

# LACK AND DESTRUCTION

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THE SUBJECT PRECEDES ITSELF

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*Destruction. — The more-than-real and the interruption of the repeatable. — Cure and re-education. — Two subjective allocations of force: anxiety and superego.*

Destruction is a figure of the grafting (*enracinement*) of the subject in which loss not only turns lack into a cause, but also produces consistency out of excess. Through destruction, the subject attaches itself to what within lack survives, and is not the repetitive closure of the effect to the presence of the cause.

If the *structural* concept of contradiction (the splitting) implies the presence of lack and points to the horizon of the law, the *historical* concept of contradiction arises from the presence of destruction whose sphere of action lies in the *non-law*. One pole of the contradiction, which constitutes the law of the *ex-place* (*esplace*) as the malevolent genie of place, plays with its own absence as that which, by founding the repeatable, guarantees the perennial conservation of the world. This is the definition of a ruling class, which is never made present except where the antagonist subject is subjected to repetition. We should name such an absence "society" — for example, the French imperialist society — so as to avoid falling into the trap of subjectivation. As for the "private" subject, it is in the law of desire, and more specifically in the dyad of perversion/neurosis that we must find the reason for its flickering identity. Neurosis and perversion are the primordial subjective elements through which we enter into society with ourselves.

But the fact that the other pole of the contradiction from which the subject arises can be considered *destructive* does not allow us to reduce the subjective dialectic to neurosis, that is, to the order of socialized repetition. It is true, however, that the social is the neurosis of the political. This is what trade unionism, with its doleful and compulsive

allegiance to the state and to its imperialistic repetitions, incarnates. Trade unions recognize only one lack, that of the law, and every vindication of the law is essentially “legitimate.”

The political, even though it is structured in the same way, disappears in the self-imposed destruction of its very legitimacy. The destructive element cannot be inscribed on the ex-placed (*esplacé*) ground of repetition except as the excess of that which keeps it in place. This element is what we will call the *subject*. To define the subject as “the metonymy of the lack of being” only identifies half of its essence. The other half is *that which allows the lack to exist*, that is, *destruction* as that which is irreducible to the act of pure substitution.

In this way, the subject as the placed (*placé*) product of the law of lack, by following the thrust of destruction, brings out a “more-than-real” through which lack itself comes to lack. It is this “more-than-real” that I call “force.” But this point needs some rectification. In the volume entitled *Theory of Contradiction* that I wrote two years ago, the notion of “force” is not really dialecticized. There force complements, or even compliments, place insofar as it is conceived as a “placed force.” In this sense, it is nothing else but the quality of the process that provides the ground for the overthrowing of the place system.

I think that today it is still premature, however justified and pedagogically correct it may be, to aim at the fulfillment of the quality of the structure. It is not only because of their qualitative heterogeneity that the two terms of a contradiction turn into a relation of forces. If we remain at that level, we are reduced to a duel. The conservative term is identified with the law of lack and subordinates the other to repetition. Force is nothing but that which, being out-of-place (*hors-lieu*), concentrates in itself a term that was assigned to repetition. In this way, it jams up the mechanism of repetition and triggers the possibility for the destruction of its law. In the place where the old coherence prescribed a mere sliding, we find instead an interruption that takes place through a purification that exceeds the place. This is the history of force.

From this point of view, just as there is only *one* subject, there is also only *one* force whose existence always surfaces as an event. This event, the trace of the subject, cuts across both lack and destruction. This is what happens when a revolution cuts the rising curve of the wheat price, or when death interrupts the conventions of war, or when the crowd assaults the Bastille, or when the Bolshevik political order comes into being.

The subject-support is inescapably divided between the part of itself that is subjected to repetition (as a result of being placed) and the part that interrupts and blocks repetition, thereby bringing out the non-repeatable. We are talking about something more complex than the simple distinction between force and place. These are not two concepts for the same process, but rather two processes (repetition/interruption and lack/destruction) for one concept (that of subject). Force is what separates from the repeatable and comes into being as the non-repeatable.

In order to clarify this point, it will be helpful to draw a parallel between the aim of the psychoanalytic cure and that of political re-education. Whatever the obvious and universal shortcomings of either may be, it is the intention that counts...

We won't pay any attention to those who argue that a couch is not as serious as a concentration camp. To them we say without hesitation that this remains to be seen. The axiom of the *nouveaux philosophes* — “a camp is a camp” — is just as false as what the Chicago therapists wanted to promote through the excommunication of Lacan: “a couch is a couch.” The fact is that the psychoanalytic cure has no other real aim than that of the readjustment of the subject to its own repetition. Hence Lacan shows extreme moderation in relation to his own power as an analyst: “An analysis should not be pushed too far. When the analysand feels that he is happy to be alive, it is enough.”<sup>1</sup>

But what does political re-education aim at? Nothing less than the overthrowing of one's subjective position, that is, the interruption of the repetitions induced by the subject's previous class identity. And in this process, happiness and “the good life” have no role to play. The psychoanalytic cure does not claim to overcome the law of lack. In fact the opposite is true: through the resolution of the symptom — which is, according to Lacan, “that which is the most real for many people”<sup>2</sup> — the labor of truth is directed at recreating subjection to the cause through its very oblivion. For “[e]very successful symbolic integration involves a sort of normal forgetting,” and “[i]ntegration into history evidently brings with it the forgetting of an entire world of shadows which are not transposed into symbolic existence. And if this symbolic existence is successful and is fully taken on by the subject, it leaves no weight behind it.”<sup>3</sup> The aim of the psychoanalytic cure is the slightly smoother exercise of the efficacy of lack.

Political re-education, or revolutionarization, entirely deserves the charge made against it of “wanting to change people,” “brainwashing,” “destroying individuality,” or, as Mao says, of wanting to “change man in his innermost being.” This is the avowed end of the cultural revolution; it presupposes the conviction that the old man can die. Look at the reverse side of these accusations: they are nothing but a plea for the eternal oblivion of the loss that constitutes the I. They are a mere defense of the right to repetition. The paradox of this line of defense is evident. When asked about what should be expected from an analysis, Lacan answers that one should expect to be rid of one's symptom. “A symptom is curable,” he says.<sup>4</sup> But what is a symptom? “The so-called neurotic symptom is simply something that allows them to keep on living.”<sup>5</sup> Should we be delivered from what is most real for us, from that which allows us go on living? To live with one's own truth causes a symptom because that which should be absent is instead in excess.

