

Tricks with Transference: Naming Things in a Post-Truth World

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As we watch conspiracy theories, disinformation, fake news and the like infuse public debate with a post-truth mix of innuendo, suspicion, and specious claims, it has become popular to lament an increasing inability of ideas to connect with reality. The issue is not, as Alenka Zupančič observes, that we have lost the Real (for this has never been the human's to have) but that we are witnessing a loss of the “*capacity of naming* that can have real effects.”¹ We are missing, to draw on Stuart Hall,² a critical approach to naming that “grip[s] the minds of masses, and thereby becomes ‘a material force’” upon our moment. We are witnessing a loss of those words that “can affect the economy of being because they come from the workings of this economy”—a loss of words that are simultaneously of our situation and able to transform it.³

The observation from Zupančič has pedigree. Jean-François Lyotard had spoken of the loss in terms of an increasing “incredulity towards grand narratives,” of skepticism towards political storylines promising either universal human emancipation or functional social systems.⁴ He associated this loss of faith with a shift in the social worth of ideas under informational capitalism. That shift has seen the qualitative meaning of ideas (their practical “use-value,” he said, borrowing from Marx) eclipsed by contributions that ideas make to the circulation of information, to their “exchange-value.”⁵ With this shift, the worth of ideas lies less with their capacities to name than with their abilities to be measured in fungible ways. To similar effect, Slavoj Žižek has observed a “demise of symbolic efficiency” in

conjunction with a dissipation of the big Other into a plethora of petty social authorities: "It is as if the lack of the big Other is supplanted by 'ethical committees' as so many substitute 'small big Others' on to which the subject transposes his responsibility and from which he expects to receive a formula that will resolve his deadlock."⁸ Key to Žižek's point is that the big Other fails to ever materialize 'as such.' It does not fail to materialize in one way only, such as with the current form of a swarm of petty authorities: expert panels, celebrities, managers, low-level bureaucrats, ethics committees, on-line influencers and so on. In a different register, though again to similar effect, Fredric Jameson notes that a loss of historicity and futurity under late capitalism—"the end of temporality"—sees the allegorical aspect of language spill beyond individual discourses to flood the domain of knowledge production, such that all knowledge has now become allegorical.⁹ Allegory thereby has itself become allegorical and, with the loss of all references to the deep temporality of the referent, the movement of time is flattened to a succession of present moments ('presentism'). From within the changes to which these observations respectively point—the reduction of knowledge to its informational exchange-value, of dwindling symbolic efficiency, and of a persistent presentism in thought—ideas now scramble for traction.

A source of capacities for naming which simultaneously belongs to this situation and able to transform it lies with a *disjuncture* between, on the one hand, historical contingency and, on the other, human knowledge. So Zupančič argues. I agree. We may yet create capacities of naming that have real effects "by performing a *disjuncture of the necessary and the impossible*."⁹ By 'the impossible' Zupančič means the Real of raw contingency, while 'the necessary' is the need for speech to arrest itself in the face of that contingency (by which speech otherwise "doesn't stop not being written"). By 'the performance of a disjuncture,' Zupančič means "taking our place" within that gap.¹⁰ It is by our doing so that knowledge might yet develop, able to have real effects.

Travails of Transference

As much as I value Zupančič's insights, I sense an impasse in keeping with our 'post-truth' moment. I cannot easily see how the disjuncture between the impossible and the necessary might support new capacities for naming amidst the diffusion of the big Other into a host of minor social authorities—in brief, amidst *the demise of symbolic efficiency*. Zupančič's approach appears as if it is immune to this situation, as if the act of taking our place within the gap sits outside that demise. How might the act of doing so yet speak to this situation?

As with the analyst in the clinical situation, Zupančič's voice speaks from within a fissure upon which therapeutic exchange depends, that of transference. The fissure lays between the subject position Lacan called *le sujet-supposé-savoir* – 'the subject supposed to know'—and 'the subject wanting not to know.' As Paul Verhaeghe notes of the relation between these two positions,¹¹ the clinical analyst moves between both in the facilitation of therapeutic transference with the analysand. The same positions are at work in the domain of writing/reading. In the context of a text, the subject who is 'supposed to know' establishes a transference relation by luring the reader to read. It presents the author as being in possession of special knowledge about the reader's situation. The author may even come to function as an object of the reader's desire, as with the analyst in the clinic. Alternatively, 'the subject wanting not to know' is one of three "transference affects" in psychoanalysis, in contrast to a site of knowledge. It takes the form of a "passion" along with love and hate.¹² With the aid of this position, the author avoids being pulled into the desires of their readership or to be repulsed by them. To entertain either would interrupt the transference relationship and block the reader's journey of self-discovery toward new capacities for naming their situation.

The operation of this productive fissure between 'the subject supposed to know' and 'the subject wanting not to know' can be seen at a key point in Zupančič's major text on sexuality, in which she summarizes her argument:

After this excursion into the possible philosophical (and political) implications of the psychoanalytic concept of sexuality, let us conclude with what seems to be its most daring implication. Namely, that sexuality (as linked to the unconscious) is the point of a short circuit between ontology and epistemology The theory that there exists a singular short circuit between ontological and epistemological dimensions is, of course, a very strong "philosophical" claim¹³

