

Embracing Žižek's Unapologetic Profanity: Enjoying One's Unfreedom

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Che Vuoi? What do you want from me?¹

For intellectuals, scientists or literary specialists, the question takes a precise form: what place does our activity occupy in the world, what role does it play? What are we as intellectuals in this world? For what is an intellectual if not the product of a history and a society in which the division of labour imposes upon us this role and its blinkers? Have not the revolutions that we have known or seen announced the birth of a *different* type of intellectual? If so, what is our role in this transformation?²

How is it that from within contemporary deliberations of intellectual freedom one might elicit unfreedom as a possible site for emancipation? Further, might this space enable an appropriate response to or even a formalisation of the boundaries of freedom considered as a socio-political ideological deployment? Freedom and the intellect certainly have an affinity in that both construct a scene for emancipation, but they are otherwise mutually exclusive. The incompleteness of this tenuous relationship is not always obvious in that it touches on the Real of enjoyment. For Slavoj Žižek freedom is a problematic dialectic whereas enjoyment is a political act. Both freedom and enjoyment are

beset with tensions and struggles of their own and when combined they capture the subject within distinctive ideological tentacles. In addition, the will to enjoy is both a political drive and where the big Other³ is most visible as a means of critiquing ideology.

Žižek's concept of the event is a formalisation, an abstraction in which the political is pivotal and essential for social transformation. Žižek states:

At first approach, an event is this, the effect that seems to exceed its causes – and the space of an event is that which opens up the gap that separates an effect from its causes... our first tentative definition of event as an effect which exceeds its causes thus brings us back to an inconsistent multiplicity: is an event a change in the way reality appears to us, or is it a shattering transformation of reality itself?⁴

Žižek's concept of the event is an important starting point from which to consider the dialectical tension between freedom and unfreedom precisely because its provocative interrogation pulls the rug from beneath any claim to the legitimacy of authority and consistency. It is here that I interrogate feminism. In throwing into crisis the quest for freedom which underlies much feminist discourse, Žižek is challenging those ideological conditions, including freedom, on which the assertions of feminism rest. First and foremost, it is crucial to understand ideology and the conditions of its emergence and it is here that we must turn to Althusser when he states:

Practical ideologies are complex formations which shape notions-representations-images into behaviour-conduct-attitude-gestures. The ensemble functions as practical norms that govern the attitude and the concrete positions men adopt towards the real objects and real problems of their social and individual existence, and towards their history.⁵

Althusser poses a significant challenge here: that there is a distinction between the practicing intellectual and one who functions within the ideological position already constituted to legitimate knowledge. Althusser also necessarily invokes the historicisation of this as a problem to be reckoned with.⁶ We must take Althusser seriously and question whether intellectual freedom is a sincere position within the current academy, and more so, whether to be an intellectual today merely serves the institution and those ideologies which constitute legitimate knowledge. Although the functioning of feminism is founded on historical events of emancipatory politics, it can be argued that today's feminism

has lost its vigour and that as a result, freedom is foregrounded more within an interdisciplinary praxis rather than as an ontological crisis. This disjuncture should be concerning for both intellectual freedom and political activism, and furthermore it has implications for the emancipatory subject. This paper proposes the concept of unfreedom to be an important Žizekian-Lacanian elucidation and provocation for contemporary feminist theory and, possibly also, for global feminist discourse.

Firstly, why is Lacanian psychoanalysis so apt a discipline for deliberating freedom? Alenka Zupančič provides a cogent response when she states:

Every satisfaction of a need brings with it the possibility of a supplementary satisfaction, deviating from the object and aim of a given demand while pursuing its own goal, thus constituting a seemingly dysfunctional detour. It is this detour, or the space which it opens up, that constitutes not only the field of the catalogued 'sexual aberrations,'; but also the ground, as well as the energy source, for what is generally referred to as human culture in its highest accomplishments.⁷

For Zupančič and Lacanians alike, the ontology of the sexed subject eclipses that of gendered constitutions resultant from postmodernism. This is an important foundational position from which to commence a critical return to feminism because it directly attends to desire and its relation to the body as contingent on unconscious forces rather than on social constructionism. More specifically, Žižek's engagement with Lacan is a way of elucidating how truth can emerge from human reality. Žižek states that Lacanian psychoanalysis, "does not show an individual the way to accommodate him – or herself to the demands of social reality; instead it explains how something like reality constitutes itself in the first place".⁸ This provides a well-poised position from which to interrogate freedom and truth as materialist emergence that is responded to as an event.

