short story *The Burrow* (1923) and its protagonist: an undefined animal, probably a badger or a mole, that has constructed a labyrinthine burrow to defend himself from outside intruders, but continues to feel threatened, even in the – significantly named – "Castle Keep" where he has stockpiled his modest yet constant food supply. At times, the animal is urged to exit the burrow, yet when he exits it he can

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⁶ Lacan 1991, p. 70.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 70-71.

⁸ Available at <http://staferla.free.fr/S2/S2%20LE%20MOI.pdf>, p. 54.

⁹ Lacan 1991, p. 71. Lacan 1988, p. 26.

¹⁰ Lacan 1991, p. 71.

never venture too far. He has scented and heard (though only as “an almost inaudible whistling noise”¹¹) potential enemies but has never seen them. He watches the burrow’s entrance for days, which partly reassures him. Yet, at the same time, he also secretly dreams of going back to his pre-burrow life and its “indiscriminate succession of perils”.¹² Dolar has concisely but effectively commented on two of Lacan’s main arguments about *The Burrow*. First, “the most intimate place of shelter is the place of thorough exposure; the inside is inherently fused to the outside”;¹³ this topological model well illustrates the subject’s desire in relation to the desire of the Other. Second, such a topology is not a mere architectonic addition to the subject; in Lacan’s words, it concerns “something which exists at the most intimate of [human] organisms”.¹⁴ That is, there is no pre-burrow life.

5

Moving from these considerations, Dolar soon turns to an intriguing reading of the role of the voice in other works by Kafka. There are, however, at least two further sets of important arguments advanced by Lacan with direct reference to *The Burrow* or in close relation to it, which, moreover, resonate with the cursory remark on Kafka we find in Seminar II.

a) In line with Lacan’s treatment of the Symbolic as a dialectic of closure and exit in Seminar II – and complicating Dolar’s point – not only does any “engagement” or “commitment” with the Other rest on the precondition that “the interior and the exterior [...] open and command each other”, but *this* topological space itself erects “the image of the aisle, or corridor, the image of the entrance and of the exit, and the image of the way out behind oneself being closed”.¹⁵ That is to say, what is at stake is not so much an elimination of the barrier between subjective inside and outside otherness – since, strictly speaking, no subjectivity or otherness precede the building of the burrow – but the fact that this very spatial fluidity goes together with the construction of a “no exit” image.¹⁶ “It is precisely in this relation of closing the way out

11 Kafka 1971, p. 370.

12 Ibid., p. 363.

13 Dolar 2006, p. 313.

14 Available at <http://staferla.free.fr/S9/S9%20L'IDENTIFICATION.pdf>, p. 100 [henceforth SIX].

15 Ibid., pp. 99-100.

16 On close inspection, Lacan’s point here is, more precisely, that the fundamental difference between animals and the human animal (plus Kafka’s “asocial” badger) lies in the latter’s construction

that [...] the engagement [with the Other] is revealed”.¹⁷ Or, as Kafka’s badger nicely puts it at one point, “it is almost as if I were the enemy spying out a suitable opportunity for successfully breaking in”.¹⁸

b) Again in line with Seminar II, and, more specifically here, its juxtaposition of Kafkaesque imagery and the dimension of – discursively embodied – knowledge, the engagement with the Other and its desire inevitably involves a demand¹⁹ (concerning what it wants, but eventually a desperate demand for whatever answer), which the Other – like the subject – cannot answer, or better, does not want to know anything about.²⁰ The demand for absolute knowledge – for a closure without exit – and the desire not know – that there will always be an exit, in spite of the image “no exit” – are the two sides of the same coin. In the last resort, “the Other cannot formalize itself, signifierize itself, except as itself marked by the signifier, or, said otherwise, insofar as it imposes on us the renunciation of any meta-language”.²¹ If the Other does not answer, it is because of the “limitation of his knowledge”. But it is precisely this structural impossibility of the ignorant Other that “becomes the desire of the subject”, to the extent that at the same time the subject manages “to exclude [or suspend/repress] the Other’s non-knowledge”²² (through the erection of the image “no exit”). Kafka’s badger seems to know all this. He assumes his enemy’s knowledge is limited – “probably he knows as little about me as I of him” – and yet, at the very conclusion of the story, he turns the Other’s non-knowledge – and his own previous “I do not know what I want,

of the “no exit” image – i.e. an image of totality – which is somehow unnatural. The topological complication of the false dichotomy inside/outside “is not our privilege” (“ants and termites know it”) and a “natural relation of structure” (ibid., p. 100). Instead, what is peculiar to our species is a certain “misrecognition” (ibid.) of this natural structure, which leads to the “no exit” image (i.e., in brief, the ego as a mental object produced through an alienating identification with the image of the counterpart).

17 Ibid., p. 99.

18 Kafka 1971, p. 364.

19 “The relation to the Other [...] is specified by demand” (SIX, p. 98); “It is from elsewhere that we should begin; from the position of the question to the Other, the question about his desire and its satisfaction” (ibid., p. 97)

20 “So the Other doesn’t answer [*ne répond rien*], except that ‘nothing [*rien*] is certain’, but this has only one meaning, that is, that there is something about which he does not want to know anything [*rien*], which is precisely [the] question [he was asked]” (ibid., p. 102).

21 Ibid., p. 100.

22 Ibid., p. 102.

probably simply to put off the hour” – into the object of his desire: “The decisive factor will be whether the beast knows me, and if so what it knows”.²³

6

In the same lesson from Seminar IX in which he discusses *The Burrow*, Lacan goes on to explain that there are two ways in which the subject can exclude the Other’s non-knowledge. The first is pathologically neurotic and tries to compensate this non-knowledge with an “It is absolutely necessary that you should know” directed at the Other. Such an attempt automatically turns the neurotic into a “victim” of the Other, Lacan adds.²⁴ The second is, at least in principle, non-neurotic and functions according to an “I wash my hands of what you know or what you do not know, and I act”.²⁵ On this basis, I would argue that the badger epitomizes a sort of “ordinary”, or at least “normally” neurotic subjectivity – and this may well account for the utter uncanniness and unpleasantness of this short-story. The badger is most definitely always active: “I had to run with my forehead thousands and thousands of times, for whole days and nights”.²⁶ In spite of continuous doubts, his actions are effective and relentless: “I have completed the construction of my burrow and it seems to be successful”; “in sincere gladness of heart [I] started on the work anew”; “I am still quite fit for all sorts of hard work”.²⁷ Moreover, he is certainly not a “victim” but a predator: “all sort of small fry come running through [the passages], and I devour these”.²⁸ One could at most speak of these traits as displaying an obsessional disposition, which however does not really inhibit him. In the end, the badger washes his hands of what the enemy knows or does not know, and acts. For him, the whole question is indeed finally “whether the beast knows me, and if so what it knows” – this becomes the object of his desire²⁹ – *but* the “whether” marks precisely the point at which the Other’s non-knowledge is excluded, suspended, or, better, repressed (Lacan will speak of “separation” in Seminar XI), in that it opens up a space for choice between alternatives,

23 Kafka 1971, p. 355, p. 378, p. 384.

24 SIX, p. 102.

25 Ibid.

26 Kafka 1971, p. 356.

27 Ibid., p. 353, p. 356, p. 384.

28 Ibid., p. 354.

29 Although it is different from (pre-Oedipal) demand and its unanswerable dimension, (post-Oedipal) desire always remains a desire for *recognition*. We should also bear in mind that Lacan contextualizes the same lesson of Seminar IX in terms of the emergence of desire in the Oedipus complex: “Desire is fundamentally and radically structured through this knot called Oedipus [complex]” (SIX, p. 97).

that is, a space for *possibility*.³⁰ Not coincidentally, Lacan discusses “real” subjective “Möglichkeit”³¹ just a few paragraphs after the one devoted to *The Burrow*. For all these reasons, I have to disagree with Dolar when, in a different article, he associates the badger with paranoia.³² If the badger were a paranoid, he would be paralyzed by the certainty that the less his enemy displays a rationally consistent behaviour, the more he is nonetheless malignantly succeeding in taking over the burrow. For instance, the “small fry” of the short story would not be annoying but ultimately innocuous little animals that dig out unauthorized new channels and do not deserve to be “spared”,³³ but undefeatable emissaries or emissions of the Evil Beast...

7

The third and final time Lacan fleetingly mentions Kafka is in one of the final lessons of Seminar XVI (1968-69). Pre-emptively, it should be stressed that this rich – and difficult – passage evokes both, as in Seminars II and IX, the complexity of the inside/outside (or entrance/exit) relation and of defining a border between subjectivity and otherness, and, as in Seminar II, Hegelian philosophy (the “game of mastery”,³⁴ as Lacan calls the master and slave dialectic in this later context). Let us first focus on the explicit reference to Kafka: Lacan speaks of an “entire population [...] queuing up in front of the Kafkaesque castle of power”.³⁵ He suggests that this image should be linked with another seminal literary image: that of the Trojan horse – an outside object containing something inside, which, when reluctantly brought into the city, is first adulated and soon after causes its destruction. Kafka’s Castle would provide us with a key to correctly interpret the Trojan horse as a symbol of power. What is fundamentally at stake in the latter – Lacan surprisingly

30 So, in the end, we schematically obtain the following – retroactive – ontogenetic sequence with regard to knowledge, which also gives us what is more technically for Lacan the passage from “demand” to full-fledged “desire” (i.e. his reworking of Freud’s Oedipus complex and its resolution):

1 “You (Other) must know!” (demand/frustration);

2 “You do not know!” (privation);

3 A split between two defining statements:

a) “Who cares (about what you know and don’t know)! I know you rascal! (level of self-consciousness / the ego)

b) “But do you know (me) or not?” (level of the unconscious/phantasy – where the “or not” opens the space for possibility/Möglichkeit).

