

Freedom and Alienation; Or, Humanism of the Non-All

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Today, the popular concept of the Anthropocene, used to denote the *human* geological age, puts to question the centrality of human subjectivity. Critical posthumanism—particularly in its neo-Spinozan and Deleuzian ontological realist versions, tied to immediacy and pure immanence—demands the de-centering of the human subject, which, in its hubristic and Promethean disregard for the non-human, appears to have set the world on fire, causing irreparable environmental damage. But is an active de-centering of the human subject truly possible? What if the only way for us to properly assess the situation is by doing the opposite—that is, of occupying an anthropocentric position, not in the sense of human domination of the non-human world, but one of making human subjectivity the methodological and ethical center of our investigation into this conundrum? What if the age of the Anthropocene demands, not the de-centering of the human subject, but the reverse: what if it is *because* of the Anthropocene that we must now aim to rethink a dialectical and universalist *humanism*? What if it is the case, in other words, that the *human* subject is the proletariat of, not the Anthropocene, but the Capitalocene (Moore 2015)? For instance, as Fredric Jameson (2019) puts it, the fact of the Anthropocene proves that humanity can truly change the world, but now it would be wise, as he writes, to terraform it.

In precisely the same way that the proletariat is the symptom of the capitalist *economy*, the human subject is now the symptom of the Capitalocene in the sense that the capitalist ecology is *always already posthuman*. By this I mean that the reifying forces of capitalism are always in the process of undermining human necessity, making humans merely instrumental in the generation of profit—even and especially, that is, when we consider the fact that the subject of bourgeois society is reified in its ownership of private property. Objective property becomes a stand-in for human subjectivity—which it trades on the market; or human labor congealed in productive technology, an idea that autonomist Marxists develop in their reading of Marx’s “general intellect” in the *Grundrisse* (Virno 1996). This way of perceiving a posthuman capitalism is no less the case for the working class, conceived as owners of their own private property in the form of commodified labor power. The key difference between capitalism and slavery (although capitalism certainly has relied upon racialized and colonialist slavery) is the fact that the worker is the owner of their own labor power, which they sell, rather than having themselves sold as productive property. Yet, we might concede that the now popular turn to posthumanist critical theory has emerged at the precise historical moment when the middle classes, through neoliberal market fundamentalism and its transformation of subjects into forms of “human capital,” find themselves increasingly reified in the entirety of their everyday lives. That is to say that “human capital” is the product of the dissolution of the barrier between the subject-owner of labor power, and its own self, conceived in terms of the commodity-object. Now, all of life is/has been commodified and it is in this peculiar historical moment when the proponents of posthumanism aim, not to humanize the exploited and oppressed, but to downgrade humanity the more we are all reified by the capitalist system. How can the de-centering of the human subject in this way be anything but a victory for the posthuman turn in capitalism?

When, in his discussion of commodity fetishism, Marx asserts that capitalist society is premised on the social relation between things, he provides for us the matrix for understanding capitalism as a posthuman structure of the market as the blind, a-subjective and objective, regulatory force. What we call postmodernity is that moment when there is no part of the world that is not potentially commodifiable. Everything becomes reified as commodity, where previously, it was assumed that some human quality is capable of escape (which is why, in art, for instance, modernism is a form that evades commodification). In this situation, *humanity* becomes the symptom of the posthumanist capitalist ecology. The human subject now occupies and overlaps with the same position as the hysterical subject, or the feminine position of the non-all, as in Lacan's logics of sexualization. If it is true that the hysteric, we might say, is Freud's proletariat, expressive of the non-all of the phallic social order, then perhaps we can grasp the human subject in the same way, as the expression of the non-all of posthuman capitalism. Human, as Ray Brassier (2022) has put it, names the absolute negativity — an absent center — against which is posited an affirmative limit constitutive of the metaphysical totality. This is the sense in which I develop my own rethinking of a dialectical humanism appropriate for the age of the Anthropocene. Anthropocene discourse calls, not for the de-centering of the human subject, but for a rethinking of dialectical humanism.

The dilemma, however, with this conception is the fact that, from the perspectives of historical materialism and psychoanalysis, the subject is *constitutively*, and not merely contingently, de-centered and self-alienated. This is a point worth noting against both the posthumanist aim to de-center the human subject and the older tradition of Western Marxist humanism, which aimed towards a politics of *dis*-alienation. Althusser (1996) has noted, in fact, that the significance of Marx and Freud — against the common Freudian-Marxist attempt to blend their methodologies (turning psychoanalysis into an explanation for the libidinal investments

into the consumer society, for instance)—lies in the different ways each troubled the bourgeois-liberal conception of human subjectivity. Marx, on the one hand, challenged the liberal conception of the subject as a free, independent, and autonomous individual by showing that the *class struggle*, as opposed to individual man, in Althusser's terms, is the motor of history. Freud, on the other hand, challenged the conception of the human subject as fully self-aware, self-present, and completely egoistic and rational. Through the discovery of the unconscious (operated by the mechanism of repression) Freud demonstrated that the individual subject is driven, not necessarily by a rational ego, but by its response to repressed, irrational and unconscious wishes, desires, and drives, to which the subject remains unaware at an individual level, often repeating painful experiences that seem to otherwise contradict the goals it sets forth rationally to serve its own interests. To put the point directly, according to Althusser, Marx and Freud both prove that the subject is *constitutively* de-centered and self-alienated—a point that poses a problem for contemporary critical theories focused on projects of de-centering. If the subject is *constitutively* de-centered then what exactly is the usefulness of a politics aimed at radical de-centering? What is the purpose of an emancipatory ethics *aiming* to de-center the subject when the subject is already *constitutively* de-centered, castrated, and self-alienated?

As an emancipatory strategy, Anthropocene discourse appears to propose a reduction in *human* activity, and a retreat into the small. It asks for humanity to whither back into a flat existence, evening out in horizontal fashion with all of the other species living on planet Earth. Anthropocene theory speaks to what Alain Badiou has called an “animal humanism,” where humanity is perceived as a “*pitiable animal*” and “deserves only to disappear” (Badiou 2007, p. 175). Animal (post)humanism and Anthropocene discourse emerge out of a politics of guilt seeking to mend the wound that humanist and anthropocentric politics and culture have supposedly, according to them, cut open in the

natural world. It's in this sense that the posthumanist ethics of proponents of the Anthropocene discourse aim to *de-center* the human subject; but as Althusser has argued, the subject is always already *de-centered*. If this is truly the case, then even Althusser's own critique of socialist humanism as ideological remains, in my view, somewhat misguided as a strategy of emancipatory thinking as well as for an emancipatory *science*. While it may, perhaps, be true that *history* is a process without a subject or a goal, it is very difficult to imagine an *emancipatory* strategy (or even a science) that does not develop out of (at least) some conception of an historically relative and contingent premise—relative, that is, to the particularity of the material and historical conjuncture, and examined, evaluated, and enacted by a collective *subject* (the masses) in the class struggle.