For this reason the cure doesn't really aim at an attunement of the All to the true. Too rigorous a pursuit of the true would lead to psychosis: “Thank God, we don't make them (the analysands)

so normal that they will end up psychotic. That's the point where we must be very cautious."<sup>6</sup> The point is rather to deliver the real to the oblivion of its oblivion, where causal force will be purified in the lack, and we will have an attunement of the true to the All. This type of work requires moderation.

But the process of revolutionarization does not call for history; in fact it cheats it — it cuts the true into pieces in the very integrity of its *schize*. It is the ambition to turn the old order into a symptom and to produce a *crisis* by showing the total truth of the symptom. This is what takes us into the domain of ethics, and of the strictest kind of ethics at that. Is it at all possible to make sense of resistance if the identity of the subject derives from the repeatable and from the law of lack? And is it possible to appraise the value of destruction from which both the possibility of the mastery of loss and the opening of a space for the new derive?

The analytic cure, revolutionarization...As usual, facts in themselves give us no evidence in either direction. Between the veterans of the couch and the militants of groups like the *Gauche Proletarienne*, we really cannot say that the debate in the seventies has brought much that is valuable. Let's try first to maintain the disjunction between the two subjective moments — for its articulation is hard — and then to graft onto it the moment of a founding destruction that is also the bliss of its possible failure.

If Lacan is a dialectician, he should be able to realize what he doesn't. That is to say that he will rejoin Hegel only on the condition of being able to take the structural primacy of the law of lack to its other extreme, where it turns into destruction and the more-than-real of force. "Force," however, is a term that he dislikes intensely, busy as he is fighting the pride of the American economists. "Psychic energy," quantity, flow: all this is *ignorantiae asylum*. He proceeds from epistemological mistrust (and he doesn't mince his words): "How often, in the course of history, have the notions of energy and force been taken up and used again upon an increasingly totalized reality!"<sup>7</sup> — to the significant verdict — "force is used to designate a locus of opacity."<sup>8</sup> We won't find any satisfaction here. I propose that there are two themes in Lacan that indicate what happens to the more-than-real of destruction and to the breach of the algebra of the subject, both on the side of lack and on that of the mark. These two themes are anxiety and the superego.

The principal reference when it comes to the superego is as follows:

The super-ego has a relation to the law, and is at the same time a senseless law, going so far as to become a failure to recognise [*méconnaissance*] the law. That is always the way we see the super-ego acting in the neurotic. Isn't it because the morality of the neurotic is a senseless, destructive, purely oppressive, almost always anti-legal morality, that it became necessary to elaborate on the function of the super-ego in analysis?

The super-ego is at one and the same time the law and its destruction. As such, it is speech itself, the commandment of law, in so far as nothing more than its root remains. The law is entirely reduced to something, which cannot even be expressed, like the *You must*, which is speech deprived of all its meaning. It is in this sense that the super-ego ends up by being identified with only what is most devastating, most fascinating, in the primitive experiences of the subject. It ends up being identified with what I call *the ferocious figure*, with the figures which we can link to primitive traumas the child suffered, whatever these are.<sup>9</sup>

The superego gives access to the source of the force of law, to that which is no longer of the order of language but which lies at the core of the imperative character of the law. If the law can resist destruction — the excess of the repetition that the law itself articulates — it is because the very order of the law, which takes the form of an imperative, is in itself excess and destruction.

This is the first sign of what I will describe as the eternal precedence of the subject to itself. The law shows that the subject must sustain itself and at the same time break out of itself in order to accomplish the splitting that defines it. In this sense, Lacan says that the superego functions as an opening, however sinister. The non-law is what manifests itself as the affirmative of the law; for this reason the superego can be simultaneously the sign of the law and of its destruction. The superego originates where there is an out-of-place (*hors-place*) of the imperative concerning every place, that is, where there is a non-repetition of the prescription to repeat. It is precisely there that the paralyzing (and therefore destructive) function of the superego becomes manifest, as is shown in the absurdity of obsessional neurosis and, in the case of the political subject, in the comfort taken in the presence of the state. In neurosis and the realm of irrational legislation, the superego sustains a destructive morality, a naked imperative, that forces every symbolic articulation into a syncope. Let's put aside for now the fact that so far all of this has been described negatively (absurdity, and so on). What counts is that an interruption as such takes place.

As for anxiety, it is from the point of view of the real in excess rather than from that of the law of lack that it functions as interruption — and therefore as revelation. “[A]nxiety is a crucial term of reference, because in effect anxiety is that which does not deceive. But anxiety may be lacking. In experience, it is necessary to canalize it and, if I may say so, to take it in small doses, so that one is not overcome by it. This is a difficulty similar to that of bringing the subject into contact with the real — a term that I shall try to define next time.”<sup>10</sup> Anxiety is the result of the submersion by the real, of the radical excess of the real over the lack. It is the destruction of the symbolic network by what reveals itself, here in the opening, of the unspeakable encounter. It is necessary to channel anxiety's effect, since it destroys the adjustment to the repeatable. It short-circuits the lamp of the subject to the real. Anxiety, then, is the sign of that which in the subject forces the legal ex-place. As Lacan says beautifully, anxiety is nothing but the lack of lack. But when the

lack comes to lack, its metonymic effect is interrupted and a mastery of real loss has to start, which is paid for with the ravaging of all symbolic points of reference. Hence anxiety never lies. Destruction must meet the law of lack in order to sweep away deception, the semblant, and the oblivion of oblivion.

Anxiety and the superego are therefore two fundamental concepts of the subject (although there are another two), two designations of that which lies at the crossing of the inert and civilized law of lack and the barbaric interruption of destruction. These two concepts have been recognized by Lacan, one in the paralyzing horror of obsession, the other in the ravaging truth of the plunge into the real. Although they weren't in tune with his theoretical line, he nonetheless acknowledged them because of the rigorousness of his experiment. As the accomplished dialectician that he indeed was...

