

What's Left to Imagine: The Privation of the Absolute¹

Felix Ensslin

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Abstract:

This paper reads Hegel's famous dictum that there cannot be a proper revolution without a prior reformation by inscribing it as the limit case of what could be understood as philosophy's attempt to preserve itself by the phantasm of history. It traces philosophy's own internal rupture induced by the attempt to integrate the Judeo-Christian god into its metaphysical project. Psychoanalysis, the proper heir to the Reformation in this respect, can place the emancipatory power of philosophy, which is itself the product of this rupture, in its proper place: as the thinking of the doubling of the form of freedom not simply into its subjective content, but into the material form of the subject itself. The spiritual form does not appear in its material content in this doubling, but as a doubled, materially objective form: the form of the analytic object.

Keywords: phantasm, revolution, reformation, subject, form, *potentia dei ordinata/absoluta*, social structure of the super-ego, history, Lacan, Hegel.

1. The Phantasm of Philosophy: The Birth of the Absolute. (A short history of phantasm).

I want to start with something like a short history of the phantasm of philosophy, moving from the phantasm of unity to the phantasm of identity in difference as the course of history. The phantasm of philosophy gave birth to the Absolute. But it did so once it was forced to integrate the concept of creation, of contingency, via the tradition of monotheism. Faced with the difficulty of joining together the Judaeo-Christian god and the contingency and freedom of his act of creation on the one hand and the demands of consistency and necessity placed on it by Greek philosophy on the other, mediaeval scholastics solved the emerging conflict between knowledge and faith by introducing the Absolute. While the objects of the world were consigned to a kind of historical, i.e. contingent, necessity, they were necessary only because they had been brought about and thus constituted reality, the ordered world. The realm pertaining to what was called the *potentia dei absoluta*, the power of god considered absolutely, was something like the region of the real, or a region of necessary contingency, where infinite possibility was located as „the options initially open to god“¹ before the act of

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¹ Courtenay 1974, p. 39.

creation. Since this infinity was limited only by itself contingency and necessity were somehow coextensive in this realm of the real. From the perspective of the existing world order, however, this realm of the Absolute was initially thought of to not have any impact at all, except to unify the antagonism between god's freedom and the necessity to think of the world as indeed ordered, cognizable and reliable.² Since philosophy could not allow for an other that was both real and outside the categories of thought, this was an elegant solution. The Absolute became the container at the same time of Being and contingency, while in the world order being could be considered as that which is in fact reliable and consistent, even though it was created and thus not itself co-extensive with Being as such. So the Absolute emerged in order to save philosophy the embarrassment of thinking beyond unity or identity. Rather than realize the antagonism as such between Being and event as the split within the articulation of Being, for a long time this solution of separating the two sides for logical reasons worked. It was by inventing the Absolute, i.e. by integrating the heritage of monotheism and Greek philosophy that the phantasm as organization of unity was preserved. The condition of possibility, however, for this unity to prevail was at the same time the condition of its impossibility: the two realms which were thus divided in unity, namely the ordered existing world and the realm of the Absolute, would not actually interfere with each other, or rather the Absolute would not interfere with the ordered world, thus bringing imbalance and unreliability into reality. The options „initially open to god“ would have to remain safely in the closet of the Absolute in order for the actually chosen and realized option to not be subject to uncontrollable outbursts of contingency in its very well ordered course steering towards the *eschaton*, the repetition of the end of times in the telos of *salvific history*.

2. The Antagonism within the Phantasm of the Absolute appears

It comes as no surprise, that this phantasmatic equilibrium, organized to contain a fundamental antagonism between Being and event, was not to last. The very antagonism it thought to contain, its inherent contradictions, namely that it doubled Being into form (the Absolute) and content (the ordered world) in order to preserve its unity,

² For the elaboration of the concept of *potentia dei absoluta* and *potentia dei ordinata* see e.g. Moonan 1994; Courtenay 1990; Courtenay 1984; Desharnais, 1966.

opened it up for various articulations beyond its phantasmatic unity. For one, it offered an explanation for miracles as still cognizable and thus not irrational phenomena: by considering them actualizations of the absolute *within* the realm of the world order. When the despot Nebuchadnezzar wants to burn the three men in the fire-oven, of course they would have to be incinerated according to the laws of the world order in both senses of the word: because they disturb the empire and because, once in the heated oven, the workings of the natural world would make sure that they burn. Since they did not burn, the intelligible explanation could be given that god out of his extraordinary (literally) benevolence chose to intervene and actualize a bit of the Absolute. Or, closer to the topic of politics: when the mendicant orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, were in a struggle with the ecclesiastical nomenclatura, they resorted to theorizing the Absolute as a blueprint for the power of the pope to act against the laws of the church and its tradition. When Pope Martin, a pope who was supportive of their cause was on the Holy See, they ascribed to him a *potestas plenitudo* that was modelled on the *potentia dei absoluta*. This absolute power made the pope, like Ockham said of God, a „debtor to no one“³ and allowed thus the introduction of emergency measures to protect the revolutionary friars⁴. This alliance between pope and social revolution

³ A condensed formula for Ockham's doctrine, that for god it is not possible to do anything which he is not allowed to do, e.g. his affirmation of the *potentia dei absoluta*: Wilhelm von Ockham, *Commentary of the Sentences* II dist. 19 H.: „*deus autem nuli tenetur nec obligatur tanquam debitor; et ideo non potest facere quod non debet facere: nec potest non facere quod debet facere.*“ (quoted after: Ockham 1990).