Much has been written about the concept of freedom, specifically its intersections with power, knowledge and social transformation. Such intersections are at the core of feminist scholarship and provocation. The 'Thing' of freedom for feminism is the figure of the woman, emancipated from patriarchal and consumerist strongholds. Historically there have been many events such as women's franchise in the West, which attest to increasing female political participation. This has been aided and abetted by three waves of feminism, also arguably by today's post-feminism which, however, suffers from a different kind of essentialist discourse – that of technology. Under technological

essentialism⁹ the current tendency to reduce freedom into sets of comfortable and socially acceptable media identifications, obfuscates the crucial condition that freedom is always in dialectical tension with unfreedom. Unfreedom is best understood as symbolic forced choice, reduced freedom or even as an acceptance of what cannot be changed. Žižek recognises this when stating, “We feel free because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom.”¹⁰ Here, Žižek is referring to the unsayableness of unfreedom because it aligns with the Real; thus freedom becomes an Imaginary fantasy and unfreedom, the repressed Real. An emphasis on unfreedom allows for critiquing the rhetorical encouragement of the fantasy that we are now freer than ever. Certainly, Žižek puts the concept and praxis of freedom on the couch: his Lacanian interrogation of freedom provokes the deadlock of desire and perversion as a useful position from which to map those political dimensions which ideologically structure freedom as desirable. Desire for the fantasy of freedom is greater than the excess it promises. It is here that Žižek is faithful to Lacan in his formalisation that desire, in the deadlock with perversion, ensures that ideological fantasies such as freedom remain captured by the cultural super-ego.

For Lacan desire is structured by Law:

The law creates desire in the first place by creating interdiction. Desire is essentially the desire to transgress, and for there to be a transgression, it is first necessary that there be prohibition.¹¹

If there is no desire for transgression, Law becomes redundant and ceases to function. Fulfilment offered through transgression of the Law is forever enticing but always an ultimate failure because through a confrontation with excess, the only fallback position is to the original desire for transgression. Arguably, this is also an indication of postmodernism’s failure in its emancipatory function. What this means is that in the context of postmodern relativism, there is no truth to be fought for, and more pertinently no link between truth and freedom. Thus transgression itself becomes only a relative state that is reduced to the politics of identity and self-interest. Žižek has linked perversion with several postmodern liberal strategies which seek out idiosyncratic paths towards enjoyment. For Žižek the need to transgress is essential to both desire and to the sustainment of Law. But more than this, Žižek suggests that transgressive acts made in the name of freedom are no more than ruses to maintain their own dialectical integrity. It could be argued that at this juncture Žižek and feminism part ways. Feminism attempted to confront those ideological scaffolds which served to subjugate women by instituting a different discursive, woman-centred framework and in this it was to some extent successful. However, Žižek

in his critical return to ideology and adoption of Lacan, poses a significant challenge by suggesting that as an emancipatory subject one must be willing to break away from identifying with the support of ideology in order to escape the false consciousness of freedom. It is here that we must return to Althusser's theorisation of ideology: "an ideological proposition is a proposition that, while it is the symptom of a reality other than that of which it speaks, is a false proposition to the extent that it concerns the object of which it speaks."¹² If we take seriously Althusser's theorisation, under scrutiny here is the feminist mantra of the liberated woman: how might a reformulation of freedom be attainable and where does this leave the problem of enjoyment?

Feminism and particularly the historicisation of its activist trajectory are closely interrogated by Žižek.¹³ Although his dismissal of feminism for being no more than desire for the postmodern Other, is somewhat glib (if not accurate), his critique is otherwise valid and useful for feminism. The most obvious point of tension between Žižek and feminism lies in its claim of universality. Žižek is unapologetic about his position that if there is no continuity between desire and transgression, then there can be no claim to universality. His main feminist protagonist, Judith Butler, who he accuses of falsely celebrating transgressive acts in the name of feminism, argues that transgression and thus freedom are located outside the subject and within systematic and political contexts. For Butler, what must be addressed is not Žižek's critique of subordination as distinctly feminist, but rather its appropriation of the Symbolic co-ordinates of the system. Here, for Butler is where true freedom resides and where the subject fully emancipates herself.