TORSION

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*A dialectical use of the mathematical text. — Torsion. — Subjective formulas. — First notes on justice and courage.*

I would like to talk about a certain use of mathematics that is my own and doesn't belong to anyone else, neither the mathematicians, who find it metaphorical, nor others, who are intimidated by it. The point is to short-circuit dialectical analysis by the examination of the way in which mathematics treats a word so that both rigorousness and its interpretive value are maintained. It is indeed a question of interpretation, or rather of representation in the theatrical sense of the term.

The postulate is that no signifier finds a place in a mathematical text randomly, and if it is true that its mathematical character derives from its function within the structure of the demonstration, it is also true that this structure should be considered, in its overdetermination, as the retroactive analysis of its very non-random character. This means that we consider the mathematical signifier a symptom around which the deductive text attempts an auto-analysis. That is, we envision the mathematical text as the analyst of some of its own signifiers as being symptomatic of itself. We will have to compare this type of analysis with others deriving from different theories, such as the dialectical and materialistic theory of the subject, in order to gauge the result of the speculation. All this is based on the assumption that when formalism's mathematical position encounters language, a desubjectivation takes place that eradicates the signifiers that suture the subject. Consider the fascination that Marx and Engels had for

differential calculus and their desire to find in it the matrix of the “dialectical law”; or the fallacy of Marx’s conviction — testified to by his numerous writings on mathematics — that he was a mathematician because he was a dialectician. The enigmatic quality of these writings is tied to the phantasm of a formalized dialectic, of which mathematics is a specialized application, but also the privileged terrain that displays its universal principle.

We must avoid falling into this temptation and take notice of the fact that, as I will show you, words resonate within a demonstration well beyond pure inference, even though their echo is audible only in the moment of the actual understanding of the chain of explanation. I’ll give you an example. We have already seen that the term “torsion” designates the subject-point of convergence of the other three classic determinations of truth: the All, coherence, and repetition. It has occurred to me that, besides its topological use (as in the torsion of a knot, Lacan’s employment of the term), the word “torsion” is used also in algebra in a very simple way. Let’s posit a group, which, I remind you, is a set defined by a law of composition among its elements that I will mark “+,” and which has the canonical properties of being associative  $(x + (y + z)) = ((x + y) + z)$ ; of having a neutral element, “0,” such that  $(x + 0) = x$ ; and of associating each element with its inverse (that is,  $-x$ , with  $(x + (-x)) = 0$ ). We call the “torsion” of an element  $x$  of a group the smallest whole number  $n$ , if it exists, such that if  $x$  is added to itself  $n$  times, it will equal zero:

$$\underbrace{x + x + x + \dots + x}_{n \text{ times}} = 0$$

For the purposes of notation, let’s call the following series “ $nx$ ”:

$$\underbrace{x + x + \dots + x}_{n \text{ times}}$$

An element that has a torsion is a torsion element, a contorted element. A group in which every element has a torsion is a torsion group. For every element  $x$  of this group, there is a whole number  $n$  such that  $nx = 0$ . This “torsion” is not my invention. It’s been in mathematics for at least fifty years. (Unfortunately, I have not looked into the history of this signifier.)

Observe the way mathematicians analyze the choice of this word, that is, in what way the mathematical chain represents a “torsion”:

1) Let’s examine the definition. It is evident that torsion is connected to repetition, that is, the repetition of the operation of the group applied  $n$  times to the same element. We could say that the element *insists* in the addition  $x + x + x + \dots + x + \dots$  because it is *serialized*. Every

partial addition is particular, but when there is torsion — that is, when the designated number of repetitions is reached — the sum is zero. In this sense, we will say that *torsion interrupts repetition*, which is the reason for its dialectical status.

Torsion interrupts repetition in the qualitative character of the different additions. If torsion were surpassed, we would find once again the previous partial sums. If  $nx = 0$ , we will have  $nx + x = 0 + x = x$ , and  $nx + 2x = x + x$ , and finally  $nx + nx = 0 + 0 = 0$ .

In this case, the partial additions return, being an “excess of zero” that surpasses the preceding terms before torsion brings us back to zero. This means that algebraic torsion wipes away all the past additions where the element insists.

2) Is it necessary to conclude that torsion modifies the ordinary laws of a group? It is to be expected that since it does so by discovering a new type of coherence, torsion does not overlap with the various repetitive series that make up the fabric of the All. This is its crucial function as an interruption. In Marxist terms, it is the paradoxical status of the party. In mathematics, this point is analyzed through a very simple theorem that states that the axiomatic theory of torsion groups is not presentable in a first-degree logic.

A first-degree logic is one in which quantifiers (“it exists,”  $\exists$ , and “for all,”  $\forall$ ) are only applied to individual variables. In this type of logic, for example, you can write: “there is an element having the property P,” or alternatively:  $\exists x(P(x))$ . But you cannot write: “there is a property p having a characteristic A.” First-degree logic is generally sufficient for normal purposes, although it employs an infinite number of axioms for each single theory.

There is a case that particularly interests us, however, precisely because it does not involve torsion. It is the case of groups in which no element different from zero is submitted to torsion. These are called *torsion-free groups*, groups with absolutely no torsion that are, in other words, completely “straight.” This case of “straightness” troubles the dialectician. In these groups,  $x$  is added to itself without ever interrupting the process of repetition. Now, the theory of torsion-free groups, that is, the theory of algebraic straightness, is easily presentable in a first-degree logic. Take the infinite list of axioms that say that for every element  $x$  different from 0, the repetition of additions of itself will never amount to zero:

Ax. 1:  $(\forall x) (x + x \neq 0)$

Ax. 2:  $(\forall x) (x + x + x \neq 0)$

.....

Ax.  $(n - 1)$ :  $(\forall x) (nx \neq 0)$

.....

Taking as the domain of the quantifier  
all  $x$  different from 0.

If we add this to the three fundamental axioms of groups, we have the theory of the first order of torsion-free groups. Why? Because you cannot know for each number what whole number represents its torsion; you only know that it exists. Thus, it should be possible to write: “for every element  $x$ , there is at least one whole number  $n$  such that  $nx = 0$ ,” or:  $(\forall x) (\exists n) (nx = 0)$ .