⁴ The development of this doctrine was not, as is often thought, a nominalist question alone. The dialectic of the relationship between the pope and the mendicant apologists of his absolute power is interesting here: First, they refer to it, so it can *introduce* their gains against the traditional church hierarchy, later in order to protect these gains against further interruption. In this development Duns Scotus plays an important part, by not only taking over „the legal terminology from canon lawyers“, but also their juridical definition of both powers „in place of the normal theological definition“ [cf. Courtenay 1990, p. 101]. The decisive issue is the homogeneity of „free will“ in both men and god. Scotus goes beyond the *pactum*-theology of the nominalists that held that while god had absolute powers, he was bound by his pact of salvation with mankind. Thus *potentia absoluta* is no longer simply the space of original options open to god, but „it is the ability to act outside of an order *already established*. *Potentia absoluta* in this definition is a form of action, human and divine, that allows one to act outside and against the legal structure.“ [Ibid., p. 102.] For those who make laws – not for those subject to them – it follows that „because they make the laws, they can act in an absolute way by temporarily suspending laws or dispensing someone from the law's provisions; or sovereigns can create new laws and thus continue to act in an orderly manner, albeit according to laws that differ from previous laws.“ [Ibid.] It is interesting that it is in fact the *spirituales* faction of the Franciscans, which had originally benefited from the interpretation of the *potentia absoluta* in this manner, that began to develop the doctrine of infallibility in order to protect against further actualization of the *potestas plenitudo* against their interests. Since Pope Martin had moved in the direction of the mendicants and their vow of poverty, Olivi developed for the Franciscans that doctrine in order to thus safeguard by way of a „self-binding“ of the *plenitudo* in the world of the *potentia ordinata*. [Ibid., p. 103]

(i.e. the vow of poverty of the mendicants) was, of course, short-lived, but it serves as an illustration how the inherent contradiction within the phantasmatic unity that was originally achieved by the introduction of the Absolute was put to use. What was thus introduced was, of course, what would become the logic of the „state of exception“⁵, in Benjamin’s terms „constituting power“⁶ that intervenes sovereignly in order to protect the constituted power, the idea behind this intervention still being a kind of unity or identity between both sides. As the opponents of the mendicants knew very well, this is of course never what happens. Once the power that intervenes in the situation is not one legitimated by what is possible within the constituted power, but by reference to the Absolute, the constituted power is protected only in a formal sense. If it had succeeded, the demands of the friars – the poverty of the church, the equality of all believers, etc. – could have been realized and thus the order of the world would have fundamentally changed. As it were, this did not come about: the short lived intervention succeeded momentarily only in the negation of the state of affairs, by protecting the Franciscans and the Dominicans, but did not extend itself into the negation of that negation, which would have been the slow and laborious process of realizing the demands in new social and ecclesiastical institutions, thus in fact creating a new order.

Let me sum up this short story: The Absolute was introduced in order to preserve the unity of Being, by in fact splitting Being in two: its form, which became the Absolute, and its content, the existing world order of nature and culture. The appearance of freedom within thought made this phantasm necessary, while at the same time it introduced its own beyond. The phantasm involved was the phantasm of philosophy: to thus preserve the intelligibility of the world in the face of contingency. The realm *ex nihilo* out of which this god was said to have created the world of reality, was thus deprived of its truly traumatic dimension and no longer an unthinkable abyss, but the realm of the real as the realm of the Absolute. Philosophy thus preserved its mission to think the intelligibility of the world according to its unchanging categories. However, the price to be paid for this phantasmatic solution was the introduction of a spectral ghost into the constituted world: the ghost of the Absolute itself. Every phantasm carries such a ghost within

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cf. Agamben 2008.

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cf. Benjamin 2009.

itself, since that ghost is itself nothing other than the appearance of the antagonism that the phantasm is meant to contain and unite. But this spectral presence is not simply as such the negation of the phantasm, rather, as the example of Pope Martin and the Mendicants showed, it needs not only to interrupt into the existing world, but to be introduced and articulated. It introduces struggle and struggle introduces it. It needs to be realized as object-cause for a different articulation than what is possible within the existing order. It appears as the making possible of some of what is impossible.