Žižek, however offers a cogent retort, his fidelity to Lacan uncompromised:

On one hand, [Butler] overestimates the subversive potential of disturbing the function of the big Other [the oppressive system] through the practices of performative reconfiguration/displacement: such practices ultimately support what they are intended to subvert, since the very field of 'transgression' is already taken into account, even engendered by the hegemonic big Other... On the other hand, Butler does not allow for the radical gesture of the thorough restructuring of the hegemonic order in its totality.¹⁴

Nonetheless, feminism is well poised as a form of intellectual activism which can critically examine unfreedom as perpetuating a space which both enables social transformation and challenges problematic reproductions of hegemonic notions of freedom which are orthodox and ideologically formalised. In discussing

freedom and the failure of its symbolisation, and without appealing to authority, how might we consider unfreedom as a distinctive and irreducible Lacanian-feminist response in order to draw the parameters of conflict and address the problems of value and participation?

For Žižek, the outcome of these matters is not entirely clear, except that for him they inhabit a space of neo-communism, a position he vigorously defends.¹⁵ This aside, what Žižek offers as social protagonist, cultural critic and provocateur is that Lacanian psychoanalysis has the important function of *being* a political space for transformation. Subjects of language are political subjects in that they can speak of historical, social and personal events. More poignantly, subjects speak of how particular events can leave them in a state of subjective destitution. Such destitution has been a focus for many feminist scholars, particularly post third wave theorists such as Butler, who employ Lacanian psychoanalysis. Both Butler and Žižek interpellate subjective destitution situated both within and beyond the contentions of dominant ideologies.¹⁶

It is a function of the feminist scholar to scrutinise that which captivates us in order to identify that which resembles what we desire. Desire has been theorised over the years by feminist scholars, both as a way to harness subjective transformation and affirmation as well as critically engage desires aligning with capitalist and patriarchal ideologies. Let us now undertake a feminist short-circuit reading of Žižek. Although Žižek and feminism might be considered antithetic, nevertheless, Žižek is a philosopher who offers powerful challenges with uncompromising theoretical rigour regarding the problems and issues of contemporary society, including those faced by feminism:

My point is that the position which I'm attacking, the position of 'Let's just demand our piece of the cake within the global order,' that already is the position of domination. It's not that I want all while the others want only their piece of the cake. Let's go to feminism. I claim that the only alternative to such [an] approach to feminism is, I think, what is the worst catastrophe for feminism, which is this grounding of feminism in the pre-Cartesian tradition. I have in mind here the claims that the Cartesian modern-age subject is a male chauvinist subject, before whose appearance there still was a proper place of women within the social body. Of course it was — the subordinated place inscribed in nature itself. I claim that all this search for some primordial matriarchal society, whatever, where you would have a more appropriate role, place, within the social body of women is, I think, a catastrophe because, again, even if you find there some kind of privileged position of women, it's defined as position in kind of a

total organic order, it's simply a specific position. I claim that feminism in the modern sense becomes possible only with this Cartesian notion of subject which is the anti-subject, the denaturalized subject, subject with no natural properties. It's only in this way that you can ground radical feminism in the modern sense. Any return to this old organic notion, any feminism which plays the game of, 'in the modern age the masculine principle was expressed too strongly, we need to reestablish the balance between the feminine and the masculine principle.' The moment that you accept this, you are lost.¹⁷

Žižek throws in crisis not only feminism as a problematic emancipatory force, but he also argues for a disintegration of the authority underpinning postmodern interpretations of it. For Žižek the proliferation of reaction against intolerance is in part an immersion in the enjoyment of unfreedom because it cannot guarantee transformation. In this case, we are enjoying what we do not have. Žižek critiques the usefulness of the Cartesian binary for understanding feminism and the relations between the sexes in light of postmodern constructions of gender fluidity and Lacan's theory of sexuation and the divided subject, a criticism which might perplex some feminist scholars. Close inspection of Žižek's response to the question of power deliberately draws upon Lacanian psychoanalysis.¹⁸ Here Žižek acknowledges that women are more powerful than men because of their *unknowability* as a fantasy object and the failure of this to be fully appropriated by and within the Phallic order, indeed that we are all subjects of lack, loss and repetition.

