

Abstracts

The Master Is Undead

Mladen Dolar

The paper takes as its starting point the anecdote of Freud's visit to Slovenia in April 1898, when he by coincidence met dr. Karl Lueger, the burgomaster of Vienna and the notorious antisemitic populist leader whom none other than Hitler later took as the role model. Lueger represented at the time a new type of the figure of the master, after the demise of the traditional paternal figures which served as the models of authority. The anecdote can be taken as emblematic of the political role of psychoanalysis which at its inception had to confront a new type of authority and a logic which stretches from that time up to the present. The paper further considers two cases of new grotesque masters after the political shift of modernity, Marx's confrontation with Louis Bonaparte in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, and the fictional figure of Ubu proposed by Alfred Jarry (roughly at the time of Freud's anecdotal encounter of Lueger) and which Michel Foucault took as the paradigm of "grotesque sovereignty." The second part of the paper tries to figure out how the seemingly excessive figures of new populist masters fit into the structure of what Lacan described as the discourse of the university, which presented for him the discourse that subtends the social ties after the advent of modernity. The populist masters can be taken as the symptoms of that constellation, following Lacan's gloomy predictions of the rise of segregation on the basis of university discourse, with the advancement of science, the common markets and the spread of universalization.

Keywords: populism, Bonapartism, grotesque sovereignty, psychoanalysis, university discourse, Freud, Lueger, Marx, Foucault, Lacan

Burning Down the Ship from “the Inside Out”: Afropessimism’s Ethics of the Real

Frances L. Restuccia

This essay addresses the question of “Black desire” (Frank Wilderson’s phrase in *Afropessimism*) as it pertains to Lacanian ethics (as conveyed in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Seminar VII). Like *Antigone*, *Afropessimism* is “a turning point” in the field of ethics. Lacan poses the same question about Antigone that Wilderson poses regarding the Black: “What does it mean ... [to] go beyond the limits of the human?” After elaborating on Fanon’s notion that “the black ... is not,” Marriott’s conception of *ab-sens* as blackness, and Wilderson’s idea of the Black as Slave, this essay uses and then reverses Žižek’s notion of parallax to suggest that the shift (which these theorists call for) in the (Black) phobogenic nightmare/object (petrified by the “white gaze”), can effect not only collapse of the (white) subject (as it pulls the black rug out from under it) but also a dissolution of the subject-object (racist) structure. As the object refuses to accept its reification (parallax), resisting its relegation to social death, through confrontation with and ownership of the Real hell that especially Wilderson’s Fanonian/Lacanian work insists on, the entire edifice will undergo a sea change as the eye that now looks at the Human sees it as what it is: nothing (reverse parallax). Herein lies the revolutionary desire—which can only arise through an “absolute condition”—that Afropessimism, in the spirit of Antigone, aims to ignite. “Social death can be destroyed,” writes Wilderson, once the ship is burned “*from the inside out.*”

Keywords: Afropessimism, Antigone, *ab-sens*, parallax, reverse parallax, social death, abjection, the undead, second death, Black revolutionary desire

Alas, poor Yorick! ... The Being of Spirit is a Bone *Nathan Brown*

This paper addresses the relation between famous phrases in Shakespeare and Hegel—”Alas, Poor Yorick!” and “The being of spirit as a bone”—which punctuate reflections upon the materiality of spirit. Meditating upon the challenge these enunciations pose to the living thought of dead matter, the author takes Hegel’s infinite judgment as an incitement to consider the problem of existence in *Hamlet* at the level of the material occupation of space. From this perspective, the article argues that *Hamlet* is pervasively concerned with the metaphysical riddles, political implications, and meta-theatrical effects of spirit’s spatial existence—not only in the graveyard scene or in the play’s famous philosophical soliloquys, but also in its subplots and apparently minor episodes. Property, warfare, station, the relation between nature and artifice, the material supports of writing and desire are inscribed in spatial economies of displacement, exchange, and dissolution that persistently accompany and conjoin the play’s intimate psychological dramas and overarching political framework. Ultimately, this is a matter of what it means for bodies to be displayed on a stage.