3. “History” saves the Phantasm of Philosophy

Of course, the history of philosophy reacted to this problem, most notably with Hegel. If Kant can be thought to relegate the real in its traumatic dimension into the unthinkable itself, then Hegel wants to domesticate it as *movens* of a teleological trajectory. If the preservation of unity introduces the conditions for the destruction or negation of unity, than this negation itself has to be a feature of the unity that was meant to be preserved in the first place: the Absolute becomes the identity of identity and difference. “History” then becomes the self-movement of this real as spirit in a continuous movement through determinate moments or *Gestalten*. This introduction of the real of the Absolute into the movement of history allows to renew the phantasm of philosophy: Unity or identity is preserved by splitting the original split between Absolute and ordered again, namely by introducing the split into the Absolute itself. Matter and spirit, nature and culture, substance and subject are then names of the Absolute in its movement through the determinate content of historical moments. The intelligibility of the world is safe-guarded, because the world itself is nothing but intelligibility returning to itself. Marx and Engels only had to „put Hegel on his feet“⁷ by introducing the idea that intelligibility or spirit itself is historical, in the sense that it is produced by the moments of history and not some collection agency that introduces the results of historical movement into the register of the Absolute. The price to be paid for this renewed success of the phantasm of philosophy is, not surprisingly, the reconfiguration of the eruption of the Absolute into the ordered world as a teleological necessity, thus depriving contingency of its radical, wild dimension. Just as the Franciscans began to develop

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This is often quoted and rarely referenced, so for once the original German reference: Karl Marx and Engels 2009, p. 292f.

the doctrine of infallibility in order to protect the gains made by the extralegal absolute power of the pope within the ordered world, so the real Absolute of Hegel has to be integrated into the infallibility of absolute knowledge in order to protect contingency against its own traumatic insistence. There is an advance in Hegel's renewal of the phantasm, but it is not sufficient to think contingency as truly real. The advance over the scholastic solution is obvious. For the scholastics up to and including Ockham the Absolute was introduced only in order to think of it as that which is for all intents and purposes impossible within the realm of the constituted order. While it is a metaphysical realm of possibility, this possibility appears within the world of men and nature only as impossibility, for the „contingent necessity“⁸ of the course of the created world was to be safeguarded for understanding. The advance of Hegel (and Marx) was to think of the appearance of impossibility within the course of history as the appearance of „determinate negation“⁹. It thus became the object cause for transforming this impossibility into actuality, under the guidance of a logic that was the logic of history itself. The obvious problem then is, that real contingency that does not fit the form of „determinate negation“ as identified by philosophy or the party secretariat. From their perspective real contingency does not only not count, it needs to be reconfigured in order to fit the mould of that which is in the process of becoming historically actualized.

8 Before the concept of the *potentia absoluta* could be thought of as a potential interruption in relation to the processes within the world of the *potentia dei ordinata*, it had been used to introduce the following differentiation: The created world was necessary according to the *neccesitas consequentis*, the necessity related to „the consequence“ (i.e. of a previous event). In order to open up a space for a potentiality from whose standpoint this *neccesitas consequentis* could prove to be, in fact, contingent, another necessity was associated with the *potentia dei absoluta*, namely the *neccesitas consequentiae*, that is the necessity of a consequence following from its antecedent, not the necessity holding sway thanks to that original consequence. In this way, the concept of a „contingent necessity“ was introduced into scholastic thought. The world as it is, should not be looked at as eternal, like the Greek *cosmos*, but the events in it should nevertheless not be marked simply by arbitrariness, but be accountable and justified, namely within the scope of the *neccesitas consequentis*, the necessity arising from the realized will of God.

9 “The one thing needed to *achieve scientific progress* – and it is essential to make an effort at gaining this quite *simple* insight into it – is the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular* content; or that such a negation is not just negation, but is *the negation of the determined fact* which is resolved, and is therefore determinate negation; that in the result there is therefore contained in essence that from which the result derives – a tautology indeed, since the result would otherwise be something immediate and not a result. Because the result, the negation, is a *determinate* negation, it has a *content*.” [Hegel 2010, p. 33.]
 “In all this, however, care must be taken to distinguish the *first* negation, negation as negation *in general*, from the second negation, the negation of negation which is concrete, *absolute* negativity, just as the first is on the contrary only *abstract* negativity.” [Ibid., p. 89.]

Thus the phantasm of philosophy became the phantasm of the course of history instituted to contain not the „main antagonism“¹⁰ which was included as what is driving the movement of this course, but to contain the multitude of antagonisms that each locus of a more radical contingency itself *is* within the world order. This being of the multitude of contingent impossibilities from the position of the constituted world cannot be taken up within the movement of history: thus the phantasm of philosophy which had become the phantasm of the course of history has to contain these radical contingencies in dreaming or acting out phantasmatic scenes of disciplinarizing, reeducating or extinguishing them. That is it became the totalitarian phantasm.