$(\exists n)$  applies the quantifier *not* to an individual variable, but to the property “whole number,” that is, to a predicate. In this way, we exceed first-degree logic. Therefore, the logic of the theory of torsion is qualitatively more complex than that of the theory of straightness.

As a consequence the dialectician has resolved his problem. In fact, he will happily find that the existential uncertainty that looms over the effectiveness of torsion hinders the functioning of first-degree logic. If the axioms of algebraic straightness are insufficient, it is because they are all universal and determined by  $\forall$ , that is, by the “for all” whose logical simplicity and masculine character we know very well. A theory in which the axioms are all universal has a set of consistent properties. In particular, every substructure of a model of this theory is itself a model of such a theory.

However, the existential that marks the limit of the theory of torsion exceeds the logical plane that sustains the universal, and appears as the figure of the unknown quantity within all repetition and as the indeterminate within all rupture. In this case, mathematics justifies the *tabula rasa* of successful revolutions.

3) Torsion groups that are infinite — although all finite groups are also torsion groups, the finite does not interest us here — can, in spite of everything, have consistent algebraic properties if they are commutative. A group is commutative if regardless of the value of  $x$  and  $y$ , we have:  $x + y = y + x$ .

In this case, the conclusions are:

- The elements that have the same torsion  $n$  form a subgroup.
- The group is made up of the direct product of the subgroups, and each of these subgroups is composed of elements whose torsion is  $p^q$ , where  $p$  is a whole number.

I don't want to take up too much time explaining these statements. What they say is that in a universe of communication and reversibility, torsions determine a set of regulated subgroups and divide the initial group into substructures whose identity principle is clear.

The subversive value of torsion is toned down into an analytical law, into a conceptual vector that allows for a reasonable partitioning of the All. In other words, torsion tends towards the segmentation of the All into local coherences in which repetition is minimal. It is as if from the point of view of a reversible historical space, revolutions had no other function than to serialize

events, to classify the epochs and to reconnect and re-group the heterogeneous. Or as if the party — when it conflates with the state, for example — had no other function than to bring out the repetitive segmentation of history through that spectacular element of commutation that we call the “restoration of capitalism.”

But in the final analysis, history is not commutative. This would be the very principle of its inexistence, within which lies the law of torsion. What, then, does the algebraist tell us about non-commutative infinite torsion groups? Well, not much. He leaves it to us.

4) The only hope is that a non-commutative torsion group generated by a finite number of elements will be in itself finite. Why is this an anti-dialectical hope? Because in this way we would have connected the values of two finitudes: the finitude of torsion that blocks the infinity of the repeatable, and the finitude that engenders the group and controls the twisted (*tordue*) dialectic that puts torsion’s finite unknown quantity to work in the non-commutative infinity of the group.

A finite-generated group is one whose elements can be presented as the sums (with possible repetitions) of elements taken from a finite stock. If, for example, we have a stock of three elements — a, b, c — every element of the group will appear as  $(a + a)$ ,  $(a + b + a + c)$ ,  $(c + b + a)$  — and these are only arbitrary examples. Obviously two combinations can be the same (that is, they can yield the same element). Thus a finite-generated group is not necessarily infinite.

Since in a torsion group all repetition of the addition of an element to itself is interrupted (that is, returns to zero), and since this is true in particular for the elements of the finite stock that generate the set, one can have the impression that it is not possible to have an infinity of different combinations of additions. Intuitively, one can see that there is the chance that a finite-generated torsion group is itself finite. From a dialectical point of view, this would constitute a problem.

Marxism’s field of operation has three analogical properties: it is infinite, it has torsion, and it is finite-generated. Why? First, because the event-element (*l’élément événementiel*), which is the raw material of mass politics, is infinite. It is infinite at every moment because its theoretically-countable nature, from a political point of view, is simply fictional. Second, because repetition is interrupted by the event in order to produce in the All a different coherence of the torsion point. And finally, because the presentation elements of all politics — classes — are definitely a finite number.

A deductive analysis of the term “torsion” from an algebraic point of view would show a divergence, a sort of exploratory hazard, if the finite-generated torsion group were finite. From a dialectical point of view, in this case, the mathematical interpretation of the term would be in a position of control over the excess. But this is not the case because the theorem of Shafarevitch shows that it is not true that all finite-generated torsion groups are finite. It demonstrates this

by way of a counterexample, through a group generated by three torsion elements that is nonetheless infinite. The existence of such a group brings the analysis of the term “torsion” back into the domain of dialectics. As a result, infinite and non-commutative torsion groups have only exceptional properties. As algebra shows, they are at the limit of the algebraic unnameable.

Torsion is the limit of algebra. Torsion is perverse — it is a subject. Note that we haven’t presented a model here, nor have we attempted to “mathematicize” anything. We have only tried to bring out a sort of surplus brilliance whose only means of expression remains the mathematical text insofar as it is the objective elucidation of the symptom. What happens, however, when the deductive analysis of the mathematical signifier that we have isolated diverges from its dialectical interpretation? In this case, we will have the audacity to say that a new mathematical hypothesis must resolve the divergence. We maintain that no term comes into use by chance. This will be a way, however unorthodox, to incite the present mathematical theory to formulate a new theorem. Mathematics is the science of the real, and its signifiers may be many, but they are still countable.

What algebraic notation will we have to use, then, to indicate the superego and anxiety? Consider that these two concepts designate neither a subjective experience, nor a part of the subject, but rather two processes whose combination defines that region of practical materiality that we should call the “subject-effect.” No subject pre-exists anxiety or remains beyond the superego if subjective anxiety and the superego are the modes of consistency of the subject-effect. Here we construct the concept of the subject starting from much more general dialectical categories: force (F), space (S), truth (T), place (P), destruction (d), and lack (l).

