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Psychoanalysis and Fate

“She knows there’s no success like failure,
and that failure’s no success at all.”

Bob Dylan, *Love Minus Zero/No Limit* (1965)

The Compulsion of Destiny

At the conclusion of the third section of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud introduces the term *Schicksalszwang*, compulsion of destiny. This concept later evolved into the notion of fate neurosis and, by extension, failure neurosis, a term coined by René Laforgue in his 1941 *Psychopathologie de l'échec* (*Psychopathology of Failure*). The pair of compulsion and failure perhaps offers the most succinct introduction to the topic of psychoanalysis and fate. Freud writes of the compulsion of destiny:

What psycho-analysis reveals in the transference phenomena of neurotics can also be observed in the lives of some normal people. The impression they give is of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some “daemonic” power ... The compulsion which is here in evidence, differs in no way from the compulsion to repeat which we have found in neurotics, even though the people we are now considering have never shown any signs

of dealing with a neurotic conflict by producing symptoms. Thus we have come across people all of whose human relationships have the same outcome: such as the benefactor who is abandoned in anger after a time by each of his *protégés*, however much they may otherwise differ from one another, and who thus seems doomed to taste all the bitterness of ingratitude; or the man whose friendships all end in betrayal by his friend; or the man who time after time in the course of his life raises someone else into a position of great private or public authority and then, after a certain interval, himself upsets that authority and replaces him by a new one; or, again, the lover each of whose love affairs with a woman passes through the same phases and reaches the same conclusion. This “perpetual recurrence of the same thing” causes us no astonishment when it relates to *active* behaviour on the part of the person concerned and when we can discern in him an essential character-trait which always remains the same and which is compelled to find expression in a repetition of the same experiences. We are much more impressed by cases where the subject appears to have a *passive* experience, over which he has no influence, but in which he meets with a repetition of the same fatality. There is the case, for instance, of the woman who married three successive husbands each of whom fell ill soon afterwards and had to be nursed by her on their death-beds.¹

Compulsion and failure as the two sides of fate come together in the concept of repetition. Seemingly passively and contrary to its conscious intention, the subject falls prey to the automatism of the eternal recurrence of the same failure.² In *Seminar XI*, Lacan emphatically grants repetition the status of one of the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis by taking his cue from this precise duality of compulsion and failure, boldly relating it to the Aristotelian couple of *automaton* (spontaneity) and *tyche* (chance), which resist integral inclusion in the famous doctrine

¹ Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 18, 21–22.

² Freud will give to these terms entirely new meanings by radically questioning the traditional oppositional pairs of intentional and unintentional, active and passive, conscious and unconscious, etc.

of the four causes.³ The two terms subvert the idea of causal determinism, in turn signaling an entirely different conception of (unconscious) causality.⁴

Lacan reinterprets Aristotle's duality by relating it to his key distinction between the Symbolic and the Real, linking *automaton* to the symbolic persistence of the signifier, to its autonomy in relation to the spoken (as opposed to the speaking) being. The spoken being of the subject is not the embodiment of speech, its incarnation, but rather results from an excarnation of being reduced to the bones of the signifier in its essential iterability. In apparent dramatic opposition to *automaton*, Lacan defines *tyche* as an "encounter with the Real"⁵ beyond the symbolic order, that is, beyond the instance of signifiers and their repeatability, and thus also beyond the pleasure principle that guides the subject along the paths of the signifier, perpetually leading it back to its place of satisfaction.

However, the relation between these two terms is not simply one of opposition.⁶ For Lacan, the two belong together in joining the *impossibility* inherent in language with the emergence of *contingency*. Lacan derives said impossibility from the very nature of the linguistic structure as conceived of by Saussure, who defines language as a system of signs whose value is given only in relation to other signs, such that in language "there are only differences, *without positive terms*."⁷ At the core of the linguistic structure lies the relation of distinctive opposition: for an element of language to be distinctive, it suffices that it differs from all other elements,

³ For the discussion of the material, formal, efficient, and final cause, see Aristotle, "Metaphysics," in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, V 2.

