

Interrogating Interpassivity: Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?¹

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*I look at the world and I notices it's turning
while my guitar gently weeps
With every mistake we must surely be learning
still my guitar gently weeps*

George Harrison, *While my guitar gently weeps*

This planet has [...] a problem which [is] this: most of the people living on it [are] unhappy for pretty much of the time. Many solutions were suggested for this problem, but most of these [are] largely concerned with the movements of small green pieces of paper, which is odd because on the whole it [isn't] the small green pieces of paper that [are] unhappy.

Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

Part I — object wetware

he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes Place. (Aristotle 335BCE Part XIV)

Robert Pfaller encounters Lacan's commentary on the Greek chorus. Something strikes him, something resonates. It raises a question for him; if the Chorus is a running commentary on the "feelings" of the actors playing the fiction (semblance) of a human reality for the passive audience watching, just *who* is "feeling" *what*, and *where*? For Pfaller this raises the thorny issue of "external existence", the feeling that exists *outside* the body and lived experience of a human (divided) subject. He writes:

Therefore, in a third step, a new example, with conceptual support from Lacanian theory, has to be introduced: Lacan's idea that our most intimate feelings, beliefs and convictions can assume an "external existence", and that the Chorus in Greek tragedy had precisely such a function [...]: to feel fear and compassion vicariously, on behalf of the spectators. Yet, again, Lacan's idea may appear as an audacious, highly speculative and arbitrary interpretation with little empirical support and even less plausibility. It is no wonder, then, that this passage in Lacan has for a long time passed unnoticed; nobody has made any use of it or referred to it, not even within Lacanian theory (Pfaller 2017: 71).²

The passage that Pfaller is referring to is a quiet one, almost an aside, found in the Seminar of May 25 1960, and is subtitled "The splendor of Antigone" and can be found in Lacan's seminal *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. It is a passage that is sandwiched – almost eclipsed – in a discussion of Antigone, her choice of death in her desire to give her brother's dead body dignity, and the *jouissance* that stands outside of phallic *jouissance* and the Law. What does Lacan say about this Chorus, then? He states:

When you go to the theatre [...] Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you (Lacan 1960b: 252).³

And this, this emotional order and ordering by some thing outside the self, is what arrests Pfaller. How is it that there is something external to us that can be given the job of feeling for us? You don't even have to feel your own feelings, you can delegate that messy job to some thing outside of yourself.

What is this *thing* to which we delegate the task of feeling our feelings for us? Truly, what is it?

Let us get this straight out on the table right from the start. There is a problem with delegating feelings to an object. For the simple, plain, logical reason that the object *does not feel*.

In her article "*Unbehagen: a gallantry with excess*" (2017), Zeiher reminds us that Lacan raises an important question; why don't planets speak? (Lacan 1955a, 1955b) "I put the question to an eminent philosopher," Lacan says, "The question didn't seem much to him to present any difficulties. He answered – *Because they don't have mouths*" (Lacan 1955b: 237). Zeiher goes on to state:

As Lacan quickly reminds us, that which does not have a mouth is not our radical alterity, rather "there is absolutely nothing about [inanimate objects] pertaining to an alterity with respect to themselves, they are purely and simply what they are." At the same time and despite not having a mouth, Lacan contends that we demand planets speak a precise language distinguishable only to us. This is an essential reference point regarding the objects of technology. We trust in our conviction that the scientific method is impartial and independent and that science should therefore be free from investment in the social bond. Science must remain

autonomous and operate independently within its own logic: this is science *par excellence* (Zeicher 2017: 2).

We demand that planets speak, trusting that Science knows what its saying.

Pfaller has a question for this Chorus: *what are you?* What is this Chorus-thing that *looks* like me – or not – and speaks the feelings that I am to hold in relation to the play being acted out in front of me? Do I feel those feelings myself? Am I being told what to feel? Am I responding to the semblance of life of the play (which I *know* to be a fiction) or are the ideas of how I am to respond being implanted into me by the Chorus, as though it is non-fiction?

Or should I just sit back and let the Chorus and Actors do their thing whilst I nod off?

It is a lot to think about when we could, just, be sitting back and watching this spectacle from a safe distance, safe in the knowledge that all of this “stuff” has little bearing on our own lives. With a logic that becomes absurdly twisted, this distancing from the “play” is in itself somewhat voyeuristic, somewhat perverse.

It is a lot to think about, all the positions in this schema, and in his collection of essays *Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment* (2017), Pfaller examines several permutations of his question, arriving at a theorization that he terms “interpassivity”.

Pfaller’s theorization of interpassive “enjoyment” evokes for me the question of the object(s) that Lacan speaks about, and the relation of the divided subject to all aspects of the object in question. Lacan even formulates mathemes to express this relation to the object:

$$S \diamond a \quad \text{AND} \quad a \diamond S^a$$

But already *what* the object *is* becomes confusing, for in these two expressions of relation to the object, each object is *not* the same as the other. The matheme $S \diamond a$ is the matheme of neurotic fantasy, from which desire follows because the fundamental object of desire is lost, never to be recouped in the Real. The matheme $a \diamond S$ describes the perverse fantasy, in which the object is disturbingly concrete and acts in all manners upon the divided subject in the precise opposition of loss, that of the thing that is Real; unrepresentable and the cause of anxiety.

I will flag right here that this is relevant to Pfaller's question: *what is the object*. For us in the audience, what is the Chorus, then? Is the Chorus wise and interpretative, giving us clues to what we "should" be feeling according to the wise author, the Master, who wrote the play and who "knows" about these things (and from whom we are one or two steps removed)? The actors, who portray to us the ethics as pertaining to Antigone, as though our shadows are projected against a cave wall? Do we aspire to believe the Chorus, who functions to organize what our feelings should be? In other words, as Pfaller asks, "Can public opinion convince me that I am having fun?" (Pfaller 2017: 35).

Or, are we fascinated by the Chorus who insists this is what's what, but repelled at the same time because they are forcing something on us – correct feelings, right thinking – that we *think* are ethical but at the same time NQR, leaving us a little queasy, uncomfortable, unconvinced.