Anxiety is the excess-of-the-real (*trop de réel*) (force) over what can be symbolized in a certain order (space). From this order the subject emerges already divided, crushed from its birth by its own truth — a truth that abides by the law of lack and, as a result, itself comes to lack. Thus, if  indicates the excess, then this is the figure for anxiety:

$$F \text{ } \text{Y} \text{ } S = \frac{T + l(l)}{g}$$

The sign “=” indicates that it is in terms of excess, within the differential form of subjectivation, that the subject exists as split.

As far as the superego is concerned, if we name the aspect of the non-law that adheres destructively to the law itself, and if we posit that L = law (or the place [*lieu*], or the ex-place), we will have:

$$F \text{ } \text{Y} \text{ } S \longrightarrow \frac{L + d}{g}$$

Here “ $\longrightarrow$ ” means that it is within the order of the full and non-differential effect of consistency (of the subjective process) that the subject maintains itself in effacement, while being all along submitted to the intrinsic ferocity of the law’s terrorizing interpellation. As you can see, this is the question of Oedipus and of Sophocles. To say that anxiety shows the way to truth means that it is in the form of a non-placed (*implacéé*) force — and not in the logic of places — that a sufficient quantity of subject-effect splits off and produces a new knowledge. This is the enunciation of torsion (it is only through it that the other three names of truth — coherence, the All, and repetition — are generated) that Mao, at the peak of the Cultural Revolution, re-translated as “troubles are an excellent thing.” An excellent thing, that is, if we want to see clearly.

The definition of anxiety, then, is the trouble of seeing clearly. This is at the same time the definition of courage, but in order to see this we have to find our way through the schism presented in Greek tragedy. It is certainly true that truth in the register of anxiety is unlivable because of its essential link to lack, and it is Mallarmé who has elucidated its latent structure. It is unlivable to the extent that — constituting an interruption of the efficacy of the symbolic, a sort of hole — it is never reducible to the totality of the said. Being only half-said (*midite*), the truth is cursed (*maux-dite*). This is why truth — that of Oedipus, and of Sophocles, the truth that demands the violent sacrifice of the gaze — is an effect of the tragic.

There is, however, another truth and another tragedy: that of Orestes and of Aeschylus. There, destruction makes possible a subject who knows how to master loss. No longer T/§, but S/T. What does this mean if not that in this way we come out of the radical impasse in which the unity of the place and the insurmountable fixity of the symbolic has forced us? Destruction becomes dialectically linked to loss in the non-representable supposition (a supposition that is almost ineffable itself, even though it is the foundation of the univocity [*uni-dire*] of the truth) that the ex-place is divisible. The subject as the overgrowth (*transcroissance*) of the revolt of anxiety is born out of the violent internal rupture of the law, and is the process through which the order that the subject sustains in its truth is constituted as other than the subject.

Neither the other of Lacan, nor the Other can conceive of this type of alterity, which is the only one that allows us to think the advent of revolutions, the only one that allows us to understand in what sense, as Marx says, the communist revolution breaks most radically with all traditional ideas. This type of alterity is also the only one that can name the heteronomy of the political. Within this divided law and this broken symbolic, we deal with a trans-Other (*trans-Autre*) that lies at the origin of the groundwork for the determination of the other and the same.

In this sense, we must say that, historically, we witness the advent of a subject at the intersection of lack and destruction, and at the point of anxiety, but in the inversion of its truth. And this subject derives from something the existence of which Lacan denies — an other of the Other where that which stands for the first Other is no longer a disguised modality of the Same.

This is precisely what Athena does at the end of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* when, in order to interrupt the family vendetta, she appoints a tribunal such that the new laws would overthrow the old ones. The courage of the schism of the laws, the anxiety of an opaque persecution, the superego of the blood-thirsty Erinyes, and finally justice according to the consistency of the new — four concepts to articulate the subject.

In 1954, Lacan implicitly indicated the necessity of these four concepts when he started to put forth the ethical reach of his discipline:

Once the number of cycles necessary for the subject's objects to appear have been accomplished, and his imaginary history is completed, once the successive tensed-up, suspended, anxiety-provoking desires of the subject are named and reintegrated, all is not, for all that, brought to term. What was initially there, in O, then here in O', then again in O, has to be referred to the completed system of symbols. The very outcome of the analysis requires it.

Where could this adjournment come to a stop? Do we have to extend analytic intervention to the point of becoming one of those fundamental dialogues on justice and courage, in the great dialectical tradition?

That is a question. It is not easy to answer, because in truth, modern man has become singularly unused to broaching these grand themes. He prefers to resolve things in terms of conduct, of adaptation, of group morale and other twaddle.<sup>11</sup>

Anxiety does not lie and the superego turns destruction into the consistency of the legal order. But the "fundamental dialogues on justice and courage" open the way to that aspect of the dialectical tradition in which, by virtue of a completely different grasp on the irruption of the real, the subject as *force* can force the excess over the place.

THE THEORY OF THE SUBJECT: SOPHOCLES/AESCHYLUS

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*Justice and the superego: non-law as law and law as non-law. — Joseph Conrad. — Courage and Anxiety. — Sophocles according to Hölderlin. — The decree of Athena in Aeschylus. — Reversal of the native place and reversal of exile.*

"[O]nce the successive tensed-up, suspended, anxiety-provoking desires of the subject are named and reintegrated,"<sup>12</sup> psychoanalysis operates as a reduction of the excess-of-the-real; it reintegrates within an ex-place of symbolization what in the place kept the subject at the mercy of anxiety. Thus, force is put back in its place. But, as Lacan says, this doesn't mean that everything has been resolved. How is this so? The question is important because the dialectical extension of the theory of the subject depends on it. In other words, what is at stake here is the recognition, on the solid ground of structural effects, of their excessive reverse side through which history

returns as subjective novelty. The excess-of-the-real, then, detached from its obscure readability in the truth of anxiety, must be able to stretch the symbolic order and not simply to replace what functions as the out-of-place (*horlieu*).