Žižek's critique of Butler on the structure and function of the emancipatory subject is illuminating:

[D]id you notice how Judith Butler, in every subsequent book radically changes her position while pretending, 'I'm just clarifying, I was misunderstood before?' It's absolutely clear that the *Psychic Life of Power* radically turns around her first book, that is to say, *Gender Trouble*. Because it precisely, aggressively — and I wholly agree with her here — reasserts the notion of fundamental loss, renouncing passionate attachment, and so on. But I want to say is that she goes into this poetry of the marginal, the one who is dislocated, half-excluded, and so on. I have two problems with this poetry of the power discourse that wants to centralize, systematize everything, and then we should speak on behalf of those who are excluded without proper place. First I claim that here is the opposition between globality and universality. These half-excluded are the site of universality in the

most radical, strict philosophical sense it can be developed.

The second thing where I disagree with her apropos of this discourse of marginal disavowed agents is: why does she think that when we speak about something which is disavowed, repressed, that, to put it in somewhat simplistic and ironic terms, it's always the good guys, ours, who are repressed? I claim isn't it that the power itself functions, the power itself has to disavow its own founding operation?... This is what interests me, this obscene underside of power, how power, in order to function, has to repress not the opponent, but has to split in itself. You have a whole set of measures which power uses, but disavows them; uses them, but they are operative but not publicly acknowledged. This is for me the obscenity of power... the whole set of unwritten rules on which power relies.¹⁹

Žižek has accused feminism of engulfing and in some ways, emulating, postmodernism in its discursive reading of power. Nevertheless, Butler attends to power as arguably the most cogent of postmodern projects when she states:

We are used to thinking about power as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order ... But if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of desire, then power is not simply what we oppose, but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are.²⁰

Whereas Butler understands power to be emancipatory, Žižek inverts this by framing powerlessness as equally so, and this is also at the core of his interpretation of Christian theology. Although both Žižek and Butler seek to articulate the political problem of freedom and emancipation, specifically through a reading of power as ideologically symbolised, Žižek's criticisms of Butler are not without validity and should give feminist scholars pause for thought. In implying that some feminists indulge in petit bourgeois musings, it might be supposed that feminism had lost its way only to return in the form of uncritical neo-pragmatic scholarship. Butler's fall back position to the Foucauldian formalisation of power²¹ becomes somewhat redundant under Žižek's criticism and thus merely creates either an ontological deadlock or ironically, a position of privilege where one deliberates on power only by virtue of being a powerful subject. Žižek resists this indulgence by offering that, when it comes to analysis of freedom, it always contains the contradiction that one

can practice freedom whilst violating that of others. This is especially so under neoliberalism where freedom comes at a financial cost to someone else. This has not entirely escaped feminist scholarship, which sometimes offers that feminist political struggle may involve the surrender of the possibility of choice. Certainly, this is the basis of non-white, non-Western critique of white Western feminism.

When Žižek critiques feminism as emanating from postmodernism it is important to consider his challenge. By employing Lacan, Žižek insists that, “[t]he usual critique of patriarchy fatally neglects the fact that there are two fathers. On one hand, there is the Oedipal father, the Symbolic-dead father ... on the other hand there is the obscene super-ego... the ‘Master of Enjoyment’.”²² The latter allows both a structure and prohibition of enjoyment, which is adopted by the subject in so far as it animates the fantasy of enjoyment. It is crucial to understand Žižek's version of postmodernism as arguably lying more within the bounds of form than of content. That is, how situations occur together with their outcomes are the result of ideological misrecognition. For example, the problematic division between the consumptions of mass and those of high culture – a modernist conundrum – is central to Žižek's critical project. Similarly, with the wider feminist project being about how the body is implicated and re-appropriated into patriarchal and power relations, it could be argued that feminism too shares this tension around misrecognition. For Lacan, the body resides in the order of the Real and in order to understand this, we need to appropriate the fantasy dimension to this spectre, for the body not to appear unrecognisable and distorted. For feminism, the body is a site of the political and although Žižek does not depoliticise the body he includes the problem of how power has been appropriated:

[T]his spectre of woman's power structurally depends on male domination: it remains its shadowy double, its retroactive effect and, as such, its inherent moment. For that reason, the idea of bringing the shadowy woman's power to light and acknowledging its central position publicly is the most subtle way of succumbing to the patriarchal trap.²³

It could be argued that here Žižek is dismissing feminism as submerging the figure of the woman within a brand of problematic identity politics. On the other hand, Žižek's provocation might well ignite a feminist imaginary surrounding freedom. Colette Soler speaks to this tension when she locates the body as a product of culture, that having a body means one is able to appropriate it into culture, do something with it.²⁴ Freedom is a problem implicated in this act

because although one can choose whether or how to act, one cannot choose one's *jouissance*. For Žižek, the notion of freedom is not only a dialectic with its shadowy double, but also in its failure, freedom becomes a foundational link to what is impossible to articulate or realise. Here, the body itself is not at stake but the fantasy of its possibility to provide emancipatory function certainly is.