⁴ See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 53–64. The fact that Aristotle analyses *tyche* as part of his discussion of causes testifies to the conceptual horizon of ancient Greek reflections on fate, which, at least since the Stoics, has been considered part of the doctrine of causes and thus the analysis of causal determinism. For a more detailed analysis of the causality of the unconscious, see Simon Hajdini, "Zakaj nezavedno ne pozna časa? Pogled s (Kantove) strani."

⁵ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, 52.

⁶ This is the case already in Aristotle, who considers *tyche* as a species of the genus *automaton*.

⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 120.

so that its entire linguistic value lies solely in this oppositional relation to others, rather than in any substantial quality of each of its elements – for language is “a form, not a substance.”⁸ However, Lacan adds a key corollary to this conception of structure by – surprisingly and counterintuitively – attributing the property of reflexivity to the relation of distinctive opposition. This centrality of reflexivity to the linguistic relation of opposition was articulated by Jean-Claude Milner in *Le périple structural* as the basic tenet of what he terms Lacan’s “hyperstructuralism.” Milner pinpoints the scandalous reasoning behind it:

In classical ontology, the fundamental relation of equivalence is that of identity. Reflexivity, in other words: identity-with-itself, $A = A$, here is the decisive point. In Saussurean ontology, founding the structural procedures, the function which was based on the principle of identity is replaced by the principle of opposition; we can no longer say $A = A$, but rather: A is in distinctive opposition to A , or, formulated in the traditional language of identity: A exists in the structure only to the strict extent that A is not identical to A . A strange supposition, and we understand why it was impossible to proclaim it without restraint, for nothing could be more alien to the philosophical tradition, even to thought itself.⁹

An element of structure is not only in relation of distinctive opposition to each and all of the other elements, but is in opposition to itself, whereby the subject, as conceived by Lacanian psychoanalysis, is nothing but the name for this reflexive oppositionity of structure, that is, for the structure’s punctual, but repeatable and recurring, non-identity with itself.

When Freud defines the compulsion to repeat with recourse to Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal recurrence of the same, the “same” at issue here is not a mere faithful reproduction of a situation in which – as if guided by a demonic force of destiny – the subject perpetually finds itself and which could be said to be identical each time. The “same” that is

⁸ Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 113.

⁹ Jean-Claude Milner, *Le périple structural: figures et paradigme*, 164–65.

at stake here and to which the subject returns as if to its fate cannot be reduced to the identity of the situation. The same is not the same as the identical; on the contrary, the same is only that which cannot be identical with itself and which therefore resists affirmative repetition in the sense of reproduction. And while the relation of identity(-with-itself) is characterized by the possibility of an element being replaced by itself ($A = A$), the same is defined by the fact that it cannot be replaced by itself because it is not self-identical but rather self-differing.

Lacan makes the same point in yet another way, deriving it from Kierkegaard's concept of repetition: only that which cannot be repeated repeats itself, thus forming the point of impossibility of iterability of signification. Consequently, the eternal recurrence of the same is not the return of the self-identical, but of the self-different subject, which lacks identity and cannot be represented by any signifier since the subject is precisely the self-difference of the signifier, i. e., the point of impossibility of replacing the signifier *with itself*. As such, the subject is the unconscious (of) structure, only ever represented by a signifier for another, repressed and inaccessible signifier, which, as if by a demonic automatism alien to the subject, weaves its destiny.

If Lacan further links the contingent emergence of the Real with *tyche*, which in ancient Greek texts denotes the punctual effect of fate on man (the Latin equivalent is *fortuna*, good or bad luck that befalls us suddenly and without a demonstrable causal connection to the past), then we can relate *automaton*, or the signifying automatism, with another ancient Greek concept of fate, namely with *Moirai*. And just as ancient Greek texts associate *Moirai* with *logos*, reason, and necessity, which remain impenetrable to us, so too can the aspect of repetition represented by *automaton* be linked to the symbolic order and, by extension, to the process of psychoanalytic interpretation, insofar as it is based entirely on the analysis of the paths and mechanisms of the signifier. This signifying game secretly weaves the threads of the subject's destiny and, as Freud's examples show, directs it toward an absolutely fixed point in the future.