Althusser's position is puzzling insofar as it is difficult to understand the emergence of *scientific* socialism without having it grounded in an engaged subjective position within the class struggle. It is not by way of objective-neutral knowledge that scientific socialism examines its object—history—but from a singular position occupied *within* the class struggle; not the spontaneous worldview of the working class (as early Lukács contends), but that of a particular political and philosophical position *relative to* the material conditions of existence. Historical materialism and psychoanalysis, we must recall, are unlike other sciences in that they are forms of *praxis*—the combination of theory and practice—in which the knowledge produced on the part of its subject has the implicit effect of simultaneously changing its object.

The subject cannot, it is true, perceive itself on its own in this way, and it requires arresting, grasping, and mediation from the position of some external, negative, vantage point (the party or the analyst, for instance, maybe even from the position of one's spouse or life partner—the small *a* (*petit autre*) as opposed to the big *A* (*grand Autre*) in Lacanese). Nevertheless, any emancipatory ethics requires building, not towards the de-centering of an

already de-centered and self-alienated (castrated) subject. Neither can it be built on a politics of dis-alienation and the fantasy of an uncastrated enjoyment. Fantasies of substantialization (of nature, of the other) merely disavow the negativity that stands at the heart of existence, and by doing so, have the potential to fall into forms of oppression. There is nothing more violent than forcing the other to substantialize in the way that it is fantasized. Instead, emancipatory politics requires political, methodological, and ethical *centering*. We see this kind of centering, for instance, in the political form of the party, or in psychoanalysis, where the *transference* moves the subject towards reasoning. However, it is never the individual subject alone or on its own that takes this step—belief in the emancipatory freedom of the individual is, after all, the mistake of the *bourgeois* humanist conception of the subject. Analysis *centers* the unconscious, or even the class struggle, as the negative constitutive of the structure, as an *absent* center. Can we, then, defend a form of political centrism in this way? I believe this to be the case and I do so here with the aim of renewing a universalist and dialectical humanism that contrasts with the theoretically fraught project of Western Marxist humanisms of the twentieth century, which aimed at an ethics of dis-alienation.

In a response to my position (Flisfeder 2021), Žižek (2022, pp. 225–228) has argued that my humanism preserves the human while rejecting the subject. He is incorrect. What I defend is not the human against the subject, but rather a conception of the subject that is drawn from a *dialectical* defence of *anthropocentrism*. This, however, is not an attempt to pit philosophical anthropology against ontology. My position emerges out of contemporary posthumanist critiques of anthropocentrism in the context of the Anthropocene discourse. To refer to Žižek’s own terms, I claim that what we require today is not the de-centering of the human, but a “super-anthropocentrism.” As he puts it, “What is required from us in this moment is, paradoxically, a kind of super-anthropocentrism: we should control nature, control our environment;

we should allow for a reciprocal relationship to exist between the countryside and cities; we should use technology to stop desertification or the polluting of the seas. We are, once again, responsible for what is happening, and so we are also the solution” (Caffo and Žižek 2021). As he explains elsewhere, too, “If we have to care also about the life of water and air, it means precisely that we are what Marx called ‘universal beings’, as it were, able to step outside ourselves, stand on our own shoulders, and perceive ourselves as a minor moment of the natural totality. To escape into the comfortable modesty of our finitude and mortality is not an option; it is a false exit to a catastrophe” (Žižek 2021). This is a position that I, too, defend. But unlike the projects of both the Western Marxist humanists and today’s posthumanists, our theoretical and political core cannot be a politics of dis-alienation, but rather must grasp the fact that alienation is a constitutive dimension of subjectivity—a position we can only grasp by setting out from a conception of social humanity, split by antagonism. As Žižek puts it in *Disparities*, human subjectivity is grounded in its own *failure* to become what it is (Žižek 2016, p. 28). The subject is, precisely, the failure of its own signifying representation. The *subject* of human subjectivity is to be located in the reasoning developed out of this failure—this betrayal to be what it effectively *is*; and this betrayal, I claim, *is* the subject of humanism.

Towards a Social Humanity

My initial point of reference for conceiving what I refer to as a universalist and dialectical humanism is Freud. As he puts it in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the “replacement of the power of the individual by the power of a community constitutes the decisive step of civilization. The essence of it lies in the fact that the members of the community restrict themselves in their possibilities of satisfaction, whereas the individual knew no such

restrictions” (Freud 1961, p. 49). Freud’s conception of civilization, here, constitutes one of the clearest definitions for what I describe as a *universalist* humanism, as opposed to naturalist philosophies—such as the Feuerbachian conception—*misconstrued* as humanisms, as in the work of many of the Marxist humanists, or even the liberal humanists who base their support of market society on some notion of brute and competitive human naturalism and individualism. It is noteworthy, of course, that Freud’s conception identifies restriction/repression as a marker of inclusion into the human community since it indicates a foundational limit against which the reasoning of the human subject takes place. Freud’s description of civilization articulates the form of the structure to which individuals submit, restricting their individual pursuits of immediate satisfaction to join together in the human community—human civilization, as opposed to the mere species being of humanity—as a way to collectively stave off and protect against the violence of a potentially threatening external nature. The final outcome of human civilizational development should be, as Freud describes, “a rule of law to which all—except those who are not capable of entering a community—have contributed by a sacrifice of their instincts, and which leaves no one—again with the same exception—at the mercy of brute force” (*ibid.*). It is the sacrifice of basic instincts which is significant here, since it demonstrates that inclusion is premised on a foundational negation. This, therefore, is only one side of things since the underside of every law is pulsation of the drive that persists in the space of the negation. Authentic freedom, in this sense, is not the freedom to *surpass* or resist the law, but that of giving it to ourselves—to assert our own self-limitations, or the inherent affirmation produced out of the fundamental negation. This is a point, too, that cannot but recall the Hegelian doctrine of the state insofar as it is distinguished from civil (or bourgeois) society.

The problem of civil society, as Hegel describes it, is that it can be confused with the operation of the state. Yet, if the state

is confused with civil society, and if its ends are primarily based in the protection of private property, the product is thus the disavowal of the universal grounds upon which market society may facilitate the satisfaction of mutual needs and instead secures primarily *individual* interests. This, of course, is the claim that Marx develops further in his critique of political economy, which must be read first and foremost as a *dialectical*, immanent, and materialist critique of the bourgeois ideology.