Already, we the audience, we are too involved and in this little schema, certainly not impassively. We are watching with passion and involvement, and the Chorus, the object – whether lost or concrete – engages us; we are close to, (space) engaged with, the Chorus. This is a reading according to the divided subject engaging with the aesthetics of Antigone, which in my understanding is also the primal foundation of drama, perhaps even a prime directive of civilization; that that which needs to be subject to the benign Law is *acted out* for us and the corresponding emotions of the audience serve to enact a catharsis and sublimation of all those awful and deadly drives that lead us to murder each other. A "cleansing" of deadly passions. Happy ending much?⁵

There are several examples which stand out for Pfaller, and which I think contribute very well to this discussion of the nature of the object. Pfaller's observation on the Greek Chorus leads him to question what happens to pleasure, or "fun", or even *jouissance*; in Lacan's commentary on the Chorus, Lacan notices that the audience leave the "pleasure of the catharsis" to the Chorus:

The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you. The greatest chance for the survival of classical tragedy depends on that. The emotional commentary is done for you. It is just sufficiently silly; it is also not without firmness; it is more or less human.

Therefore, you don't have to worry; even if you don't feel anything, the Chorus will feel in your stead. Why after all can one not imagine that the effect on you may be achieved, at least a small dose of it, even if you didn't tremble that much? To be honest, I'm not sure if the spectator ever trembles that much. I am, however, sure that he is fascinated by the image of Antigone (Lacan 1960b: 252).

Catharsis however, as Freud points out, serves a function. In his early work with Breuer, Freud notices that "an injury that has been suffered in silence [is] 'a mortification' [...] The injured person's reaction to the trauma only exercises a completely 'cathartic' effect if it is an *adequate* reaction – as, for instance, revenge. But language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an affect can be 'abreacted' [...] when, for instance, it is a lamentation of giving utterance to a tormented secret, eg, a confession" (Freud 1893: 8).

Aristotle's Chorus serves this purpose for the play, but also for the audience. The Chorus *speaks* something, the affect, thus allegedly abreacting any unlawful or disorderly drives that the divided subjects of the audience may hold. What strikes Pfaller in Lacan's depiction of the Chorus has to be taken in context of the *hic et nunc*. Much like spectators

of football or ice-hockey today, Aristotle's audiences could get something off their chests whilst watching a tragedy, rather than killing each other.

The object of tragedy, and the catharsis that tragedy is meant to bring about, (comma) holds a shifty position. Aristotle already noticed the "lost" quality of the object, and the notion that proper tragedy *imitates* the object:

Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies. The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general; whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited. Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, "Ah, that is he." For if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such, but to the execution, the coloring, or some such other cause (Aristotle 335BCE Part IV).

The divided subject who views the tragedy takes pleasure in the spectacle, the way "it looks", the way the spectacle senses a traumatic part within – a personal affect – and speaks this trauma for the viewer (or at least, in Aristotle's schema of things).

But there are many different ways this spectacle-object can operate, and Aristotle's "proper use" of tragedy speaks to a specific type of object relation, that is referring to what Lacan calls *object a*, that lost thing that we are forever searching for and is the object cause of desire, never to be refound.⁶ It is an object proper to a certain type of neurosis described by Lacan, and is the object that forms the matheme of the fantasy of desire, $\$ \diamond a$. Aristotle himself says:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts

of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions (Aristotle 335BCE Part VI).

To mourn the lost object *is* the catharsis; and thus, to give voice to our tragedy of primal loss there needs to be an object towards which to aim the effect of affect. Lacan positions this object as the analyst,⁷ but for Aristotle, the play's the thing – more of a group therapy in the *hic et nunc* when the civilizing laws of the group were still in process of being formalized.

But for Lacan – and this is what sparks Pfaller's question – something else has happened in the meantime. It is at this point the *hic et nunc* of contemporary times is, I believe, what has changed and probably the object along with the times.

Pfaller tells us that interpassivity is this: guided by his revelation on Lacan's observation of the Greek chorus, Pfaller notices that the audience delegates its catharsis onto the Chorus (whom Aristotle notes should too be regarded as actors⁸). I suggest Aristotle would argue that – as I would – in that his intention of catharsis was not a *delegation* but a *discourse* into which the audience was included. But that is a matter for the ancient Greek *hic et nunc*. “In my view,” states Lacan, “the Chorus is people who are moved” (Lacan 1960b: 252). This implies – according to the notion of dramatic catharsis – that the audience is involved *as* the Chorus themselves.

For Pfaller's reading of Lacan changes this: Pfaller picks up that Lacan's audience has abnegated their position in the discourse of tragedy/drama and simply goes to the theatre, passively:

Therefore, look closely before telling yourself that emotions are engaged in this purification. They are engaged, along with others, when at the end they have to be pacified by some artifice or other. But that doesn't mean to say that they are directly engaged. On the one hand, they no doubt are, and you are there in the form of a material to be made use of; on the other hand, that material is also

completely indifferent. When you go to the theatre in the evening, you are preoccupied by the affairs of the day, by the pen that you lost, by the check that you will have to sign the next day. You shouldn't give yourselves too much credit. Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you [...]

Therefore, you don't have to worry; even if you don't feel anything, the Chorus will feel in your stead. Why after all can one not imagine that the effect on you may be achieved, at least a small dose of it, even if you didn't tremble that much? [...]

In this he is the spectator, but the question we need to ask is, What is he a spectator of? What is the image represented by Antigone? That is the question (Lacan 1960b: 252).

There is no longer any discourse between audience and tragedy (which is mediated via the actors), there is no *movement* or catharsis, and we are left with a passively stuffed audience who is watching what? Pfaller has – quite correctly – observed something; something has happened to the discourse between audience member and actor. The action of catharsis has changed. The audience member has become too busy or distracted to engage in the work of catharsis and has given the job to the Chorus. But the Chorus has changed quality too. Passivity begins an insidious creep: the audience member is too passive to engage in catharsis and so delegates this job to an other, the Chorus. But what of the Chorus?