The use of scare quotes around *philosophical* establishes simultaneous states of proximity and distance towards the term. The surety with which Zupančič signals the strength of her central claim (that sexuality closes the circuit between ontology and epistemology because of its association with the unconscious) is thereby not matched by a sense of surety about how the reader might respond to its philosophical form (upon which, for that reader, the reasonableness or otherwise of the claim may be decided). Zupančič herself comes across as ambivalent toward philosophy. At times she uses the term in a categorizing manner, to mark out the distinctiveness of psychoanalysis from philosophy as a form of thought;¹⁴ at other

times she distances herself from philosophy on the grounds of its speculative character;¹⁵ yet, from the outset she presents her work as a work *in* philosophy: "The way in which I propose to approach the question of sexuality is to consider it a properly *philosophical* problem of psychoanalysis—with everything that resonates with this term, starting with ontology, logic, and the theory of the subject."¹⁶ The acknowledgement of ambivalence that comes with the use of scare quotes may be intended as a message to herself and/or it may be intended for the reader insofar as they may notice her ambivalence. It also, however, licenses ambivalence within the reader. It signals that Zupančič does not need to know—in transference terms, is wanting not to know – the reader's relation to philosophical argument. To presume knowledge of this kind would risk the text's purpose of enabling the reader to learn for themselves how to take their own place within the points of disjuncture they face—including those, now, that involve arguments mounted in 'the philosophical.' Possession of this knowledge may interrupt the work that will otherwise be the reader's to perform.

A complication arises in the structure of this approach, however, in that the big Other cannot be counted on to fail in the manner which Zupančič's work seeming assumes—as if singular in its form. The big Other cannot be counted on to return from its state of petty social authorities swarming across the social as if, now, an insufficient father. The socio-cultural conditions for transference cannot thereby be assumed to exist to establish a writer/reader relation. The decentred type of authority to whose directives people might now be amenable is thereby likely to comprise a networked transfer of highly provisional moments of authorization, materializing as flashes of agreement between petty social powers of the kind to which Žižek's work gestures. The mode of authorization is thereby likely to be one that enables everyone to simultaneously "watch and be watched, to see and be seen," as Verhaeghe notes:¹⁷ "Instead of hiding [from the big Other] the postmodern subject exhibits himself constantly to the controlling gaze of his [multiple and equally insignificant] peers."

A "new madness" emerges amidst this situation, Verhaeghe continues,¹⁸ as he reviews fellow psychoanalysts' clinical experiences over the last three decades. When now faced with failure, people tend not to respond with symptoms that seek audience with the big Other and that, thereby, would be amenable to transference—of "guilt and neurosis." Instead, they present with symptoms that are difficult to voice, for which there is no audience as such, and with which the development of a transference relation is less probable—of "shame and depression" in conjunction with aggression.¹⁹ We need not possess a formal diagnosis to identify with this.

It is from within this diffusion of social authority (into small big Others)—and from within the social effects of that diffusion (psychical conditions less amenable to the transference relation)—that any renewal of the ‘capacity of naming that has real effects’ needs to emerge. As uneven as these tendencies might be across societies and across social cohorts, the communication of social criticism cannot now assume its counterpart as the norm—of the reader who awaits in a state of desire for the insights of the author. Writing cannot rely upon a traditional transference relation between author/reader.

Potential for new capacities of naming to develop under these conditions lies with the very same positions we find in the traditional transference relation, of the ‘subject wanting not to know’ and the ‘subject supposed to know.’ These subject positions will not take as their goal the attainment of Enlightenment knowledge but, rather, of the event horizon of that very pursuit, of a modernity that has not yet formed. This shift asks the subject positions to develop in conjunction with objects that had emerged with European modernity but whose presence was obscured from view with the rise of science and the scientific subject-supposed-to-know.

I draw here on two such artifacts of European modernity—fetishism and the uncanny. Fetishism and the uncanny signal in different ways the limit-points both of knowledge under modernity and of European modernity itself. Their use to critique the social may yet enable a passage through that modernity and its deepening social, political and ecological crises.

The ability of the subject positions to form in relation to these two artifacts comes with a reversal of their structural roles. This reversal generates a new kind of transference within the writer/reader relation. The reversal sees ‘the subject wanting not to know’ morph from a transferential affect to a *structural feature* of modernity. In conjunction with this shift, ‘the subject supposed to know’ loses its own structural form (a site of enlightened reason) to become a *transferential affect*. I have much to say about the first of these subject positions, which is not to say that it matters more.

The ‘Subject Wanting Not to Know’: Knowledge as Fetishism

‘The subject wanting not to know’ takes on a structural form where attention shifts from the various entities that make up a social formation (self/society and so on), to ‘the relation’ by which such entities co-exist (to *the relation* between self and society, for example). *In itself*, the relation resists representation. This complicating factor becomes apparent as soon as we attempt to say what ‘it’ is. “The relation” resists representation, Fredric Jameson suggests, “in the sense in which no relationship is

an entity in the first place; in the sense in which relationship as such is unrepresentable.”²⁰ In brief, *the relation is unrepresentable*.

Jameson's point is that *the relation* does not depend on the entities being connected as is frequently assumed, for example, within sociological analysis of socio-political formations (of self and of society). Instead, *the relation* operates in the absence of any content borrowed from the entities being conjoined. It is as if the relation exists in its own world, in a state of “(non)-being,”²¹ as an “ontological primitive,”²² as an element existing prior to human society and, thereby, in the “pure and empty form of time” into which human discursivity cannot reach.²³ We need not become occultist with this observation, however, pursuing an arcane truth about *the relation* in its unrepresentability. The unrepresentable character of *the relation* has political significance and we can progress on this basis. As Brian Massumi notes:

It may seem odd to insist that a relation has an ontological status separate from the terms of the relation. But, as the work of Gilles Deleuze repeatedly emphasizes, it is in fact an indispensable step towards conceptualizing change as anything more or other than a negation, deviation, rupture or subversion..²⁴

The possibility of open-ended social transformation depends, Massumi accentuates, upon *the relation* being understood as autonomous of the objects being joined.