As Marx puts in his tenth thesis on Feuerbach, the standpoint of bourgeois materialism is civil society; whereas, for the materialism developed by Marx and Engels, the standpoint is *social* humanity. We see this developed most clearly, of course, in *Capital*, where Marx sets out to challenge the bourgeois presupposition of the individual caught in nature. Marx responds to the Robinsonades—the reference to Robinson Crusoe in Adam Smith and David Ricardo, for instance—in their assumption of the human individual originating in nature, and instead posits the presupposition of the *socially* determined individual acting in bourgeois society. As Marx puts it at the beginning of the *Grundrisse*, “Individuals producing in society—hence socially determined individual production—is, of course, the point of departure” (Marx 1993, p. 83). Marx’s point, of course, is that political economy begins from the presupposition of the individual human subject in nature—an abstraction that coincides with the avoidance of class struggle in actually existing society—whereas it would be preferable to begin with the presupposition of the individual as it is structured by social humanity, along with the actually existing political antagonisms giving structure to human society (i.e., class struggle as the motor of history).

Marx does not set out in *Capital* to produce a new political economy. His approach is, rather, that of a *critique* of political economy read as the bourgeois ideology of market society beginning with the individual as owner of private property. The materialism of *Capital* should be grasped as one of *immanent*

critique of the bourgeois ideology. Marx's methodology, and his accomplishment, is to show how, if we take the bourgeois ideology at its word—particularly its apparently humanist claims centering on equality and freedom in the market and in civil society—and apply it to a materialist unfolding of the movements of capitalist development, then we encounter, instead, the *undermining* of bourgeois assumptions evinced most clearly in the existence of the proletariat. As Sartre puts at the end of the first volume of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, “bourgeois humanism lays its contradictions at the door of the proletariat” (Sartre 2004, p. 753).

Marx's accomplishment, in other words, is to show that exploitation is obscured by the form of commodity fetishism, which, amongst other things, creates the illusion that the wage laborer is an equal owner of property, on par with the capitalist. The difficulty for the bourgeois liberal conception of humanism rests on the fact that, although liberalism strives towards equality and freedom—that is to say, liberalism espouses racial equality, gender and sexual equality, and so forth; it even espouses an environmentalist and equitable relationship with the natural world—although it avows these desires, it fails to explain the reproduction of its social symptom, the proletariat, and instead downloads its existence onto the inefficiencies of particular individuals. Not unlike the Kantian expulsion of the Thing—needed to create the illusion of consistency in reasoning—bourgeois humanism excludes its symptom to create the appearance of its own reified system as equitable. It fails to see that the real presence of inequality lies in exploitation concealed by commodity fetishism. This is a fact that is obscured for both the worker and the capitalist insofar as commodity fetishism and the wage form create the illusion that workers are, themselves, individual property owners—owners of their own labor power as commodity-property—which is the condition granting them their relative position of freedom and equality in the market society of individualist competition. Again, as Sartre puts it, “The freedom of the worker-commodity

therefore conflicts with the human freedom of the worker before and during the signing of the contract;” the worker, then, “is the being who lays claim to humanity only to destroy the human in himself; he is anti-human: no one but *himself* has excluded him from bourgeois humanism” (*ibid.*). Such a formal conception of freedom, equality, and humanity, of course, forces us to ask about the fate of those who are or have been, historically, legally restricted in their rights to own property—women, the disabled, the *lumpenproletariat*, etc.—or even those who are themselves considered *as* property—*as* means of production—as is the case in slavery.

The wage form, thus, obscures exploitation to the extent that it creates the appearance of market reciprocity. Workers sell their labor for a wage and, thus, in the commodification of their labor power, appear as owners of property just like any other capitalist. As owners of their own property, privately produced—i.e., in social reproduction, in the time allotted in the working day to the reproduction of labor power—workers are, in this way, interpellated as subjects of market exchange, conforming to the presupposed assumptions of political economy, of individual producers, engaged in relations of trade and exchange in the market, whose subjectivity, as Sohn-Rethel demonstrates, is *produced* as one of private individualism: “In exchange, *the action is social, the mind is private*” (Sohn-Rethel 2021, p. 24). It’s important that we see, though, that this form of subjectivity is but the result of interpellation by the market form, and by way of bourgeois civil society, and that *bourgeois humanism* is a reflection of specifically bourgeois social relations.

The apparent humanist investment in equality and freedom in bourgeois society is undermined by its very own system of reification. As such, bourgeois humanism betrays and negates the very universality it nevertheless relies upon, as Hegel shows when he asserts that in the market society, individuals enter into arrangements of social relations in which the private production

of the particular needs of each is the condition for the collective production of the needs of all:

In the course of the actual attainment of selfish ends — an attainment conditioned in this way by universality — there is formed a system of complete interdependence, wherein the livelihood, welfare, and rightful existence of one individual are interwoven with the livelihood, welfare, and rights of all. (Hegel 2008, p. 181 [§183])

It is a mistake, however, according to Hegel, to confuse civil society of the market relation with the form of the state:

If the state is confused with civil society, and if its specific end is laid down as the security and protection of property and personal freedom, *the interest of individuals as such* becomes the ultimate end of their association, and it follows that membership of the state is something optional. (*Ibid.*, p. 228 [§258])

Universality, for Hegel, in other words, inheres to a certain extent in the market society, which is, however, undermined in its avowed particularisms and privileging of an individualist subjectivity geared primarily towards the protection of private property. This, however, undoes and damages the very social humanity and universality upon which the mutual satisfaction of needs is based in bourgeois society.

It is, thus, the mature Marx, I claim, who, through an immanent critique of bourgeois ideology in *Capital*, rather than the young Marx of the *1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, demonstrates that bourgeois humanism is not, in fact, the universal humanism it claims to be. Bourgeois universality is nothing of the sort since it appears as merely the accumulation of particular individual differences, and emerges as anti-dialectical and *irrational* or conservative. The reasoning initially developed in bourgeois society turns back on itself and, rather than building towards the further emancipation of human subjectivity, halts

as a real species-being, i.e., as a human being, is only possible if he really employs all his *species-powers* — which again is only possible through the cooperation of mankind and as a result of history — and treats them as objects, which is at first only possible in the form of estrangement. (Marx 1992a, pp. 385–386)

Marx adds, however, that

Because Hegel equates man with self-consciousness, the estranged object, the estranged essential reality of man is nothing but consciousness, nothing but the thought of estrangement, its abstract and hence hollow and unreal expression, negation. The supersession of alienation is therefore likewise nothing but an abstract, hollow supersession of that hollow abstraction, the negation of the negation. (*Ibid.*, p. 396)