Here Lacan offers a grandiose perspective: “it is in as much as the subjective drama is integrated into a myth which has an extended, almost universal human value, that the subject brings himself into being.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently, there seems to be an extensive and universalizing productivity of the “subjective drama” that the psychoanalytic work can decode by means of the “fundamental dialogues on justice and courage.” Why justice and courage? Justice is the function of the subject’s tie to the place, that is, to the law, and represents the divisible figure of its transformation, whereas the superego is the representation of the ferocious archaism of the fixity of the law. Justice makes no sense as a constitutive category of the subject if the symbolic operates on indivisibility and founds the subject on terror and obsessive repetition. It requires a dialectical precariousness of the law that is shaken and finally ruptured. This is not the precariousness of a particular law, but of the very imperative character of the law. More radically, from the point of view of the constitution of the subject-effect, justice is the possibility that the non-law might function as law.

This fact is well known to Marxists. The effect of the superego is that the essential and constitutive core of the state — class domination — is always dictatorial. Under the pretense of defending the law and parliamentary democracy, the state is the quintessential illegal agent of all legality, of the violence of right, and of the law as non-law. On the other hand, the communist project is justice, the claim that the non-law can become the last law of proletarian politics. Communism, the only modern theory of revolution, realizes the type of subjectivity that can sustain the universal principle of justice, that is, the non-law as law. For this reason, what is extended (the “extended, almost universal” value of Lacan) must grow out of what is in excess (of the place, of location, of the symbolic, and of the law).

Poetry gives us an example of this by way of the fragmentation of ordinary prose that extends the limit of the communicable and causes an opening of the inaccessible frontiers of the mother tongue (*lalangue*). It is not by chance that Joseph Conrad, the writer of anxiety and the superego — as *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* testify — gave art the strategic task of “rendering the highest kind of justice in the visible universe.”<sup>14</sup> For this reason, he also became the writer of courage: see *The Rover* for men and *The Arrow of Gold* for women.

Courage is the non-subjection to the symbolic order at the urging of the dissolutive injunction of the real. Arising in response to the excess-of-the-real, courage is identical to anxiety, but as a disruptive force within the ex-place, it functions as its inversion. Through the disruption of communication, courage brings disorder into the symbolic, whereas anxiety is simply an

invocation of death. Since courage is not an attribute of the subject, but rather the divisible process of its intrinsic existence, it is more appropriate to compare it to *fortitudo* (fortitude or strength of mind) than to *audacia* (audacity) because the opposite of courage is not fear, but anxiety. See Spinoza's *Ethics* on this (Part III, beginning with theorem 59). *Audacia* is entirely defined by the mediation of the Other; it is "the desire whereby any one is incited to do anything with a danger which his equals dare not encounter."<sup>15</sup> *Fortitudo*, rather, is intrinsic because it refers to the true, S/T, where by the true we mean "[a]ll actions which follow from the emotions which have reference to the mind, in so far as it is active or understands."<sup>16</sup> The true is the result of a deficiency in the symbolic produced by the thrust of the real. From this deficiency the subject derives its force, which is proportional to the measure of its courage in the face of the radical absence of any security. In this situation, the subject loses its name; as one of Spinoza's theorems says, security desubjectifies. What he means is that security is not a virtue, but rather is the sign of subjective impotence.

Anxiety results from the deficiency of the place, while courage is the assumption of the real by which the place is disrupted. Anxiety and courage share the same causality in a reversible articulation of the point reached by loss. On the necessary basis of anxiety and of the superego, courage and justice also articulate the subject-effect as the division of the symbolic order by the excess, that is, as the ex-place where such an excess is in-placed (*s'implace*). Hence a political subject comes into being only by giving rebellion a revolutionary value, by tying destruction to reconstruction. It will become apparent in the real that every order and every legal injunction, however stable they may seem, end up internally dividing themselves. The Other must let itself be divided into an unknown Other that it never was, and into a Same whose identity it had never prescribed.

There is a theory of the subject according to Sophocles and one according to Aeschylus. The latter (which is historically the first, but is still the second for Freud) entirely dialecticizes its other because, besides anxiety and the superego whose identities it retains, it postulates that courage and justice are the necessary operators of the subject-effect. It goes without saying that Sophocles and Aeschylus are signifiers — that is, they are concepts, not names or literary works. They are texts, but meant for the theater, which makes all the difference.

The limit of the psychoanalytic contribution to the theory of the subject can be evaluated by asking the following question: why is its theory of the subject essentially based on Sophocles, that is, predicated on the Oedipus complex? I propose instead that we refer to Aeschylus. Lacan sides with Sophocles, but aims at Aeschylus, which is where we want to get. Hölderlin opens the debate in his "Remarks on 'Antigone,'" where he describes Sophocles in the following way:

1) The type of contradiction dealt with by Greek tragedy is that of the originary versus the formal, of what is native versus what is learned (according to Hölderlin, the “natively Greek” is opposed to the “native form”). This is a division of the native place, an internal contradiction that opposes the simple foundation of the law to the law itself. In terms of ex-place, tragedy is the *parousia* of an internal division that separates the One of the ex-place from its function, which is that of regulating the multiple. Tragedy is an avatar of the contradiction between the One and the All that produces the subject.

2) For the Greeks, this contradiction sets in opposition: first, from the point of view of the originary One, its infinite and orgiastic, “Asiatic” consistency; and second, from the point of view of the regulated (civilized) ex-place that is the origin of this One, its power of representative closure that can be found in the formal perfection of Greek art, mathematics, architecture, and politics.

Let’s reformulate this: if the Greek law is finitude and closure, the non-law that is the foundation of this law is the plasticity of Asia. Thus, the law as non-law, the realization of the Greek superego as consistency of the subject, is *elucidated* in tragedy.

3) In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the contradiction that informs and elucidates the tragedy is set in motion by insurrection. The fratricidal rebel turns against the city and as a result, is radically excluded by it (he is killed and his body is left unburied). But the attempt at exclusion fails: the polis enters a crisis, not as a result of a political insurrection, but as a result of the infinite absence of a limit within the native form.

4) This infinite absence of a limit produces a reversal — it is a subjectivation thanks to which the place reveals the contradictory origin and unlawful unity under the inflated framework of regulations.

5) This reversal takes on the theatrical figure of an antagonism:

—The infinite absence of a limit within the native form results in an excess-of-form (Creon). The law is revealed as being in excess of its own restorative function. Creon is the super-law.

—In reaction to this excess of form, the formless is set ablaze through the invocation of the infinite of the sky against the finite law of the polis (Antigone).