In the *Sublime Object of Ideology*,²⁵ Žižek insists on drawing a line in the sand between his theoretical boundaries and those of postmodernism, although it is interesting to note that he has since distanced himself from this earlier text. There Žižek claims we are interpellated through ideology, largely without question and consider it oppressive only if it does not align with our intentions, which are to try and find a way to live under the aegis of late stage capitalism. When this fails – as Marx rightly cautioned – we are utterly confounded, demanding to know why we are the mere 'ninety-nine per cent'. And yet, is there not an extreme perversion at work in the collective reductionism of this 'ninety-nine per cent' identity politics, undertaken primarily by white, Western liberal male elites?

From this perspective it can be argued that Žižek operates as a critical feminist scholar in claiming that we need to critically engage ideology in order to understand those hidden and oppressive forces which govern our day-to-day lives. His demand for absolute difference, the radical break, is one that feminism has for long been grappling with. For those of Lacanian feminist persuasions, Lacan's claim that there is no meta-language is crucial to understanding the plight and fight feminist scholars have been tantalised with. It is at this juncture where one is not bound by ideological conditions of what it means to be a woman or a man, that the possibility of freedom resides. However, Žižek reminds us not be carried away with our *jouissance* in these possibilities for freedom because they are illusory. The concept of freedom is predicated on a lie or a form of denial because under capitalist conditions, when one is afforded freedom, someone else is denied. In true Marxist style, Žižek compels us to think about how we obtain and sustain privilege and status, although even before Žižek, feminist scholars and activists were pondering this.

Freedom has become a commodified utility and feminism has arguably played a part in this misdirection. Freedom is a guise in the ideological conditions which structure the Symbolic. Let us turn to Žižek's reading of Marx to explain this. Žižek states:

[W]e must break the appearance according to which the value of a commodity depends on pure hazard – on an accidental interplay between supply and demand, for example. We must accomplish the crucial step of conceiving the hidden 'meaning' behind the commodity-

form, the signi-fication 'expressed' by this form; we must penetrate the 'secret' of the value of commodities.²⁶

The commodification of feminism has become a class fetish. The new problem emerging from feminism is not freedom, but freedom of choice and this is a problem resulting from feminism's appropriation of and collusion with capitalism and the neoliberal political economy. Here the demand upon women by other women to *be* and *do* everything is an ultra commodified expression of feminism, whereby the dominant accepted value of 'female' within feminism – or rather, left-wing social democratic feminism – is the reduction to the economic identity of the female worker as commodity. Under this accepted version of freedom, freedom becomes a commodity with an exchange value in the market. When one feels free, the efficacy of the market is not interrogated as being ideologically problematic. I claim that feminism needs to dispense with the illusion that we can all act as if we can become free, but instead return to the position where freedom is a struggle, impossible to fully articulate. This position reinvigorates not only feminism, but also freedom and choice as partial forms of enjoyment, notwithstanding that they are unrealisable.

Thus feminism presents as a forced choice for the subject, a choice which seeks to throw the problem of freedom into crisis. Here, feminism is not a position of leisure and privilege, it is a political struggle rather than an appeal to consensus. For freedom to be fully interrogated as a formalisation of feminism a return to robust critique, a form of intellectual activism which addresses how freedom has failed in its traditional and postmodern symbolisations, is essential. Freedom antagonises the Symbolic and touches on the Real because it fails to resolve the deadlock with desire. This deadlock is repeated within each permutation, as there emerge new ways to enjoy, even partially, other orientations, all the while asking the unavoidable albeit unanswerable question: *Che vuoi?*