Hegel's conception of alienation is, according to Marx, tied up with his idealism. It is a conception in which the subject is alienated in thought, which brings the subject down to Earth. On Marx's view, Hegel's conception of alienation coincides with materialism in the way the subject's labor mixes with nature in the movement of a primary negation *from thought*, only. However, as Marx sees it, the subsequent movement in Hegel is one of the *negation of the negation*, in which the subject returns *from* the material world of nature back up into spirit. Hegel's idealism, according to Marx, is shown in its initial movement away from thought only to return to it in the end. Dis-alienation appears in the negation of the negation, according to Marx, as *the restoration of thought to itself*. We can imagine this, for instance, as an inverted triangle in which, initially, the subject is alienated from thought (or spirit), moving from above down to the ground, only to be then, in the negation of the negation, returned back to the heavens of thought, congealed in the idea. For Marx, however, we should think the terms of alienation beginning not from the heavens of thought but from the bottom up, from the material

reason only by placing a restriction on its capacity to apprehend contradiction in its totality. To make further sense of a universal and *dialectical* humanism, then, we should begin, as the Marx of the theses on Feuerbach does, and as Freud and Hegel do, with a humanism based principally upon a conception of *social* humanity. Not, that is, to conceive a wholly unified humanity—not to imagine an end to the class struggle—but in order to understand the class struggle in its social totality. Today, class struggle has to be reimagined as the antagonism between humanity and the reifying posthumanism of capitalism.

The Contingency of Alienation in Marx

My point in the preceding has been, in part, to argue that we find a more coherent dialectical humanism in the later Marx than what we find in the early Marx, which formed so much of the basis of the Western Marxist humanisms. Marx's early theory of alienation is taken up, most commonly, through a reading of his section on estranged or alienated labor in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, where he describes humanity's alienation from its foundational nature, or from its *species-being*. Marx's early development of the category of alienation, as well as the naturalism of his Feuerbach-inspired conception of species-being emerges out of his critique of Hegel's apparent idealism in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Marx writes:

The importance of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and its final result—the dialectic of negativity as the moving and producing principle—lies in the fact that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of object [*Entgegenständlichkeit*], as alienation and as supersession of this alienation; that he therefore grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives objective man—true, because real man—as the result of his own *labour*. The *real, active* relation of man to himself as a species-being, or the realization of himself

grounds of nature—that is from the concrete, to abstraction, and then back down into the concrete. The trajectory is reversed, in which the triangular figure goes from the Earth up into the heavens of thought, at which point, in Marx’s paradigm, the subject is alienated from its species-being, only then, subsequently, to be returned back down to Earth in “an objective movement which *re-absorbs* alienation into itself” (*ibid.*, p. 395).

As Jon Stewart explains, Marx’s “critical point is that alienation is conceived as the second step—that is, negation—but then the third step, the negation of the negation does not meaningfully do away with alienation since this third step [in Hegel] is simply an abstract thought” (Stewart 2021, p. 156). Hegel, according to Marx, begins with the Idea as universal and only *then* moves into concrete particulars. Marx’s materialism, in contrast, begins with “the empirically perceived particulars” as “what is truly real,” and thus, for him, “this second step should be the real focus” (*ibid.*). Instead, for Hegel, the third step of the negation of the negation appears to reconcile the second step with the third, of a movement back into the universality of the Idea. This common misconception of the Hegelian dialectical process—from the positing reflection, to external and then determinate reflection; or, in the logic of judgement, from the positive to the negative, to the infinite judgement—that we find in Marx regarding the final reconciliation with the idea is one that has plagued dialectical scholarship for over a century. It’s on these points, too, that we see the continued rejection of the category of the negation of the negation in Stalin, Mao, and even in Althusser.

We can see here, too, the sense in which Marx’s early attention to humanism coincides with a naturalism that he gets from Feuerbach, and it is clear why even some posthumanist scholarship has sought to return to the naturalism of the early Marx (Nail 2020; Butler 2019). Taking humanity primarily as a natural being—an *active* natural being, that is—Marx equates communism in his early writing with humanism in the sense of returning humanity

back to its species origins and, in this way, resembles the idealism of posthumanist monism and what Badiou, as noted above, refers to as animal humanism, insofar as the latter aspires towards the recombination and reconciliation of humanity towards its basic nature. This is not to say that nature shouldn't be a factor for us, but it is not, as some have argued (Johnston 2019, pp. 149-152; Heron 2021, p. 504) an ontological priority. Nature is a *biological* necessity, of course, but there is no basic natural state to which we can return. Alienation, to repeat, is constitutive.

Posthumanism, then, especially in its monist, new materialist, and vitalist varieties, may be grasped, as Žižek sometimes puts it, as the desire to move from subject back into substance (Žižek 2016, p. 55). This is oddly, too, a useful description of some of the earliest versions of Western Marxism humanism. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes in *Adventures of the Dialectic*, historical materialism “states a kinship between the person and the exterior, between the subject and the object, which is at the bottom of the alienation of the subject in the object and, if the movement is reversed, will be the basis for the reintegration of the world with man” (Merleau-Ponty 1973, p. 33). For Merleau-Ponty, seeking “reintegration” is fundamental to the historical materialist outlook on history—that is, that the movement of history heads in the direction of a recombination of subject and object into a totality of the being of the species. The unity of the subject with the natural world, with the homogeneity of society, as well as with the unity of itself, is one way to grasp what was fundamental in Western Marxist incarnations of humanism, particularly in its conception of the problem of alienation, seen in this way as *contingent*. Insofar as both Posthumanist new materialism and Marxist humanisms perceive alienation as contingent both are based on a political ontology of *dis-alienation* and full transparency.

A Politics of Dis-Alienation? Both posthumanism and varieties of Marxist humanism aim at a complete recombination of humanity and the natural world, imagining that a certain equilibrium

exists that has been destroyed by the modern order of liberal, Western, capitalist society. Both perspectives, in other words, imagine a moment in the past where the universe was whole and complete, and at some point humanity and nature separated from each other, caused mainly due to the hubris of (the concept of) humanity. This perspective, however, forces an essential question: if the universe was in fact substantially whole prior to this separation and alienation between humanity and nature, what, in fact, was the cause of this separation in the first place? Let's tackle this question second. First, we should consider the *terminal* point of humanist and posthumanist political goals since it is mainly, I claim, according to a kind of retroactive speculation that we are able to come to understand "origin stories" themselves.