“Creon” is the name of the superego: the deregulated law — destroyed and, by its very own essence, returned as an excess of the space that it circumscribes. “Antigone” is the name of anxiety, that is, the principle of the infinity of the real that insists in the regulated finitude of the place. From this point of view, Antigone and Creon, although antagonists in the play, contribute to the same process, the formation of the Sophoclean tragic subject. Such is the foundation of

this tragedy as One-text (*texte-Un*): to present the subject-process through the articulation of anxiety and the superego.

We will formulate the problem by isolating Hölderlin's two major theses:

- The effect (the dynamics) of insurrection is that of a reversal by which the advent of the new is barred.
- The internal engine of the tragic is that of the excess of the law over itself, the figure of Creon. The formless is set on fire only as a reaction at a later stage. As for the figure of the rebel, it has no room for action; it is simply an algebraic term, an absent cause subtracted from the polis. Those that turn against one another are the excess of form and the formless, the superego and anxiety — intertwined figures of the primordial One, the One of the reversal.

Thus, we ask: what is the link between these two theses? What is the politics underlying Hölderlin's poetics? The possible modernity of the tragic, like the question of the theory of the subject, is a political question.

For Hölderlin, contradiction is tragic because it leaves no way out other than death. Why? Because there is no new right that can articulate it. In the two terms (Creon and Antigone), it is the infinite form that pervades everything, that is, the real that submerges the symbolic and the native force that dissolves the place. The unity of opposites prevails over their division to the extent that the essence of the process lies in the already-there of the origin. Hence the Sophoclean name of every subject-process is reversal. Oedipus, in the clarity of his blindness, incarnates this idea. And I believe this subjective figure, whose dialectic is built on anxiety and the superego, always prevails in times of decadence and disarray, both in history and in life. For this reason, it is necessary to articulate the difference between Aeschylus and Sophocles.

In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the tragic is set in motion by the murder of Agamemnon. Orestes is forced to kill his mother (who has in turn killed his father) by the intricate logic of revenge and counter-revenge. This space of repetition is one in which a murder is punished by another murder. Here the unlimited is the debt of blood. The (future) Sophoclean categories are clearly present — they are connected to the ex-place itself, the palace where Orestes takes refuge after the murder that subjectivizes him through anxiety and where he is pursued by the pack of the Erinyes (the watchdogs of the superego and cruel custodians of the repetition that sets off the family vendetta).

But the true orientation of the trilogy is the rupture that allows for the advent of the new. What is at stake is the interruption of the infinite debt, of the repetitive chain of murders, by way of a torsion imposed by the ex-centered intervention of Athena. It is the advent of a new right

that can completely reconfigure the logic of decision. Thanks to the tribunal set in place by Athena, the repetition of the series that made up the previous order is interrupted and a new coherence is instituted. All of a sudden the two antagonistic positions are no longer articulated by the unity of the native as in Sophocles/Hölderlin. Instead they are the internal division of that which constitutes them, a division beyond the law of what can have a legal value. It is the location (*lieu*) that is shown to be in essence not one, but two. In the course of this dialectical process, the new prevails over the old. In Hölderlin's language, we could call this, not the reversal, but the advent of the native form.

These two positions are made explicit in the trilogy. We can see the first one in the chorus of the Erinyes:

Catastrophe now is coming from new ordinances, if a justice which is harm to justice shall prevail for this man here, the matricide. This day's work will at once accustom all men to licence...Justice's house falls. There is a place where terror is good, and a watch on minds by fear seated above. It is well to learn wisdom through grief. Would any that nurses no terror in his heart's clear light — both man and city the same — revere Justice still?...the man who defies out of boldness, transgressing [while he carries] his great cargo, one randomly got without right, in violence, will lower sail with time, once trouble catches him up and his yard-arm shatters. He calls on those who do not hear, from the whirlpool's centre so hard to struggle with; and god laughs over a hot-headed man, when he sees one who was confident that he would never be caught impotent in helpless torment, and not surmounting the wave-top. His prosperity, life-long till then, is dashed upon Justice's reef; he dies unwept, unseen.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the dialectic between anxiety and the superego is the only foundation of measurement in the chain of revenge. Justice is subordinated to the superego and the structural regularity of punishment. As a result, subjectivation occurs through anxiety and under the sign of death.

The second position is enunciated by Athena, the founder of the new right:

*Athena:* Now hear my ordinance, people of Athens, who are judging the pleas in the first trial for shed blood. For the future too this council of jurors shall always exist for Aegeus' people...Untouched by desires for gain, revered, quick to anger, the land's wakeful guardian of those asleep, this council I now establish. This has been my lengthy exhortation to my citizens for the future; and you must rise and take your votes for casting and decide the case with respect for your oath. My speech is said...And Orestes wins even if in the judgement he has equal votes. Empty the votes from the urns at once, you jurors who have this duty put on you!...

*Apollo:* Count the emptied votes correctly, strangers, with reverent care against a wrong determination! When good judgement's gone away, great harm happens; but if a single vote comes in, it can set a house upright.

*Athena:* The man here goes free on the charge of bloodshed. The numbers of votes are equal.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, because the old right lacks a limit, a new right must be instituted that puts an end to the vendetta. This requires the divisible courage of the Council, which intrinsically refers to the justice of number. The fact that everyone is given an equal right to speak signifies a radical change in the understanding of what it means to make a decision. It is a division in the very essence of right. Athena's decree produces an egalitarian torsion that sets up a new juridical coherence — the deliberation of the majority without appeal that, once applied and practiced, interrupts the mechanical repetition of revenge.

There are, then, two categories of the tragic in Greek drama: the tragic according to Aeschylus, predicated on the advent of justice out of contradiction and through the courage of the new; and the tragic according to Sophocles, based on the anxiety caused by the quest, through reversal, for the superegoic origin.

What does Hölderlin say? “The true language of Sophocles, since Aeschylus and Euripides know more how to depict suffering and wrath, yet less how to depict man's understanding as wandering below the unthinkable.”<sup>19</sup> Here I object to the fact that, first of all, it is not possible to pair Aeschylus with Euripides. But this is only the sign of a much deeper distortion: a partially unexplained predilection for Sophocles. This is also present in Freud — who can deny that the native logic of the unconscious is by no means exempt from the reversal?