4. The post-structuralist, post-modern and spinozist Critique of the Phantasm of the Course of History.

This diagnosis has been at the core of the last decades of left theorizing, be it the deconstruction of Derrida who safeguards radical contingency through the prevention of semantic closure; be it Toni Negri's celebration of the multitude as the concrete material realization of the immediate universality of this radical side of the Absolute as contingency; be it Simon Critchley who attempts to think these radical contingencies as anarchist interventions against but at a distance to the state, safeguarding, as it were, against the necessity of a version of infallibility; be it Ernesto Laclau and Chantall Mouffe who want to think the hegemonizing process as a precarious way of collecting these radical contingencies with a collective or rather collecting emancipatory framework; be it Deleuze and Guattari who think these radical contingencies as molecular bodies without organs against the molar organisms of the ordered world. All of them have in common that they want to save the patient who suffers from the phantasm of the ordered world from the doctor who suffers from the phantasm of overcoming the ordered world through the destructive and at the same time instituting power of negativity. If the Absolute appears originally within scholasticism as the virtual intelligible safeguard of the actual world, it then became the eruption of this virtual into the actual through negation of the ordered world: miracles and the state of exception. Now, against the totalitarian effects of the institutionalization of this eruption,

10 Famously Mao furthered Marxist dialectical thought in his „On Contradiction“ of 1937 in order to allow for a Marxist analysis of various social phenomena which were not immediately economic [cf. Mao 1967].

i.e. Marxist-Leninist revolution and its movement towards infallible Stalinism, the prospect has become to think this virtuality as positivity itself, as the transcendently empirical agent against the territorialized, disciplinarized and ordered world. It is no surprise then that in Deleuze the phantasm loses its negative connotation of delusion. Rather it is the productive form through which this positivity - one might name it the Absolute as transcendently empirical - appears in the world, freed from the totalizing phantasms of negativity, i.e. of philosophy and of the course of history itself. Similarly, and this is for example the debate between Judith Butler and some Lacanians, sexual difference no longer appears as real in the sense of negativity or privation – the real lack of a symbolic object, i.e. of the phallus, a real lack of inscription into the ordered world – but as always already mediated within the social dimension of the ordered world. Here the Absolute becomes coextensive with the ordered world itself: it is the effect of power/knowledge regimes on the distribution of what is allowed and recognized and what is non-recognizable and cannot even be mourned. And, also similarly, class-struggle is no longer the antagonism that is real and cuts through the entire social ordered world, but is dissolved into the multiple and singular struggles of identity politics and the fight for recognition or the micro-practices of resistance. Here too, the negation of particularity in the search for universality is exposed as the phantasm of the Absolute appearing as negativity. One might in a reappropriation of a slogan from Paris in 1968 say, that against this one affirms the elaboration of particularity as singularity, that is as a form in which empirically real, but socially counterfactual „phantasy“ takes over power. „Another world is possible“ then becomes the slogan that organizes the collection of these singularities under the umbrella of a regulative idea: namely the world which is - and always will continue - becoming another. The problem here is that by immediately identifying the real absolute, radical contingency, with positivity and be it subversive positivity within the ordered world, this radical contingency is always thought of as always already related and relational, as never without an object, as never being negativity as such or negativity as being. Within psychoanalysis this problem emerged in a similar way. While Melanie Klein realized that there was not only an oedipal – paternal super-ego that inscribed the subject into the ordered world, but also a more radical super-ego of hate and destruction that was prior to it, she also thought this more radical dimension as always already related, namely with the dimension of phantasm of the good and bad object to which this drive of negativity

relates. Radical contingency, the absolute as real, as the non-related agent of relation, as the impossible agency of producing possibility is not truly conceptualized here either.¹¹

5. Super-Ego and Discourse: The social organization of Phantasm

Lacan introduced his four discourses as „liens sociaux“, social links.¹² One could say, they are the structure of the ordered world, i.e. in anachronistic scholastic terms over and against the ontologically other place of the Absolute. The first of these discourses, the discourse of the master, indeed does nothing other than to repress the knowledge that the ordered world is created (by god or the labour of man).

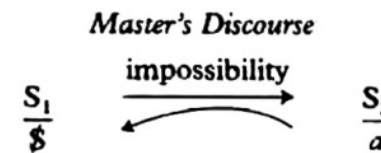


Fig. 1: Master's Discourse¹³

$S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ stands for the fact that around one or a few master-signifiers all other signifiers are ordered so as to produce the sense or the representation of this world. The signifier orders (in the double sense of this word) ones place within this world and there is nothing to be done, since this simply is a representation of being. This is, of course, the structure of repression *tout court*. The phantasm of this discourse is that there is no phantasm, since the experience of reality and the phantasm

11 "As I have mentioned, I had already recognized in Rita and Trude the internalization of an attacked and therefore frightening mother the harsh super-ego. (...) Through her analysis I learned a good deal about the specific details of such internalization and about the fantasies and impulses underlying paranoid and manic-depressive anxieties. (...) I also became more aware of the ways in which internal persecutions influence, by means of projection, the relation to external objects. The intensity of her envy and hatred unmistakably showed its derivation from the oral-sadistic relation to her mother's breast, and was interwoven with the beginnings of her Oedipus complex. Erna's case much helped to prepare the ground for a number of conclusions (...), in particular the view that the early super-ego, built up when oral-sadistic impulses and phantasies are at their height, underlies psychosis (...)." [Klein 2001, p.17].