So much flows from how we grasp things in the present, but the present is always overdetermined by the way that we perceive our goals or aims—the question of what we want or what we desire in the end—which retroactively forces us to posit our set of presuppositions that give rise to our understanding of the causes of our crises. Erich Fromm, for instance, has claimed that "Marx's aim was that of a spiritual emancipation of man, of his liberation from the chains of economic determination, of resituating him in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature" (Fromm 2011, p. 3). As a corollary, for Fromm, prior to the emergence of human consciousness or self-consciousness—that is, of humanity's own self-awareness—humanity lived in perfect *unity* with nature. For Fromm, the evolution of humanity "is characterized by man's struggle with nature" (*ibid.*, p. 19). The first act of freedom, therefore, according to him, is humanity's "capacity to say 'no,'" in which case the human individual "sees himself as a stranger in the world, beset by conflicts with nature, between man and man, between man and woman" (*ibid.*, p. 64). Socialism, then, according to Fromm, will be "the abolition of human self-alienation, the return of man as a real human being"

(*ibid.*, p. 68). We can easily see here the way that, for Fromm, the project of socialism as one of dis-alienation coincides with his presupposition that humanity exists as alienated from its essence. Henri Lefebvre, likewise, characterized the project of historical materialism as one of dis-alienation.

Total man, as Lefebvre describes, “is ‘dis-alienated’ man” (Lefebvre 2009, p. 150). According to him, “human alienation will end with ‘the return of man to himself’, that is to say in the unity of all of the elements of the human.” As he puts it, “this ‘perfect naturalism’ coincides with humanism” (*ibid.*, p. 15). There is, of course, precedent to this point in the early Marx of the 1844 philosophical manuscripts, who writes comparatively of naturalism and humanism, noting the way that “naturalism or humanism differs both from idealism and materialism and is at the same time their unifying truth.” The human after all, as Marx notes, is an *active* and *natural being* (Marx 1992a, p. 389). Thus, for Marx, communism as the superseding of private property is a humanism insofar as it is the re-absorption of alienation into itself (*ibid.*, p. 395). As Lefebvre writes, defined in this way, “humanism has a quantitative aspect: it is based on the development of forces of production. It also has a qualitative aspect. Every human community has a quality or style... total humanism does not aim to destroy [national; cultural] communities but, on the contrary, to free them from their restrictions...” (Lefebvre 2009, p. 151). Humanism, for Lefebvre, based on Marx’s conception in his early writing, can thus be understood as “the supreme instance” of “total man” as a “free individual in a free community.” Total man, according to Lefebvre, is “an individuality which has blossomed into the limitless variety of possible individualities” (*ibid.*, pp. 151–152).

The most notable instance of the Western Marxist and humanist insistence on a politics of dis-alienation comes from the young Lukács, who, without having even read Marx’s early writing, developed a conception of emancipation based on a reading of

the later Marx's writing on commodity fetishism. In the development of his conception of reification, Lukács shows how the proletariat in capitalist conditions of exploitation, self-objectifies as commodified labor power. Lukács' turn to Hegel stands out in particular. As Žižek (2020, pp. 41–56) notes, beginning with Lukács and Karl Korsch, Western Marxism turned to a particular kind of Hegelianism that described the social context as the ultimate horizon for grasping objective phenomena. Both returned to Hegel in opposition to the neo-Kantianism of the second international and its insistence upon the gap between objective reality and the normative dimension of ethical practice. Lukács and Korsch aimed at the combination of theory and practice, making its knowledge of history into a practical dimension for changing and transforming its object.

For Lukács, in his early phase, alienation coincides with reification, and the consciousness of the proletariat is one of grasping as subject its objectification as commodity. Whereas Western Marxism, as Žižek puts it, grasps "human praxis as the ultimate transcendental horizon of our philosophical understanding," Soviet Marxism clung to a "naïve realist ontology" (*ibid.*, p. 43), claiming direct access to the whole form of reality and history. Instead of merely subjective *social* knowledge, it claimed direct and objective knowledge of the whole of reality, not unlike the realist ontology of contemporary posthumanist theory that seeks to bypass human epistemology, going straight to ontology. For the later Lukács, however, the evasion of the transcendentalist horizon ultimately returns to a realist ontology in an attempt to humanize Soviet ideology by distinguishing between the objectivizing aspects of labor, as such, and the alienating-reifying dimensions of labor under capitalism.

The theme that nevertheless persists in the various versions of humanist Marxism (as a kind of transcendentalism), as well as in that of the realist ontologies, is the prospect of a transparent *coincidence* between human social reality and nature. This vision,

however, fails to account for *the way* human social reality *separates* itself from nature. At what point does humanity alienate itself from nature? Is it the product of capitalism? Was there an alienation in the feudal order? Fromm (2011) argues that, despite a certain lack of freedom, the human community still provided a sense of wholeness in pre-capitalist societies, provided for by the comfort and security of the social reality. Was it, then, the development of technology that first forced the alienation of humanity? But by what cause was the development of technique set in motion?

The solution to this problem, according to Žižek, is “to abandon the starting point [that is, of a contingent alienation] and to admit that there is no reality as a self-regulated whole, that reality is itself cracked, incomplete, non-all, traversed by radical antagonism” (Žižek 2020, p. 52). Much of the problem in humanist Western Marxism, not unlike the problems we encounter in post-humanism, turns on the way it grasped the Hegelian conceptions of sublation and reconciliation—often associated with the poorly defined notion of *synthesis*. But this is, in fact, *not* the point of the Hegelian reconciliation, which is actually a reconciliation with the *inevitability* of alienation—that is with the fact of negativity. Human subjectivity, we might say, coincides with the negativity constitutive of reality. It is not, as some argue (Johnston 2019, pp. 149-152), through the production of a “de-naturalizing nature”—again, nature is still a biological necessity of human subjectivity, if not necessarily an ontological one—but of the occupation of the position of *negativity* within reality. We can locate human subjectivity, that is, in the form of a primordial *negation*—through a constitutive alienation—that is arrived at in its rejection, as Freud argues, of basic instincts. Every act of (free) choice involves, at the same time, a negation of those choices not chosen. This alienation in every free act of negation is where we locate the human subject.

What we should do, then, according to Žižek, is return to Hegel, as the Marxist humanists did, but to read the Hegelian reconciliation in a different way—*not* in terms of the *contingency*

of alienation, but as a *constitutive* aspect of both subjectivity *and* reality—that is, as informed by a constitutive *lack*. Subjectivity is the product of emergence of the negative in a reality that is constitutively *non-all*.