The splitting of this third stage corresponds to the emergence of desire *stricto sensu* (through castration).

31 Ibid., p. 101.

32 See Dolar, “The Burrow of Sound”, available at <http://www.saltonline.org/media/files/232.pdf>

33 Kafka 1971, p. 370.

34 Lacan 2006, p. 369.

35 Ibid.

argues against common readings – is not the Achaeans warriors who will come out of it, but the Trojans who party outside the horse and, most importantly, desire to be “absorb[e]d” by it³⁶ – in his view, like Kafka’s K. and the villagers lining outside the apparently inaccessible castle. Lacan adds that the desire in question amounts to nothing less than the “discontent of civilisation”.³⁷ He then bluntly concludes that these two literary images “have a meaning only if we take into account [object] little *a*”,³⁸ which elsewhere in Seminar XVI he pertinently conceives as an “extimate”, or intimately external, object.³⁹

8

In his works, Lacan makes several references to Troy and the Trojan horse, some of which are quite revealing. In Seminar I, he reminds us that, at the beginning of *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud uses the ruins of Rome as a metaphor for the unconscious. For Lacan, it is rather the ruins of Troy – a city upon which no other city has been built – that encapsulate the linguistic/symbolic nature of the unconscious, that is, the fact that the signifier (“Troy”) cannot be bi-univocally paired up with a thing (a city), but rather gives rise to a permanent “presence-absence” or differential structure (“city/not-city”), itself inseparable from an ineradicable objectal remainder (the ruins). “However little remains of the city of Troy”, its ruins witness to the fact that things that disappear “essentially remain there”.⁴⁰

9

In the unpublished Seminar XIII – which focuses on the status of object *a* – Lacan turns his attention to the figure of Sinon as treated in Dante’s *Inferno*. Sinon is the Greek soldier who pretends to have been abandoned by his comrades in arms; tells the Trojans that the horse is an offering to the goddess Athena; and persuades them to transport it into the city – especially by slyly insinuating that the wooden object is too large to be taken into the city. Endorsing a close commentary on Dante’s treatment

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³⁶ Ibid. The most explicit source on the involvement of the Trojans in the transportation of the horse into the city, their excitement, and their partying is Book II of Virgil’s *Aeneid*: “All prepare themselves for the work and they set up wheels / allowing movement under its feet, and stretch hemp ropes / round its neck [...] Around it boys, and virgin girls / sing sacred songs, and delight in touching their hands to the ropes / Up it glides and rolls threateningly into the midst of the city [...]”; at night “the city is drowned in sleep and wine”.

³⁷ Lacan 2006, p. 369.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 224, p. 249.

⁴⁰ The passage in question has been shortened in the official version of Seminar I. For a more exhaustive transcription, see <http://staferla.free.fr/S1/S1%20Ecrits%20techniques.pdf>, p. 254. Lacan here closely follows the key argument Freud makes when he speaks about the ruins of Rome: “In mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish” (Freud 2001, p. 69).

of Sinon presented by Thérèse Parisot (itself in turn based on Roger Dragonetti’s article “Dante et Narcisse ou les faux monnayeurs de l’image”), Lacan briefly dwells on Sinon’s lies, and by extension on the luring function of the Trojan horse. For Dante, Sinon is twice guilty: not only is he a simulator who feigns to be what he is not (a deserter) but also a perjurer who insults the gods by making up the story that the horse is an offering. Especially in this second sense, he “abuses language” and is implicated – like Judas – in an offence that becomes universally notorious.⁴¹ Lacan observes that Sinon is thus deservedly condemned to inhabit one of “the deepest points of Hell”, and that this concentric yet topological space, defined by the “turning of speech into a fraud”, is precisely what provides us with one of the “necessary coordinates of the object *a*”.⁴²

10

The image of the Trojan horse in Seminar XVI (as similar to that of Kafka’s castle) and its being in close relation, or even identical, with what Lacan calls object *a* are further investigated in a fairly well-known passage from Seminar VIII. Here, Lacan dwells on the *Odyssey*’s original description of the Trojan horse, in Homer’s words, “the horse which once Odysseus led up into the citadel as a thing of guile [...] The Trojans themselves had dragged it into the citadel. There it stood, while the people sat round it, discussing it endlessly to no conclusion. Three suggestions found favor: to cut through the hollow timber with pitiless bronze, or drag it to the edge of the rock and over the cliff, or let it stand there, as a grand offering [ἄγαλμα] to the gods, in propitiation, which is what happened in the end”. Lacan singles out the following strictly interconnected issues:

a) The richness and complexity of the enigmatic signifier ἄγαλμα. In the *Odyssey* and elsewhere, the term does not simply designate a grand “offering”, but also a “trap for gods”, and a “device that catches the eye”. In short, Lacan concludes, the *agalma* is a “charm”⁴³ – which is what prevents the Trojans from ripping it apart to see what lies inside.

b) The dimension of lure and deceit as inextricable from the horse as ἄγαλμα. This is evident both at the conscious level of the Greek’s stratagem and at the unconscious level of the fascination it exerts on the Trojans – which makes them hesitate and thus leads them to ruin.

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⁴¹ Available at <http://staferla.free.fr/S13/S13%20L'OBJET.pdf>, p. 87.

⁴² Ibid., p. 93. Dante’s hell is a paradigmatically “extimate” place: a totally alien universe where, however, sinners are punished eternally in a fashion that fits their most defining sins. To put it bluntly, they suffer their intimate self from the outside.

⁴³ Lacan 2001, p. 175.

c) The horse/ἄγαλμα as an “unusual” and even “embarrassing” object.⁴⁴ This is the case for Trojans and Greeks alike, Lacan specifies.

11

Based on textual evidence – that is, following Adorno, taking Kafka à la lettre – can we read the castle from the homonymous novel as an *agalma*-like object comparable with the Trojan horse as understood by Lacan? There are several elements that strongly support this hypothesis. Although the novel does not abound with descriptions of the outer appearance of the castle, from the outset, K. most definitely cannot take his eyes away from it. He is constantly “looking up”; “he could see the castle above, distinctly outlined in the clear air”; “his eyes fixed on the castle, K. went on, paying no attention to anything else”. When he meets the schoolteacher, the first thing he asks K. is “Looking at the castle, are you?”.⁴⁵ The fascinating building is, at the same time, also described as a cause for disappointment, if not embarrassment: “It was only a poor kind of collection of cottages assembled into a little town [...] The paint had flaked off long ago, and the stone itself seemed to be crumbling away [...] If he had come here only to see the place, he would have made a long journey for nothing much”.⁴⁶ And yet, K. surprisingly concludes that, altogether, “there was something crazed [*irrsinning*] about the sight” – a hallucinatory trait that confirms in broad daylight the first impression he had of the castle upon his arrival in the late evening, when due to the mist and darkness he perceived it as an “apparent void” [*scheinbare Leere*].⁴⁷ This dimension of uncanny captivation and of veiling/unveiling soon translates into the physical appearance and deceitful psychology of the characters most closely associated with the castle, or assumed to be so. For instance, Frieda – who immediately becomes K.’s lover, only to abandon him shortly after – is a “small blonde, rather insignificant, with a sad face and thin cheeks, but with a surprising expression of conscious superiority in her eyes”. Her first interaction with K. is letting him look at the unreachable Master Klamm through a “little peephole”. Not coincidentally, towards the end of the novel, Pepi tells K. that, with Frieda, “he f[ell] in the most obvious trap on the very first evening [...] What did he see in Frieda?”.⁴⁸

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44 Ibid.