12 Lacan 1998, p. 17.

13 Ibid., p. 16.

of this reality coincide. The surplus over this world which is thought in the doubling of the world through the *potentia dei absoluta* simply is, from this perspective, a safe-guard against the notion that things could be really different, once the thought of creation and createdness enters via the monotheistic revolution. This surplus appears, of course, also within this discourse, but it does so only as the *prestige* of the Master, that is the material embodiment of the social order it institutes, the palaces, the riches, the lands and the rights of the master. They in turn serve to hide the fact that the master himself is „castrated“, i.e. forced to articulate his orders in the domain of the ordered world, through signifiers. This repression or hiddenness is shown by the second part of the discourse below the bar.

Lacan has written that his discourses are not to be understood as historical in the sense of one giving birth to the other, instituting a teleological sequence that would place the final discourse, that of the analyst, in the position of absolute knowledge.¹⁴ This anti-Hegelian stance is necessary, of course, on two levels: on the one hand, Lacan does not want to affirm the phantasm of philosophy as the phantasm of the course of history. On the other: what absolute knowledge would the analytic discourse offer? The Absolute as knowledge depends on mediation and the analytic discourse interrupts, cuts any mediation with the impossibility of stating the „whole truth“. In the most fundamental level it stages *„Bindungslosigkeit“*, unrelatedness, not mediation. The knowledge of the unconscious, understood both as a subjective and an objective genitive, does not offer a highway to the complete representation of the situation, rather it speaks to a dynamic of presentation, of interruption, of the impossibility of saying the whole truth or the truth as something totalizing or whole. This is precisely the legitimation of the critique of the Oedipus complex by Deleuze and others. The master-discourse and its oedipal subject-machine safeguard the working of the administrated, ordered, molar world. It inscribes subjects into the workings of the pleasure-principle through the help of the reality principle. The two principles show here their complicity: The master-discourse, as the discourse of repression, organizes more or less successfully the integration of the subject into the world as it already exists. Any excess dimension of desire, jouissance itself, is relegated to the reduction through reality in order

14 Ibid.

to allow the subject to participate in the ordered world with pleasure: Pleasure, the ability to enjoy within a given identity and the social space it offers, is an index of normalization. And the agency that organizes this inscription into reality is, of course, the super-ego. This side of the super-ego is in a direct way the heir to the Thomistic principle: Serve the order, and the order will serve you.¹⁵ The condition of this possibility is, of course, castration, the acceptance of reducing one's existence to the representation within the ordered world. Yet, maybe there is something to the heroic attempt of Slavoj Žižek and the Ljubljana School to show Lacan his own disavowed Hegelian face, i.e. to read the discourses of Lacan at the same time as historically successive and dialectical. However, this is true only, if one thinks of this as a properly dialectical move: it negates Lacan, in order to articulate a negation of this negation: a psycho-analytic theory of the historical material social order itself, which in turn would think the Hegelian Absolute not as absolute mediation, but as a privation of this mediation as an inherent impossibility within mediation itself.

But let me return for a moment to Lacan's discourses: While he says that the discourses are not to be thought of as a mediated historical succession, he also says that within the change from one discourse to the other, there always is „emergence of the analytic discourse“.¹⁶

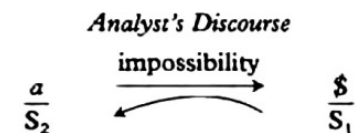


Fig. 2: Analyst's Discourse¹⁷

It has often been noted that the upper side of the Analyst's Discourse is also Lacan's algebra for the pervert. The „normal neurotic“ regains the being he has lost by the inscription into the ordered world through his relation to his phantasm: \$ <> a, which is, as we remember,

15 While not original to Thomas Aquinas, his philosophy is well summed up by the ancient adage, for centuries written on the walls of nearly every catholic institution: *„Serva ordinem et ordo servabit te.“*

16 Lacan 1998, p. 16.

17 Ibid.

the lower half of the Master-Discourse. The pervert, on the other hand, makes him or herself the object of the Other that is lacking, in order to disavow this very lack.

Here is the unity of the phantasm as such, namely to somehow organize somehow the disappearance of the lack in the Other, through denial, disavowal or foreclosure. Freud wrote that perversion is the positive to the negative of the neurotic phantasy.¹⁸ The pervert knows on the one hand, that the Other is lacking. In scholastic terms, he knows that the ordered world is created and as such is an index of lack or negativity. Thus he knows that taking over the signifiers of his interpellation and participating in the social world does not, indeed, fill this lack, as the neurotic needs to believe (whether he serves this signifier by sacrificing his own desire like the obsessive or whether he questions the desire of the Other like the hysteric). Thus the pervert offers the Other, the ordered world, not the sacrifice of his desire nor does he stage the question regarding the Other's desire, but he offers the Other his jouissance. The pervert makes himself the object for the Other's jouissance, staging the phantasmatic scenes of excess over the social order as scenes of enjoyment for the Other, the social order itself. In the scholastic language I have introduced, the pervert knows that the Absolute is not simply the outer limit of the „options initially open to god“, but his insatiable jouissance inscribed into the ordered world itself. With this we have the second side of the super-ego: if one side, the oedipal super-ego of Freud, inscribes the subject into the master-discourse, here the archaic super-ego of Melanie Klein appears as the command to enjoy and the interpellation to make oneself the object of the social order's enjoyment, not its surface institutional functioning.