*From Constitutive Alienation to the Positing
of the New Signifier*

In contrast to the Marxist humanist conception of alienation as contingent—in which politics is aimed in the direction of *dis*-alienation—in Hegel’s ontology we find that a *constitutive* alienation—and the reasoning required to grasp this via language, representation, and discourse—provides the grounds and the conditions upon which an ethical freedom is made possible. As human subjects, we experience our freedom—and there cannot be any ethics, or even politics, without freedom—not by returning into a species being, but by grasping that reality and actuality are open-ended, never whole on their own, never complete. There is only politics if subjects are free to transform and recreate the actual conditions of existence—to change, that is, the object. This possibility is undermined if we conceive a terminal point of history, in which an alienated subject is finally reconciled with its un-alienated nature, and which would bring about an end to the class struggle. All we can do—if, however, with a conception of universal freedom in mind—is develop that which is necessary given the historical contingency of any and every situation. No one knows the course of history—historical knowledge is only knowable after the fact—and therefore, all we can do is create necessary conditions in situations of pure contingency. It’s from this perspective that we can conceive the overlapping of the lacks in the subject and in reality.

Hegel describes this overlapping of the lacks in the subject and the material world in the section on culture as self-alienated spirit

in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here, Hegel describes the world that confronts the subject as the *negative* of its own self-consciousness (Hegel 1977, p. 294 [§484]). The world, however, also has an *alien* reality, according to Hegel, both present and given, and has a being of its own, but in which *it does not recognize itself*. In the absence of its own self-recognition, the subject is, thus, the *negative* of the material world. In its immediacy, the self *appears* without substance, just as much as substance appears without subject. It seems that by alienating itself through externalization—by changing and transforming the real world through work—that substance attains its existence *for* the subject. However, the reverse is also true since this is the sense in which Hegel writes, in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, that “everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance* but equally as *Subject*” (*ibid.*, p. 10 [§17]). In contrast to Spinoza’s substantive monism, for instance, by evincing the process by which Spinoza comes to *think* and *reason* the substantive world, Hegel shows that the presence of the subject is there in the very *thinking* involved in the coming to recognize the actuality of the world as substance. Subject is, here, present where reasoning apprehends the negativity in being.

Spirit, for Hegel, represents the self-conscious unity of self and essence, each relating to the other in the form of their *mutual self-alienation*—essence, that is, as a determinateness that has its being and appearing *for* self-consciousness. However, although it is the consciousness of the objective real world, which exists freely and on its own account, consciousness is still confronted by Spirit—that is, through its externalization in the real world *and* by that which *supersedes* the actual world in what lies beyond it. “The *present* actual world,” Hegel writes, “has its antithesis directly in its *beyond*, which is both the thinking of it and its thought-form, just as the beyond has in the present world its actuality, but an actuality alienated from it” (*ibid.*, p. 295 [§485]). Nothing—or nothingness—which is the beyond of the actual, inheres as the

negative of both the self-conscious Spirit and the actual world. “The equilibrium of the whole,” then, as Hegel puts it, is not a unity that remains unto itself, a unity, that is, which is self-substantializing, but which “rests in the *alienation* of opposites” (*ibid.*, p. 295 [§486]; my emphasis). The *whole*, in other words, is a *self-alienated* actuality. There is, thus, we might say a “hole” in the *whole*, which the subject apprehends in its materiality through the process of reasoning the presence of the negative in this way.

Knowledge of the beyond, of this negativity that lies beyond the actual, according to Hegel, at first rests on Faith. Yet, just as consciousness, divided by that which it knows and that which it does not (its *un-conscious*), returns into itself as its constitutive self-alienation, so too does self-alienated Spirit return into the *self*, initially in its immediacy as a single person, but subsequently, through its externalization, it returns in its universality insofar as consciousness grasps or arrests itself via the reference to the Concept or the Notion. The insight that this produces, according to Hegel, completes the stage of culture and moves the subject from Faith to Enlightenment, which, in the very material sense of grasping the constitutive alienation at the heart of both the self *and* the actual world, provides the basis for absolute freedom—and, in Lacanian terms, it is the moment of *subjective destitution*.

By recognizing that *nothing* inheres—nothing, that is, as an object—intrinsically in actuality, not only can Faith, but also the actual world, be overthrown, giving rise to the possibility of *ethical action*, which depends upon the freedom of the subject. In this way, the subject can suspend the realm of causality and enact its freedom in the positing of the Concept. The Concept, in this way, provides the *representational* co-ordinates of self-alienated actuality insofar as it is translated into language and discourse.

As Fredric Jameson puts it, although “language cannot be trusted to convey any adequate or positive account of the Notion [the Concept], or of truth and reality... it can much more pertinently be used as an index of error or contradiction”

(Jameson 2010, p. 35). Language (and representation), in other words, *mediates* that which cannot be said or spoken, which it conveys by grasping lack, negativity, alienation, and contradiction. This is how, for instance, we come to grasp the Real, in the Lacanian sense, at the *limits* of the symbolic, a point that departs from the Deleuzian perspective, where representation amounts, merely, to the congealing of, and therefore the evisceration of contradiction and difference. To the contrary, it is only by way of the mediations of language and representation that we are able to apprehend—or know—contradiction and difference at the limit points of the representation itself. This is also where the Althusserian conception of ideology as an imaginary *representation* of the subject to its real conditions of existence can appear misleading. Ideology is not simply in the representation itself; the representation, rather, is the medium through which the critique of ideology is made possible. Without representation—without language, discourse, and rhetoric—our hands are tied in our attempts to locate that which remains negative at the heart of every affirming and positing of an idea. As Zupančič notes, posthumanist new materialists tend to distance themselves from representational paradigms found in structuralism and post-structuralism. However, she notes, it is the discovery of the *inconsistencies* in language that locate the position of the subject: “if language, discourse, or structure were consistent ontological categories, there would be no subject” (Zupančič 2017, p. 119). This is how even abstractions can be liberating.

In Hegel, then, we see that language becomes the medium of universality, but it is only through our alienation *in* language that we are made capable, through reasoning its logic to the end, of grasping its significance. In speech, as Hegel puts it, “self-consciousness, *qua independent separate individuality*, comes as such into existence, so that it exists *for others*” (Hegel 1977, p. 308 [§508]). Again, as Jameson explains, here we see the paradox of the fact that “my individuality, expressed through first person

language, does not really come into existence until it is expressed ‘for others’” (Jameson 2010, p. 38). In Lacanian terms, we see here how the subject attains its identity via the signifier (from $\$$ to S_1), which represents the subject for all of the others. At the same time, the signifier (S_1) is that *for which* all of the others (S_2) determine the subject ($\$$). The subject, in other words, is self-present, on the one hand, in its representation in the form of the signifier, while, on the other hand, finds itself emptied out as the missing place—the gap or lack—in the battery of all the other signifiers, or the symbolic order as such.