Žižek signals Lacan's position that one is attached to one's subjectivization as constitutive of how one presents. Suffering, pain and compromise make sense under this structure. This kind of reflexive logic entails that the fantasies of wholeness and completeness remain external to the conditions in which the subject undertakes them. The feminist fantasies of complete freedom and equality in the hallowed company of great emancipatory female figures, is no exception. However, this too allows for a problematic and unreflexive logic premised on historicisation. Feminism is a scene in which the fantasy of freedom takes on particular ideological contours in the attempt to subvert the big Other of patriarchal consumer society. This is problematic in that feminism's claim of a new freedom remains within consumerism. The spectacle of the suffering

feminist is of one who enjoys unfreedom and fully submitting to this is crucial to passionate attachment as a way of disentangling oneself from the bounds of subjective presuppositions. The great irony and fundamental paradox is that when one touches on the Real, one is inevitably horrified by getting too close to the object of desire. Here, the Real is a spectacle which appropriates its fundamental opposite. Thus there is inevitable pleasure and virtue in the attempt to subvert, in particular, perceptions of social immobility. One enjoys unfreedom and the struggle it entails in trying to mobilise social transformation. Similarly one takes pleasure in the scholarship which unfreedom beckons. Maybe feminists need to return to a Žižekian enjoyment (or similarly, what Judith Butler calls 'passionate (dis)attachment') as an uncompromising position of the intellectual super-ego. Here, identity politics considered as a codified ideological transgression falls away and in its place are norms and prohibitions one is allowed to both enjoy and transgress. In place of identity politics is acknowledgement of misrecognition of, in this case, the fantasy of freedom. The injunction to enjoy is a way of remaining faithful to the fundamental fantasy of demanding the impossible of acting within the Symbolic in accordance to one's desire.

Lacan's question, *Che vuoi?* or, what do you want from me?, is an impossible question, especially in the context of unfreedom because an answer is not even for the subject to decide in so far as it is undecidable. Words fail to articulate a response with any cogency or traction. Herein lies Žižek's fundamental problematic of freedom whose self-imposed logic requires desire to remain perpetually unsatisfied. This position prompts feminism into an area beyond postmodern discourse and into a more emancipatory, albeit anxious, structured space. This structure has no certainty because it critiques ideology and those social fantasies which provide mandates for the super-ego. There is no answer to the question *Che Vuoi?* also because it is a question that directly implicates freedom. Any attempt to respond would be an illusion in that it would necessarily involve what Žižek calls the subject-presumed-to-know about desire.

Today feminism remains caught within this deadlock of desire and unfreedom. The imagined state of true emancipatory freedom leaves feminism as nothing more than a vanishing spectre of ideology which struggles in vain to traverse any social fantasy. One is always at the mercy of choice and specifically of the illusion that one must make the best possible choice in so far as there exists freedom to undertake this apparently rational task. For Žižek feminism poses the same political question of how we are to act. Žižek approaches this question as a libidinal political project:

The most difficult thing to do is not to violate the prohibitions in a wild

orgy of enjoyment, but to do this without relying on someone else who is presupposed not to enjoy so that I can enjoy: to assume my own enjoyment directly, without mediation through another supposed purity.²⁷

Here Žižek and feminism are surprisingly synchronized – we need to fully assume the burden when enjoying unfreedom. This act ought not to deceive either us or anyone else. On the other hand we should not appropriate freedom because its very existence relies on commodification. One can never be a subject of free-choice because freedom is always an illusion in which politically correct and problematically enlightened semblances of freedom are insufficient in deciphering the many provocations which freedom poses. The great illusion is that one can become a consumer of free-choice, which is a neoliberal offer of perversion and of desire disappearing under consumption and commodity. These are political ruses devised to trick us into thinking that freedom can and does exist, that all we require is correct insight, tolerance, inclusivity and so on. This kind of displacement or deterritorialisation of the subject *vis-a-vis* the state has unwelcome and even malign implications. More than ever, the academy is subject to capitalist interference, for example, through the imposition of a business model onto a teaching and research institution, including attempts to control or privilege specific intellectual fields and traditions. This has resulted in a system of internalisation and sets of standards where enjoyment of scholarship and intellectual pursuits are increasingly restricted. The University discourse is hegemonic as Lacan predicted and as Žižek states: “One of the telltale signs of university discourse is that the opponent is accused of being ‘dogmatic’ and ‘sectarian’. University discourse cannot tolerate an engaged subjective stance.”²⁸