Pfaller links Lacan's statement that the Chorus feels for us to enjoyment. Something – some thing – outside of ourselves does the work of enjoyment for us so that we don't have to. It is an odd phenomenon, and Pfaller asks "What is the benefit that interpassive people derive from letting the means of their pleasure be consumed by others? What is the gain, the specific satisfaction in delegating one's pleasure? How is it possible to enjoy through the other?" (Pfaller 2017: 33). The Chorus, we see, whilst no longer including us, is still made of divided subjects who

are *acting* (as we all do, all the time). There is still a link, a common identification – All the world's a stage, after all, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts⁹ – that we still must respect.

Pfaller evokes Freud to speak to this identification with an other: Like “identification”, the notion of “displaced narcissism” also appears to miss the point. It is true, as Freud has noted, that it is possible to *displace one's narcissism* — which means that one can give one's narcissism to somebody else [...] displacing one's narcissism to the other means making the other an object of love [...] But that is also not the case [for the interpassive subject] [...] The other is quite indifferent here. It can be anybody, even a stranger. What matters here is that a certain job gets done, by no matter whom. It should just be done by somebody other than itself. The job to be done is yet a specific one: it is not a job of work, but of enjoyment. *You wish the other to do in your place what you yourself want to do* (Pfaller 2017: 50).

So Lacan's audience wants the Chorus to enjoy the tragedy of Antigone for them, because they are elsewhere. This is, for Pfaller, the first step in his theory of interpassivity.

If we wish to linger with Lacan, we can speculate that here there is a fundamental shift in the relation to the object, and as I have stated previously, it becomes imperative to question *the object itself*. Because, as I have said, it is not the object — technically — that does the feeling for us, but our own position in the face of that very object.

There are objects and there are objects.

Part II — neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring

Psychoanalysis works with three fundamental psychic structures: neurosis, psychosis and perversion. Within neurosis, there are two further distinctions, hysteria and obsessional neurosis. All of the structures stand

in position to the object, differently. All of these structures *do* something different with differing objects. I have already begun to speak about Lacan's mathemes of fantasy, stating that the first matheme, $S \diamond a$, is more to do with the neurotic's relationship to a primal lost object that is long gone, but the search for which shapes desire (whether this is a desire on the side of *jouissance* or a well-informed desire is another matter). The second matheme I introduced is that of the perverse fantasy: $a \diamond S$. We can see this as a simple reversal of the first matheme, and indeed there is a relationship between neurotic desire and the perverse trait. But in perversion proper, the perverse subject – who cannot bear his own division¹⁰ which makes him extremely anxious – utilizes an object to plug his division.

Whereas for neurotics the primal object is lost, and the enjoyment comes from the search for this very lost object, for the pervert the object is never apprehended as lost. The pervert – for whom loss is unbearable – creates an object to fill the gap of loss, thus preventing any access to a well-shaped desire. The pervert makes a *fetish* object, an object in the Real. The pervert utilizes this fetish for a twisted “ethical” purpose; because the fetish is the answer to all loss – goes the logic – the pervert must needs share his answer with a partner (or partners) to solve the agony of *their* loss. Never mind that neurotics and psychotics hold different positions to their objects.

Pfaller gives us a beautiful example of this in demonstrating the way a subject may delegate their own enjoyment on to an other:

Luckily, there is a name for this structure: interpassivity.

Interpassivity is the case when somebody prefers to delegate their enjoyment (their passivity) to some other instead of enjoying themselves. So what Freud tries to designate by the term “displaced narcissism” can be more adequately rendered as delegated enjoyment. To give an example, I once encountered a man who was a big drinker. All of a sudden he changed, and did not drink anymore. But he adopted a new passion: he became a perfect host. He would always have a bottle in his hand and take care that

glasses of his guests were refilled, so that he could, as it were, continue to be a drinker through his guests. He had become an interpassive drinker (Pfaller 2017: 50).

This actually struck me as problematic on first reading. Yes, the man of this vignette certainly *was* doing something to his guests, but what?

To answer this first, we must contemplate the difference between *jouissance* and a well-formed desire; which begs the question, *what is enjoyment?*

The term that Lacan utilizes throughout his work associated with the thorny issue of pleasure is *jouissance*. It is a word based in the French verb “*jouir*” (to enjoy) and “*jouissance*” (pleasure).¹¹ Lacan reformulates Freud’s notion of the beyond of pleasure via *jouissance*. Whilst the pleasure principle introduces a limit to pleasure – and thus castration – *jouissance* goes beyond this limitation into unpleasure and suffering. It is a terrain to which the unconscious returns, as it contains traces of infantile trauma, but also is attached to the polymorphous perverse state which language and the Law places a limit on to. The drives attempt to break through the pleasure principle in search of *jouissance*. Lacan also distinguishes between phallic *jouissance* and feminine *jouissance*, which are two different iterations of *jouissance*.

To displace enjoyment such as this host does, to constantly fill his guest’s glasses so as to render them with his enjoyment reads to me much more on the side of *jouissance*. If this host is a drinker *through* his guests, he is getting off – as it were – on their drinking; he is giving them his former *jouissance*, which for some reason that we do not know, has become somehow unbearable to him. This anxiety he manages by giving it others, in the double-speak of disavowal; “I don’t have it (the alcohol) but I do so that I can give it to others, see how they enjoy it”. His passion is to see others enjoying, to *see* their *jouissance*, to watch the spectacle of his guests becoming drunk. His perverse “ethics” sees that he experiences some sort of loss — giving up drinking — only to fill his guest’s glasses with his *own* loss. Alcohol becomes a *fetish object*. It is

not lost at all, it is there in the bottle from which he pours his own *jouissance* into the glasses of his guests. We do not know what his guests think or feel, if they enjoy getting plastered, or want to give up, or don't even like alcohol at all. This pervert gives his *jouissance* to his partners and enjoys that without the limit of the partner's consent (or castration, which is exactly what this pervert cannot bear).