Language and representation thus, according to Jameson, become, for Hegel, diagnostically necessary. The Concept becomes the representational device against which the negativity that inheres in both the actual world and the subject itself can come to be known. The absolute (ethical) freedom that we found previously in the understanding that *nothing* inheres in the actual world—and that the actual world is, too, self-alienated, fissured by gaps, and thus incomplete—is given form in the way that the subject finds itself capable of positing the Concept, or the new signifier. In other words, to *center* its constitutively de-centered and self-alienated presence. Does this, however, mean that the subject can automatically become self-actualizing, on its own, in this way, thereby completely negating the Symbolic order, the realm of language and representation, in which its self is given substance through its definition by others *in* language?

The Alienated (Non-All) Subject of the Signifier

Alienation, for Lacan, like Hegel, is also consubstantial with subjectivization. The subject is not alienated *from* the symbolic order; it is, rather, alienated *into* the symbolic order. The subject is alienated in the sense that, in the formation of subjectivity, the moment of positive subjectivization coincides with a certain *loss*,

which depends on the subject's relation to the signifier. As Lacan puts it, the signifier "is that which represents a subject for another signifier" (Lacan 1981, p. 207). The subject, according to Lacan, is, therefore, "born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other" (*ibid.*, p. 199). The choice of signifier into which we invest our identity and our sense of self represents the way that the subject perceives itself from the perspective of the gaze of the symbolic order, or the big Other, and in this way helps to produce the subject as an ego-ideal. Again, as Lacan explains, the signifier "producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject" (*ibid.*, p. 207). This petrification of the subject, this loss central to subjectivity, coincides with its emergence in the field of the Other and is the flipside of its alienation—in order to exist socially and in the field of the Other, the subject is required to give up something, which is why Lacan (2007, p. 124) refers to the subject's entry into the field of the Other as "symbolic castration." As Mladen Dolar puts it, "alienation was for Lacan always essentially connected with the idea of a forced choice... The subject is subject to a choice—this is what makes it a subject in the first place" (Dolar 1998, p. 17). Dolar is quick to note, however, that this choice is "the opposite of a free and autonomous choice one is accustomed to associate with the subject" (*ibid.*), as we see, for instance, in Sartre's existential ethics of responsibility. This is due to the fact that the emergence of subjectivity is formed, initially, in the field of the Other.

The alienation of the subject, in other words, involves a kind of emptying out, which is the other side of its positivization in the field of the Other, in its subjectivization. While the subject submits to its alienation in the Symbolic order of the *big* Other (*grand Autre*), it loses what Lacan calls the object small *a*: the *small* other (*petit autre*)—the objectification of lack. It's how-

ever, necessary, to grasp the fact that the small other only ever emerges as existing *through* the loss itself. Its *positive* existence is that of being lost. Prior to its loss, the small other never existed and, therefore, no actual object can ever satisfy the loss central to subjectivity. The subject is always structured around this lacking. The production of the subject of the signifier coincides with the emergence of the small other in the same way that every act of choice overlaps an operation of an affirmation and a negation. Every affirmative choice we make is, at the same time, the negation of all of the other possible choices. The truth is that we can never be or have everything all at once and, thus, in every act of decision—in every act of choice—we lose something at the same time that we gain something else.

Lacan develops this point by splitting the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* into two separate moments of the “I think” and the “I am”—that is, the split between thought and being. It is noteworthy that this division between thought and being corresponds to the traditional distinction between idealism and materialism that we find described in Marx as early as his theses on Feuerbach, and later expanded by Engels. This division is also, in its later development in “official” Soviet Marxism, adapted by the various anti-Hegelian materialisms of Mao and French Structuralism, central to vulgar materialist, ultraleftist, anti-humanist and posthumanist critiques of subjectivity. But specifically, for Lacan, the choice of thinking *or* being is one in which the affirmation of one, and the negation of the other, doesn’t necessarily mean that the negative choice is completely lost. Its presence persists in fantasmatic form, in the same way that for Hegel being and nothingness consist in assuming each other. This, for instance, is where Lacan improves on the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*, where Sartre famously rejects the thesis of the Freudian unconscious.

As Žižek notes, in Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan proposes that, by alienating itself into the field of the Other, the subject is forced to choose thought

over being. For Lacan, the “eclipse of being” is “induced by the very function of the signifier” (Lacan 1981, p. 211). However, Žižek also notes that Lacan later on, in Seminar XIV on the logic of fantasy, reverses course and instead claims that the subject, by alienating itself into the field of the Other, chooses being, instead, with thought therefore relegated to the position of the unconscious. According to Žižek (1993), we shouldn’t read this change in Lacan’s teaching as a later adjustment to a prior formulation. Rather, the two formulations should be read as two different ways of relating to the forced choice of being along the lines of Lacan’s later logics of sexuation.

For Žižek, the choice of *being* must be understood according to the masculine logic of universality—that is, where a universal exception, a finite limit informs the (closed) field of signification. It is in this sense that the phallic signifier creates a point of suture to the signifying field. The choice of *thought*, however, is, thus, one of the *unlimited*—as Joan Copjec (1994) puts it—thus coinciding with the *feminine* logic, where a particular *negation* implies that there is no exception and that the Symbolic order is *not-all*, incomplete and marked by gaps and negativity. The masculine subject, we might say, is here—in the choice of being over thought; the affirmation of a finite *limit*—the Kantian transcendental subject of the *Verstand*, of mere *understanding*; whereas the feminine subject is that of the *Vernunft*, or of thinking and reasoning.

The feminine (hysterical) subject is the one who is constantly engaged in bombarding the Other with questions: what am I? What am I to you? Am I a man or woman? Why am I what you (the Other) are saying that I am? The hysterical questioning here, is, of course, as expressed in Lacan’s discourse of the hysteric (Lacan 2007; Lacan 2006), also key to the production of psychoanalytic knowledge and analytical discourse; and, to avoid any misunderstanding, it is important to note that we call this subject the feminine or the hysteric, not because of anything attached to

the body or the biology of the subject, but precisely because of the *material* anxiety of being a woman in patriarchal society. As Juliet Mitchell once put it: psychoanalysis is the interpretation of a patriarchal society, not the prescription for one. Thus, again, we might say that the hysteric is Freud's proletariat. The hysterical subject is, therefore, the subject as such. Hysteria, as Žižek (2002, p. 101) puts it, means failed interpellation; and, it is in this failed interpellation that we find the emergence of the subject. As Žižek (*ibid.*, p. 62) has also noted, elsewhere, hysteria is the "human" way of installing a point of impossibility in the guise of absolute *jouissance*." This is why, as I have put it elsewhere, the contemporary fear of the human subject coincides with what I have referred to as the *hysterical sublime* (Flisfeder 2021). Put differently, it is the feminine position of the non-all that allows the subject to grasp itself in the *failure* of its own signifying representation. It is from this position, the *hysterical* position of coming to reconcile with the constitutive alienation of human subjectivity, that I now advocate reading a renewed conception of humanism via the Lacanian discourse of the analyst alongside the Hegelian conception of love.