One final point follows this opening observation about *the relation* as an object. ‘The subject wanting not to know’ develops in conjunction with *fetishistic attachments* to *the relation* in its state of unrepresentability. This coupling with the relation is not initiated from the side of the subject. Freud's reading of fetishism can be interpreted in this way, such that the subject develops fetishes to deal with realities it would prefer not to face..²⁵ In the present approach, alternatively, fetishism is not a way by which a subject develops an orientation towards desire: it is not an epistemological attribute of the modern subject. Rather, fetishism is an ontological artefact of modernity. As Žižek observes, a state of irreducible difference within the matrix of objective reality and subjectivity generates fetishism. In explanation he notes: “the semblance conceived in the ‘objective’ sense [here, of *the relation* ‘in itself’], designates the moment when the difference between objective reality and subjective semblance is reflected within the domain of the subjective semblance itself [of given expressions of *the relation*, for example].”²⁶ The subject comes into being as its perceptions of reality (semblances) take on an objective quality. The perceptions take on that quality not because they correspond with their object but because they participate in the irreducible gap between subjectivity and objectivity.

From Žižek again, the subject comes into being through their participation within the domain of semblances, wherein a given semblance begins to “objectivize itself and starts to function as a ‘real’ semblance.”²⁷ *That* which the subject thereby recognises as a true picture of an object (the semblance to which it holds) is not the object ‘in itself’ but the state of irreducible difference by which the matrix of objective reality and subjectivity is constituted. This is the very object Lacan discovered lurking amongst the discourses of modernity, of what “seems to be a leftover [but which] is actually a product [of modernity]”—*objet a*.²⁸ What the *modern* subject is responding to in its declaration of truths about the world is not objective reality but the scrap of the Real –*objet a*–within their thought, which forms in the process of the semblance objectivising itself. To be ‘modern’ is to exist through the silent impasse which *objet a* presents to thought, operating as if from within thought itself. Fetishism provides the mechanism through which this occurs on a systemic basis.

As an ontological artefact that emerges with modernity, fetishism fragments *the unrepresentability of the relation* to which Deleuze and Jameson each point. It fragments that unrepresentability into a set of *valences* (of the relation in its state of being unrepresentable). It does so through *the relation's* role in supporting criticism of European modernity, of that modernity's mechanisms of bio-political administration, of self-valorising value, of the doctrine of human exceptionalism and so on. I will shortly describe three valences that have developed in this way: the “commodity fetishism” of capitalism;²⁹ the object-oriented ontology of “Difference”;³⁰ and the object-*dis*oriented ontology of “the unconscious.”³¹ When we begin from the observation, as does Jameson, that *the relation* cannot appear ‘in itself’—that is it unrepresentable—*the relation* manifests as *the valences* taken by that very condition of unrepresentability. *The unrepresentability of the relation* can thereby be found in *the difference by which each of the valences remains objectively distinct from each other, amidst their similarity*. The subject finds no basis within the set upon which to discriminate between the three expressions of the relation's unrepresentable character. The subject thereby holds to the set in a fetishistic manner, being unable either to privilege one of the expressions or to let them all go. It cannot privilege commodity fetishism, for example, any more than it can dispense with the valences as a set. It is to this state of difference between the valences amidst a state of similarity they share, as characterizes *the relation in its valences of unrepresentability*, that we now turn for insight into new capacities of naming associated with ‘the subject wanting not to know.’

Valences of Unrepresentability

At first glance, Marx's comments on the commodity fetish provide a strong working description of *the relation* in its state of unrepresentability under capitalism.

Famously,

the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity of the material [*dinglich*] relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.³²

The operative word here is 'fantastic.' The word points to an effect that participation in the relations between commodities has on perception. Relations between commodities not only express the presence of another set of relations—of material arrangements that configure people as labour power—but veil the latter's existence. Amongst this dialectic of expressing/veiling, the association between commodities effaces the relation between manufactured things and the social relations by which those things are manufactured. The fundamental capitalist relation at work—the formation of value through the commodification of labour—thereby becomes unrepresentable from the vantage points from which people routinely participate in capitalist economy—from the production of commodities (including themselves as labour power) coupled with the consumption of commodities.

As useful as this approach can be for the analysis of capitalist relations, it is a strong reading of commodity fetishism. It presumes the existence of a subject who is immune to the fetish, who has 20/20 analytic vision of it, who is not complicit in its operation. A detached rationalism is thereby presumed, which opens this reading up to an array of criticisms that echo the critiques of Cartesian dualism (mind/body; self/other).

An alternative reading is possible from within Marxism, as exemplified in the work of Moishe Postone.³³ This reading holds that the commodity fetish operates across all expressions of labour under capitalism. The notion of the commodity fetish is thus as much a theory of subjectivity as of economic relations.

Marx's theory of the fetish does not merely unmask the legitimization of bourgeois society ... rather, it is a social theory of subjectivity that relates forms of consciousness to the manifest forms of social relations in a society where labour mediates itself and thereby constitutes people's relations among each other as well as with nature.³⁴

No one can see clearly through the veil that the fetish casts over the relations between commodities, people and nature. Instead, subjectivity develops within the fetish, is subsumed by it. A shift is thereby called for in expectations about what can be known—"the nature of an adequate social theory"³⁶—and in how what we know might be held.