Intellectual freedom resides in not only in being able to express claims and views in which the inner problematic workings of ideology are revealed, but also in being supported to do so. Here freedom holds a precarious and limited function – a certain promise of relative freedom is being made to those who know how to act within unfreedom. In order to perpetuate itself as a pillar of knowledge and power, the academy relies heavily on the disavowal of gifted scholars and to this extent identifying with enjoyment in the current University ethos is false consciousness. The apparent appearance of free choice is paradoxically more oppressive than ever and it is here that Žižek and feminism might be seen to conflate. Within Žižek's formalisation of the event, the enjoyment of unfreedom is undoubtedly one such. Because we are already located within unfreedom, the only possible orientation for us is political, where enjoyment is experienced through mediation of the ensuing inevitable loss. In applying a Žižekian formalisation to unfreedom there emerges the possibility

for political reframing and form. Here is an explicit direction for emancipatory action and energy, which in turn reorients unfreedom to create the distance required for critique rather than succumbing to over-identification with the fantasy of the big Other. For feminism this is arguably disentanglement from postmodernism. We need to immerse ourselves in the reality of the fantasy that there resides enjoyment in unfreedom. It is here where profound horror lies - in the fantasy which elucidates limitations and oppressions.

The big Other of the academy however, cannot guarantee obedience from those both within or marginalised from the norms of academic life. To take up Althusser's position, "absolute freedom on the one hand, planned research on the other",²⁹ we are caught in an ontological bind. He elaborates:

When faced with the complexity and difficulty of these massive problems, where it is no longer simply a question of immediate scientific practice (the researcher in his laboratory) but of the social process of the production of knowledges, of its organization and its politics (the question of who will govern it), one wonders: might not the philosopher by chance have something to say; a semblance of an answer to these questions? Something to say, for example, on the important theoretical and political alternative of freedom or planning in research? On the social and political conditions and goals of the organization of research? Or even on the method of scientific discovery?³⁰

Althusser provokes us, along with Žižek to orient ourselves towards the practice of our discipline.³¹ No longer should we direct *Che vuoi?* to the academy, the inverse must occur as an event of this provocation; the academy must speak to us by itself asking this question which although impossible to answer, we must still grapple with. We must take up Althusser's question precisely: what kind of intellectual do we want to be? Further, to invoke Žižek, how might such an intellectual act? These questions have to be situated alongside the misapprehension that surplus value under capitalism offers freedom of choice. Freedom, although a stumbling block which is continually rearticulating itself, must be confronted in order to fully assume a position of alienation and thus of possible transgression. It is at this point that desire is protected from vanishing. Here, we are taking desire literally as a counterpoint to its failure and in the surrender to unfreedom different intentions are revealed, including that authenticity of freedom as universalisable, is an illusion. More than this, might capitalism be in part the result of the failure of the emergence of desire and thus of the reduction of desire to the commodity? Ironically, unfreedom is

dialectically situated within the contours of transparency as providing a frame for enjoyment and transgression. The enjoyment of pursuing transgression is far greater than any kind of prohibition. One could argue that unfreedom is the mistake of the provocation of freedom. However, I claim the contrary, that unfreedom constitutes a recognisable gap in the discontinuity which freedom implies. Thus, we need to attend to freedom in spite of its non-existence. Here I am taking seriously the desire to deliberate freedom as a position of productive failure, as a political drive aimed at destitution, and as a devotion to anger and anxiety, all necessary for emancipation. This echoes Žižek's exhortation to unapologetically return to enjoyment as a fundamental political act from which a non-prescriptive event can emerge. Such an act anxiously embraces both desire and its uncertain outcomes. We need to be subjects of the act and attend to the rupture of freedom rather than that of power. More than this, fidelity to the act is a confrontation with the fantasy of dissatisfaction, with the approach to jouissance. Todd McGowan explicates this when stating

[t]he political act does not aim to change our mode of enjoyment or to create a new world in which it no longer causes subjects suffering but rather aims at placing this enjoyment at the center of the symbolic structure. The politics of the act envisions a world in which the relationship between the symbolic order and the real will be reversed, in which the real would have a structural priority.³²