The Absolute appears here as an absolute command to enjoy, here and now, to laugh at the demands of the social world, even while fulfilling them as empty gestures, devoid of the sense of reproduction in all its biological and material senses, devoid of any historical or institutional mission. The pervert laughs at the phantasm of philosophy as the phantasm of the course of history, in order to state that truth is only as excess enjoyment, as the destruction of truth. What he imagines is not the path forward but spaces and times to organize „sonderbare Veranstaltungen“¹⁹ in which he can stage the jouissance of the Other.

18 Freud 2001, p. 170f.

19 Freud 1993, p. 191.

Thus, the repression of the neurotic or the master-discourse safeguards the social order against the Absolute, by keeping it out of sight, as it were, as simply the container of ideas „that are maybe good for theory but no good for my pleasure principled practice within the reality that my obsessional sacrifice or my hysterical questioning affirms“; and the pervert realizes the Absolute as a positivity, as the excess jouissance of the Other that is the only truth there is. He safeguards the social order only as an empty shell for his „Veranstaltungen“ or simply destroys it as an act of jouissance, in the extreme burning the world down as an instrument of the hidden jouissance of the social order itself.

6. No Revolution without a Reformation

So is there no position if not outside, then at least beyond that of the phantasm? Either I uphold the phantasm that closes the antagonisms and inconsistencies in the existing ordered world or I misunderstand the positivity of my jouissance as already accomplishing an outside of the law, as its inherent place of resistance, up to and including the phantasm of self-destruction, i.e. of making myself through jouissance inoperable, useless for the master-agencies of the ordered world? One might add here, even though I left it out of consideration, the phantasm of realizing the phantasm through the act, a *passage à l'acte* à la Antigone?

One way of reading Hegel's famous dictum, that it is a false principle to think that one can have a revolution without a reformation is to read it as the affirmation of the opposite stance: the Phantasm upholding the existing order through castration or jouissance will only reemerge in different form, if the truth that splits the ordered world is not already present within it.²⁰ The most obvious reading of this dictum is of course supported by Hegel in many ways, namely that the formal introduction of freedom on the objective side of spirit – the laws governing society - has no chance of realizing itself unless it is already present on the subjective side. This is then read as a split analogous to the split of inside and outside, internal and external, mediated through the elaboration of freedom on both sides of the split. Hegel's position

20 „For it is a false principle that the fetters which bind Right and Freedom can be broken without the emancipation of conscience — that there can be a Revolution without a Reformation.” [Hegel 2001, p. 473.]

then is: The Reformation or more precisely: Luther was right, but he simply did not go far enough, he misunderstood that freedom did not only appear within or rather as the form of the subjective certainty of self-consciousness, but also as its content, the positive laws governing society. Luther thought of the content as something „given, something revealed through religion.“²¹

However, another and more radical way of understanding this would be to say that what happens in the reformation on the side of the subject is not yet an elaboration of its objective content, but simply the choice of subjectivity as such. This choice is occluded, covered up, by immediately being *related*, namely the content given through revelation in the ordered world: the word. The problem, however, would not be the obvious one that the objects of this revelation are wrong, because they are not itself the content of freedom, but that before there can be any relation, right or wrong, the subject has to choose subjectivity as unrelatedness *tout court*, as the impossibility of relation. Such a reading would be closer to some hints Lacan gives in reading Luther, namely that he thinks the fundamental *Bindungslosigkeit* of the subject, i.e. the dimension of death-drive or evil a such. For what is evil or the death-drive if not unrelatedness, *Bindungslosigkeit*?²² It is here where Lacan goes beyond Melanie Klein and her super-ego of jouissance. In this horizon what is important and leads to Hegel's dictum about the relation between revolution and reformation is the appearance of subjectivity as such, not, as Hegel himself often states, the certainty of self-consciousness as always already a testament to relation. Precisely the fact that the Reformation can misunderstand itself, because it ties itself immediately to objects given through revelation shows that this act of tying itself to these objects is not essential to subjectivity itself. What this means is that subjectivity is not identical with the subject that is produced by interpellation into the ordered world, by the master-discourse. Nor is it simply the rest which does not fit under the

21 "After a free investigation in open day, Luther had secured to mankind Spiritual Freedom and the Reconciliation [of the Objective and Subjective] in the concrete: he triumphantly established the position that man's eternal destiny [his spiritual and moral position] must be wrought out *in himself* [cannot be an *opus operatum*, a work performed *for him*]. But the *import* of that which is to take place in him — what truth is to become vital in him, was taken for granted by Luther as something already given, something revealed by religion." [Ibid., p. 461.]