First, fresh academic insight into the commodity fetish has the potential to simultaneously ('fantastically') express and veil the social relations that endow academic labour with special social status. Alfred Sohn-Rethel had referred to this as a "fetishism of intellectual labour" under capitalism.³⁶ Academic commentary on the commodity fetish can inadvertently participate in that fetishization where it does not question the social conditions that endow its production of knowledge with social status. Paradoxically, then, critical academic insight into the commodity fetish has the potential to reproduce the fetish. Academic critique can inadvertently render *the relation* unrepresentable where it unreflectively melds new insights and the (capitalist) conditions of its own (intellectual) existence.

In the absence of subject positions that develop outside the commodity fetish—within the societies of capitalism, at least—a goal of social criticism becomes the articulation of a dialectics appropriate to the subsumption of subjectivity under the fetish. This is a dialectics that moves between, on the one hand, points of disjuncture within the various determinations of capitalist society (associated with law, media, religion, politics, the economy, and so on) and, on the other, subjectivities appropriate to the new relations through which transformed institutions will function. As Postone suggests:

(O)n this basis, one could develop a theory of the historical transformation of subjectivity that would elucidate the social constitution and historical development of needs and perceptions—both those that tend to perpetuate the system and those that call it into question.³⁷

One final point follows, on how such knowledge might be held.

A dialectics of this kind can never be known 'in itself.' It can never appear in its completed form, as if a self-assembling, trans-historical jigsaw puzzle. Rather, it is one that seeks "to grasp this society from the viewpoint of its possible transformation by means of a socially self-reflexive, historically determinate theory of social constitution."³⁸ Such a dialectics may only become an object of understanding after it has emerged through, for example, new insights people generate as they attempt to change their socio-economic circumstances. Though a *retroductive dialectics* of this

kind, capacities for naming with 'real effects' may yet emerge from within the condition of commodity fetish, and in criticism of that fetish.

Unlike the case of the commodity fetish, in which *the unrepresentability of the relation* appears as an unanticipated consequence of "traditional" Marxist thought,³⁹ the state of unrepresentability is reached *directly* in the object-oriented ontology of Gilles Deleuze. For Deleuze, *the relation* brings together objects in their natural differences through a form of differentiation that eludes representation, of "difference without a concept," through a "non-mediated difference."⁴⁰ Two effects follow from this kind of unrepresentability. First, the substantive content of knowledge-claims shifts each time those claims are repeated. Second, the relation becomes simultaneously material and discursive and, with that breath of existence, comes the possibility for a new capacity of naming that is, also, both material and discursive.

We can imagine two peas whose natural differences are subsumed by a concept that highlights their similarities—'peas in a pod.' The concept subsumes the two peas within itself as being 'of the same' but in a way that does not deny the existence of natural differences between them. What's more, the ability of the concept to represent the peas means that, in principle, we could keep adding peas to a hypothetically elastic pod such that the concept could cover the case of an infinite number of peas. At such a point the concept would become 'identical with itself,' needing nothing in reality to validate it. A cost follows, however, as Deleuze notes.

The differences that we might thereafter anticipate between actually-existing peas comes to be contained by the concept. From that point on, there is nothing new under the sun, so to speak, and we are in for no surprises. Peas that we later come across will appear 'so' because the natural differences between them will be understood in relation to the range of difference to which we had become accustomed through our repetition of the concept 'peas in a pod.' The move reduces critical thought to the forms of mental processing associated with law—with the juridical quest for "identity" and with acquiescence toward the figure of "the Same."

Another difference is also always at work, for Deleuze. This is a state of differentiation—"Difference"—that arises between, on the one hand, the objects that appear to us as being similar (but which we also know to contain natural differences) and, on the other, the concept we will borrow to describe them.

Difference is therefore between two repetitions: between the superficial repetition of the identical and instantaneous external elements that it contracts [as experienced in borrowed ideas as we repeat them across new cases], and the profound repetition of the internal totalities of an always variable past [the

state of natural difference repeated between objects that are the same under the cover of the concept used to name them].⁴¹

What interests Deleuze about this state of double-repetition, is that the concept assumes the existence of natural differences while it dispenses with any need for this difference to affect how peas are named (to continue with our example). A split thereby occurs *in the concept* that is *also* a split *within things*: the concept encounters a tension it cannot resolve which is also the state of natural difference that endures within objects independently of the name those objects share. That double-split *is* Difference, manifesting in discourse as the “difference [that is] without a concept [of itself].”⁴² For Deleuze, then, our attempts to relate objects to one another—that is, to repeat our knowledge across objects—is disrupted by a split in the concept that is also a split of things in their becoming. Practices of representation make few inroads into reality because of this split. Other capacities of naming are needed.

The capacities that are needed for naming to have real effect are, for Deleuze, practices of “signification”⁴³ including “the problematic,”⁴⁴ “the simulacra,”⁴⁵ and “the Idea.”⁴⁶ These practices find themselves sharing in an element that does not form as an idea—a condition of “excess”⁴⁷—which appears to be Difference by another name. Under the tractive force exerted by this condition of excess, the practices of signification are always “extra-propositional and sub-representative, and do not resemble the propositions which represent the affirmations to which they give rise.”⁴⁸ For Deleuze, then, insights that follow from the practices of signification only dimly resemble the sketchy problematics that have seeded their development, given those problematics’ participation in the unrepresentable excess of Difference.

Our third valence of *the relation* in its unrepresentability shares in Deleuze’s optimism toward practices of signification. It takes the optimism further, in that the valence anticipates representational outcomes that may produce more than the vague signifying practices that have birthed them. “New signifiers” are on offer.⁴⁹

The mechanism able to name with this greater level of social effect is the field of unconscious process. So Alenka Zupančič argues. The possibility for this capacity is glimpsed in an optimistic observation from Lacan with which Zupančič opens her text *What is Sex?*—“sublimation is satisfaction of the drive, without repression.”⁵⁰ Sublimation, as a means by which the subject signifies the world, succeeds because it eludes the strictures of representational thought. What enables sublimation to stay on track in the absence of either direct access to the Real or sure representational markers of reality, is its accord with an unconscious process that exceeds the

individual subject and over which the subject has no direct influence ('the drive'—ultimately, the 'death drive').