With this example, I wondered if Pfaller meant that interpassivity was a form of enjoyment in the manner of the perverse structure? Perhaps, though, we can see this as Pfaller's first step on the theory of interpassivity, because as with the example of the Chorus, there is *still* an identification occurring here; there is still an other divided subject in the mix, whether it be the other we love via displaced narcissism, or the partner that the pervert seduces into the perverse relationship, in which the pervert who has the fetish gives it to a partner whose own relationship to the fetish is questionable.¹²

But Pfaller doesn't let us off so lightly. He questions the notion of *as if*, and its relationship to its object:

Delegation takes place here by *acting as if*. By the help of some other agent we create an appearance: we stage a small representation of our enjoyment, and this allows a small representation of our enjoyment, and this allows us to stay away from it. So, in interpassivity, we establish a symbolic representation of our enjoyment instead of really enjoying it. *We replace an act by something acting as if* (Pfaller 2017: 50).

The pervert is not acting *as if* in Pfaller's vignette of the host who gets off on his guest's drinking. The pervert is *very much enjoying* his guests's *jouissance*. Their pleasure (or the beyond of their pleasure) is his. There is nothing *as if* about this. The relationship that I believe Pfaller is reaching for in the *as if* notion has more to do with the psychotic structure than the perverse. Psychosis operates via the action of foreclosure; that is, castration – the “no” that forbids polymorphous perverse pleasure and ensures that the Law of civilization is instilled – is

radically refused, never put into place for the subject. Law is refused, especially the Law that Greek drama speaks about; the type of benevolent law that prevents people from staying in the lawless state that existed when God spoke to Noah.¹³

Psychosis is on a level that is difficult to comprehend for a neurotic subject; there is *no* relation to the Law, castration or Symbolic register, the register in which the group is inscribed. The Law and the Symbolic register is that to which the neurotic and the pervert hold a position; for the neurotic and the pervert, the Symbolic register of the Law is what to kick against, or not. For the psychotic, this is forever foreclosed, there is no entry, no engagement with Symbolic register. The relation to unconscious repression simply is not there, the unconscious may be somewhere but it is not functioning. Lacan says:

What comes under the effect of repression returns, for repression and the return of the repressed are just the two sides of the same coin. The repressed is always there, expressed in a perfectly articulate manner in symptoms and a host of other phenomena. By contrast, what falls under the effect of *Verwerfung* [foreclosure] has a completely different destiny [...] It's not pointless in this respect for me to remind you of the comparison I made [...] between certain symbolic order phenomena and what happens in those machines, in the modern sense of the word, that do not quite talk [...] we can only introduce things into the circuit if we respect the machine's own rhythm — otherwise they won't go in and can't enter the circuit. We can re-use the same image. Only it also happens that whatever is refused in the symbolic order, in the sense of *Verwerfung* [foreclosure], reappears in the real (Lacan 1955c: 12-13).

This is precisely where the psychotic object appears, in the register of the Real. But it is also, precisely, *not* the concrete fetish object either, which also appears in reality, with its purpose is to create a currency of *jouissance* that circulates between two subjects. The fetish – if we use perverse “ethics” – serves a purpose in the moral imperative of the will to *jouissance*¹⁴. The psychotic object is something else. What is refused in

the Symbolic register for the psychotic returns as a *real thing*, a concrete representation of where the unconscious object is in neurosis. The phenomenon of paranoia bears witness to this. It is not a lost object that the subject tries to refind, it is not a fetish object of such ambivalence that one is both fascinated and repulsed by and has to do with a partner and enjoyment. The psychotic object is fearsome and persecutory and is very, very real, it cannot be symbolized via another signifier, or disavowed. The psychotic fears it. Someone who is not psychotic may hear this object as a delusion, and a psychotic solution to this difficult universe he has to inhabit is to create an “orthopedic structure”, a scaffolding based on strategies “as if”. This scaffolding provides a guideline on living for the psychotic so that he can live “as if” he is living on the Symbolic register of the Law, and his very existence depends on this to move through the world.

It is a tragic circumstance.

When Pfaller speaks of delegating enjoyment *as if*, by replacing an act with an act *as if*, I begin to wonder if he is now speaking of the psychotic object, which is delusional and persecutory to the subject in question. Certainly, for the hallucinating schizophrenic subject, or the persecuted paranoid subject, the experience with the delusion is *anything* but passive. A “symbolic representation”, it seems to me, has nothing to do with the psychotic object. We generally do not go to the theatre and come away certain that the Chorus is going to kill us and dismember us, or that we are the dead body of Antigone’s brother, which would be a very difficult thing.

Part III — from object to i-thing¹⁵

So again, I ask: what is the object of interpassivity?

I take Pfaller’s positioning of the “as if” as step two in tracing out the theory of interpassivity. The psychotic object has a purpose here, if only to establish that the object Pfaller begins to describe more and more is precisely *not* an object that has a relation to a divided subject; it is not a

human mistaken for something else long forgotten, nor is it an object that serves to cause *jouissance* in another human for the first human's pleasure. It is not a psychotic object, for Pfaller does not ascribe a fear attached to this object that would cause a *weltanschauung*, a horrifying subjective collapse to the point of creating a delusional replacement world.

The object of interpassivity is supposed to experience pleasure for the interpassive subject; or is it meant to *represent* the experience of pleasure for the interpassive subject? These are two different actions. What is pleasure now delegated to in Pfaller's theory? The interpassive person delegates pleasure to some-thing else instead of enjoying for himself. The interpassive person puts a distance between the self and pleasure and it is the *thing*, the object that is supposed to enjoy.

We see this odd dance of distance and pleasure in obsessional neurosis. Freud describes very well the rituals that an obsessional will engage in to stop pleasure; masturbatory or otherwise.¹⁶ It is the ritual that is designed to put a space between the subject and his pleasure, a defence against pleasure as it were. It is somewhat similar to a perversion, in that desire and pleasure cause the obsessional subject anxiety. But instead of the solution of the fetish, the obsessional distances himself from all engagement with the question whatsoever. Pfaller gives us a neat example of the intellectual and the strange love-affair with the photocopier:

One may be familiar with the interpassive behaviour of some intellectuals in libraries: these intellectuals find an interesting book, rush to the photocopier, copy some hundred pages, and then give the book back and go home with a deep sense of satisfaction — as if the machine had already read the text in their place. The crucial point in this case of interpassive behaviour is the *figurativeness* of the act: what the intellectuals do (usually without knowing it) is to act as if the photocopier were reading the text. They literally *play reading* by means of the machine: the light of attention, as it were, is

shed on every page, one after another, in a linear process; slowly the machine “looks” at every line and every page.