Dieter Bremer classifies ancient Greek tragedies according to the distinction between these two concepts of fate and reads *Oedipus Rex* as a

tragedy of *tyche*, of the contingent-inaccessible as opposed to the absolutely – and thus continuously – inaccessible, which defines Moira:

The Greek concept of Fate and its historical transformation is essentially linked to Necessity (Ananke). From Homer to Aeschylus, Moira has the character of Ananke. The archaic connection between Fate and Necessity is later replaced by a conceptual connection between chance and Necessity ... The history of the Greek concept of fate extends between these two poles: as the history of the progressive empowerment of *tyche*.¹⁰

The psychoanalytic concept of the Oedipus complex highlights the tension between the two and thus links the contingent emergence of chance with the signifying mechanisms of the unconscious, whereby Moira and *tyche* become two sides of the same fatal framework. Here we can only mention in passing that Freud repeatedly refers to the connection between the concepts of Moira and Ananke. In *Totem and Taboo*, for instance, he links it to the creation of spirits as man's first cultural creation or "first theoretical achievement,"¹¹ with which this part of his originally conceived omnipotence is entrusted for the first time to external forces that resist his narcissism. But what about *tyche*, which Freud does not explicitly mention? Is it not representative of the libido which, according to Freud, resists submission to Ananke? Libidinal *tyche* would thus be located beyond the reality of the universe, and thus beyond the pleasure principle, insofar as reality implies a necessity that directs the speaking being onto the paths of the pleasure- and reality-principle.¹²

Such an interpretation is in line with Kierkegaard's unusual definition of repetition as prospective remembrance, that is, a remembering not of the past but of the future. An earlier subtitle of Kierkegaard's *Repetition* read "A Fruitless Venture." Repetition, the narrator finds, is fruitless,

¹⁰ Dieter Bremer, "Der Begriff des Schicksals bei Hegel und seine griechischen Ursprünge," 26.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 13, 93.

¹² Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, lecture XXVI.

impossible, yet it is precisely its fruitlessness that bears fruit (that is un-consumable). Repetition is barren in the sense of not reproducing, of being incommensurable with reproduction. Reproduction is always a reproduction of the self-identical, while we only ever repeat that which cannot be reproduced. As such, repetition is neither hope nor recollection. The latter are all too fruity: “Hope is an enticing fruit that fails to satisfy, recollection sorrowful sustenance that fails to satisfy.” Willing the fruitless flowers of repetition requires the courage of hopelessness: “It requires youthfulness to hope and youthfulness to recollect, but it requires courage to will repetition. He who will only hope is cowardly.”¹³

For a proper reading of Freud’s examples, a slight yet crucial shift in perspective is therefore necessary. They are not about the subject’s current situation repeatedly reproducing a fixed point in the past, which, as an unavoidable determinant, would provide the template for the future. According to this reading, the past would be fixed or immutable and, as such, would dictate the immutability of the subject’s future. In contrast, repetition is something entirely different: what is repeated is a fixed point of the future itself. The demonic power that commands over subjects and gives the impression of the subjects’ “being pursued by a malignant fate” is a compulsion that *pursues subjects from the future*. Fate, as Freud understands it, therefore implies a temporal loop: the subject follows in the footsteps of its fate, *while preceding it*.

The point regarding the repetition of the future can be illustrated by the example of trauma, which Lacan touches upon in his analysis of repetition.¹⁴ Trauma, in the emphatic sense, does not operate from the past, but from the future as the subject’s prospective fate. This is why Lacan can say that the subject of trauma cannot reproduce or remember it, but this does not prevent the trauma itself from remembering the subject – but from the future, in random moments of encounter that are structurally experienced as failures. In short: the object of the compulsion to repeat is chance, *tyche*, something that cannot be anticipated and therefore

¹³ Søren Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” in: *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, 4.