The possibility follows Freud's observation that the unconscious has been set in motion by the operation of "primal repression"—by, as Freud describes that mechanism, an ongoing "attraction exercised by what is primally repressed upon everything with which it can establish a connection."⁵¹ Material that has been primally repressed is not available to conscious thought. At best, it creates ripples within the unconscious. These ripples occur where primal repression exerts a gravitational pull upon painful experiences, which are thereafter brought into the unconscious through a 'secondary' process of repression. Unlike the contents of primal repression, material from that secondary repression can be recovered for interpretation.

The significance of primal repression goes beyond the formation of subjectivity, as we find also in the work of Deleuze,⁵² reaching to the development of knowledge. Primal repression is the site at which *the relation* falls from representation. Our sight grows dim. The primal repression of the human unconscious becomes a dislocating presence within ontology itself. With the unconscious, the human animal introduces—and then exists by virtue of—what Zupančič calls an "object-*dis*oriented ontology."⁵³ About *the unconscious* as a form of knowledge, Zupančič notes that its "'nothing' is inherent to being, and constitutes its irreducible crack; it registers as a peculiar ('negative') epistemological score, it registers as a peculiar form of knowledge."⁵⁴

In this third valence of *the relation*, the mechanism by which new capacities for naming might emerge lie with 'new signifiers that work.' By this kind of phrase Zupančič refers to a type of word that ushers new realities into being: "it is about words that name something about our reality for the first time."⁵⁵ These are words that emerge from holes bored through the networks of signifiers that have come to problematically frame situations, and into the field of drive in which the individual unconscious participates. Think of Marx's concept of "class struggle," Zupančič suggests. The concept reveals a problematic aspect of human society that was otherwise being masked by conservative constructions of political economy. With the naming of the phenomenon in this way, class struggle became an object for which the concept has thereafter generated "tools to think it" and for the subject to interpret experiences of exploitation that otherwise elude its understanding.⁵⁶ Future capacities for naming with real effect lie with the articulation of 'new signifiers' of this kind.

In summary, attention to the valences in their distinctiveness is how 'the subject wanting not to know' develops understanding of the current moment. Indeed, a fetishist attachment to those valences *is* how this subject position forms. The

valences frame this subject's inquiries. The subject focuses not simply on capitalism, for example, but on the commodity fetish as a principle of capitalism's dynamism, nor upon ontology per se but upon the operation of a movement of differentiation across the discursive and material alike; and neither simply upon the unconscious but upon the operation of processes associated with drive. To this list, also, we could envisage other socio-historical dynamics including points of disjuncture associated with situations of ongoing colonization. The analytic significance of the valences lies with the equal and undifferentiated attraction that fetishism generates toward each in its expression of *the relation in its unrepresentability*. Fetishism generates interest in each, through an attachment to all that cannot be jettisoned. As to how the subject remains with the valences amongst their shared state of difference—such that it foregoes the lure of 'picking a *winner*'—is a problem not for 'the subject wanting not to know.' Rather, that task lies with 'the subject supposed to know' as a transferential affect.

The 'Subject Supposed to Know': on Being Uncanny

In contrast to 'the subject wanting not to know,' there is little to be said about 'the subject supposed to know' in its guise as a transferential affect. The status of the former subject position was complicated by the knowledge that it does not want—about *objet a*, about that secret amalgam which presupposes *the relation in its unrepresentability*, which only gets expressed in/as the valences of that unrepresentability, and whose non-existence outside of those expressions *is* the difference being expressed *between* the valences. A special subjective attribute needs to be activated for the subject to remain with knowledge of this dislocating kind.

An attribute able to sustain the subject in this state is one of *being* uncanny. This is 'the subject supposed to know' now as a transferential affect rather than site of knowledge. The state of being uncanny goes beyond the holding of knowledge about uncanniness. Knowledge 'about' concerns the 'how, where and when' of the uncanny to which Freud contributed—of the uncanny's emergence in unresolved infantile complexes and of its return in 'surmounted' juvenile beliefs; of its appearances in real experience, in works of fiction and in non-fictional writing, and so on.⁵⁷ More than this knowledge, 'the subject supposed to know' forms as a transferential affect by *taking its place* within the uncanny. This is not the uncanny as an essential element of the human condition, as presupposed in phenomenological accounts but, rather, of the uncanny as an historical formation, in its guise as an artifact of European modernity.⁵⁸

'The subject supposed to know' emerges as a transferential affect in conjunction with the displacement of the uncanny in modernity. In pre-modern European society, Mladen Dolar notes, the uncanny "was assigned to a religiously and socially sanctioned place," this site having been displaced for members of European society by the Enlightenment, such that "this privileged and excluded place ... was no more. That is to say that the uncanny became unplaceable; it became uncanny in the strict sense."⁵⁹

The unplaceable nature of the uncanny has introduced a limit-point to European modernity and to the forms that knowledge can take under its cover. This is not to imply that being uncanny provides a means of "going beyond the modern, but rather an awareness of its internal limit, its split, which was there from the outset."⁶⁰ As with fetishism, this limit-point is signaled with Lacan's discovery of *objet a*. A form of subjectivity thereby emerges in conjunction with recognition of *objet a*, that can take its place within the displacement of the uncanny under modernity; that can take its place within the uncanniness of modernity.