Freedom is a problematic (and arguably, missing) signifier when used to make feminism appear discursively legitimate. Although this consideration once had a function, today it invites critique because of its closeness to historicisation and traditional identity politics. Feminism needs to seriously address Žižek's provocation of both itself and freedom as legitimate vicissitudes, freedom especially being problematic when its elevated status remains unchallenged, whereas unfreedom might be considered the rupture of the event that requires attention because it is a manifestation of the repeated pursuit of loss. Unfreedom at this juncture becomes the more meaningful and ethical pursuit in that we have the duty to unfreedom as a condition for an encounter with possibility, particularly within the realms of intellectual activism. Freedom interpellates surplus renunciation; unfreedom by contrast is enigmatic and relies on jouissance for it to have liveability. For feminism this liveability must entail enjoying what one does not have - one's unfreedom and even having a passionate (dis)attachment to surpassing alienation as a critical subject position. Livability for a feminist intellectual also entails possible acts of transgression, including robust critique of feminism itself, which might beckon from a

new political form where unfreedom is apprehended as the most desirable emancipatory immanence of all.

¹ Lacan poses this in *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious* as a question directed by the subject to gauge the desire of the big Other.

² Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays* [Part 2], ed. Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 1967), 82.

³ Slavoj Žižek offers a concise and succinct account of the Symbolic dimension of the big Other when he states that it is, “the invisible order that structures our experiences of reality, the complex networks of rules and meanings which makes us see what we see the way we see it (and what we don’t see the way we don’t see it).” *Event: Philosophy in Transit* (London: Penguin, 2014), 119.

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Event: Philosophy in Transit* (London: Penguin, 2014), 4-5.

⁵ Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays* [Part 2], ed. Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 1967), 83.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Alenka Zupančič, *Why Psychoanalysis? Three Interventions* (Nordic Summer University Press, 2008), 10.

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta, 2006), 3.

⁹ With regards to the technological imperative within capitalism, Žižek offers the following: “We should not succumb to the temptation of reducing capitalism to a mere form of appearance of the more fundamental ontological attitude of technological domination; we should rather insist, in the Marxian mode, that the capitalist logic of integrating the surplus into the functioning of the system is the fundamental fact.” *Jacques Lacan’s Four Discourses* <http://www.lacan.com/zizfour.htm> (accessed April 10, 2016).

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. (London: Verso, 2002), 2.

¹¹ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Brunner- Routledge, 1996), 99.

¹² Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays* [Part 2], ed. Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 1967), 79.

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (Verso, 1994).

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso), 265.

¹⁵ Although it might be argued that there is a space for neo-feminism within neo-communism, nevertheless this might constitute another kind of unfreedom.

¹⁶ Derek Hook and Calum Neil offer a very cogent account of Žižek's wider political project as an intersection with subjectivity: "While Žižek's critique of dominant ideology and the subjectivity that might be bound to it is well disseminated, it is not always clear where this critique leads. Žižek's politics appears to situate an impossibility that, on a first encounter, seems to point to a choice between stepping out of rationalism or embracing a pure subjectivity that stands against current ideology." Žižek, *Political Philosophy and Subjectivity*, *Subjectivity*, 3, no. 1 (2010): 1-6.

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Human Rights and its Discontents*, <http://www.lacan.com/zizek-human.htm> (Accessed April 10, 2016).

¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (Verso, 1994).

¹⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Human Rights and its Discontents*, <http://www.lacan.com/zizek-human.htm> (Accessed April 10, 2016).

²⁰ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 2.

²¹ Here Butler is referring to Foucault's insistence that power is situated within

the practices of gendered relations, a postmodern formalization, propagated by governments and institutions.

²² Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (Verso, 1994), 206.

²³ Ibid., 56.

²⁴ Colette Soler, L'Inconscient et l'Événement de Corps, *La Part de l'Inconscient dans la Clinique, Revue des Colleges de Clinique psychanalytique du Champ lacanien*, Numéro 8, Mars (2009): 215-223.

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London & New York: Verso, 1989).

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso), 268.

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Jacques Lacan's Four Discourses* <http://www.lacan.com/zizfour.htm> (accessed April 10, 2016).

²⁹ Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays* [Part 2], ed. Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 1967), 80.

³⁰ Ibid. 80.

³¹ It is here that I turn to Agon Hamza's book, *Althusser and Pasolini: Philosophy, Marxism, and Film* (2016) in his consideration of Althusser alongside Marx to interrogate Pasolini's wider political project as a precise praxis of one's discipline.

³² Todd McGowan, Subject of the Event, Subject of the Act: The Difference between Badiou's and Žižek's Systems of Philosophy. *Subjectivity* no. 3 (2010): 7-30.