Keywords: Hegel, Shakespeare, Delacroix, space, theatricality, ornament, embodiment

His Master’s Missing Voice *Eric L. Santner*

The paper offers a reading of Franz Kafka’s late prose work, *Researches of a Dog*, as a literary thought experiment or exemplum of what it means to live a life where a region of being is foreclosed, a region linked to the figure of the Master. In the case of the dogs, it is the realm of human being; for humans, divine being.

Keywords: Kafka, Master, dogs

Earthlings and Spacemen: Life-and-Death Struggle *Bara Kolenc*

There are two fantasies building up the collective unconsciousness of the West today. One is the fantasy of the ultimate recovery of the ‘humanized’ planet – a fantasy of a *return to Paradise*. The other is the fantasy of *Noah’s Ark* – the beginning of space imperialism. The function of both is, of course, to cover the real with the phantasmal shield, for life in space is far from being possible and likewise a recovery of the humanity-friendly conditions on Earth. We might suggest, though, that these two fantasies point to the emerging class division of the 21st Century: the few who can count on the space asylum, and the rest who cannot – *spacemen* and *earthlings*. Masters and slaves. With turning life into a product, which is the nearing ultimate goal of the biotechnological revolution, the space masters are trying to rise above death as a sorrowful determination of the existent things, and, with this, also above the very dialectic of life and death. They aspire to transcend *life as a living thing* by taking it in hand, by technically managing it, and to become, not only symbolically but also physically, the masters of *life as a substance*. But they essentially fail.

Keywords: Hegel, Marx, spacemen, earthlings, masters, slaves, life, death, dead-living, living-dead, garbage, dialectics, biotechnology, space, production, reproduction, capitalism

Caesar’s Wounds: On the Absolute Master *Gregor Moder*

In Shakespeare’s dramatization of the death of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony delivers a powerful speech that turned the course of events. This article focuses on the rhetorical strategy employed by Antony and determines it as a rhetorical denegation of rhetoric – “I am no orator, as Brutus is” –, similar to the procedure Socrates uses in Plato’s *Symposium*. In addition, Anthony authorizes himself vicariously, not speaking in his own name, but in the name of the dead master, as the voice of Caesar’s wounds. The author discusses this rhetorical procedure as a case of

the theatricality of the very figure of the master. Discussing the role of death as “the absolute master” in Hegel’s dialectic of master and slave/bondsman, as well as in Hegel’s concept of historical repetition, this article suggests that the split between Caesar as a living individual and Caesar as the name of the master captures not only the point about the theatricality of the master, but also the difference between what Hegel called a world-historical individual and his idea of the monarch as suggested in his *Philosophy of Right*.

Keywords: Hegel, Shakespeare, master, rhetoric, theatricality, death

The Master, the Slave, and the Truth upon a Membrane *Jure Simoniti*

The paper argues that the archetypal staging, in which the master ends the struggle by risking his life, is primarily not about providing some sort of “transcendental form of sociality,” but rather serves to unfold an entirely novel measure of truth. Hegel invented a new logical space of truth which neither refers to anything *an sich* nor to anything *für uns*. Instead, it is a truth that requires an event to emerge at all, for only an incident that shatters the coordinates of its own emergence can mark the place where truth ceases to be either simply objective in the sense of referring to the incarnated order of things out there, or simply subjective in the sense of deriving the constitution of reality from the inner set of concepts or cultural and language forms. In this reading, thus, the clash between two consciousnesses, ending in the asymmetry of the master and the slave, represents a *paradigm of an event* in philosophy, an occurrence which is not derivable from any previous principle or state of affairs but rather changes the game once it takes place. Its eventual character consists in forming a membrane between the outside and the inside world, and on this membrane both the “objectivist” claims of classical metaphysics and the “subjectivist” prerogatives of Kantianism cancel each other out and lose their hold.

Keywords: Hegel, master-slave dialectic, truth, struggle for recognition, risk of death, principle of sufficient reason, law of non-contradiction

Dialectic's Laughing Matter

Simon Hajdini

Is laughter a reactionary or a revolutionary affect? The talk zeroes in on the key differences between Benjamin's and Adorno's respective theories of laughter. Contrary to the latter, who conceptualizes laughter as an instrument of mass dumbification, sadistic ridicule, and false happiness, Benjamin places laughter at the very point of inception of thought, associating it with the possibility of a revolutionary break, and the onset of a new collective subjectivity. For Benjamin, thought as borne of laughter is essentially dialectical. Accordingly, the focus of this talk is not on the dialectics of laughter, but rather on the laughter of dialectics. That is to say, the question at issue here is not how we might think laughter dialectically, but rather how laughter already thinks dialectically, and thus always already structures dialectics at its most fundamental—not merely logically and metaphysically, but also politically.