Figurativeness, and the substitution of a real act (such as reading) by a figurative representation of it (such as photocopying) is characteristic of ritual action. Interpassivity consists in ritual acts. This ritual character of interpassive practices provides us with an answer concerning the method of interpassivity: the interpassive person and her medium are not connected by tubes, but by a representation. The interpassive person delegates her pleasure to a medium by ritually causing this medium to perform a figurative representation of consumption. The one who ritually causes this act is the one for whom the medium reads, observes, laughs, eats, and so on (Pfaller 2017: 56-57).

My reading of this is a repetitive question: what exactly is this object that we invest our pleasure in? For Pfaller, it increasingly becomes a *machine*, and not another subject onto which we project our “representations”. And this is not without context in our *hic et nunc* in which machines and technology have become pervasive. This, perhaps, we can see as Step Three in Pfaller’s theory. He gives us a few more examples.

Of course, Pfaller brings us a fetish, Marx’s commodity fetish that he reads via Žižek, we have become the objects of our objects, as though the object is the Master *in the Real*. We become slaves to economic units and exist in their service (which is Marx’s criticism of capitalism). But, as Douglas Adams points out, it’s not the money that is happy (Adams 1979: 6). It occurs to me that the communist/socialist fixation with capital falls on the side of the psychotic object; unable to be placed in a Law of desire, and completely persecutory in the Real.

Žižek’s analysis brings in the Tibetan prayer wheel, which adds a benign element to Marx’s formulation: the prayer wheel is the thing that is able to *believe* instead of us and for us, a reification of the priest, a concrete object that believes for us instead of a flesh and blood man.¹⁷

But we also have the example of canned laughter, which Pfaller links to the Chorus; the canned laughter not only indicates to the viewer of the television when to laugh, when to make catharsis, *but also* that there is the semblant – albeit a machine – that can laugh *instead of us* and we can passively view. So can we say that the passivity of the viewer (who does not laugh, does not engage in catharsis) relies upon the machine to do this job, but the machine itself is simply that, a machine and is passive in its orientation in the same manner as the planet who does not speak? What *is* this interpassive object? A void?

We have to bear in mind the relationship of this phenomenon of the “interpassive person” and obsessional neurosis, the defence against pleasure. Pfaller asks: “What is the benefit that interpassive people derive from letting the means of their pleasure be consumed by the other? What is the gain, the specific satisfaction in delegating one’s pleasure? How is possible to enjoy through the other?” (Pfaller 2017: 33) and “Can an absence of pleasure sometimes be identical with the pleasure of absence?” (Pfaller 2017: 34).¹⁸

I wonder, though, if by “interpassive person” Pfaller means the obsessional neurotic who puts a distance between himself and desire, because having to encounter desire (and possibly pleasure) means having to make a choice about desire. Or is the “interpassive person” the one who gets off on pouring wine to the guest whose pleasure he is watching, with his own particular type of pleasure? Or is the “interpassive person” the one who acts “as if” the pleasure that is rejected by psychotic foreclosure is enacted by a representation which is apprehended as horrifyingly real and about to destroy him? In paranoia, the object really acts “as if” it is the one who is experiencing the *jouissance* that is unbearable for the subject.

But, more disturbing, is Pfaller’s question of pleasure being consumed by the other; what other, specifically, are we talking about? Pfaller has already indicated the other he believes is involved with in the interpassive action, is a *machine*. We have seen via the structures of

psychoanalysis that all subjects of a structure (which is all of us) have a particular relation to the object, of which there are many types.

The object itself, whether Real, delusional, lost or fetishistic does not enjoy the pleasure we transfer on to it. The photocopier doesn't care if you desire it to read in the same way as the planets don't speak.

Part IV — the excess is us

We transfer our *jouissance* on to an external object. The object *per se* doesn't matter, it cannot speak, it is as deaf as a planet. If the object onto which we transfer our own hopes and dreams happens to be another human, their divided humanity takes us by surprise when it asserts itself and objects to your supposition of it as object. But when we fall passive and delegate (rather than transfer) our *jouissance* on to a machine that cannot speak and does not have an unconscious – rendering it more than merely passive, it is inert – we have a problem. Passivity does not speak to passivity, it is a nothingness that swallows up any chance of *creation ex nihilo*.¹⁹

It is a problem knowing what to do with surplus *jouissance* to begin with. Our relationship to that little bit extra of ourselves is what drives us to the analyst, to the subject-supposed-to-know what to do with it. We know that for Marx, that surplus, that little bit “extra” which caused him so much anxiety, was capital; the object.

What Pfaller has *observed* is that there is always some thing that causes anxiety, even if it began with pleasure, which then turned deadly. Pfaller observes the very action of *jouissance*.

What Pfaller observes, also, is how this anxiety is managed by a particular “type” of person, who in analytic terms falls under one of the three psychic structures. This “handling” of anxiety-to-do-with-pleasure is what strikes him as *interpassive*; how come the “interpassive” person delegates his pleasure elsewhere? But as I read Pfaller, his theory of interpassivity can be addressed to several different psychic structures in his vignettes and examples. Most strikingly, Pfaller's theory of interpassivity

gives us something that looks like obsessional neurosis: a distancing of affect to ward off anxiety and even desire. The notion that an other enjoys *for us*, an object outside of ourselves.