'The subject supposed to know' functions amidst the uncanny by sustaining an antagonism that had emerged with European modernity, between the domains of knowledge and belief: "I know very well but all the same ... I believe."⁶¹ With modernity, the uncanny wanders without a home and 'the subject supposed to know' (in its guise as a transferential affect) helps provide a place for it. That place is a condition, as Dolar calls it,⁶² of "oscillation" between the two domains. The purpose of this oscillation goes beyond a perpetuation of epistemological ambiguity, as we have within postmodern traditions of social inquiry—as if vacillation, epistemic pluralism and the like have analytic value.⁶³ Rather, as Dolar continues, the oscillation is "a strategy of postponement to defer the encounter with the Thing," a ploy that delays engagement with the uncanny in its strictest sense.⁶⁴ The sustaining of oscillation enables the subject to avoid the anxiety associated with a state of "terrible certainty" that the uncanny—the silent impasse of *objet a*—presents to thought.⁶⁵ Such would be the lot of the 'knowing' subject if *objet a* were encountered without the cossetting sheaths provided by discursive techniques promising epistemic "exactitude"—those of science, philosophy, political ideology, religious doctrine and so on.⁶⁶ Without such protections, the subject faces "a too-close presence of the object ... [and] the lack of the support of the lack" which would otherwise provide the needed distance from *objet a*. Without such, the subject faces an unbearable situation in which the "lack lacks" and subjectivity risks facing an empty psychotic universe.⁶⁷

Under these conditions, to *be* uncanny—which is the task of 'the subject supposed to know' as a transferential affect—is (like psychoanalysis in general) to

hold open the gap between knowledge and belief. With that gap held open, an ongoing narration of situations may yet be sustained amidst forces that threaten narrativization itself, including an ahistorical terrorizing certitude and an historically contingent waning of symbolic efficiency. The ability of this subject position to do so in conjunction with the work undertaken by 'the subject wanting not to know' will be helped by a method by which both can participate, in the narrativization of social change.

Writing Between Subject Positions: Autoethnographies of Disjuncture

The reversal of roles played by the two subject positions can be put into motion by the naming of contexts by which those positions exist. By 'naming,' I do not mean how the contexts we have already considered are described (of 'Difference,' 'capitalism' and 'the unconscious'). Rather, I mean how such descriptions are made into narrative, "*narrative* [being] the central function or *instance* of the human mind," as Jameson suggests.⁶⁸ The significance of narrative goes beyond these (uncharacteristically) foundationalist observations from Jameson. Narrative enables social analysis to engage with points of disjuncture as they occur in different registers and across times and spaces. This is a task towards which the present piece has been moving, with its attention to the points of disjuncture that come with *the relation in its unrepresentability* (that is, through the *valences* thereof). As Jameson illuminates,

history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious.⁶⁹

Through his use of narrative to critique the present, Jameson brings together various points of disjuncture that create the need and possibility for such critique: 'history as an absent cause'; 'the Real itself'; and 'the political unconscious.' These are not events in the commonsense use of the term but events of disjuncture. This is a narrativization of *objet a* as it shifts shape.

An overlooked kind of narration may prove useful for the knitting of points of disjuncture into narrative sequences—autoethnography. With the rare exception, autoethnographic accounts do not satisfy my intellectual curiosity. They tend to be either too subjectivist (as with the 'evocative' strand of autoethnography), too representationalist (as with its 'analytic' strand) or too voluntarist (as with its

'performative' strand). That said, the use of the narrative form in autoethnography proves unexpectedly useful. Autoethnography can support accounts that pivot upon points of disjuncture, charting *objet a* as it shifts expression.

By way of an example, an autoethnographic account—if I were to write one in the current moment—would turn upon three such points. The first point would relate to autistic features about myself, a second to the capitalism in which I live and a third to a writing practice by which I negotiate autism and capitalism. Let me flesh this out as a way of illustrating the issues to which the two subject positions of 'subject wanting not to know' and 'subject supposed to know' would find themselves attending.

In referencing autism as a feature of myself, I find myself in an unusual situation. I have no official diagnosis but personally identify with the term because of insights gained into myself over recent decades. I sit within a condition that autism activist Dora Raymaker calls "A/autistic"—within a field of "overlapping and interconnected communities of [autistic] identity."⁷⁰ Setting aside a range of hesitations that are validly made about the politics of diagnostic procedures,⁷¹ diagnosis usefully enables people with autism to access services and resources otherwise blocked to them by organizational cultures, stereotypes and other social biases. The privileges brought to me as a white, middle-class male mean I do not need a diagnosis to obtain the resources I need. For this reason, I can identify with the condition without feeling a need to participate in the bio-political procedures that establish the condition 'as such.' For the most part, also, the autistic traits I carry are masked by a lifetime spent in emulation of neuro-typical behavior. I learn social practices and roles as a way of 'fitting in.' For the most part this works.

In making sense of how I perform the lessons I have learned, I've found psychoanalytic interpretations of autism useful. These interpretations are distinctly unfashionable at present, with 'social' models of autism in the ascendance because of their politically progressivist normalization of neurodiversity. What the psychoanalytic understanding brings, however, is insight into a state of "foreclosure" that appears to condition the psychological structure of the autiste.⁷² The commonplace mechanisms of secondary repression were seemingly not properly installed in the likes of myself and, as such, life experiences are not consistently brought for processing into the language-like machinations of the unconscious, as might happen with others. The big Other is not easily invoked.