However, Aeschylus' contribution consists of the capacity to grasp, on the ground of the superego, the moment of the *institutive disruption*. There is never a return to order in his theater, but rather the constitution of a different order. Aeschylus excludes the presupposition of a unity of the ordinary. For this reason, the Aeschylean man does not march on the side of the unthinkable. Aeschylus is on the side of the thinkable. His virtue lies in the ability to deflect the reversal, or rather the ability to expose a non-native reversal. In this way, it is no longer the formal excess that prevails, but rather the refusal in the sign of courage. Although devoured by anxiety, and in fact *precisely because of it*, Orestes does not internalize the law of the debt of blood, nor does he turn against it in a blind fury. Instead, he demands a discussion based on facts; he resists and does not give in to the murderous seduction of the Erinyes. “Orestes” is first the name of anxiety and then of courage. “Athena” is the name of justice.

Antigone, Creon, Orestes, and Athena name the whole range of subject-effects within Greek tragedy: the formless, the formal excess, interruption, and reconstitution. In a tragedy by Aeschylus, the dynamics of insurrection, as Hölderlin would say, do not coincide with the propagation of death. Aeschylus is the founder of justice through internal division and the decline of the old right. Far from being suspended in the exclusion of the absent cause, the rebel — Orestes

or Prometheus — is the agent of this dynamics. Hölderlin clearly opts for the Sophoclean tragic, that is, for the structural aspect of the theory of the subject.

The dividing line is the native limitation of the reversal. Because of this limitation, Sophocles' tragedy marks out antagonism in the power of the One. The point for Sophocles/Hölderlin is the retrogression toward the origin in its double aspect, the formal excess and the diffusion of the formless. In this case, the tragic hero owes his subjectivation to anxiety and his consistency to the superego — leading him to follow the involution of the ex-place to the point of death. The point for Aeschylus is completely different — it is the interruption of the power of origin and the division of the One. This interruption also has two aspects. The first is that of courageous refusal that questions the law under the effect of the excess-of-the-real and resolves anxiety by choosing the form of the *dispute*. (This takes place when Orestes demands that a decision be made on the question of whether he was right or wrong.) The other aspect is interruption and the reconstitution of a new order of justice. In neither case is the origin reinscribed in the new rule. Both aspects name the dimension of the subject that is always realized through the law (anxiety and the superego), but which is at the same time also in excess of it and enables it to constitute itself anew — in Aeschylus' case, as a new subject of the law.

As every great dialectician, Hölderlin at times recognized the value of Aeschylus: “And in patriotic reversal where the entire form of things changes, and where nature and necessity, which always remain, incline toward another form — be it that they transcend into chaos or into a new form.”<sup>20</sup> However, the “new form” that could generate the tragedy can be realized only through death. Why? Because this new form is precisely the formal excess — it is the law itself caught in the vortex of terror. Chaos is nothing but the unlimited, as the proliferation of the formless. In fact, how can we apprehend the novelty of an effect if it is already subsumed within the mode of the native, in the absolute unity of the cause? Hölderlin also must allow for a principle of limitation — a total reversal, he says, is not granted to man. It is evident that a total reversal could not be native. For something like this to happen, we must be delivered from superegoic fixity. Aeschylus' model, in which courage and justice dialecticize anxiety and the superego, allows for divisibility and elucidates the possibility of deliverance. It is not that we have to leave the word “reversal” behind. Instead I want to distinguish two forms of it within the theory of the subject. First, there is the native reversal, which takes place in anxiety and pretends to cure, both through terror and its opposite, the mystical stupor. Then, there is the reversal of exile in which the denial of the old law and its internal division produces the illumination of the torsion inflicted upon the real (which takes the form of the new). The reversal of exile revokes the original as not-enough-real (*peu de reel*) and restores the real in justice. For this reason, it is a total reversal — it makes a *tabula rasa* of the past.

This is not simple: it is vain to hope that the process of the reversal of exile will take place without the structural support of the native, because it is from the materialistic impasse of the latter that the practical existence of the former proceeds. It is unilateral to declare the subject tragic; nevertheless, tragedy exists.

To sustain exile, or as Rimbaud says in *A Season in Hell*, “to stand one’s ground” (*tenir le pas gagné*), is what Hölderlin could not do. Exile for him never stopped being the crucifying mediation of the return. There is no other definition of courage: it is precisely exile without return, the loss of the name. But Hölderlin wants to maintain the nomination of what is near: “And no wonder! Your native country and soil you are walking, / What you seek, it is near, now comes to meet you halfway.”<sup>21</sup> We claim that it is necessary to overcome nostalgia, to excel in courage, the creative figure of return.

In Sophocles, we find that the quest is the return of the near in what is remote, the infinite patriotism of pure proximity, a truth so intimate that one has to die in order to uncover it in oneself. In Aeschylus, we find the remote in the near and exile in what is closest. Action performed on something whose logic is most foreign to us — this is the subject of antagonism. Even though we have to return — and it is this return that makes the subject — we have the chance to set free that which no longer calls for any return.

*Translated by Marina de Carneri*



The selection translated here is from “Manque et destruction,” the third section of Alain Badiou’s *Théorie du Sujet* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982).

1. Jacques Lacan, “Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines,” *Scilicet* 6/7 (1976): 15. [All quotations from this article are the editor’s translation.]
2. Ibid.
3. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1988), 192.
4. Lacan, “Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines,” 32.
5. Ibid., 15.
6. Ibid.
7. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 163.
8. Ibid., 21.
9. Lacan, *Freud’s Papers on Technique*, 102.
10. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 41.



11. Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique*, 198-199.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 190-191.
14. Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (New York: Norton, 1979), 145.
15. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1938), 137.
16. Ibid., 126.
17. Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, trans. Christopher Collard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 98-100.
18. Ibid., 103-105.
19. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Remarks on 'Antigone,'" in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 110.
20. Ibid., 115.
21. Hölderlin, "Homecoming (To His Relatives)," *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1994), 277.