22 The translators of Lacan's Seminar VII into German translate the French word *déréliction* as *Bindungslosigkeit*, which I will use in this text. [cf. Lacan 2007, p. 111; Lacan 1996, p. 115.]

signifier of this interpellation nor with the condition of possibility of reflexively subjectivizing such an interpellation. It is something more primordial, something that is in Hegelian terms substance itself as its own disturbance, prior to all articulation. For Hegel the law of nature simply *is* freedom. Freedom has a double determination: its content - „its objectivity“ - and its form, in which the subject knows itself as active, because it is the demand of freedom that the subject knows itself in this form and does what is his.²³ What this implies then, is that the appearance of the *form* of freedom which is the significant aspect of the reformation for Hegel, does not imply the ability to acquiesce into the ordered world, but rather the very impossibility to inscribe this subjectivity into the ordered world, the in- or for-itself of the content of freedom. But the doubling of freedom, its appearance as *form*, demands at the same time an articulation, activity, so that the subject of this subjectivity knows itself and does what is his. What is implied here is that the doubling happens first on the side of form itself: that subjectivity proper chooses itself as split between form and content, between freedom proper and social articulating necessity.

7. Privation of the Absolute.

Lacan famously has described the three ways in which the lack in the Other appears. Castration, Frustration and Privation.²⁴ The latter is defined as the real lack of a symbolic object. We could rewrite this here, the form of freedom, activity, lacking its form as activity related to content. Privation thus is the index of the absolute within the ordered world, neither nature nor culture ascribes immediately objects to the subject of privation. The aspect of reformation, then, without which no revolution should be engaged in, is not the quietist certainty of one's inner world, that is immediately absolute, certainty of the Absolute as immediate self-relation. The aspect of reformation is the discovery of the subject as privation of *this* absolute. The Absolute appears as privation within the ordered world, privation not of something, but of the Absolute as relatedness, as mediation itself. It is activity and movement that has not objects, subjectivity without bounds, yet tending towards a content,

23 "Freedom presents two aspects: the one concerns its substance and purport — its objectivity — the thing itself — [that which is performed as a free act]; the other relates to the Form of Freedom, involving the consciousness of his activity on the part of the individual; for Freedom demands that the individual recognize himself in such acts, that they should be veritably his, it being his interest that the result in question should be attained." [Hegel 2001, p. 467.]

24 cf. Lacan 2003.

towards an articulation, once it so chooses. One can easily see that this is the death-drive itself that exceeds the life of culture and nature, cuts through them as a ghost-like presence or as the undead substance of life itself.

We can now return to the beginning and see that the split between the Absolute and the ordered world, the phantasm of philosophy to uphold intelligibility, is a phantasm precisely because it wants to *situate* this subjectivity. We can also easily see that the phantasm of the course of history is the phantasm that wants to situate the emergence of this subjectivity within the realm of the ordered world. Neither the subject of the master-discourse, the subject of repression, which accepts and fights the interpellation into the ordered social world, nor the subject of perversion, which undermines this interpellation by staging scenes of jouissance, or realization, are identical with this subjectivity, this form of freedom as always already double.

Reformation and revolution are in this sense one: Reformation is the name for the fact that the agent of change has no legitimation outside of the activity of the drive itself. However, this does not mean that one realizes positively the scenes of one's jouissance, as the pervert does, nor that one questions the signifiers that orient one's drive in relation to the Other. Rather what this ultimately implies is that the subject needs to choose to enter the framework of legitimation itself and by repeating this gesture to institute the contingency of legitimation. The historical fact that the Reformation itself occluded this insight by taking its content from revelation simply clouds this insight. This is Hegel's point – in a way read against Hegel himself – about the relation between reformation and revolution. The „*Gesinnung*“²⁵ that legitimises the drive cannot be given by what it articulates, by its content, its idea. This is a misuse of the notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, après-coup. It does not simply mean that we have to see what worked, and if it works, if the signifier will have organized satisfaction - then it was true. It also means that there remains a spectral dimension of what lies unrealized, not in the sense of something yet to come nor of something that will have to be picked up and realized later. But in the sense of the dimension of subjectivity as such, of choosing freedom as form by choosing freedom as content. In a way, this notion of *Gesinnung* has to be identical with being itself, as

25 The translator of Hegel's Philosophy of History translates "*Gesinnung*" as "Disposition", but morality might be equally possible, if it did not conjure notions of being conscious. I leave it best untranslated. cf. Hegel 2001, p. 468.

the choice to enter the stage of appearance and to realize the concept. Just as the Absolute of the scholastic thus implicitly split being into two, so does this concept of subjectivity or *Gesinnung*. Hegel himself seems ambivalently reluctant in relation to this realization, when he later states that the effect of the Reformation was the production of a kind of atomistic individuality, that was nevertheless held together by the reciprocal trust built by the *Gesinnung* that all of life (and its labour) are "religious works"²⁶, a *Gesinnung* made possible by individuals who have certainty over their self-conscious determination. Subjectivity as being itself splits being into unrelatedness, chaos, drive *tout court* and determination, and this split has to be chosen by subjectivity itself in order to open the space to articulate itself. Obviously it can and must do so only within the ordered or the ordering of the world. The ordered world that is held together by the phantasm that governs it is met by the activity that orders only after it has chosen itself as activity and not determination. Here the absolute of mediation – the phantasm – meets its own truth, the absolute as drive. Reformation and revolution are thus in a sense not opposed, but rather and contrary to what we normally would think in the logic of social history, reformation is the truth of revolution, in the sense that only taking on, subjectivizing this fundamental subjectivity allows for the truth of revolution to develop beyond the phantasm of philosophy or the phantasm of the course of history. What is left to imagine is thus a question and an act: The question is related to identifying the dead-lock of the phantasm at work in order to identify the appearance of subjectivity that organizes this phantasm, yet is not localizable within it. And the act is to repeat the gesture of subjectivity itself. *Achtung vor dem Gesetz*, Immanuel Kant's subjective position that, as Alenka Zupan i has shown, supersedes the perverse pain that is involved in making myself the object of the law, can be rethought in this way.²⁷ Regard, *Achtung* for the law would not be