*Is it Possible to Love One's Analyst?
Humanism as Separation*

By referring to love in this way, I do not mean it in the sense of loving all of humanity or the love of nature, and so on. Rather, love here denotes the *choice* of a singular other—a small other (*petit a*) that holds me to account. An other in whom I choose and can trust, into whom I invest my own negativity. As Lacan puts it, "love is giving what you don't have" (Lacan 2015, p. 129). Embracing the small other as a *limit* of my own choosing is the embracing, at the same time, of the formalization of a new structuration giving the subject its freedom—as Anna Kornbluh

puts it, this involves the embracing of a limit “as the *condition* of freedom” (Kornbluh 2019, p. 154; my emphasis). It is not by escaping structure, but by building and producing it, that we create the conditions of our freedom—that is, *by giving to ourselves* the conditions of our freedom. It is not the case, however, as in an older humanist model of the fully self-present and self-aware subject who freely makes choices on their own. Rather, it is the position of the small other as limit who helps to bring about the negativity within us, and that holds us to account for it. We can see this relationship in the link between the hysteric and the analyst.

The hysteric, at the outset, produces the knowledge needed for the analytical discourse. Through its symptom, through its bombardment of questioning, the hysterical subject helps to produce the analytical discourse, as is represented by the matheme of the hysteric’s discourse, where it is knowledge that gets produced.

$$\frac{\$}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

This same knowledge is then applied by the analyst in the treatment of the subject.

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

And, conversely, what gets produced via the discourse of the analyst is the construction of a new signifier instituting a new signifying structure. What changes in the analytical discourse is the fundamental structuring principle of the subject with regards to its enjoyment—the lack and alienation constitutive of subjectivity. Similarly, with regards to the social field, the production of the new signifier is, likewise, fundamental to changing the structural principle of society (Žižek 2000, p. 93).

According to Lacan, love is what gets produced in the course of the analytical treatment. It interests us, according to Lacan, “insofar as it allows us to understand what happens in transference—and, to a certain extent, because of transference” (Lacan 2015, p. 49). As Dolar notes, love is one of the effects of the transference and, therefore, part of its aim is to cure a symptom produced by the analytical treatment itself (Dolar 1993, pp. 84–85). Love, in this way, according to Dolar, involves a dimension *beyond* interpellation (*ibid.*, p. 87). This, too, is how we can come to see the overlap between the Lacanian analytical discourse, and the Hegelian conception of love. For Hegel:

Love means in general terms the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I am not in isolation by myself but win my self-consciousness only through the renunciation of my independence [*Fürsichsein*] and through knowing myself as the unity of myself with another and of the other with me. (Hegel 2008, p. 162, [§158] Addition)

We can see, here, too, how love relates differently than the standard reference to the struggle between the Lord and Bondsman, and the striving towards the liberal conception of “mutual recognition.” In the latter, self-consciousness is won in a conflict whereby recognition becomes a source for the production of the *big* Other, and we can see this clearly, too, in the way that Kojève describes the creation of desire out of the struggle for self-recognition in the master-slave dialectic. But as Lacan writes in Seminar XX, his teaching aims to dissociate or *separate* the small other from the big Other (Lacan 1998, p. 83). The movement of the subject in the analytical discourse is one of moving from the Symbolic Other to the Real other, and this is something we see, again, in Hegelian love. Hegel writes:

The first moment in love is that I do not wish to be a self-subsistent and independent person and that, if I were, then I would

feel defective and incomplete. The second moment is that I find myself in another person, that I count for something in the other, while the other in turn comes to count for something in me. Love, therefore, is the most tremendous contradiction; the understanding cannot resolve it since there is nothing more stubborn than this point [*Punktualität*] of self-consciousness which is negated and which nevertheless I ought to possess as affirmative. Love is at once the producing and the resolving of this contradiction. As the resolving of it, love is unity of an ethical type. (Hegel 2008, p. 162, [§158] Addition)

Love, as we see in Hegel, allows for the recognition, the grasping of the subject's own alienation—its own lack or gap or negativity—through its reflection in the other. The self-consciousness attained in love is not one of completion and wholeness, or of becoming fully self-aware; rather, it is one of reconciling with the fact of the subject's own constitutive alienation, the negative at the heart of subjectivity. In love, the subject *renounces* its own independence, its own *affirmative* self-presence, and accepts its constitutive alienation. But in doing so, attains the knowledge of the freedom that allows it to produce the structure of its own further freedom. There is also in love something of an irrational kernel—the level of feeling produced in the form of the transference—allowing the subject to, later, join with the rational, objective, and universal form of the state, a rationalism that *can be known* to us.

The structuralist revolution, as Dolar notes, was “a break away from the humanist tradition centered on the subject [...] and particularly as a radical rupture with the philosophical tradition based on *cogito*” (Dolar 1998, p. 13). However, if we are to think emancipatory politics and ethics via reason and the presence of the subject, we can see now in what way the constitutive alienation of the subject is a condition of dialectical reasoning. The kind of reasoning produced in the transference—in love—involves the reconciling of the subject with its own constitutive alienation.

This, to conclude, is how the subject comes to *center* itself in the moment of an ethical act that produces the new as a signifying structure, the fundamental principle of the society, founded upon a necessary transformation that is nonetheless historically contingent. It is how the subject passes, not towards dis-alienation, or de-centering, but towards *separation*—the movement from the big Other to the small other. The new signifier, produced, then, in the analytical discourse, as the new center—an absent center, correlative with the subject as the gap in the structure—and the structuring principle is, as Zupančič puts it, “the event proper, and it triggers a new subjectivization” (Zupančič 2017, p. 127). This is how, again, as Dolar puts it, for Lacan “*there is no process, and no structure, without a subject*” (Dolar 1998, p. 13).

These are the terms in which the renewal of a dialectical humanism that apprehends subjectivity in its constitutive alienation must be grounded: not by way of the false humility of bourgeois and posthumanist concern with a substantialized otherness, where, as Žižek puts it “the subject pretends to speak on behalf of the Global Cosmic Order, posing as its humble instrument” (Žižek 1999, pp. 132–133)—a strategy to combat anthropocentric hubris—but as acknowledgement of the fact that no subject but us can take responsibility for doing what is necessary in historically contingent conditions. In a nod to Sartre, we have to agree that humanity is nothing other than what it makes of itself. We, alone, are responsible for what we do. Our struggle today, then—the struggle of the Anthropocene against the Capitalocene—is precisely the struggle of (dialectical) humanism against posthuman capitalism. Dialectical humanism must be grasped as the choice of preserving the conditions for human universality—a choice that, nonetheless, is centered on a constitutive loss.

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