Keywords: Benjamin, Adorno, Brecht, Hegel, laughter, jokes, dialectics, capitalism, subjectivity, biography, trauma, digital dystopia

Undoing the Master/s: Generic Ambiguity in Karoline von Günderrode's Ballad "Don Juan"

Frauke Berndt

In her ballad "Don Juan," the German Romantic author Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806) is talking back to the Weimar masters, mainly to Friedrich Schiller. For that purpose, she exploits the figure of Don Juan, who is both the historical half-brother of King Philip II of Spain (John of Austria, 1547–1578) and, at the same time, the fictional prototype of masculinity and virility with a long intertextual and intermedial tradition. Günderrode identifies "Juan" as a whiny little boy and so reveals the master's potency as a regressive phantasy. In a psychoanalytical close reading, I would like to demonstrate how the master is made ambiguous in three steps. I begin with the history of the Don Juan motif and consider the theoretical readings of this figure (1). Then I analyze

the generic forms in G nderrode’s ballad (2) and demonstrate that their interplay produces the ambiguity of the master. With this ambiguity, the ballad “Don Juan” undertakes a frontal assault on the modern myth of the master before the concept had even begun its illustrious career under Hegel (3).

Keywords: Karoline von G nderrode, European Romanticism, Don Juan, ambiguity, genre theory, queer theory, iconography

Master, Don’t You See That I Am Learning?

Henrik J ker Bjerre

The essential ingredient in research as well as teaching is, what I will call “knowing differently,” i.e. a change in the very structures of knowledge, which occurs at some, crucial moments. In both research and education, the accumulation of knowledge culminates in a qualitative shift. The research community at large “knows differently,” when such a shift occurs, and the individual learner “knows differently” on a more personal level, when they grasp, what Ray Land has defined as a “threshold concept.” Knowing differently involves a relation to the master signifier as the culmination or indeed simply the name of a shift, which has already taken place. However, contemporary academic bureaucracy carries with it a danger for the very capacity of knowing differently. Because of its meta-quantification and pseudocommodification of academic work, it risks starving the potential for scientific breakthroughs and leaving students helplessly locked in a state of liminality. Research and education are therefore in urgent need of defense and reimagination.

Keywords: knowledge, research, education, threshold concepts, university discourse, pseudo-commodification, master signifiers

On Ridiculous Master

Peter Klepec

The article deals with the question of what distinguishes the “ridiculous masters” and what consequences this has for the figure of the master in general. It proceeds in three steps. First, it argues why the new masters who have recently appeared in the political sphere are “ridiculous masters.” Then follows a terminological excursus on the meaning of the words “master” and “ridiculous,” with consequences for the expression “ridiculous masters.” These are manifold and presented in the third step: Not only is there an ambivalence of the term “ridiculous”, there is also no normality of the master, as Žižek’s notion of “parallax” shows us. This means that the master is at the same time more precarious and stable than we can imagine: There will always be masters, but at the same time there are no more (true, real) masters today. The complaint about the loss of masters in the present (as put forward by Arendt) consists, in fact, in referring to other masters (past masters) and to naive believers (in the past) who really believed in masters. Thus, the master as such is always ridiculous in one way or another, but not all masters are “ridiculous masters.” We should beware of the novelty and specialness of the latter and take them seriously – even if they are ridiculous, they are still masters, which makes them even more dangerous.

Keywords: masters, politics, “ridiculous masters,” Hegel, Freud, Lacan

Hysterical Authority

Candela Potente

The analytic setting is inaugurated by the institution of what Lacan calls the “subject supposed to know.” This presupposed mastery that the analyst has is eventually replaced by the analysand’s discovery that it was actually her who produced meaning all along. Through a consideration of Lacan’s theory of the four discourses and his understanding of the analyst’s utterances as enigmas along with Freud’s use of the figure of translation in his theory of dream interpretation, the question of authority in the analytic setting can be reconsidered from a new perspective.

