

Abstracts

Varieties of the Transcendental in Western Marxism

Slavoj Žižek

Contrary to today's few remaining radical Leftist theorists, whose main premise is that the Western Marxism has lost contact with the Third World revolutionary movements, this article argues that it is in fact the Third World Communist radicalism which has lost contact with authentic emancipatory content of Marxism. The main novelty of Western Marxism, the article further argues, resides in its rehabilitation of the transcendental dimension. If at its inception, Western Marxism was a Hegelian reaction to the progressive neo-Kantianism which was (more or less) the official philosophy of the reformist Second International social democracy, neo-Kantians insisted on the gap between objective social reality and the normative realm of autonomous ethical goals which cannot be deduced from reality (they reject this option as a case of illegitimate determinism which reduces the Ought to the positive order of Being); which is why they referred to their political stance as that of "Ethical socialism." However, although revolutionary Marxism aims at overcoming all metaphysical dualities, its history is traversed by the gap between realism and transcendentalism: while the Soviet version of dialectical materialism proposes a new version of naïve-realist ontology (a vision of all of reality with human history as its special region, a topic of historical materialism), Western Marxism proposes collective human praxis as the ultimate transcendental horizon of our philosophical understanding.

Key words: cosmology, Marxism, materialism, ontology,
the transcendental

Marx and Manatheim

Eric L. Santner

In this essay, I argue that Claude Lévi-Strauss' critical engagement with the concept of *mana* in the writings of Marcel Mauss and Émile Durkheim offers a new perspective on the nature of work in capitalist societies. Supplementing Marx's notion of the fetishism of the commodity, I argue that the so-called labor theory of value comes down to the claim that what is really at stake in the manufacture of commodities is *mana-facture*, the production of a spectral substance that "enchants" the social relations of secular modernity. I follow Lévi-Strauss in reading *mana* as an enigmatic signifier that holds the place of a void of knowledge that can never be made whole but only elaborated by historically specific modes of "mana-ical" enjoyment.

Key words: branding, fetishism, Lévi-Strauss, mana, Marx, political economy, political theology, value

Home Economics: Why We Treat Objects Like Women

Noam Yuran

Anyone but avowed economists would suspect that money today is an obscene object. The question is what economic theory would look like had it acknowledged this. This article traces the obscenity of money to the sexual economy of capitalism as it surfaces in the contexts of marriage, prostitution, and love. With the progress of capitalism, marriage was separated from the social production, circulation, and exchange of goods and money. Obviously, this separation could not have taken place without affecting the nature of goods, money, and exchange. It tied the workings of goods and money to what money can't buy. Capitalist money is obscene because it is related to what it can't buy. Rather than a universal equalizer, obscene money upsets equivalence and generates excesses. It fosters an alternative view of the capitalist market as a system of inherent imbalance.

Key words: Adam Smith, capitalism, love, luxury, Mandeville, marriage, Marx, money, prostitution, sexual economy, Veblen

Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy *Jean-Claude Milner*

The Me Too movement initiated a radical paradigm change in the representation of sexual relations. One of the main conceptions of coitus goes back to Kant; it relies on the contractual form and mutual consent. The philosophy of the Me Too movement rejects this approach in a way that shares a striking analogy with Marx's criticism of the labor contract. Both doctrines claim that so-called contracts are in fact based on an inequality between a weaker and a stronger party. Women, according to Me Too, are systematically wronged, because they structurally belong to the weaker side, just as workers do according to Marx. Yet, civil rights are often referred to contractual forms in Western societies; consequently, their validity must be questioned whenever sexual relations of any kind are involved. Such a philosophy cannot be considered as self-evident. Moreover, its relevance for non-Western societies is debatable.

Key words: coitus, contract, inequality, Kant, Lacan, Marx, structural weakness, women

Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself?!

Alenka Zupančič

Reference to Christianity, and to the Christian tradition, is one of the key ingredients of the expanding right-wing identity politics in Europe (and more broadly, in the West), including its more or less explicit nationalism and racism. The commandment to love your neighbor as yourself obviously presents this politics with a problem by seemingly undermining "our" identity. This necessitates a severe (re)interpretation of its meaning. This article looks into some examples of this interpretational work, and how it affects the figure of the neighbor. At the same time, it interrogates the reasons why Freud has situated this commandment at the very core of what he called "discontent" in our "civilization" (*das Unbehagen in der Kultur*). What is this aggressiveness that tends to emerge together with, and is inseparable from, the figure of the neighbor? To answer this

question, this article takes recourse to (Lacanian) psychoanalysis, not so as to steer away from the political dimension of the question, but rather to help us work our way back to it.