45 Kafka 2009, p. 5, p. 10, p. 11, p. 12.

46 Ibid., p. 11.

47 Ibid., p. 11, p. 5 (translation modified).

48 Ibid., p. 35, p. 260.

12

What does K. see in Frieda – and the castle? In Seminar VIII, the main focus of Lacan’s interest on the *agalma*, and his privileged approach to the notion of object *a* (which is here still in the making), is Alcibiades’s description of Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*.⁴⁹ Socrates looks like an ugly and hirsute Silenus (216d), yet he is irresistible for the handsome and proud Alcibiades, who still desperately loves him. Lacan explains that the image of the Silenus should be understood in relation to a “wrapping” that has the shape of a Silenus, or better – in Plato’s own words – to a “small sculptured Silenus” which the Greeks used as a jewellery box.⁵⁰ “What is important here”, Lacan argues, “is what is inside”, the *agalma* as a “precious object”.⁵¹ He adds that this is “an essential topological indication”.⁵² He also importantly specifies that if, on the one hand, the sources never tell us what the *agalma* contained in the otherwise empty casket really is,⁵³ on the other, it is adamant that those who are deemed to possess it are invested with a formidable power: Alcibiades only wants “to do everything that Socrates may have ordered”.⁵⁴ The subject is spellbound by what (deceivably) appears to be in the o/Other (Socrates, Frieda, the castle, the Trojan horse) more than the o/Other itself. At stake here, Lacan concludes, is object *a* as the object of the subject’s desire; or, which is the same, the object of the subject’s desire as the question asked to the o/Other: “Is there a desire that really conforms to your will?”.⁵⁵

13

In Seminar VIII, Lacan continues to discuss at length object *a* as *agalma* in a relatively straightforward fashion.

a) The *agalma* is not simply an icon or image, in the sense that the latter would simply be a “reproduction”, or copy.⁵⁶ Its “special power” can more appropriately be approached if we compare it with the function of fetishes in traditional

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49 For a more detailed reading of Lacan’s interpretation of the *Symposium*, see Chiesa 2006, pp. 61-81.

50 Lacan 2001, p. 170.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p. 171. Lacan also calls the *agalma* a “je ne sais quoi” (“I don’t know what”).

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., p. 173.

cultures, or with the everyday expression “You are my idol!”.⁵⁷ The *agalma* thus preserves a relation to images but what is at stake is a “very special kind of images”.⁵⁸

b) As hinted by the use of the term ἄγαλμα with respect to ex-votos shaped like breasts, the *agalma* anticipates what psychoanalysis will call “partial object”. Against common misunderstandings of this notion, which see it as the “spherical object” that would constitute our counterpart as a whole worthy of our desire, the other becomes the object of our desire only as a “heap of partial objects”, which is far from amounting to a “total object”.⁵⁹

c) In remaining irremediably a partial object, *agalma* witnesses to the subject’s own structural split, that is, his being forcedly determined only by “his submission to language” and the differential logic of the signifier.⁶⁰ *Agalma* can thus never stand for an object of equivalence, transaction, or the “transitivity of goods”. It remains “unbalanced” with regard to all other objects.⁶¹ Yet it is precisely on this unbalance that not only “intrasubjectivity” but also “intersubjectivity” rest.⁶²

d) The non-exchangeable *agalma* structurally goes together with a void. Socrates knows he does not actually possess any *agalma* and that he is “nothing”, or “void” (*ouden*).⁶³ He knows that “there is nothing in him which is lovable” and warns Alcibiades: “You are mistaken” – or, more literally, “undeceive yourself” – “consider things more carefully (ἄμεινον σκόπει)”; “There where you see something, I am nothing”.⁶⁴ Knowing this *ouden* has paradoxical implications. It is because Socrates *knows* he is nothing that he does not love, but this very familiarity with the void gives rise to “non-

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57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p. 174.

59 Ibid., pp. 176-177.

60 Ibid., p. 179.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., p. 180.

63 Ibid., p. 189.

64 Ibid.

knowledge constituted as such, as a void, as the void’s call at the centre of knowledge”.⁶⁵ Socrates is not a badger (who knows how to suspend non-knowledge).

e) In not accepting his luring role of *agalma* (i.e. in refusing to be loved by Alcibiades, since he knows he is nothing) Socrates is in turn luring *himself*.⁶⁶ He “misrecognises the essential function of the aim-object constituted by the *agalma*”.⁶⁷ That is to say, a subject cannot dispose of object *a*: the “triple topology” of subject, other, and big Other cannot do without it.⁶⁸ The badger is eventually wiser than Socrates. As the very lesson from Seminar IX in which *The Burrow* is discussed makes it clear, although “desire must include in itself this void, this internal hole” (in turn “specified in relation to the Law”), the “knot with the Other” necessarily presupposes a “relation of lure”.⁶⁹

14

Throughout Seminar XVI, and especially in and around the lesson in which he mentions the “Kafkaesque castle of power”, Lacan offers us the most advanced conceptualization of object *a*. While his works of the 1950s mostly centre on the passage from the small other (the imaginary counterpart as the origins of the subject’s alienating identifications) to the big Other (the symbolic locus of signifierness, inter-subjectivity, and, in short, “civilization”), starting from the early 1960s and culminating in Seminar XVI, Lacan’s interest shifts to the consideration of this same passage – which is also a link – with regard to the real otherness of object *a*. The title of Seminar XVI is suggestively “From an Other to the other”. Here the otherness of object *a* – as a luring void – is primarily discussed in terms of “surplus enjoyment”, which in short amounts to the “discontent” of civilization, and its being somehow content with this discontent. I am tempted to add that, through object *a* as surplus enjoyment, Lacan now scrutinizes the topology of the burrow and its complex dialectic of exit/“no-exit” and non-knowledge/knowledge precisely from the stance of the badger’s limited “supplies”, his “modest way of life”, whereby “it is the single huge accumulated mass of food that seduces

.....
65 Ibid., p. 190.

66 Lacan is very adamant on this point (ibid., p. 194, p. 198).

67 Ibid., p. 194.

68 Ibid., p. 182.

69 SIX, pp. 97-98.

[him]”.⁷⁰The “Castle Keep”, an underground and profaned version of K.’s Castle, is wrongly reputed to satisfy this image of completeness. However, in an instance of psychoanalytic clairvoyance, the badger also rightly acknowledges the following: “It is stupid but true that one’s self-conceit suffers if one cannot see all one’s stores together, and so at one glance know how much one possesses”.⁷¹The idiotic image of complete enjoyment remains structural.

15

Lacan explicitly derives the notion of surplus enjoyment (*plus-de-jouir*) from Marx’s notion of surplus value.⁷²To put it very simply, just as surplus value corresponds to the extra value that generates profit for the capitalist insofar as the value of a commodity exceeds that of the worker’s labour – that is, the worker is not fully remunerated for his labour – so surplus enjoyment involves a certain “renunciation of enjoyment”⁷³ on the part of the subject, who confers it to the Other. This renunciation should be seen as a fundamentally mythical renunciation of full enjoyment (Lacan evokes here again the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave). Yet, at the same time, it should also be taken as a structural “effect of discourse”, whereby the subject supposes that in the field of the Other there is a “correlative”, “a surplus enjoyment [that] is established [and] captured by some”.⁷⁴ Strictly speaking, object *a* is in turn not identical with surplus enjoyment; it is what is “produced”, as a *loss*, from surplus enjoyment as the “function” of the renunciation of enjoyment.⁷⁵The subject’s object *a* – as the cause of his desire – is the Other’s supposed surplus enjoyment.

16

The Castle is undoubtedly a novel about work and the renunciation of enjoyment. Poor life-conditions, exploitation, precarious employment, and even some precursory form of zero-hour or long-probation contracts seem to apply almost universally to the villagers, who accept them. For example, Pepi, a temporary replacement for Frieda at the Castle Inn, says her new job “is very tiring” and she “will hardly be able to stand

.....
⁷⁰ Kafka 1971, p. 354, p. 358.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 357.

⁷² See Lacan 2006, pp. 16-17.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 17-19.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁵ “Surplus enjoyment is the function of the renunciation of enjoyment under the effect of discourse. This is what gives its place to object *a*” (ibid., p. 19); “Nothing can be produced in there without the loss of an object” (ibid., p. 21).

it”.⁷⁶When she is sent back to her previous job as a chambermaid – “an insignificant job with [even] few[er] prospects” – she does not complain: “She didn’t seriously expect to get very far, she had come to terms with what she had already attained”.⁷⁷ Barnabas indefatigably travels to the castle’s vestibule to find some work: “There seems to be an excessive number of employees there, not everyone can be given work every day”; yet, “after all, Barnabas is given work to do”.⁷⁸ He is said to be, like many others, a “semi-official employee”,⁷⁹ and this should be enough to content him. As for K., Klamm’s letter enjoins him not to desist from his “zealous labours”, but his appointment as land-surveyor is only the outcome of an administrative mistake: “You have been engaged, you say, as a land surveyor, but unfortunately we don’t need a land surveyor. There wouldn’t be any work for you here at all”.⁸⁰ Interestingly, although K. initially sees his alleged position as prestigious and well paid (“I am the land-surveyor, and the Count sent for me”; “the arrival of a land-surveyor was no small matter”; “they say [the Count] pays well for good work”⁸¹), he soon renounces it, without putting up too much of a fight. He instead accepts an unpaid “temporary post” on probation as school janitor.⁸² Paradoxically, it is only when the schoolteacher would like to dismiss him that K. strenuously fights and manages to keep his unremunerated job.