As a sign of this, my mother proudly told people that 'he never cried'—not recognizing in infantile crying the first of what would ordinarily be the subject's many gestures to the big Other.⁷³ I thereafter took a long time to speak, being the infant sitting in the corner mumbling 'thugh, thugh, thugh, thugh' And when I did learn to

As I learned to speak, I became fixated with words—not for the meaning they convey but as objects in themselves. To talk, also, and even now, requires me to be conscious about speaking. Each episode is an event. It is not that a state of intention precedes my speech, such that a moment of self-awareness occurs from which I then talk. But neither does it seem the case that consciousness follows as I speak, as if a mechanical reflex. What I have awareness of is an abiding glitch in their interaction, of the presence of time being “out of joint”—to channel Derrida⁷⁴—in the mutual constitution of speech and consciousness.

Where the big Other does appear, it arrives as a terrorizing force—of repetitive dreams marked by excoriating pain, for example. Here, the big Other arrives without the buffering effects of language. It arrives fully external to me, as an annihilating force I cannot assimilate. I am foreclosed from it, such that not even unconscious processes of repression can mediate the physical pain its presence brings. And yet, clearly, my psychological structure is not only this. I have learned to speak. I have learned to mimic social behaviors that (for the most part) meet other's expectations. Moreover, the dreams occur only in periodic waves and not continually. Foreclosure is not complete.

An insight I have garnered into the autism is that the condition of foreclosure has modified in me over the years. That said, the change has not brought with it a ‘normal’ state of repression. I think of my state, instead, as one of *(non)foreclosure*. By this I mean that foreclosure remains the psychic state that conditions my psyche but it does not fully do so. I am *(non)foreclosed*.

If I were to continue this autoethnographic narrative through the organizing work of ‘the subject wanting not to know’—that is, using points of disjuncture that are constitutive of my subjectivity—I would note that a writing practice has become central to my ability to sustain this state of *(non)foreclosure*. This practice sees me writing every day with pen on paper, discarding the paper into the waste-paper basket. The practice fabricates the big Other in its failure to materialize—in its failure to know (to remember) me. It helps that I have a terrible memory and that I can never remember the point on which my last writing episode had concluded. That concluding point must always be reconstructed. The point that emerges when I put pen to paper again invariably takes on a new appearance from that with which I had previously finished. To draw on Deleuze, ‘Difference’ is in operation. An extended quotation from Deleuze's collaborator Felix Guattari takes us further into the constitutive role of Difference in this writing practice:

These dissident vectors [me = each day's new writing] have become relatively detached from their denotative and significative functions [the production of the article or chapter I am ostensibly writing] and operate as decorporealized existential materials. However, as experiments in the suspension of meaning they are risky, as there is the possibility of a violent deterritorialization which would destroy the assemblage of subjectification [I might not remember the insight at which I arrived the last time I wrote and, if it were not to return ... I might never write again ...]. A more gentle deterritorialization, however, might enable the assemblages to evolve in a constructive, processual fashion [writing in a sunny café, with people about but not too close]. At the heart of all ecological praxes there is an a-signifying rupture, in which the catalysts of existential change are close at hand, but lack expressive support from the assemblage of enunciation [as the insight begins to return, it doesn't return 'as such,' as a recognizable idea]. In the scenario of processual assemblages, the expressive a-signifying rupture summons forth a creative repetition that forges incorporeal objects, abstract machines and Universes of value that make their presence felt as though they had been always 'already there' [the insights develop anew, displacing – without eradicating – their previous expressions]; although they are entirely dependent on the existential event that brings them into play [the new insight reflects its prior appearance but arrives augmented and altered by circumstances since the last writing event. It becomes 'itself,' though the manner of its new occurrence].⁷⁵

At some point, movement in the writing diminishes and I am keen to commit the emergent text to the memory of the computer. At that point, I sit at the keyboard and, in short order (a few hours), will write the article/chapter/essay. To frame the process in psychical terms, the process enables me to maintain a state of (non)foreclosure. To reframe it again in terms of *the relation in its unrepresentability*, the writing enables a movement of concepts and materiality in their mutually constitutive states of becoming.

If I were to build the autoethnographic narrative even further through the work of 'the subject wanting not to know,' I would note that a third kind of disjuncture has appeared. The writing practice has enabled me to publish successfully across a range of socio-legal topics over the years. As I returned to writing after an extended period dominated by teaching/administrative responsibilities, however, I found that it worked less. I wrote much but said little. It is as if something had altered in the operation of (non)foreclosure within my psyche. I felt the writing practice to be riskier, as the audit regime of our neoliberalised tertiary sector took on greater significance

within the academic setting in which I work. As an academic practice, my writing pivots upon a presupposition that I am never 'up to the task.' Instead, the practice assumes that I must *become* capable. Writing is the process of *becoming capable*. That capacity does not come from skill with a research method or from a state of theoretical surety. I am jealous of those who can claim either. Rather, new insights develop into a topic only where the motion of the central object of interest is engaged, such that the movement of that object inaugurates psychological movement within myself. To the extent to which movement within my psyche meets the movement that the object takes, the writing develops. There is no guarantee that this will work and the audit culture of our university system has little patience for it. It would be far better for me if I could be the orthodox 'subject supposed to know,' projecting myself as one with 'expertise' according to some measure of academic exactitude.

I can understand the allure of expertise and its related measures. In a period in which administrative demands have increased upon the academic to demonstrate that their work has 'real effects,' proximate measures provide assurance. To not participate risks censure, while participation brings considerable material and social rewards. These measures signal the commodity fetish at work. They focus attention on the circulation of academic outputs—on their exchange value—rather than insights into the capitalist conditions through which the maintenance of such attention has become central to contemporary academic life. The fetish hides the impasse. A twin-obstacle obstructs my ability to identify with this intensification of capitalist process—the viability of my psychological state of (non)foreclosure and the writing process that has helped me function within academia. The operation of the commodity fetish threatens both.