¹⁴ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, 51.

emphatically belongs to the future. As Frank Ruda writes in *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*, “there is a repetition that strangely precedes what it repeats.”¹⁵

How to Fail (Successfully)

Psychoanalysis relates the notion of fate to the concept of the compulsion to repeat. The object of such repetition is the impossibility of repetition (as reproduction), which makes of repetition a compulsion to fail (to reproduce). But in this failure, as Lacan often points out, something nevertheless succeeds, and we could say with Bob Dylan that psychoanalysis “knows there’s no success like failure, and that failure’s no success at all.” If the subject succeeds in failing, this is because failure is the success of truth, which comes to light precisely where we witness a failure

¹⁵ Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*, 8. Ruda mentions in passing that his “argument resembles to some extent what Jean-Pierre Dupuy [in *The Mark of the Sacred*] calls ‘enlightened doom-saying’.” There are certainly several obvious similarities between Ruda’s (Badiouian) and Dupuy’s (Girardian) projects, but suffice it to only mention the key use of the concept of “self-transcendence,” which in both cases forms the core of the “counter-history of rationalism.” Here, we cannot dwell in detail on the idea of the future as conceived by Dupuy, who, as a thinker of liberalism, bases his critique of contemporary neo-liberal “economystification” and the project of re-politicizing the economic sphere on the reintroduction of the idea of the future into the sphere of economic rationality, so that this project can be summed up in the slogan: *Economy without politics is economy without a future*. However, is Dupuy’s analysis compatible with conceiving of the future as repetition? The key difference between Dupuy’s “back to the future” proposal and our own would be that Dupuy conceives of the future through the concept of self-transcendence, i. e., the immanent political self-transcendence of the economic sphere, while our thinking about the future is more closely related to Eric L. Santner’s concept of the “surplus of immanence.” In short, the surplus of immanence as the core of repetition arises precisely at the point of the impossibility of self-transcendence, just as the subject of fatalism arises at the point of impossibility of the subject of free choice. See Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*; Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Economy and the Future: A Crisis of Faith*. For the concept of “surplus of immanence,” see Eric L. Santner, *The Weight of All Flesh: On the Subject-Matter of Political Economy*.

of meaning. Think of Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* which bears brilliant witness to this: something gets stuck, it fails, but that is precisely why it (i. e., an unconscious formation) works. Or think of jokes as another in the series of unconscious formations: for a joke to succeed in articulating a truth, it must depart from meaning (or at least from the expected meaning); for a slip of the tongue to succeed, it must depart from intended sense.¹⁶ It is inaccurate to say of someone who has told a joke that they have succeeded in telling a good joke. Rather, and more precisely, they *unfailed* in telling a good joke in the same sense that the woman from Freud's example has *unfailed* three times in a row to marry men who soon fell ill, so that she had to nurse them until their death.

Failure, which manifests itself in *tyche* – that is, in the punctual effect of fate, insofar as fate is essentially something that happens – is not the opposite or a mere negation of the predicate of success, but rather corresponds to the affirmation of the non-predicate, which defines the difference between Kant's negative and infinite judgments analyzed by Slavoj Žižek.¹⁷ Just like the undead (zombies, vampires, etc.) are not merely not dead (and hence alive) but rather *not not* dead (that is, neither living nor dead), that which *unfails* is irreducible to the fact that it does *not* succeed, in turn bearing witness to a surplus that eludes the opposition between success and failure. The most we can say about this successful failure is that it did *not not* succeed. If using a double negation, we say that something did *not not* succeed (and hence that “there's no success like failure”), that does not mean that it succeeded (for “failure is no success at all”): the negation of negation does not coincide with affirmation but rather remains irreducible such that the theorem $\neg \neg p \equiv p$ does not apply. Only under these conditions can failure become an object of compulsion and of repetition, that is, of *the compulsion to (unfailingly) repeat*. The subject does not repeat failure as such, but only failure that is by its nature not a failure – because it succeeds in bringing about a surplus of enjoyment.