17

In *The Castle* there is also a clear connection between the peculiar occupations of the masters and surplus enjoyment. While the villagers – especially those who fell from the grace of the castle – are suspended in a limbo of extenuating precariousness and *work* in officially *not* working, they also invariably assume their masters to be always extremely busy. Commentators often misleadingly claim that this is just an “ideological” façade that covers for the masters’ idleness. What is rather at stake here is something more complex: the masters do *not* work in officially *working*. Emblematically, Klamm (as seen through the peephole by K.) sleeps whilst working: “Mr Klamm was sitting at a desk in the middle of the room [...] He had a long, black moustache, and a pair of pince-nez, set on his nose at a crooked angle reflecting the light, covered his eyes [...] ‘He’s asleep.’ ‘What!’ cried K. ‘Asleep? When I looked into the room

.....
⁷⁶ Kafka 2009, p. 89.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 253.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 158.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 196.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 106, p. 55.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 6, p. 7, p. 9.

⁸² Ibid., p. 82.

he was awake and sitting at the desk.' 'He's still sitting there like that,' said Frieda. 'He was already asleep when you saw him'".⁸³ We later learn that the masters are used to sorting out their business and even granting audiences while lying in bed, since for them "there is no difference between ordinary time and time spent working".⁸⁴ This obliteration of any division between private and public life seems also to account for the shared assumption – and acceptance of the fact – that the masters must have unlimited sexual access to the village girls ("very likely no official was ever rejected"; "we know that women can't help loving officials when the official turns to them"⁸⁵). Frieda sleeps with Klamm when he visits her workplace at the Castle Inn. Sortini tries to seduce Amalia during a fire brigade festival. Before losing her on the eve of their wedding, K. cogitates that if Frieda can never really forget her former role as Klamm's lover, this is because "nowhere before had [he] ever seen official duties and life so closely interwoven, so much so that sometimes it almost seems as if life and official duties had changed place".⁸⁶ K. then continues with an open question that beautifully condenses the structural discrepancy Lacan sees between the subject's projection of surplus enjoyment onto the big Other and the void actually lying at its – dysfunctional, ignorant, and impotent – core: "What was the meaning [...] of the power, so far only formal, that Klamm had over K.'s services compared with the power that Klamm really exerted in K.'s bedroom?".⁸⁷ This tension is further substantiated by two other unrelated passages from the novel. On the one hand, "Klamm acts like a military commander with women, he orders now one of them and now another to come to him", and "the officials' love is never unrequited".⁸⁸ On the other, and simultaneously, "official decisions are as elusive as young girls".⁸⁹

18

In Seminar XVI, Lacan presents the big Other as structurally inconsistent: "What is the Other? It is [...] the place where the subject's discourse *would* become consistent", yet "in the field of the Other there is no possibility for a full consistency of discourse".⁹⁰ Discourse does

.....
83 Ibid., p. 38.

84 Ibid., p. 228.

85 Ibid., p. 173.

86 Ibid., p. 55.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid., p. 173.

89 Ibid., p. 153.

90 Lacan 2006, p. 24 (my emphasis).

not totalize itself; the big Other always remains "elusive".⁹¹ The big Other basically stems from the "existence of language".⁹² But signifierness and the symbolic networks it founds are such only because no meta-language guarantees them from the outside. There is no Other of the Other. Does it mean that there is only *one* Other? No, because otherwise "it would not be the Other".⁹³ To put it differently, as Lacan already anticipated in much simpler terms in Seminar II, the big Other must have an "exit". By Seminar XVI, Lacan thinks that the "exit" is concealed with surplus enjoyment in what he calls "fantasy". Here the subject – split by signifierness – maps himself as the object *a* of the Other's surplus enjoyment (that is, as the object the subject has allegedly "lost"). More importantly, this very concealment, which is acquired at the price of non-autonomy, needs to be repressed.⁹⁴ For the subject to emerge as an ego (or self-consciousness) he has to believe in the consistency – or lawfulness – of the big Other. The big Other thus occupies both the unconscious reservoir of the surplus enjoyment supposedly stolen from the subject and the conscious field in which enjoyment has been "purged".⁹⁵ The semblance of consistency can be reached – in the ego – through "naïve faith" only if the subject reduces the Other to an equivalent counterpart with whom he shares "non-enjoyment, misery, helplessness, and solitude".⁹⁶

19

For Lacan, the subject has fundamentally two ways of dealing with the inconsistency of the Other: perversion and neurosis. These can certainly manifest themselves in "pathological" ways – in Seminar XVI, voyeurism and exhibitionism are discussed at length – but they more importantly indicate at this stage of Lacan's work structural modes of subjectivation. The third mode, psychosis – which is, strictly speaking, not a mode of subjectivation – simply forecloses the problem – with terrible consequences – and blindly relies on the Other's consistency (as Schreber shows, even the dissolution of the "order of the world" would rest on a superior Order of God). Lacan's basic point in Seminar XVI is that the (inconsistency of the) Other and object *a* are coextensive.

.....
91 Ibid., p. 59.

92 Ibid., p. 226.

93 Ibid., p. 357.

94 Lacan in fact tells us that the inconsistency (or "exit") of the big Other "is the place of *Urverdrängung*" (ibid., p. 59), that is, primal repression.

95 Ibid., p. 225.

96 Ibid., p. 24.

Again, the big Other is not a “whole”; it does not “contain itself”.⁹⁷ And yet, the ensuing “lack, bar, gap, or hole” in the Other functions also as “a certain kind of lure, which is absolutely fundamental”.⁹⁸ The subject can eventually “measure” the field of the Other as a One precisely “through” the subject’s own loss of object *a*,⁹⁹ which is supposed to be possessed by the Other in the guise of surplus enjoyment, and on which the subject phantasmatically maps himself as a split being of desire. This move or measurement is particularly clear in perversion. In perversion “surplus enjoyment is unveiled in a bare form”.¹⁰⁰ To put it bluntly, the fantasy is here acted out. But this acting out is in turn a veiling of the void in the Other. The pervert “consecrates himself to corking the hole in the Other”,¹⁰¹ its inconsistency. He thus enjoys *for* the Other. In contrast to this, in neurosis the fantasy is repressed, since it stages an alleged theft of enjoyment. While the pervert openly aims at turning the Other into One – he is a “defender of the faith” in its existence, Lacan adds – the neurotic “would like to be himself One in the field of the Other”.¹⁰² The neurotic’s strategy entirely revolves around narcissism. His problem is that object *a* cannot be transposed to the imaginary level, that is, added to the specular/narcissistic image that always escapes him – and ultimately depends on a “retroactive illusion” of full enjoyment.¹⁰³ The neurotic then prefers not to enjoy rather than enjoy for the inconsistent Other. This further renunciation – which he attempts to impose on the counterpart – and the fragile semblance of consistency that accompanies it finally amount to his own paradoxical enjoyment.

20

The Castle could be read, with good reason, as a most potent allegory of perversion in its broadest sense – one that far surpasses the Silling castle of Sade’s *The 120 Days of Sodom* and its limited focus on morbid sexuality. The inconsistency of the masters goes to the point that Klamm not only works whilst sleeping – as Lacan has it, “the consistency of a system means that when you enunciate a proposition in it, you can say ‘yes’ or ‘no’”¹⁰⁴ – but he is even “different before and after he has drunk a

.....
97 Ibid., p. 311, p. 380.

98 Ibid., p. 252.

99 Ibid., pp. 132-133.

100 Ibid., p. 23.

101 Ibid., p. 253.

102 Ibid., p. 253, p. 260.

103 Ibid., p. 261.

104 Ibid., p. 98.

beer”, and there are those who swear that “Momus is Klamm”.¹⁰⁵ And yet this inconsistency only reinforces the landlady’s defense of his existence and unpardonable behaviors: she gladly gave herself to him for three nights eighteen years earlier and, although she ignores why she was no longer “summoned”, she remains firmly devoted to the “gentleman” through what K. cannot but call a “terrible fidelity”.¹⁰⁶ For the landlady this fidelity goes without saying since she will never lose her “rank” as Klamm’s mistress.¹⁰⁷ Such an indissoluble special relationship with the inconsistent Other as the object of its surplus enjoyment is in turn fetishized by the landlady through “three mementoes” of Klamm’s visits: a photograph – significantly enough, of somebody else – a shawl, and a nightcap – indeed, “the gentlemen sleep a great deal”. The landlady adds that “without those three things I could probably never have borne it here for so long, probably not even for a day”.¹⁰⁸ In turn, the very scene in which Frieda lets K. look at Klamm through a peephole, and the reflection of the light on the pince-nez “covered his eyes”,¹⁰⁹ strikingly conveys what, in Seminar XVI, Lacan says about voyeurism – which he takes as a paradigm of the pervert’s “corking the hole in the Other”. What matters for the voyeur is interrogating in the Other what cannot be seen, what “the Other as such is missing”, and, most importantly, “fix” it by means of a supplement, that is, the voyeur’s own gaze as object *a*.¹¹⁰

21

It is clear that K. is, at least initially, alien to perversion as a mode of subjectivization. As the landlady rightly suggests after being informed about the peephole incident, he is in “no position to see Klamm properly”.¹¹¹ Unsurprisingly, when K. later returns to the Castle Inn alone and searches for the peephole, “it was so well fitted that he couldn’t find it”.¹¹² If, following Lacan, we generally understand neurosis as a desire “to be One in the field of the Other”, this definition appears to fit K. well. His ultimate aim is to speak to Klamm, clarify all misunderstandings concerning his work status, and be given what is due to him. When this soon proves increasingly difficult, he clearly privileges “non-enjoyment”

.....
105 Kafka 2009, p. 156, p. 160.