26 "Soon the whole attention of the inhabitants was given to labor, and the basis of their existence as a united body lay in the necessities that bind man to man, the desire of repose, the establishment of civil rights, security and freedom, and a community arising from the aggregation of individuals as atomic constituents; so that the state was merely something external for the protection of property. From the Protestant religion sprang the principle of the mutual confidence of individuals — trust in the honorable dispositions of other men; for in the Protestant Church the entire life — its activity generally — is the field for what it deems religious works. Among Catholics, on the contrary, the basis of such a confidence cannot exist; for in secular matters only force and voluntary subservience are the principles of action; and the forms which are called Constitutions are in this case only a resort of necessity, and are no protection against mistrust." [cf. Hegel 2001, p. 101f.]

27 cf. Zupančič 2011.

the *Achtung* for the positive law to be articulated, i.e. simply the regard for the subjectivity that is excluded within the given world in order to then include it. Nor is it the position of making oneself the instrument of the Law. *Achtung* for the law would be the regard for the choice of subjectivity itself as the split between freedom and determination.²⁸ The political field is then described as elaborating on the one hand the antagonism that is implied in the phantasm at work, and on the other hand the necessity to realize this real, partially and painstakingly, through transferring the impossible choice of freedom into the possible world of determination. This is a process that cannot be realized without creating a new world, a different socially ordered world, because it fundamentally bars all reference to what remains the same. The difference between this position and a position of „reformism“ is clear: No matter how big the changes, reformism must accept a dimension of the Same, of determination, that underlies its activity. It presupposes a dimension of determination and thus relatedness that is always already there, be it nature, science or capitalism or all three woven into one. The non-dialectical dialectical identity of reformation and revolution on the other hand, cannot realize either side of its own condition, without addressing this dimension of choosing freedom, and to then readdress, repeat it on the level of the material, i.e. economic, cultural and social order of the world.

8. The three impossible professions

Freud has spoken of the three impossible professions: Governing, healing, i.e. analyzing, and teaching.²⁹ If we think of these three as standing in for the three elements and powers of the living state: Law, Administration, Ethics or Morality (*Gesinnung*) of which Hegel speaks in the same lecture, we receive this schema.³⁰ Administration would stand in for the regulation of the ordered world, teaching for Ethics or *Gesinnung*. This leaves psychoanalysis for the law: psychoanalysis shows us that the law is split in two, positive law and the command to enjoy. The relation between teaching and psychoanalysis, between *Gesinnung* and law offers then a different plain for action. The law of psychoanalysis is the law of desire, the unconscious, the discourse of

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28 This would deserve further elaboration, of course. Please refer to Alenka Zupančič (2011) and my article “Accesses to the Real: Lacan, Monotheism, and Predestination” [Ensslin 2012].

29 cf. Freud 2005, p. 94.

30 Hegel 2001, p. 467f.

the Other, itself. If *Gesinnung* is indeed the realm of the realization of the privation of the absolute as the moment of unrelatedness to the law, as I have argued, i.e. the lack of symbolic objects, of guarantees and legitimation, in order to open the dimension of choosing the very realm of guarantees and legitimation as contingent, than it is clear that *Gesinnung* is not the name of the moral convictions that make up my subjective universe of beliefs and even less the ideological name for what really are simply my inclinations. In fact what this implies is that there is not even a number of different *Gesinnungen*, but only one, namely the position of privation itself as the form where freedom shows itself as double. Privation means that freedom is not given, but needs to be taken. It is freedom that chooses itself in a first step as the content, namely as the form for its content. The two sides of Hegel's determination of freedom, subjective form and positive, objective content, are thus not on the same plain. For positive law to emerge as objective freedom, freedom has to choose itself first as content, i.e. as form. The task laid out by the three impossible professions is then this: Teaching needs to open up the space to subjectivize privation as the realm of the choice of relatedness as such. Contrary to what is the phantasm of pedagogy, it is not mediating anything other than the limit of mediation within itself. It needs to identify this limit as being something other than the effect of the Same, but as the form of the Absolute itself, as the Absolute as the privation of the Absolute. This then opens the space for a reorganization of the relation to the ordered world, to the law as it is thought by psychoanalysis, to the super-ego of positive law and the super-ego of jouissance. It would imply to change the way we dream, to change the unconscious, the discourse of the Other, i.e. to traverse the phantasm. Placing philosophy in traversing it's phantasm of unity, one might say that if thinking and teaching would succeed in colluding with psychoanalysis in this way, governing or administration might have no choice but to follow.

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