¹⁶ See Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life: Forgetting, Slips of the Tongue, Bungled Actions, Superstitions and Errors*; Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*.

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, 113.

If anything, this success is not something we should or could strive for, but rather something we cannot escape and which cannot *not* succeed, because it *unfails* every time.

By way of example, we can think of the elaborate strategies of procrastination devised by the obsessional neurotic, who will do anything to delay encountering the Real, to anticipate the occurrence of contingency, which by its very nature cannot be anticipated and which he will therefore always encounter despite (or because of) all his or her efforts to avoid it. With his protective measures, the obsessional neurotic arranges everything down to the last detail so as to avoid chance and ensure that nothing happens. Here, the very pseudo-certainty of a looming catastrophe functions as a means of avoiding catastrophe, whereby doubt and uncertainty act as conditions for asserting pseudo-certainty as a paradoxical contingent certainty. In this sense, it cannot be said that the obsessive fails to arrive at the right time, but rather that they *unfail* in arriving at the right time, which is the source of their paralyzing enjoyment.¹⁸

This is also the matrix of contemporary survivalism and its project of outliving humanity. Survivalist preparations are not about the afterlife, but the outlife. Survivalists are actively preparing for the onset of extraordinary circumstances, prepping for the apocalypse, anticipating disaster – so that it will not have happened and that their preparations for the outlife will have been completely successful insofar as they will have been completely unnecessary. Do these subjects not “act as if they were not free” (as one of the slogans in Ruda’s book has it) and thus as if the future were inevitable, necessary – all with the aim of preventing an accidental catastrophe, a catastrophe of chance? And does Ruda’s *Abolishing Freedom* not claim that in these fatalistic times we are not fatalistic enough? That our fatalism is obsessive, that is, the fatalism of protective measures, trapped

¹⁸ In his analysis of the Rat Man, Freud highlights these two key moments of doubt and uncertainty, emphasizing both the need for uncertainty in mental life, which is reflected in compulsive rituals as methods of producing uncertainty, as well as the rejection of clocks so characteristic of obsessive-compulsive individuals. Sigmund Freud, “Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis,” in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 10, 232–33.

in the premise that it is possible to avoid the paradoxical contingent necessity of fate? And that in doing so, we overlook the fact that the onset of this fate results from our attempts to avoid it; that our attempts to cure the illness effectively are “flights into illness” (to use Freud’s term)? Hence the gospel according to Ruda: “The worst has already happened.” The slogan repeats the temporal paradox of repetition: we are living in a post-apocalyptic state that precedes the apocalypse itself. For how could the catastrophe of the event be worse than persisting in the current state of “catastrophe without event,”¹⁹ i. e., in a state of suffocating actuality that equates the future (and thus the change in the coordinates of our socio-economic reality) with a terrifying vision of the end of all ends, renouncing the very idea of a future and thus preserving the *status quo*?

Ruda’s book stages a confrontation with Aristotle’s concept of freedom as capacity. Here, every free act can always be said to be the rational realization of a possibility, so that every free act merely effects a transition from the modality of the possible to that of the actual, thereby realizing itself as necessary. In the name of fatalistic freedom, Ruda abolishes Aristotle’s concept of freedom, which is the code for our enslavement to the possible: the road to abolishing slavery leads through abolishing freedom. Ruda opts for *Wahnfreiheit* as opposed to *Wahlfreiheit*, a “mad freedom” instead of the “freedom of choice.” For from the perspective of free choice advocates, the fatalist freedom must necessarily appear as a *Wahn*, as a ruinous delusion of apocalyptic proportions. In a series of lucid analyses that traverse the history of rationalism, Ruda, in the name of fatalism, opposes the idea of naturalized freedom, freedom as capacity and possession that is realized in the act of choice, in order to wrest freedom from necessity and surrender it to the impossible and the contingent.