106 Ibid., p. 73.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., p. 77, p. 38, p. 72.

109 Ibid., p. 36.

110 Lacan 2006, pp. 254-255.

111 Kafka 2009, p. 47.

112 Ibid., p. 88.

over the enjoyment for, and through, the Other. For example, rather than enjoying the services of the two assistants sent from the Castle – however unpredictable and utterly obscene they may be – he prefers to dismiss them and dreams of a life of hard toil with Frieda where he would nonetheless preserve his autonomy and even some power: “All my future prospects – sombre as they may be, still, they do exist – all this I owe to Frieda. [...] I have gained in stature, so to speak, and that in itself is something. Little as it all may mean, I have a home, a position, and a real work [as unpaid janitor] [...] I am going to marry her and become a member of this community”.¹¹³ A member of this community: that is, a monadic – and modestly immodest – element of the supposedly consistent field of the Castle.

22

The more specific neurotic mode in which K. confronts the Castle throughout the novel appears to be obsession. In Seminar XVI, and in the very lesson in which he refers to the “Kafkaesque Castle”, Lacan provides one of his most detailed – and clearest – accounts of the obsessional stance vis-à-vis the inconsistency of the Other. The basic trait of the obsessional neurotic is that he desperately and incessantly tries to *negotiate* with the inconsistent Other. As Lacan has it, “any enjoyment is for him thinkable only as a treaty with the Other”, and this treaty is always imagined as conclusive and indisputable, as a “fundamental whole”, which would establish him as One in the field of the Other.¹¹⁴ That is to say, in wanting to come to *terms* with the Other, the obsessional would like to occupy the impossible position of “the *signified* of the barred Other, *s(A* barred)”.¹¹⁵ Obviously, the problem is that, given the inconsistency of the Other, every contract and settlement that has apparently been agreed by both parties can only give rise to a spiraling series of “payments”, to “something that never equals itself”.¹¹⁶ In obsession, the neurotic enjoyment of non-enjoyment materializes as an enjoyment of the “ceremonies of debt”;¹¹⁷ of what, for the subject, is still *owed* to one or the other party.¹¹⁸

113 Ibid., pp. 174-175.

114 Lacan 2006, p. 335.

115 Ibid., p. 292 (my emphasis).

116 Ibid., p. 335.

117 Ibid.

118 I cannot discuss here Lacan's equally fascinating treatment of hysteria in the same context. This would inevitably also involve a close reading of the character of Amalia from *The Castle*.

23

There is no doubt that K. attaches enormous importance to the letter in which Klamm states that he is “taken into the count's service” and personally reassures him that he will be “always ready to oblige him”, since he is “anxious to have contented workers”.¹¹⁹ After the mayor informs K. that the letter has no official status, and he is thus jobless, he protests that this “throws out all my calculations” and “I and perhaps the law too have been shockingly abused”.¹²⁰ K. does not certainly “want any token of favour from the castle”; he just wants his “rights”, that is, “work[ing] at a little drawing-board in peace as a humble land surveyor”.¹²¹ K. discusses at length his case with the mayor and, to strengthen his claim, eventually focuses on the authority of Klamm's signature. The mayor does not dispute its validity but informs K. that the letter really says “nothing binding”: insofar as it contains the phrase “as you know”, “the burden of proof of the fact that you have been appointed lies on you”.¹²² Upon reading the letter for the first time a few days earlier, K. himself already felt oddly responsible for his predicament: “The letter did not, after all, gloss over the fact that if there were any disagreements it would be the fault of K.'s recklessness – it was said with delicacy, and only an uneasy conscience (uneasy, not guilty) would have noticed it in those three words ‘as you know’, referring to his entering the appointment of the castle”.¹²³ Without K. ever stopping to regard himself as the victim of an “abuse of power”, this position of a priori and inextinguishable indebtedness, or at least of “uneasy conscience”, is perhaps what explains the fact that he receives the mayor's news (about his being dismissed before taking office) feeling “firmly convinced that he had expected some such information”.¹²⁴ And yet, we are told that the story of how he was appointed by mistake surprisingly also “entertains” K.; the mayor, whose unsuccessful attempt to produce K.'s file epitomizes a ritual of incompetent bureaucracy (he too is lying in bed; his wife looks in vain for the relevant document among a heap of unprocessed paperwork), seriously rebuts that he is “not telling it to entertain [K.]”.¹²⁵ Similarly, K.'s failed negotiation with the angry schoolteacher to obtain a salary as janitor ends with K. “laughing and clapping his hands”.¹²⁶ Their disagreement

119 Kafka 2009, pp. 23-24.

120 Ibid., p. 56, p. 64.

121 Ibid., p. 68, p. 62.

122 Ibid., p. 65.

123 Ibid., p. 25.

124 Ibid., p. 56.

125 Ibid., p. 59.

126 Ibid., p. 86.

unsurprisingly focuses on who is doing a favor to whom, and, conversely, who is indebted. K.'s "strange" assumption here is that "if someone [the schoolteacher] is forced to accept another person [K.], and that other person allows himself to be accepted, he [K.] is the one doing the favour".¹²⁷

24

The rest of the novel follows K. in his abortive attempts to be granted an interview with Klamm. As Frieda has it, his "sole aim was to *negotiate* with Klamm",¹²⁸ and even his apparent feelings for her should be considered in this perspective. In the process, he becomes more and more indebted to the villagers, up to the point that his assistants (who, among other things, spy on him when he makes love to Frieda and subsequently seduce her) submit a grievance against him to the Castle. And yet, when K. has the unexpected chance to solve his increasingly complex predicament with Bürgel – a well-informed secretary of the Castle – he falls asleep. K. literally ends up *in bed with the Other*: "[K.] had sat down on the bed at once on being invited, abruptly and *unceremoniously*, leaning against the bedpost".¹²⁹ K. cannot stay awake even though Bürgel tells him that "matters here are certainly not in such a state that any professional skill ought to be left unused".¹³⁰ More to the point, in sleeping on behalf of the insomniac secretary ("it's out of the question for me to sleep now"¹³¹), K. masks the void in the Other and quite evidently enjoys for and through it by – of all things – *groping* Bürgel: "K. was asleep [...] his troublesome consciousness was gone [...] Bürgel no longer had a hold on him"; it was rather "he [K.] [who] just groped out towards Bürgel from time to time [*nur er tastete noch manchmal nach Bürgel hin*] [...] No one was going to rob him of that now. He felt as if he had won a big victory".¹³² What we witness here is not a passage from obsession to perversion – which are for Lacan mutually exclusive modes of subjectivation – but the functioning of the unconscious perverse core of the fantasy (i.e., enjoying being the object *a* of the Other's enjoyment) that is present also in neurotics, albeit in a repressed form.¹³³

.....
127 Ibid.

128 Ibid., p. 138 (my emphasis).

129 Ibid., p. 226 (my emphasis).

130 Ibid., p. 227.

131 Ibid., p. 226.

132 Ibid., p. 231 (my emphasis; translation modified).

133 In this sense, Lacan speaks of fantasy as such in terms of a *père-version*. It could be argued that, towards the end of the novel, K. actually switches to a strictly speaking perverse mode of subjectivation when, in seeing a servant tearing up a document and thinking that it could be his own file, he

25

Bürgel explains in detail to a sleepy K. how the contradictory but somehow effective "negotiations" of the Castle are convolutedly carried out (the term *Verhandlung*, "negotiation", is repeated six times in less than four pages).¹³⁴ The expert secretary concludes that "the world corrects itself in its course and keeps its balance; it's an excellent, incredibly excellent arrangement, although dismal in other respects".¹³⁵ Only at this point, K. can no longer decide whether Bürgel is "amateurish" and "know[s] nothing" or, on the contrary, he has a "certain understanding of human nature".¹³⁶ Throughout most of the novel K. supposes that the Castle *knows* his case perfectly well, in spite of countless indications to the contrary. K. trusts what others tell him: or better, he relies on the big Other's supposed knowledge, which would grant him a precise position and status within it. A telephone voice from the Castle "knows" K. as "the eternal land surveyor"; one of the first things Frieda tells him is "I know everything about you. You are the land surveyor"; even the mayor seems to know him in advance and welcomes him with a "this is our land surveyor!".¹³⁷ K. thus assumes that "they knew all they need to know about him at the castle".¹³⁸ But, as the landlord retorts, K. does not know "what the castle is like". K. agrees with him but adds "all I know about the castle is that up there they know how to pick a good land surveyor",¹³⁹ and this should be sufficient for him to become "a member of this community". In Seminar XVI, Lacan points out that for the subject to establish himself in the field of the big Other it is necessary that the latter is in turn established as "the place where *that* is known". He specifies that this dimension is valid for "everybody"; it "gives a foundation to everybody", although it is particularly "prevalent" in the case of obsessional neurotics.¹⁴⁰ The big Other emerges as a "whole" primarily as "there is some place where everything that has happened, *that* is known".¹⁴¹ This paves the way to the further issue as to whether the structural – and universal – supposition that "*that* is known" holds also

nonetheless concludes that "even if it had been an irregularity, it could be forgiven" (ibid., p. 244).