Key words: anti-value, capitalism, Good, love, Marx, neighbor, value

Lacan and Monotheism: Not Your Father's Atheism, Not Your Atheism's Father

Adrian Johnston

In terms of the critique of religion, a striking parallel exists between the Feuerbach-Marx and Freud-Lacan relationships. The fourth of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" faults Feuerbach's gesture of reducing "the holy family" of theology to "the earthly family" of anthropology for not carrying out the additional labor of critiquing the latter in turn. Likewise, Lacan, in his later reassessments of Freud's Oedipus complex and myth of the primal horde, takes Freud to task for failing to be thoroughly atheistic in leaving the figure of the earthly father, to which he reduces the heavenly father, deified (as all-loving, all-powerful, etc.). By Lacan's lights, such Freudian texts as *Totem and Taboo* protect the very essence of Judeo-Christian monotheism by preserving a vision of paternity central to such theism—and this despite Freud's vehement atheism. Furthermore, Lacan explicitly situates himself in the same post-Hegelian atheism-in-Christianity lineage to which Feuerbach, Marx, Chesterton, Bloch, and Žižek also belong. Lacan's critical reflections on religion generally, and Christianity especially seek to radicalize this atheism. Through examining these facets of Lacan, I conclude by raising questions for the Hegel-inspired tradition concerning me here, particularly: Can an atheism *in* Christianity ever become an atheism *after* and *beyond* Christianity? Can the determinate negation of an immanent critique of religion eventually morph into an absolute negation no longer dependent on and beholden to what it negates?

Key words: atheism, Christianity, Feuerbach, Freud, Hegel, Lacan, Marx, religion

The Sub-Ego: Description of An Inferior Observing Agency

Robert Pfaller

The children Gods of older religions (like Eros in ancient Greek mythology) deserve some attention from psychoanalytic theory: Do they not show us that older cultures felt observed—and obliged—by something which they situated (morally and intellectually) well below their ego? Following this idea, one should regard the lower agency in Freud's topography of the psychic apparatus not as an "Id" from which "drives" stem, but rather as a "sub-ego" that issues somehow silly, but still obligatory duties. Ambivalent matters and practices, such as drinking alcohol, love, sex, carnival, sports, art, etc., were ambivalent also for the ancient Greeks; yet by regarding them as duties imposed from "below," they were able to give them a sublime quality by celebrating them, with celebration providing the required obligatory, collective, and social character to these matters. We moderns, on the contrary, feeling observed only from above, cannot see in those "follies" anything but appalling outbursts of individual, anti-social drives that have to be tamed. Therefore, the other who indulges in a certain pleasure is today in most cases perceived as a "thief of enjoyment," i.e., a kind of anti-social, uncastrated "primordial father." Yet perceiving the enjoying other as somebody following a duty from below would allow us to experience the other as castrated, and his pleasures as something that can be shared in solidarity.

Key words: drives as duties, infantile Gods, observation from below, sub-ego, sublimation

From Public Opinion to Public Knowledge: Hegel's State as an Epistemic Institution

Zdravko Kobe

In this paper, I attempt to explore the connection between the political and the logical in Hegel's philosophy, presenting his conception of the state as an institution of knowledge, that is to say, as an epistemic, even

philosophical organization. Throughout my exploration, special attention is given to Hegel's novel theory of public opinion and the ways in which it can be transformed into public knowledge. I conclude with an attempt to formulate some problems of the modern state in Hegelian terms, as well as proposing some Hegel-inspired suggestions for their solution.

Key words: ethical substance, politics of knowledge, political representation, public opinion, public reason, state

The Endgame of Aesthetics: From Hegel to Beckett

Mladen Dolar

This paper first treats the problematic and paradoxical status of Hegel's *Aesthetics*. The major paradox is that it coincides with the advent of the autonomy of art (*l'art pour l'art*) while at the same time proclaiming the "end of art," art having become obsolete as a stage that the progress of spirit has already left behind once it reached its full autonomy. The question is posed about the problematic framework of the Hegelian progression of spirit and its teleology which seemingly testifies to Hegel's inveterate optimism—"we are constantly progressing towards the best." As opposed to this, the second part of the paper scrutinizes one of Beckett's last texts, *Worstward Ho* (1983), which seems to be the furthest removed from Hegel's optimism. The paper proposes five perspectives from which to consider the relationship of Hegel and Beckett and the shift that happened in the century and a half between the two: the question of progression ("On"); gray on gray; coming too late; the problem of how to conceive the end (Beckett's *Endgame*); and the problem of assessing aesthetic value. The paper tries to measure the distance between Hegel's "Bestward Ho" and Beckett's "Worstward Ho," taking them as a Janus figure of a parallaxic shift.