However, for most obsessional neurotics, this very object is the *objet a*, that lost object that causes desire, causes us to want because we know we don't have. This wanting is what inspires and provokes us to go out and seek something — albeit when we think we find “it”, it's never good enough. The obsessional neurotic is the one who can never go after what he wants because there is always something in the way: the obsessional neurotic goes through great and intricate lengths to throw up blocks in his path to interrogating his desire. Pfaller's interpassive individual, much like the pervert, as we have seen, utilizes the object to *displace jouissance* on to an other. (Although let us not forget that the neurotic has a relationship to perversion: the neurotic dreams of polymorphous perversion without limit, but this remains in the realm of neurotic fantasy — untangling perverse fantasy from desire is a large mental work for the neurotic. The pervert, on the other hand, *acts out* the perversion on an other in the real, which is why there is a primacy for the pervert to *have a partner who can embody jouissance in the real*. The pervert's partner is complicit in this currency of *jouissance*. This is the opposite of desire, because it involves concrete objects, acts and flesh.)

Marx's excess, the surplus, is problematic, and Pfaller picks up on this in his evocation of the Tibetan prayer wheels and canned laughter. This type of object is a universe away from his question of the Chorus. The interpassive individual who allows the Chorus to tidy up his feelings – as Lacan describes – falls more on the side of the neurotic, and the neurotic's relationship to lack and desire, and his machinations around the lost object.

Marx's excess is positioned as *Real*. This surplus capital is persecutory for Marx, and he goes to great lengths to establish a world of his own to try and cope with it. He attempts to make a world that runs without division, without divided subjects: the division of labour is meant to eradicate difference and level all humans – albeit human capital cogs

in the service of an implacable, utopian state – to one plane; socialist utopia. Much like Schreber's delusional world,²⁰ the socialist utopia cannot bear difference, *in particular* not the difference of the divided subject and the prevalence of the unconscious.

The real object has a relation to Kant's notion of Sovereign Good (Lacan 1963c). The pervert uses the object – the fetish – to claim that *jouissance* for the benefit of all man; the fetish plugs up all anxiety, and he, the pervert, holds the key to cure all ills for the other. Bear in mind here, that the fetish still acts upon the other; the will to *jouissance* is what troubles and fascinates the neurotic subject at the same time.

The Marxist thing, though, also lays claim to a Sovereign Good, but in a way that is different to the pervert's fetish: eradicate that excess and we can build utopia. It operates in a manner very, very different to the fetish, that Marx attempted to link to commodity, but in the end only created a persecutory thing.²¹

The Marxist thing is Real and persecutory. As Lacan tells us:

Jouissance is very precisely correlated with the initial form of the entry into play of what I am calling the mark, the unary trait, which is a mark toward death, if you want to give it its meaning. Observe that nothing takes on any meaning except when death comes into play.

It is on the basis of this split, the separation, between *jouissance* and the henceforth mortified body, it is from the moment that there is a play of inscriptions, a mark of the unary trait, that the question arises. There is no need to wait until the subject has shown itself to have been well hidden, at the level of the master's truth. The subject's division is without doubt nothing other than the radical ambiguity that attaches itself to the very term, "truth." (Lacan 1970i: 177)

Let us talk about this [...] that is not based on exchange — in conclusion

Interpassivity as Pfaller describes it has a curious relationship to exchange. I have observed — casually, perhaps — that it is completely impossible for the divided subject calling himself a human to operate without exchange. The neurotic, the pervert *and* the psychotic all want something in return for what they give (in accordance with their structure). The hysteric demands to be loved and desired in equal or greater part in return for the gift of her love. The pervert wants the *jouissance* of the other in return for his gift of “ethics”. The psychotic wants to be held in a logical stability – however delusional – to stop the utter destruction of the universe by division. The obsessional wants the sex and pleasure he’s been told he can’t have, but is unwilling to pay for it with a little bit of necessary castration: he distances himself from this exchange, but that is not to say that his secret is that he really, really wants it.

For Pfaller, the “interpassive” person delegates pleasure to a thing, which is apparently designed to enjoy for him, and I have argued already that this is a strong trait of obsessional neurosis. But the object is different in Pfaller’s version of obsessional neurosis: the object is *mechanical*. The “passivity” of “interpassivity” is just quite that: no-one has to give anything to anyone; there is *no* exchange whatsoever. In fact, assigning enjoyment to canned laughter becomes to be more in the realm of a pervert’s disavowal: *I know the laughter is canned, but then again someone is enjoying it. Not me, though, I don’t have to work that hard.*

Let us return to these objects that are supposed to do the work of pleasure for us, the photocopier, the prayer wheel and the television’s canned laughter. I would like to contend that thinking the thing has gone a little too far, and in the *hic et nunc*, we have this new version of a thing, the i-thing. It permeates every part of our functioning lives these days, and indeed, we cannot really even do business without it. It is inevitable, and whatever way our individual structure identifies with it, it is there.²² It

is a tool that we utilize in accordance with our structure for whatever we need it to be.

But I am still troubled by the question of the object of interpassivity, since Pfaller's depiction of how interpassive subjects displace their pleasure onto the thing is confused by structural differences. It is problematic that there is still the concept that the thing – somehow – believes, enjoys, or otherwise contains its own *jouissance*, the one the interpassive (obsessional? psychotic? perverse?) subject cannot bear this.²³

I wrote earlier on about Zeiher's comment on science, and the idea that we trust science as a fully autonomous agent that operates above and beyond our human capacity as a full Master. I would like to return to this idea in relation to the object of interpassivity, because there is something in Pfaller's theory that is elusive, still. For each subject, the thing stands in for something, whether it is lost, is real, is entitled with an "ethics" of *jouissance* or is persecutory. But what is the object of interpassivity? Unlike *das Ding*, there is no central point of erotics involved, even to a remote object that is rendered without subjectivity (Lacan 1960a: 146). The erotics that is attached to *das Ding* is delegated to the point of erasure in the theory of interpassivity.

Is it the object that holds the place we designate to the Master of Science, which knows us better than we know ourselves? For we laud science and the scientific object better than our degraded, divided being. We look to "artificial intelligence" to free us from our misery. We want this mechanical "overlord" to tell us what to do, the Master who manages our *jouissance* for us. According to Pfaller's theory of interpassivity, we willingly give over our *jouissance* to this thing to manage for us, fully trusting – in an almost foreclosed manner – that we don't have to do the work anymore.