134 Ibid., pp. 229-233.

135 Ibid., p. 236.

136 Ibid., pp. 227-228.

137 Ibid., p. 22, p. 37, p. 55.

138 Ibid., p. 8.

139 Ibid., p. 9.

140 Lacan 2006, p. 329.

141 Ibid.

reflexively: does “*that* is known” know itself? The answer is negative.¹⁴² And yet, even in the case of perversion, where the subject *knows* that the Other does *not* know that it knows and nonetheless acts as if he did not know it by enjoying for the Other,¹⁴³ what is not assumed is that “the Other has never known anything” – also and especially about the “satisfactions that are delivered to [it] by means of the inclusion of [object] *a*”.¹⁴⁴ Due to their sexual intimacy, Frieda believes she knows Klamm “very well”, but Klamm remains “indifferent”, and has not “summoned” her.¹⁴⁵ More generally, in terms of the big Other’s structural relation with knowledge, we are told that nobody “can keep anything from Klamm” (as the place where “*that* is known”), yet, at the same time, Klamm “never reads any of the [records]”.¹⁴⁶ “Klamm forgets at once”.¹⁴⁷

26

Along with the big Other, object *a*, and surplus enjoyment, knowledge is arguably the central theme treated in Seminar XVI. This still mostly remains uncharted territory, with commentators preferring to focus on the treatment of knowledge in the more famous Seminar XVII and its theory of discourses. Again, Lacan’s basic point in Seminar XVI is that the big Other is the place where knowledge is “illusorily” articulated as One.¹⁴⁸ The gap or flaw that renders the Other inconsistent amounts fundamentally to a gap of knowledge – which in turn basically means that the differential structure of language is such only insofar as it always lacks a signifier (or has an “exit”).¹⁴⁹ But this does not entail that “the Other does not know”; “the Other knows” in the sense that it corresponds to the very locus of the unconscious structured like a language.¹⁵⁰ Rather, the Other does not know that it knows; that is, the big Other is not another subject.¹⁵¹ It is the neurotic subject who, precisely while questioning the truth of knowledge, turns the Other into a subject supposed to know who would enclose an absolute knowledge. In this way, importantly,

.....
142 Ibid.

143 That is, the pervert’s logic follows the principle “Je sais bien, quand même” (“I know very well, but nevertheless”).

144 Ibid., p. 303.

145 Kafka 2009, p. 36, p. 40, p. 47.

146 Ibid., p. 102.

147 Ibid., p. 77.

148 See Lacan 2006, p. 349.

149 Ibid., p. 59, p. 320.

150 Ibid., p. 362.

151 Ibid.

“knowledge [becomes] the enjoyment of the subject supposed to know”, of a master who would know what he wants.¹⁵² More specifically, Lacan’s – sketchy but fascinating – arguments in Seminar XVI coalesce around four closely related issues concerning the triangulation between knowledge, enjoyment, and power:

- a) The conjunction between knowledge and power in Antiquity, and the latter’s professed extraneousness to enjoyment.
- b) An appraisal of the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave in terms of knowledge, power, and enjoyment.
- c) The disjunctive short-circuit “knowledge-power” [*savoir-pouvoir*] in capitalism and the parallel creation of a “market of knowledge” or, better, “knowledge-enjoyment” [*savoir-jouissance*] in the university discourse.
- d) The epistemological, ethical, and political stance of psychoanalysis in this context.

27

Lacan states that the inconsistency of the Other has always been “the same”.¹⁵³ What changes historically is the way in which the speaking animal relates to it. Lacan draws attention to how, surprisingly, the speaking animal has managed for a long time to “ward it off” effectively by means of (animistic and religious) forms of knowledge.¹⁵⁴ For instance, what is fundamentally at stake in the paradigmatic case of ancient Greek *episteme* is the wager that “all the places where there is no count” – i.e., all the manifestations of the inconsistency of the Other – will one day be reduced by wisdom to the “constitutive intervals” of a cosmic harmony.¹⁵⁵ This take on the alleged order of the Other goes together with the assumption that knowledge equals power. The wise-men who know how to “count” – especially in the “handling” of their emporia – must hold power, and what they distribute is by definition just.¹⁵⁶ Emporia and empires go together. In turn, the assumed equation between knowledge and power allows the wise-men of Antiquity to maintain a particular relation to enjoyment, which Lacan once defines as “innocent”. They somehow

.....
152 Ibid., p. 334, p. 63, p. 353, p. 385.

153 Ibid., p. 49.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid., p. 296.

156 Ibid., pp. 296-297.

“withdraw” from enjoyment – as the triad given by the loss of the object a, surplus enjoyment, and the retroactive projection of absolute enjoyment – since, in line with their epistemic wager, what matters the most is finding a balanced pleasure (*hedone*) that is harmonious with the cosmos.¹⁵⁷ Pleasure consists of being “in tune” with a nature of which men are less the masters than the celebrants.¹⁵⁸ This attitude leads them to both accept apparently unnatural pleasures as in the end justifiable through what these very pleasures would give the “measure” of – that is, again, an ultimately harmonic cosmos – and promote a form of asceticism, or *otium cum dignitate*, whose motto is “not too much work”.¹⁵⁹

28

For Lacan, the great merit of Hegel is having articulated the disjunction between knowledge and power – which had always been there to begin with – and the incompatibility between power and enjoyment – which the Greeks did not sense as problematic. Hegel would, intentionally or unintentionally, demonstrate how:

a) The Cartesian cogito as the mastery, or power, of “I know that I think” and “I am where I think” actually conceals a more structural “I do not know where I am”.¹⁶⁰ In Hegel’s dialectic, thought as such ultimately amounts to “I cannot think that I am where I want to be”.¹⁶¹ “I am where I think” is thus an illusion, and there is no freedom of thought.¹⁶² That is, the master’s freedom – the power he has acquired by risking his life for the sake of recognition – is always already subjected to, and separated from, the unfolding of knowledge in the progress of history, which is carried out through the work of the slave.

b) Knowledge originates in the slave. The knowledgeable slave serves the powerful master. Yet thanks to the work of the slave the master only enjoys a “recuperation” of enjoyment “that has nothing to do with enjoyment but with its loss”.¹⁶³ Although Lacan claims Hegel fails to see this, his dialectic

.....
¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 332, p. 110.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 110-111.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 115.

would clearly stage how, fundamentally, power entails a “renunciation of enjoyment”.¹⁶⁴ By risking his life, the master would paradoxically leave enjoyment to the slave, who in fact accepts to be dominated “for the safety of his body”.¹⁶⁵ We should therefore not confuse the – mythical yet somehow still present in Antiquity, Lacan specifies¹⁶⁶ – enjoyment of the slave, of which we know nothing, and the surplus enjoyment the master obtains from the slave, which initiates the master’s desire to know.¹⁶⁷ The Hegelian dialectic of master and slave applies structurally also to the classical world and its effective veiling of the inconsistency of the Other by means of the use of pleasure.

29

Seminar XVI, delivered in 1968-1969 a few months after the uprising of May ’68, offers Lacan’s most detailed discussion of capitalism. The discourse of the capitalist, which will never be properly spelled out in later works, is investigated in close connection with the discourse of the university, which will be systematized in Seminar XVII. The two discourses are to a large extent presented as synonymous or at least complementary. The basic novelty of capitalism lies in a different arrangement of knowledge and power in structure and the way in which this gives rise to a universalization of surplus enjoyment. In the capitalist-university discourse, the disjunction between power and knowledge is both maintained (in brief, the master-signifier S1 cannot but remain structurally distinct from the battery of signifiers S2 as knowledge; the master cannot but be an idiotic “dickhead” [*con*]¹⁶⁸) yet also as such short-circuited. In other words, knowledge is now in the position of the agency of discourse, which was previously occupied by the master. As Lacan puts it, “the master [has been] elevated to knowledge”, and this “has enabled the realization of the most absolute masters one has ever seen since the beginning of history”.¹⁶⁹ In parallel, the “liberation of slaves” only “enchains them to surplus enjoyment”, that is, to the enjoyment of non-enjoyment.¹⁷⁰

.....
¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 115-116, p. 396.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 370.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 385.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 396.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

Lacan's tentative account of the rise, consolidation, and functioning of the capitalist discourse oscillates between economic considerations (in dialogue with Marx and Althusser), epistemological remarks (concerning the triumph of modern and contemporary science and technology), clinical observations (about the neurotic-perverse discontent of current civilization), and a ferocious critique of bureaucracy as epitomized by the University apparatus. In accordance with the claim that psychoanalysis is not "a science without knowledge" but rather aims at constituting itself as "a knowledge that is not One", that is, as a knowledge of how the truth of inconsistency "creates knowledge",¹⁷¹ his arguments are willingly left as open suggestions. It is nonetheless possible to isolate a number of quite well defined – and ambitious – recurring themes:

a) Since the emergence of the Galilean-Newtonian paradigm, the evolution of science – as a direct descendant of the knowledge of the slave – has constituted an increasing "problem" for traditional forms of power.¹⁷² Power becomes more and more aware that "positive power" lies "elsewhere", that is, in the knowledge of science as structurally disconnected from power.¹⁷³

b) Capitalism attempts to provide an answer to this predicament. On the one hand, as rightly sensed by Marx, the real economic novelty of capitalism amounts to its creation of a universal "labor market"; it is only on the basis of the latter that surplus value acquires a sense.¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, the same market also functions as a "market of knowledge", where an otherwise indomitable science is epistemologically "unified" through the "value of knowledge".¹⁷⁵ This enables the master-capitalist to finally somehow "manage to know what he is doing"; yet, at the same time, his "liberal" power can only be fundamentally "anarchic", or "divided against itself", since it becomes inextricable from the function of science in a *savoir-pouvoir*.¹⁷⁶

.....
171 Ibid., p. 204, p. 275.