Historically, fatalism has presented a problem for philosophy, which saw belief in fate as an example of escapism from responsibility and therefore as something that cannot form the basis of a credible philosophical position. It understood fatalism as an attack on and criticism of rational

¹⁹ I am borrowing the diagnostic description of our contemporary age as a time of “catastrophe without event” from Eva Horn, *The Future as Catastrophe: Imagining Disaster in the Modern Age*.

judgment, on which rests the type of freedom called freedom of choice (Greek: *proairesis*). It is therefore not surprising that Aristotle treats *tyche* or chance (which, in contrast to him, we read as the punctual emergence of fate) precisely in the context of free choice as an irrational addition, a *paralogon*, that does not correspond to rational choice, to *logos*, though it does not undermine it. Unlike *automaton*, which Aristotle attributes to inert objects, children, and animals, denying them the ability to choose, chance (lucky or unlucky) for Aristotle can only befall those capable of rational choice, for “what is not capable of action cannot do anything by chance. Thus an inanimate thing or a beast or a child cannot do anything by chance, because it is *incapable of choice*; nor can good fortune or ill fortune be ascribed to them ...”²⁰ For Aristotle, only beings capable of rational judgment and thus of freedom have a fortunate or unfortunate hand in their choices, so that fortune goes hand in hand with *proairesis* and *logos*.

The alternative dictated by the principle of freedom of choice is therefore as follows: either we have the possibility of choice and are capable of chance (*tyche*), or we have no possibility of choice and are capable only of spontaneity (*automaton*). The alternative roughly corresponds to the division between the subject, understood as a being of *logos* and freedom, and the object, which lacks both. Psychoanalysis radically shifts this alternative. As we have seen, Lacan does not place *automaton* in the field of the automatism of nature, which lacks rational thought and the ability to choose, but rather links it to the instance of the signifier without which there is neither *logos* nor subject. It is where Aristotle only sees an asubjective field of *automaton*, that Lacan situates the subject of the unconscious (as essentially different from the subject of cognition). The subject of fatalism emerges at the point of impossibility of the Aristotelian subject of free choice and is hence the symptom of the universe of choice as such.

As for *tyche*, Lacan also explicitly detaches it from the Aristotelian context in order to wrest chance from the accidental and hand it over to contingency:

²⁰ Aristotle, “Physics,” in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 197b; my emphasis.

Aristotle's formula – that the *tuché* is defined by being able to come to us only from a being capable of choice, *proairesis*, that the *tuché*, good or bad fortune, cannot come to us from an inanimate object, a child or an animal – is controverted here. The very accident of this exemplary dream depicts this. Certainly, Aristotle marks the extreme limit of that point that stops it on the edge of the extravagant forms of sexual behaviour, which he can only describe as *teriotés*, monstrosities.²¹

The dream referenced in this passage is the famous nightmare from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which the apparition of a dead child visits its sleeping father with the words “Father, don't you see that I'm burning?” spoken at the very moment when a candle in the next room tips over and ignites the tablecloth under which the child's body lies.²² To summarize the well-known point of Lacan's reading of this dream, the father wakes up from his dreams in order to avoid the Real of the dream itself, which is more real to him than external reality and which consumes him like a flame. But what is crucial for the discussion here is that *tyche*, the dream-encounter with the Real apparition of the dead child, is very much the product of some inert being, the dead son who appears in the dream, or the candle that tips over in reality.²³ This encounter with the Real is by no means a random (side-)effect of a being capable of free choice, but rather the effect of an object, the *objet petit a*, an inert piece of the real, with the help of which chance is realized.

When speaking of the demonic compulsion of fate, Freud adds that in this case “the subject appears to have a *passive* experience, over which he has no influence, but in which he meets with a repetition of the same fatality.” Lacan's reinterpretation of Aristotle's duality of *tyche* and *automaton* radically shifts both the opposition between subject and object and the opposition between active and passive. The passive experience of fate is neither passive nor asubjective. Fate as *automaton* implies subjectivity that stems entirely from the activity or action of the structure, which, on

²¹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, 69.

²² Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 509.

²³ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, 58.

the other hand, as *tyche*, is realized with the help of a contingent and inert piece of the real. In this precise sense, the unconscious is “out there,” and the trauma (as incarnated in object *a*) enters a relation with the excarnated being of the subject – remembering *us*, rather than *us* remembering *it*.

For Aristotle, chance is defined by the possibility of choice in the sense that the subject of choice could have chosen something, but did not, and yet it happened anyway. In contrast to this, we would now propose the formula of fatalist freedom, insofar as it does not coincide with freedom of choice and insofar it does not reduce contingency to an accidental moment that in no way undermines the *logos*: *Choose that which cannot not be chosen because it is impossible to choose it*. The subject of fatalism is thus confronted with the following: it is impossible to choose *and* impossible not to choose. Fatalist freedom kills two birds with one stone, just like Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, who wants to die *and* live in Paris.

If we were to look for examples of fatalist freedom, we would find plenty of them in Kafka. The hunger artist cannot eat and cannot not eat – and therefore eats nothing itself. Josephine the singer cannot or does not know how to sing and cannot or does not know how not to sing – her skill is in that she cannot not sing. The man from the country cannot enter the Law and cannot not enter the Law – therein lies the precariousness of his fate. Josef K. is neither guilty nor innocent – his guilt lies in his very innocence.²⁴ All these examples repeat the contradiction of the unfailed, which provides the key to grasping their economy: the hunger artist is *un-eating*, Josephine is *un-singing*, the man from the country is *un-entering*, and K. is *un-guilty*, which does not mean that they do not eat, do not sing, do not enter, and are not guilty. Underlying this structure is the paradox of the psychoanalytic concept of enjoyment: it is impossible to enjoy (which, however, does not mean that we do not enjoy) and it is impossible not to enjoy (which, however, does not mean that we enjoy). Enjoyment is at once lacking and excessive, a surplus scarcity, that is, lack as excess.²⁵

²⁴ Simon Hajdini, “The Tripwire of Modernism: Hunger as Function and Ornament,” in: *Understanding Lacan, Understanding Modernism*, 178.

²⁵ For the term “surplus scarcity,” see Eric L. Santner, “Marx and Manatheim,” 31, 36.

If enjoyment, as Lacan famously writes, is “prohibited [*interdite*] to whoever speaks,”²⁶ then the emergence of speech is the erasure of enjoyment. However, this erasure is not a neutral absence, but rather an excessive lack or surplus enjoyment: enjoyment is simultaneously prohibited and unavoidable. Therefore, psychoanalysis does not promote a transgression of the prohibition, its abolition as a path to a well measured enjoyment, to the Aristotelian “golden mean,” i.e., to enjoyment without excess. Enjoyment rests only in its excess – it is an addition, a supplement without a whole to which it is added. In this sense, enjoyment corresponds to repetition and its tychic object, to repetition as prospective remembering that precedes what it repeats. Herein lies the point of Freud’s paradoxical term “choice of neurosis.” The subject, as conceived by psychoanalysis, finds itself in a double bind of choice, both unable to choose *and* not to choose. For psychoanalysis, choice and fate are not opposites. On the contrary: we can only choose our own fate (we can only choose what cannot be chosen and what emphatically is situated beyond free choice), so that there is no other fate than the one we choose. Fate is something we choose, but by chance, so that the choice unfolds behind our backs as a chance encounter – with *it* choosing *us*.

If today’s subject is burdened with the hardships of unsatisfactory success, the reasons for this must also be sought in the enjoyment in failure, which shows that the source of our insurmountable hardships lies not so much in the failure of socio-political and economic reality as in its excessively successful triumph. Today, we are witnessing a flood of success manuals that promise us guidelines and strategies that will do away with our daily misfortunes and failures. As a venerable heir to fatalism, psychoanalysis offers guidelines for failure. The real question for our time is not how to succeed, but how to unfail.

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²⁶ Jacques Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in: *Écrits*, 696.

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