Up to this point, my autoethnographic account has been driven by 'the subject wanting not to know.' From my discussion thus far, this is to be expected. This subject position is attached in a fetishistic manner to the points of disjuncture that arrive with *the relation in its valences of unrepresentability*. It busies itself with establishing nodal points for the narrative in keeping with those valences as I understand them thus far—unconscious processes, the mutual constitution of material reality and discourse, the commodity fetish. To 'the subject supposed to know,' a different role is given.

In its guise as a transference affect, 'the subject supposed to know' sustains a state of oscillation between knowledge and belief in the autoethnography, doing so amidst an anomaly that increasingly threatens the narrative's coherence. On the one hand, the subject position supports the *knowledge* being produced about the named objects in the account—of capitalism, writing and autism—supporting the presentation

of each one not in terms of 'itself' but in terms of *the valences of unrepresentability in the relation* by which each is constituted (the commodity fetish, Difference, (non)foreclosure).

On the other hand, the subject also supports a *belief* that the objects nevertheless exist with all the coherence implied by their 'named' status. They remain capitalism, writing, autism. An anomaly arises here centered upon the matter of causation to which the 'subject supposed to know' responds. It does so not as a site of knowledge that adjudicates on the matter but as a transferential affect that can occupy the anomaly without requiring its immediate resolution.

Objects that appear in the guise of knowledge and those that appear as artifacts of belief, are attributed mutually exclusive causal qualities. Within the former, causality may be seen as an overdetermined state associated with the interconnectedness of things. Alternatively, the latter may point to the discreteness of objects as they become objects of analysis, and of a mechanical kind of causality to which the objects become amenable as analysis proceeds. The possibility of ongoing narrativization depends upon a traversal of this antagonism. This is a task faced by 'the subject supposed to know' as a transferential affect.

The possibility of ongoing narrativization depends upon the impasse between approaches remaining open and of it not being collapsed into one side or the other—into either *knowledge* or *belief*. Collapse into *belief* could take the form, for example, of theoretical argument that identifies the form of causality at work: of "mechanical" or "expressive" for example.⁷⁶ It promises analytical exactitude. It could be argued, in this vein, that capitalism directly ('mechanically') determines the courses taken by my writing practice and by my autism or, alternatively, that the writing and autism both 'express' an essential feature of capitalism that sees the latter reproduced through the trajectories independently taken by each of the two conditions. Alternatively, a collapse into *knowledge* could see a reification of the ideas that sustain the open-endedness of my approach, especially that of '*the relation as unrepresentable*.' It promises analytical surety. Collapse in either direction would end the process of narration, however, insofar as the process of narration would close around one or other of the narrative's elements, around a preferred causal model (mechanical or expressive) for example, or the leading idea now in reified guise.

It is within the authorial powers of 'the subject supposed to know' to prevent closure in either direction. It does this by taking its place within the oscillation between knowledge and belief, by sustaining that state of oscillation. It does so by refusing the ideological closure or psychical certitude that knowledge and belief respectively promise. It can leave theoretical questions of causality to work

themselves out amidst the waft and weave of history, while ensuring that narrativization continues as part of the always already effectiveness of cause.

Writing Amidst the Demise of Symbolic Efficiency

A shift to a transference relation animated by a reversal of roles between 'the subject supposed to know' and 'the subject wanting not to know' has a straightforward effect upon writing: it focuses attention on a new object. No longer is the object of the transference relation the subject and its prospects under modernity. While the idea of 'the subject' might appear nostalgic, we also know that it has not disappeared. We see the promise of the subject reinvigorated by the Covid-19 pandemic, even while from vastly differing political perspectives. It appears within populist calls for 'freedoms' and 'rights' in the face of restrictions upon movement, vaccine passports and the like; and it appears as demands placed upon the 'tech giants' to ensure that individuals encounter verified truth claims in on-line platforms before being peppered with claims of other kinds.

Under the new transference relation, however, the central object of critical social commentary becomes modernity itself and of its prospects under the subject. The subject is not simply a product of modernity but also its leftover. It is *objet a* in the guise of a pulse. Modernity's prospects are not disconnected from the ends towards which that pulse can work. We can think of these ends in terms of the capacities of naming that the subject might yet produce amidst the demise of symbolic efficiency that has been of concern in this piece. Animated by the new transference relation, the subject in a state of 'wanting not to know' can chart ways in which *objet a* changes shape across socio-political settings—as with the commodity fetish under capitalism, for example; as a valence of *the relation in its unrepresentability*. The other subject position in the new transference relation, of 'the subject supposed to know' (now as a transferential affect rather than as a site of knowledge), is a state of being simultaneously with the valences and with the difference through which each of the valences is constituted; which is to be with *objet a*; which is *to be uncanny*.

The new transference relation highlights an observation popularized by Bruno Latour, for whom 'the modern' subject has never really existed.⁷⁷ To become subjects through the artifacts produced by modernity—which includes not only those upon which Latour has focused, of science and technology, but also of fetishism and the uncanny—produces an array of challenges for which the 'solutions' of ideological closure and psychical certitude can appeal more than participation in a dialectically spiraling modernity. The quest to create new capacities for naming amidst the

demise of symbolic efficiency, amidst the dispersal of social authorities into a plethora of small big Others, amidst the waning of the traditional transference relation, and amidst the emergence of a new madness, presents us with the question of modernity as if for the first time—and with a challenge to yet become modern.

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