172 Ibid., p. 238.

173 Ibid., p. 240.

174 Ibid., p. 17.

175 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

176 Ibid., p. 396, pp. 239-240.

c) The "homogenization" of knowledge (through the value of knowledge) leads to an "ordering" of enjoyment, or *savoir-jouissance*.¹⁷⁷ The replacement of the work, or know-how, of the slave with the surplus value produced by the worker – which renders him the "damned of the earth" – corresponds to the reduction of the slave's enjoyment – the enjoyment of the way in which the products of his work changed the world, following Kojève's Hegel – to the worker's *non*-enjoyment of surplus enjoyment.¹⁷⁸ Due to this mounting separation of work from enjoyment, the "I" of the worker is more and more characterized by frustration.¹⁷⁹ Knowledge is no longer primarily bound to work but to the price of knowledge, and this is precisely "the price of the renunciation of enjoyment".¹⁸⁰

d) This very universalization of surplus enjoyment as the enjoyment one does not have but supposes to be enjoyed by some others – which affects also and especially the capitalist himself; let us not forget that the logic of surplus enjoyment involved the master in the first place – is at the same time what relates the subject to enjoyment as taken from the "edge of its purity".¹⁸¹ The subtraction of enjoyment from work does indeed open, or better make obvious, the hole of enjoyment, but by the same token it also projects enjoyment as an "infinite point".¹⁸² This is the point/hole of the "discontent" of our civilization;¹⁸³ of the endless and self-phagocytizing accumulation of surplus enjoyment *for* the Other/Capital (perversion); and of the equally paralyzing – as ineffectively antagonistic – "sacrifice"¹⁸⁴ of surplus enjoyment *against* the Other/Capital (obsessional neurosis).

e) The place where knowledge is given a value and commodified – which in turn makes the "ordering" of

.....
177 Ibid., p. 40.

178 Ibid., p. 396.

179 Ibid., pp. 37-38, p. 239, p. 333.

180 Ibid., p. 39.

181 Ibid., p. 333.

182 Ibid.

183 Ibid., p. 40.

184 Ibid., p. 372.

enjoyment possible – is the University.¹⁸⁵ The latter is a specific institution, the “Alma Mater” of capitalism,¹⁸⁶ yet also a more general apparatus that sustains the bureaucratic arrangement of the capitalist discourse. In both senses, the University manages knowledge as the Other’s surplus enjoyment.¹⁸⁷ While the idea that knowledge could be constituted as a totality that is as such satisfying is “immanent to the political as such” – it clearly also applies to both ancient *episteme* and the dialectic of master and slave – the “problematic” and dangerous specificity of the University lies in the fact that it installs knowledge in the “dominant” position of discourse.¹⁸⁸ This “all-knowledge” [*tout-savoir*] as power, that is, bureaucracy, does not obviously know everything, but nonetheless renders “more obscure” the truth of the inconsistency of the Other – which was still evident in the master and slave dialectic, where the master is such only as a split subject.¹⁸⁹ All-knowledge represses, or better disavows, the structural impossibility of mastery – its inherent deadlock – and, with the same move, renders mastery “more unassailable, precisely in its impossibility”.¹⁹⁰ Power thus becomes anarchically more powerful. This is especially the case because in perversely “calculating”, “counting”, and eventually accumulating surplus enjoyment for the Other, bureaucracy successfully manages to “do a semblance of surplus enjoyment, [which] draws quite a crowd”.¹⁹¹

31

While we cannot assess here Lukács’s harsh contention that Kafka’s modernism is “bourgeois” and fundamentally nihilistic, and that his real subject-matter is “man’s *impotence* in the face of [...] the diabolical character of the world of modern capitalism”,¹⁹² it is safe to say that his work pitilessly reports on bureau-crazy, that is, literally, the power of

.....
185 Ibid., p. 39.

186 Ibid., p. 399.

187 This point is explained more clearly in Seminar XVII. See for instance Lacan 2007, p. 14.

188 Ibid., p. 31.

189 Ibid., pp. 31-32.

190 Ibid., p. 178.

191 Ibid., p. 81.

192 Lukács 1964, p. 41 (my emphasis).

offices. As Adorno has it, Kafka’s fictions – and *The Castle* in particular – stand as an “information bureau” of the current “human condition”.¹⁹³ Evidently, in *The Castle*, actual masters such as Klamm (a “Chief Executive”¹⁹⁴) are unreachable and should not be disturbed. In turn, the Castle’s master of masters is merely a name, significantly enough “Count *Westwest*”.¹⁹⁵ Not only does the schoolteacher (speaking in French...) forbid K. to utter his name before “innocent children”, as if there were something essentially corrupt about the count, and the landlord is “afraid of being interrogated about” him, but, most interestingly, the villagers do not even display any image of him: “‘Who’s that?’ asked K. ‘The count?’ He was standing in front of [a] portrait [...] ‘Oh no,’ said the landlord, ‘that’s the castle warden’”.¹⁹⁶ In *The Castle*, concrete power clearly belongs to wardens, deputy-wardens, clerks, attorneys, secretaries, special secretaries, and assistant secretaries. When K. defiantly asks the village mayor whether all he knows of the castle are its offices, the latter resolutely and proudly answers: “Yes [...] and they are the most important part of it”. The officials themselves wish each other well by saying: “May you be as well off as a servant”. At one point Olga self-evidently concludes that “*servants are the real masters in the castle*”.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, in *The Castle*, the chain of command whereby the power a servant exercises on another servant is itself subjected to the power of a third servant, and so on with no master in view, stands out primarily as a chain of alleged all-knowledge. In considering K.’s case, which he “know[s] all about”, the mayor relies on the “excellent memory” of his wife Mizzi, and in turn reports to Sordini, a bureaucrat “well-known for his conscientiousness” – whose office, however, is characterized by the sound of “huge bundles of files stacked one above the other [...] crashing to the floor”.¹⁹⁸ The mayor plainly explains to K. that there is one basic “working principle” underlying the Castle’s administration: “the authorities [...] do not even consider the possibility of mistakes being made”.¹⁹⁹ In this way, as Olga later adds, even in the case of “very dubious officials”, what cannot but be taken for granted is “how great [their] power and knowledge [is]”.²⁰⁰ After all, how can one prove that a mistake “is really a mistake in the long

.....
193 Adorno 2003, p. 211.

194 Kafka 2009, p. 24.

195 Ibid., p. 5 (my emphasis).

196 Ibid., p. 12, p. 9, p. 10.

197 Ibid., p. 63, p. 194 (my emphasis).

198 Ibid., p. 55, p. 60, p. 59, p. 61.

199 Ibid., p. 60.

200 Ibid., p. 200.

run?”.²⁰¹ Since “there are *only* supervising authorities [*Kontrollbehörden*]” with no ultimate authority – i.e., there is no ultimate master-signifier in the dominant position of discourse – it should rather be assumed that the “consistency of the offices involved” is especially admirable where “no such thing appeared to be present”.²⁰²

32

Unlike Mizzi, who remembers everything, the master Klamm “forgets at once” and “sleeps a great deal”.²⁰³ But, for the villagers, Klamm *is* Momus, his authoritative secretary. The rumors are in the end somehow correct. Although the name of the count should not be uttered – as this could evidence his absence – Momus does not hesitate to speak “in Klamm’s name” (the name of the count’s Chief Executive), when, in his vain search for the truth of knowledge, K. the foreigner dares to question the consistency of the Castle.²⁰⁴ This disavowal of the impossibility of mastery, which as such reinforces mastery and supports knowledge-power by delegating the role of the master (the count can only be named via “Klamm” and Momus can only speak in Klamm’s name), is also reflected in the topology of the Castle itself. The latter is both omnipresent and, at the same time, a missing center – which functions as an agalmic/luring void. On the one hand, Olga notices how “we all belong to the castle, and there is no distance at all, no bridge to be gaped”.²⁰⁵ This absence of distance is confirmed by the fact that her brother Barnabas – who holds the “high office of a messenger” in spite of the precariousness of his job at the castle – “passes [...] barriers in the offices [...] and they look no different from those he has never crossed, so it can’t be assumed [...] that beyond those last barriers there are offices of an essentially different kind from those into which Barnabas has been”.²⁰⁶ On the other hand, and concomitantly, Olga cannot avoid asking: “Is what Barnabas does service to the castle? He certainly goes to the offices, but are the offices really the castle?”.²⁰⁷ The least one can conclude is that the barriers of the castle should not be “imagined as distinct dividing-lines”.²⁰⁸ Accordingly, Barnabas can both “doubt that

.....
201 Ibid., p. 60.