But there is a catch to this, and this catch needs to be pointed out before we go any deeper into our interpassivity. I must return to my original question: *what is the object in interpassivity?*

Like the planets, the i-thing does not speak. We give it the words, the words come from us. We program the machine with our words, our capacity for language. But that is not to say, then, that the machine knows what it is saying. The machine does not have an unconscious.

Lacan tells us this:

Of course there are things that run and that certainly seem to work like little machines — they are called computers. I am willing to accept the notion that a computer thinks. But that it knows, who would say such a thing? For the foundation of knowledge is that the *jouissance* of its exercise is the same as that of its acquisition (Lacan 1973b: 97).

The machine *thinks*; of course it does, it thinks with the language of the programmer. But apart from that? It can never *know*, with the unconscious knowledge that the divided subject contains within themselves, just as the spun prayer wheel will never know the anguish contained in the supplicant's prayer. How can this metal wheel then speak to God? Not even *as if*.

How can the canned laughter *know* exactly which part of the joke the viewer may find funny?

But the most frightening question of all that I have to ask of interpassivity is *why are we divided subjects so passive that we allow these machines to tell us what, where, when and how we are feeling?*

We impute a character to God, much as we impute a character to the Chorus. Or, in the manner of a joke that I read the other day:

Two boys were walking home from Sunday school after hearing a strong preaching on the devil.

One said to the other, "What did you think about all this Satan stuff?"

The other boy replied, "Well, you know how Santa Claus turned out. It's probably just your Dad."

The thing, the object encountered in the theory of interpassivity doesn't even allow us the luxury of Satan as Our Father; we passively give over the work of being a divided subject to a machine that can never "know" as we do, and in fact are in thrall to this object, being as it is the Master of a Science that operates autonomously within its own logic that cannot be questioned by a divided subject. To trust this object of science that cannot know us with our *jouissance* has to be called into question. As Lacan reminds us:

If I have said that language is what the unconscious is structured like, that it because language, first of all, doesn't exist. Language is what we try to know concerning the function of language.

Certainly, it is thus that scientific discourse itself approached language, except that it is difficult for scientific discourse to fully actualize language, since it misrecognizes the unconscious. The unconscious evinces knowledge that, for the most part, escapes the speaking being (Lacan 1973c: 138-139).

Dear God, start an evolution someone!

¹ With apologies to Philip K Dick.

² Lacan introduces the idea of "the intimate exteriority or 'extimacy'" in regards to *das Ding* in the Seminar of February 10 1960: Courtly Love as anamorphosis (Lacan 1960a: 139).

³ This is the full passage that Pfaller refers to:

'Next then in a tragedy, there is a Chorus. And what is a Chorus? You will be told that it's you yourselves. Or perhaps that it isn't you. But that's not the point. Means are involved here, emotional means. In my view, the Chorus is people who are moved.

'Therefore, look closely before telling yourself that emotions are engaged in this purification. They are engaged, along with others, when at the end they have to be pacified by some artifice or other. But that doesn't mean to say that they are directly engaged. On the one hand, they no doubt are, and you are there in the form of a

material to be made use of; on the other hand, that material is also completely indifferent. When you go to the theatre in the evening, you are preoccupied by the affairs of the day, by the pen that you lost, by the check that you will have to sign the next day. You shouldn't give yourselves too much credit. Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you. The greatest chance for the survival of classical tragedy depends on that. The emotional commentary is done for you. It is just sufficiently silly; it is also not without firmness; it is more or less human.

'Therefore, you don't have to worry; even if you don't feel anything, the Chorus will feel in your stead. Why after all can one not imagine that the effect on you may be achieved, at least a small dose of it, even if you didn't tremble that much? To be honest, I'm not sure if the spectator ever trembles that much. I am, however, sure that he is fascinated by the image of Antigone.

'In this he is the spectator, but the question we need to ask is, What is he a spectator of? What is the image represented by Antigone? That is the question.

'Let us not confuse this relationship to a special image with the spectacle as a whole. The term spectacle, which is usually used to discuss the effect of tragedy, strikes me as highly problematic if we don't delimit the field to which it refers' (Lacan 1960b: 252).

° $\mathcal{S} \diamond a$ is first mentioned by Lacan in 1958, in the Seminar 22 of 14 May, 1958, in *Seminar V: The Formations of the Unconscious* (Lacan 1958: 17). $a \diamond \mathcal{S}$ first appears in the Seminar of 19 June 1963: From Anal to Ideal, in *Seminar X: Anxiety* (Lacan 1963b: 302).

° "Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude — by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament, each used separately in the different parts of the play: it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions" (Aristotle 335BCE 1449b).

° "To set our target, I shall say that the object a — which is not to be situated in anything analogous to the intentionality of a noesis, which is not the intentionality of desire — is to be conceived of as the cause of desire. To take up my earlier metaphor, the object lies *behind* desire" (Lacan 1963a: 101).

° "The decisive function of my own response thus appears, and this function is not, as people maintain, simply to be received by the subject as approval or rejection of what he is saying, but truly to recognise or abolish him as subject. Such is the nature of the analyst's *responsibility* every time he intervenes by means of speech" (Lacan 1953: 247-248).

° "The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action, in the manner not of Euripides but of Sophocles. As for the later poets, their choral songs pertain as little to the subject of the piece as to that of any other tragedy. They are, therefore, sung as mere interludes—a practice first begun by Agathon. Yet what difference is there between introducing such choral interludes, and transferring a speech, or even a whole act, from one play to another" (Aristotle 335BCE Part XVIII).

⁹ Shakespeare, W. *As you like it: Act II, Scene VII*. 1623.

¹⁰ What the pervert cannot bear is exactly that which the neurotic has a relationship to; loss. For the pervert loss of the mother's phallus is experienced as a trauma of the greatest magnitude; if his almighty mother *doesn't* have one, then his can be chopped off in the Real. The young pervert then invents one for his mother, and this is what Freud first describes as *disavowal*. He "knows" his mother doesn't have a penis, but then again of course she does, how can she not! For the hysteric, of course the mother has no penis, neither does she, but her father does so she searches for a man who will give her one for herself—although nothing he ever gives her is ever good enough; she constantly searches for "The One", even though she knows it might not exist. But still she searches!

