Politics and the Impossible

Beyond Psychoanalysis and Deconstruction

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the recent work of Slavoj Žižek and his extensive critique of post-structuralism and deconstruction from a Lacanian perspective. In this context, it examines Žižek's provocative approach to questions of social reality, ideology and nationalism, and explores the potential of such an approach for an analysis of crucial themes in British political culture. In addition, the paper investigates the nature of the encounter between psychoanalysis and deconstruction - and especially where explicit referral is made to the terrain of politics - with a view to breaking the apparent deadlock that has emerged. Through the development of a post-marxist critique, it is argued that an alternative perspective can be formulated which combines the insights of both psychoanalysis and deconstruction and, at the same time, is able to transcend the limitations of each.

In recent years the Lacanian school of thought has produced a number of highly original and provocative works which have drawn on psychoanalysis in order to shed light on a number of issues which are of central concern to contemporary social and political theory. From questions of ideology and nationalism to the idea of reality itself these works have convincingly identified the paradoxical forces of 'the Real' which cannot be fully represented but which inexhaustibly drive the processes of representation as such.

In contrast to many perspectives that tend to identify Lacan as yet another acolyte of 'post-modern' theory, writers like Žižek and Copjec are concerned to emphasise a fundamental distinction between Lacan and the more 'conventional' positions of post-structuralism and deconstructive theory. In very broad terms, if post-modern theory tends to stress de-centredness, the plural and the contextual, psychoanalytic theory is far more concerned with the 'universal' and 'transcendental' dimensions which underlie, and are constant in, all realities. In opposition to the historicism of thinkers like Foucault, for example, Copjec affirms that there are basic

and persistent forces of desire which can be identified within a general Lacanian, and anti-historicist, 'order of the real' (1994). However, this does not amount to a return to some new form of objectivism. On the contrary, according to these writers, psychoanalytic theory is even more radical in its critique of objectivism and takes the whole debate a stage further.

Beyond the familiar anti-essentialist claims of post-modern thought, for example, plurality is rather conceived as *radical* plurality insofar as it can be referred to an ultimate lack. Thus, for Žižek, plurality is a 'multitude of responses to the same impossible-real kernel' (1989: 4). Paradoxically, contingency is an essential condition in which the possible grows out of a transcendental impossibility. It is because the symbolic, or discursive, order can never fully master its object that we have an essential plurality written into the structure of reality itself.

Similarly, the subject is not simply a 'decentred self' or historical identity. It is not the classical subject of Foucault that aspires to an aesthetic and particularistic form of self-invention and self-mastery against universalist orthodoxy. For Lacan the situation is far more critical. Far from containing any positivity or consistency of its own the subject persists as a fundamental lack or void which can never be fully mastered in any Foucauldian sense. And here a crucial Lacanian distinction is made between subject and subjectivation (identification with subject-positions).[1] While subjectivation depends upon its articulation within a signifying structure, the subject persists as an ultimate lack within that structure; a lack which can never be fully signified and which means that an unrepresentable condition of trauma lodges at the heart of every identity (the eternal 'who am I?').

In contrast to Althusser, then, the subject is precisely that which *cannot* be interpellated; or, as Žižek puts it, the subject 'is the name of the void which cannot be filled out with subjectivation' (1990, p.254). Indeed the subject may be regarded as the unbearable cipher of being which all forms of interpellation and identification attempt to prevent from 'emerging' in all its effects of lack and dislocation. Identification, therefore, is ultimately a 'delusional' matter of concealing the fact that we live under the sign of erasure (which is why the Lacanian mark for the subject is $), and of eluding the encounter with our own immanent negation. It is in this respect that Žižek writes 'the stake of the entire process of subjectivation, of assuming different subject-positions, is ultimately to enable us to avoid this traumatic

experience (of self negation and blockage)' (1990, p.253). Thus new forms of subjectivity are always possible, not because of any post-modern playfulness or existential theatricality, but because of the universal and primal impossibility of interpellating the subject.[2]

Thus, according to Žižek, the mistake of post-structuralism is to focus too heavily on the contingent constructions of meaning in a significatory network and to overlook the underlying and universal persistence of the Real - the unrepresentable and the impossible - which cannot be given any meaning within such a network. In particular, post-structuralism overlooks the transcendental forces of trauma and enjoyment which drive the symbolic but which can never be fully captured by it. There is therefore no simple playfulness or irony in the significatory process. Rather we are doomed to be permanent raiders of the lost signifiers - to attempt to suture what is ultimately unsuturable - and thereby complete the circuit of enjoyment and bring an end to the quest of representation. And in this sense we might say that what the Lacanian perspective identifies is an ultimate 'psychosis' at work - which is constitutive of existence - in which the various constructions of reality will always be a signifier short of a full representation.