202 Ibid., p. 60, p. 54 (Kafka’s emphasis).

203 Ibid., p. 77, p. 38.

204 Ibid., p. 99.

205 Ibid., p. 172.

206 Ibid., p. 107, p. 155.

207 Ibid., p. 154.

208 Ibid., p. 155.

the official who is described there as Klamm [is] really Klamm” and, at the same time and without contradiction, be unable to describe “in what way that man was different from the usual idea of Klamm” – or better, he describes the official in question, “but that description tallies exactly with the description of Klamm that we know”.²⁰⁹

33

To use a seminal expression that appears repeatedly in Seminar XVI, and that echoes with the discussion of *The Burrow* in Seminar IX, the exploited workers/villagers are thus “inside-outside” [*dedans-dehors*]²¹⁰ the Castle of alleged all-knowledge – ultimately as the object *a* of its surplus enjoyment. But for such a topology to take place, the *masters* themselves must first be “absorbed” by the Other. According to Lacan, this is precisely what is at stake in the myth of the Trojan horse, or, more to the point, in the passage from the fall of Troy – which is inevitable – to the construction of the Kafkaesque Castle. In Seminar XVII, he in fact returns one final time to the Homeric story, and says that the “interior”, or “guts”, of the Trojan horse lay the “foundations” for the “fantasy of a ‘totality-knowledge’” [*savoir-totalité*].²¹¹ He also specifies that the horse can take Troy only if the Trojan masters “knock on it” from the outside.²¹² This remark should be read together with the lesson from Seminar XVI where Lacan associates the Trojan horse with the Kafkaesque Castle. Here his complex and only hinted arguments revolve around two series of considerations. First, the Trojan horse epitomizes how the Other, the battery of signifiers (S2), is initially constituted as “*one* Other” in the guise of an “empty set” (or better, as one Other *in* the Other-that-is-not-One).²¹³ Second, this logical movement is only possible insofar as phenomenologically the pure prestige of being a master (S1) always already involves the master’s redoubling in the ideal image of the knowledgeable slave (“it is the slave who is the ideal of the master”; “the master is himself as perfectly enslaved as possible”²¹⁴). The image of the other is here no longer simply, as in Lacan’s early work, an image of specular perfection in whose place the subject would like to be – by being recognized by the other but also by ambivalently intending to obliterate him. As such this image also and especially circumscribes the slave’s unknowable desire as an agalmic void – that is, again, as an empty

.....
209 Ibid., p. 155, p. 157.

210 See especially *ibid.*, pp. 279-293.

211 Lacan 2007, p. 33.

212 *Ibid.* (translation modified).

213 Lacan 2006, p. 369, p. 363.

214 *Ibid.*, p. 366.

set – that initiates the master's desire to know and his erection of the Castle: "Through this lure, through this process [*procédé*] of the 1 [the S1] that equals itself to 1" – i.e., equals itself to the 0 as 1 of object *a* – "in the game of mastery, the Trojan horse absorbs always more of them in its guts, and this becomes more and more expensive. That is the discontent of civilization".²¹⁵ In other words, as soon as the object *a* emerges as the cornerstone of the subject's unconscious identification in fantasy, "the entire mechanism takes place there", and "the process [*processus*]" – the Kafkaesque *Prozess* – "does not stop until the end".²¹⁶

34

How does psychoanalysis confront the process/*Prozess* of the anarchically powerful Castle of supposed all-knowledge? In Seminar XVI, Lacan openly presents psychoanalysis as, firstly, an *epistemology*, whose primary task is to contrast all-knowledge and the subject supposed to know.²¹⁷ The fact that there is no universe of discourse (no meta-language or absolute knowledge) does not entail that discourse is impossible; on the contrary, psychoanalysis evidences that the flaws of discourse, the inconsistency of the big Other circumscribed as an agalamic void, initiate and sustain signification; in this sense, the field of the Other equates with "the field of truth insofar as truth does not know itself".²¹⁸ Secondly, focusing on the productive impasse of knowledge, psychoanalysis also stands as an *ethics* of the real. What is real and must be assumed is that "the desire of the Other cannot be formulated"; that the subject's desire originates precisely at this point as a desire (not) to know; and that surplus enjoyment as structurally *savoir-jouissance* calls for circulation, expenditure [*dépense*] and sharing, not reinvestment and accumulation.²¹⁹

35

Seminar XVI is also surprisingly rich in *political* suggestions – possibly even more than Seminar XVII. On the one hand, the facts of May 1968 prompt Lacan to pair up capitalism and revolution as the two conflicting sides of the hegemony of all-knowledge in our political world: the emphasis on revolution follows from the frustration caused by the "ordering" of enjoyment as surplus enjoyment. This has no doubt a symptomatic value in pointing at the current generalized discontent

.....
215 Ibid., p. 369.

216 Ibid. I think that it is in this context that we should read the "infinite *anteriority* of the Kafkaesque Process" Lacan enigmatically mentions in Seminar IX shortly after discussing *The Burrow* (SIX, p. 101, my emphasis).

217 Lacan 2006, p. 48, p. 281, p. 344, pp. 346-348, pp. 349-352.

218 Ibid., pp. 14-15, p. 199.

219 Ibid., p. 190, p. 274, p. 109. See also Lacan 2007, p. 82.

of civilization, but one still does not realize that capitalism *requires* revolutions (and wars) to keep science at bay.²²⁰ On the other hand, although he disputes any idea of teleological "progress", Lacan clarifies that psychoanalysis should not advocate a "restraining" of science, which would automatically render psychoanalysis "reactionary".²²¹ It is absolutely not a matter of going back to an old configuration of power, that of the master's discourse – also because this discourse has always already undermined itself in favor of knowledge. If revolution shows a "strict and circular solidarity [...] with the capitalist system", then psychoanalysis should highlight the juncture "where this circle could be opened".²²² This juncture necessarily has to do with knowledge: "refusing the [capitalist] game acquires a meaning only if the question is centered on the relation of knowledge and the subject".²²³ "Novelty" can only originate from a subversion of the function of knowledge as the management of knowledge, whereby "this way of relating to ourselves that is called knowledge" would be subtracted from its "universal" and "unitary order".²²⁴ For the time being, the provisional "solution" seems therefore to be that we "enter the procession of knowledge", that is, scrutinize bureaucracy, "without losing [our] thread" in it.²²⁵ This could also help us to rethink class-consciousness and class struggle in terms that do not depend on the "educator-educated" couple, which currently submits most forms of Marxism to the University and its bureaucracy.²²⁶

36

On 25 June 1969, Lacan concludes Seminar XVI by reading out to his audience the letter with which the École normale informs him that it will no longer host his Seminars. Overturning a previous concession granted on request of the sixth section of the École pratique des hautes études, the Dussane hall must be vacated. No other hall is apparently available. This is allegedly due to the "reorganization of the École", the "General Reform of Universities", and the "development of teachings".²²⁷ Lacan makes three hundred and forty-one photocopies of the letter, dates

.....
220 Lacan 2006, pp. 37-40, p. 240, p. 242.

221 Lacan 2007, p. 106.

222 Lacan 2006, p. 333.

223 Ibid., p. 399.

224 Ibid., p. 241.

225 Ibid., p. 397.

226 Ibid., p. 396. As will be restated in Seminar XVII (Lacan 2007, p. 149), Maoism, with its stress on the know-how of the slave, is in this regard a promising exception (Lacan 2006, p. 397).

227 Lacan 2006, p. 403.

them without signing, and delivers one to each of his students: “It is a diploma [...] a symbol [...] it is S1 [...] one day those who will have this piece of paper will be given access to a certain hall for a confidential communication on the subject of the functions of psychoanalysis in the political register”.²²⁸ A long quarrel follows on the pages of *Le Monde*. On 26 June 1969, the newspaper reports that the management offices of the École normale have terminated Lacan’s lectures since they are “mundane and incomprehensible for any normally constituted” human being.²²⁹ On the following day, the Director of the École disavows the article but accuses Lacan’s students of “depredations and several thefts”.²³⁰ Lacan answers on 5 July. He stresses how the Director does not seem to hold himself responsible for what the management offices say; specifies that saying a document is false “is not disavowing its content, but the publication of a [defamatory] text”;²³¹ and further notices how *Le Monde* has not doubted the authenticity of this second letter. The dispute continues until November 1969.²³²

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Volume 6 /
Issue 1

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228 Ibid., p. 404.

229 Ibid., p. 422.

230 Ibid., p. 421.

231 Ibid., p. 422.

232 This article is dedicated to the pro-vice deputy wardens and the junior senior-senior assistant secretaries of the really existing Castle. May they adopt it – and photocopy it – for their market of knowledge.