The analysand's act of instituting the analyst as the subject supposed to know and the realization that analytic interpretation is primarily based on translation—which makes the analysand realize that it was from her that knowledge had always come—constitute what can be called the analysand's hysterical authority.

Keywords: Lacan, subject supposed to know, analyst, analysand

Our Duty Towards Our Master: Hegel's Feelings on Feelings

Goran Vranešević

The article re-examines the relationship of power and subordination that Hegel brought to the fore in the figures of master and slave. Rather than following the standard practice of analyzing their struggle for recognition of self-consciousness, we will focus on the role of feelings in their face-to-face confrontation. At this moment their only recourse is their sense of self. They are immersed in the being of life, in self-feeling, which is why the feeling of fear for their lives shakes their self-consciousness to the core. However, one of them, who later becomes the master, vehemently disregards these feelings, while the other, the slave, is obliged to carry the burden for both of them. In this context, we will conceptualize the often neglected feelings as an essential part of Hegel's thought, but also contribute to the understanding of the contemporary master, who, in contrast to the traditional one, often wants to be recognized as having feelings.

Keywords: Hegel, feelings, affects, consciousness, master, desire, body, metaphysics

Caught in the Web. Media and Authority, Between Old and New

Ywval Kremnitzer

In recent decades, a new style of authoritarian politics has taken hold throughout the liberal-democratic world. The new style of authority figures is characterized by obscene, transgressive, behavior, reminiscent of the “crowd” leader as theorized by Freud, only far less transient. It is rather obvious that the rise of this new authoritarianism has something to do with the rise of the new medium, the internet. But here most scholars bifurcate: political theorists and social scientists who study the new wave of populist authoritarianism tend to view technology as epiphenomenal to their topic, a mere means of communication, utilized for effective propaganda, whereas theorists of technology tend to view the transformation in technology as almost a sole factor, certainly the determining one. My interest in this article lies in the intersection between authority and technology. How can we think of the network as a social phenomenon, and, at the same time, consider the social as a network? What can social and political phenomena teach us about the nature of the new technology? How and to what extent does technology reshape the very fabric of social and political life? I pick up the connections, tensions, and intersections between network technology and related topics (systems, structure), and social and political theories of social, unwritten rules, which serve to support authority.

Keywords: Arendt, Lacan, Simondon, McLuhan, authority, technology, media

Whose Servant Is a Master?

Slavoj Žižek

Friedrich the Great defined himself (the king) as “the first servant of State,” and this is how, from the early Enlightenment onwards, a master justifies his rule: he is in reality the greatest servant, the servant of all his subjects/servants. As expected, this false humility can justify the most

brutal terror—Stalin fully belongs to this space. But there are different modalities of this position of “serving the servants,” from technocracy and religious fundamentalism to obscene master-clowns, or even, as Mao Ze Dong can be characterized, to the “Lord of Misrule,” a master who periodically organizes rebellions against his own rule.

Keywords: Hegel, master, state, power, law

Rage Against the Machine: Adorno, Hegel, and Absolute Mastery

Jamila M. H. Mascot

Contingencies can be taken as the litmus test of the speculative mastery of Hegel's Absolute and of his philosophy tout court. This paper engages with the modal category of contingency (*die Zufälligkeit / das Zufällige*) as it appears in the *Science of Logic*, as well as with the contingencies (*die Zufälligkeiten / das Zufall*) that occur in nature and in the realm of the spirit to revisit the painful endurance of the Hegelian concept, which Adorno took for a monster of cruelty and Gérard Lebrun considered a master of patience. If the contingent is the limit par excellence, the specter that haunts the Hegelian system and that which may endanger and sabotage the very speculative enterprise of the Absolute, what is the fate of contingencies in the dialectical economy of the concept? Does the calvary of the speculative consist in the dialectical torment of unceasingly and unsuccessfully attempting to overcome (*überwinden*) and eliminate (*entfernen*) the contingencies of the world? Is then the contingent the “speculative Good Friday” of Hegelian philosophy?

Keywords: Hegel, Adorno, contingency, concept, Absolute