Key words: aesthetics, Beckett, end of art, Hegel, negation, progression, spirit, teleology, *Worstward Ho*

So Fake, So Real! Josephine and the Voice of Death *Frank Vande Veire*

Kafka's story *Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk* is about a singer who feigns investing all her power into a singing that is barely audible. Producing only the empty signifiers of a singing performance, she gives the spectacle of a voice that is lacking. This lacking voice expresses her speechlessness to which death compels her. That is why the community of mice, including the ones who are mocking her, are fascinated by her. In Josephine's "frail little voice" they recognize their own speechlessness in the face of an indeterminate enemy which stands for death, and in that secret silence that is never openly admitted they more than ever form a community. Never is Josephine more "authentic" in her "being towards death" than when feigning to lose herself in a song wherein she presents her voice as a hidden object.

Key words: Agamben, art, death, dialectic, Hegel, Kafka, Lacan, voice, object *a*

This Beast is Complex: Imposture in Plato's *Sophist* *Alexi Kukuljevic*

In this paper, I argue that the figure of the sophist should be thought as an impostor. Drawing a conceptual distinction between posing or being a poser and imposture, I develop an interpretation of the figure of the sophist as a form of philosophical impersonation that seeks through its use of speech to incarnate non-being. I thus read Plato's dialogue *Sophist* as an effort to determine and frame a "subject" defined by its present absence. This is what the Eleatic Stranger, in the dialogue, calls an imitator. The sophistic subject who makes of himself an "apparition" takes refuge through an art of sophistication: a kind of practical know-how that works with non-being. By putting non-being into practice, sophistry makes use of language's capacity to slip from the hold of signification. The sophist is not a figure who does not know what he does not know. Like the philosopher, rather, he knows that he does not know, but unlike him, he is actively dishonest about what it is that he knows. This makes

him philosophically villainous, trading like Melville's Confidence-Man on the trust implicit in speech (*logos*). The effort of Plato's dialogue is to pin down speech's capacity to slip from determination—a slippage that turns the aims of education into something ridiculous, a joke. The sophist causes *paideía* (education) to slip into *paidía* (joking around). Plato's dialogue takes this joke, this play (*paidía*) seriously, in earnest (*spoudē*), by thinking the absent place that such slippage implies, pinning absence to the form of otherness. The difference between sophistry and philosophy thus hinges on the capacity to draw a distinction between a form of non-being that is and a form of non-being that is not: a difference that is perilous like every encounter with one's double.

Key words: absence, being, confidence-man, difference, dishonesty, Heidegger's Sophist, imitation, impersonation, imposture, logos, mimesis, non-being, nothing, Other, performance, Plato, posing, presence, Sophist, sophistry, speech, subjectivity, trust

On “the Idea” in Badiou

Peter Klepec

This text presents an overview of the topic of “the Idea” in Alain Badiou's opus. It attempts to account for its prominent place, as well as to determine the exact role it plays in Badiou's philosophy. Written almost exclusively as “the Idea,” the concept stands for several tasks. It is simultaneously “a compass” that orients us in these disoriented times, and a banner of Platonism that evokes, provokes, and fights for the legacies of Plato and Communism. As a name for thinking and acting, “the Idea” is an operator and a mediator that somehow connects two poles of every truth-process: contemporaneity and eternity, finitude and infinitude, etc. The text proposes to think the concept through various triplets that specify its role: hypothesis, principle, decision; matheme, knot, pivot; eternity, universality, transmundanity; excess, gap, operator or mediator, etc. Finally, it addresses the question as to why we participate in “the Idea”? The text claims that the answer lies in Badiou's (up until very recently missing) theory of repetition: while himself reluctant

to use the term “repetition,” or even opposed to it, instead preferring other concepts such as “resurrection,” “rebirth,” “redoing,” etc., Badiou has, however, in the course of time spontaneously produced no less than seven different conceptions of repetition, of which the latest, “creative” as opposed to “circular” repetition, presents a way of simultaneously producing the new and to repeat, re-declare, and re-touch the Absolute.

Key words: Badiou, idea, operator, participation, Plato, triplet