¹¹ "jouir de [...] to enjoy [...] to enjoy the use of [...] to have [...] jouissance [...] to have the use of [...] pleasure [...] orgasm" (Corréard, M-H, Grundy, V, Ormal-Grenon, J-B, Rubery, J, [eds.] *Le Dictionnaire Hachette-Oxford Concise: français → anglais anglais → français*. 329. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2009.)

¹² Clavreul asks "who is the partner of a pervert?" in his article "The Perverse Couple" (1967). In it he does question the status of the pervert's partner, especially in relationship to the fetish object.

¹³ "The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created — people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favour in the sight of the LORD" (Genesis 6:5-8). This is a myth that stands well in the face of Freud's writings, particularly *Totem and Taboo* (1913) which describes how the taboo against incest was put in to place; precisely because an organization *against* incest was needed to create a Law that castrated continuous polymorphous pleasure. The Christian myth describes this well, if a little on the side of complete holocaust. This God, it seems, was a murderous castrating judge.

¹⁴ "We would thus find anew here the Sovereign Good of the Greeks by induction from this effect, if Kant, as is his wont, did not specify once more that this Good does not act as a counterweight but rather, so to speak, as an anti-weight — that is, subtracting weight from the pride [*amour-propre*] (*Selbstsucht*) the subject experiences as contentment (*arrogantia*) in his pleasures, insofar as a look at this Good renders these pleasures less respectable. This is precisely what the text says and quite suggestive.

"Let us consider the paradox that it is at the very moment at which the subject no longer has any object before him that he encounters a law that has no other phenomenon than something that is already signifying; the latter is obtained from a voice in conscience, which, in articulating in the form of a maxim in conscience, proposes the order of a purely practical reason or will there.

"For this maxim to constitute a law, it is necessary and sufficient that, being put to the test of such reason, the maxim may be considered universal as far as logic is concerned. This does not mean — let us recall what 'logic' entails — that it forces itself

on everyone, but rather that it is valid in every case or, better stated, that it is not valid in any case if it is not valid in every case [...] The crux of the diatribe is, let us say, found in the maxim that proposes a rule for jouissance, which is odd in that it defers to Kant's mode in being laid down as a universal rule. Let us enunciate the maxim:

“ 'I have the right to enjoy your body,' anyone can say to me, 'and I will exercise this right without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body.'” (Lacan 1963c: 647-648).

¹⁵ “I-thing” is a term that I am borrowing from my colleague Julie-Anne Smith, who has worked on the question of emerging technologies, social bonds and the object, and whose knowledge held a great value to the Lacanian Cartel on Psychoanalysis and Culture in Everyday Life in the 21st Century (Melbourne).

¹⁶ See for instance Freud's case of the Rat Man: Freud, S. “Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis”. In Freud, S. 2001. *The Standard Edition on the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume X (1909): Two Case Histories: 'Little Hans' and the 'Rat Man'*. 153-327. London: Vintage. 1909.

¹⁷ Given that priests have been so unfrocked in recent times to actually bring to light the horrors of their polymorphous perversity that *cannot* be successfully castrated by the Rules of God of Abstinence, maybe the believing metal prayer wheel is a better option, *if you want to believe*. (Apologies to Agent Fox Mulder.)

¹⁸ Freud described this phenomenon of the pleasure of absence in his account of the butcher's witty wife, who took her pleasure from the absence of pleasure, the desire for the lack of desire: see Freud, S. “Chapter IV: Distortion in Dreams”. In Freud, S. 2001. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume IV (1900): The Interpretation of Dreams (First Part)*. Translated by J Strachey. 135-162. London: Vintage Press. 1900. See specifically pages 146-151.

¹⁹ “Now if you consider the vase from the point of view I first proposed, as an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the centre of the real that is called the Thing, this emptiness as represented in the representation presents itself as a nihil, as nothing. And that is why the potter, just like you to whom I am speaking, creates the vase with his hand around this emptiness, creates it, just like the mythical creator, *ex nihilo*, starting with a hole” (Lacan 1960: 121).

²⁰ Freud, S. “Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)”. In Freud, S. 2001. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): Case History of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*. 3-84. London: Vintage. 1911. SEE ALSO Schreber, D. *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*. Translated by I MacAlpine. New York: The New York Review of Books. 2000.

²¹ My father told me the following tale: when he was a boy in Communist Czechoslovakia, it was illegal to own US currency. Some benevolent — but otherwise ignorant — western charity tried to establish a penpal system for youth in “underprivileged countries” and my father was in correspondence with another young person from the USA. As it happened, the penpal once sent my father a letter containing a US dollar, which my father had to destroy in case the authorities would arrest him. It

surprises me that the letter was not first opened and read by the state censor at the time, which would have surely finished with my father's arrest, for it would have been *his* crime against the Socialist State in receiving the currency, *not* the crime of the well-intentioned young capitalist in the USA.

²² For instance: a fuckboi may use the i-phone to send his dick pix to cause *jouissance* to a random woman on Tindr. An obsessional neurotic may use his i-phone to watch a football game whilst he himself is sitting at the football with the game playing on the field in front of him. A hysteric posts selfie after selfie to get followers to adore her, and Donald Trump tweets at 3am in the morning for whatever deluded purpose he thinks is a good idea.

²³ I deliberately do not include the hysteric in this structural schema of the interpassive subject: the hysteric deals with the lost object of desire, the *objet a*. For instance, my husband's obsession with his i-phone: when asked what the weather looks like, he reaches for the app instead of sticking his head out of the window. The weather app is continuously proved incorrect. I would like to take his i-phone and flush it down the toilet, so as to lose this object forever and stimulate his desire to stick his head out of the window and engage with the weather, to enact some mythic time of my own which is lost to ages past and which represents a fantasy of utopia for me (ie, the good old days before i-things took everyone's attention away from life).

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