Focusing on the work of Žižek, this paper examines the consequences of the Lacanian approach for a new understanding of ideology and reality. It then moves to a consideration of the 'theft of enjoyment' thesis in the analysis of nationalism and to explore the insights here in relation to Britain. Finally the paper will present certain criticisms with a view to supplementing the Lacan-Žižekian perspective. Two main points are made. First that Žižek tends to draw too strong a distinction between his perspective and that of Derridean deconstruction and thereby does not allow for a more positive interplay and cross-fertilisation. The second, and more important, point is that when Žižek refers to the terrain of the political there appears to be a tendency towards an 'excess' of (Hegelian-dialectical) theorisation and a consequent down-playing of historico-discursive possibilities and the potential for more radical forms of hegemonic intervention and resistance. In this context, the paper argues that it becomes possible to move beyond the usual deadlock of psychoanalysis and deconstruction in a way that combines the insights of both traditions.

The Real, Ideology and (virtual) Reality

In Lacanian thought the concept of the Real is crucial. According to Žižek the Real constitutes 'a substantial hard kernel that precedes and resists symbolisation and, simultaneously, it designates the left-over, which is posited or 'produced' by symbolisation itself' (1993: 36). The Real precedes symbolisation in the sense that any symbolic order must be carved out of a bewildering array of possibilities that would overturn/negate that order. What we call 'objectivity', therefore, is always a symbolic order, which is constituted against the threat of infinite otherness (the Real). At the same time, in attempting to establish affirming limits against otherness, the symbolic order also produces its other, which returns in the Real to distort that order (e.g. the paranoid concern with infidelity in the construction of chastity).

Moreover the Real is not simply an external threat (in a spatial sense) but crucially irrupts within the symbolic itself (e.g. Freudian slips, failures in communication, etc.). The Oklahoma bombing is a case in point. And here perhaps we could say that there were two types of 'explosion': one symbolic, the other Real. The first type was seen to be the consequence of an external threat (Islamic terrorism) and to some extent was 'anticipated' insofar as it exploded in a 'place' already made for it: the symbolic construction of threatened America. However later revelations, that the bombing had been carried out by a member of the right-wing gun lobby, sent out much deeper shockwaves. The source of this trauma was not only that such an atrocity could be carried out by a fellow American but one who, to some extent, was the 'product' of a certain logic of middle Americanism: the historical freedom and democratic right to bear arms and defend oneself (etc.). This is the point at which, borrowing a phrase from Marx, the Real irrupts within the symbolic as 'the unreason of reason itself'.

Thus although symbolisation is a process which attempts to structure and organise the Real it can never fully achieve this. As Žižek puts it, 'the Real is the rock upon which every attempt at symbolisation stumbles' (1989: 169). The failure of symbolisation is a point at which the Real is experienced as an unrepresentable traumatic event. The 'function' of symbolisation, therefore, is to work ceaselessly to prevent the horrifying condition of lack/trauma in the Real from emerging. At the same time the Real is also constitutive of reality as 'the lack around which the

symbolic order is structured' (1989: 170). In this sense, the Real is both the primal condition of possibility and impossibility for all objectivity.[3]

On these grounds a crucial Lacanian formulation is that reality 'cannot reproduce itself without (the) so-called ideological mystification' (1989: 28). Reality, in fact, is always an ideological construction that provides a (perishable) screen against the distorting and traumatising effects of the Real. As Žižek explains:

'Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel...The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel' (1989: 45)

What ideology offers is the symbolic construction of reality itself, as the ultimate fantasy, against the traumatic effects of an eternally corrosive Real. Reality, therefore, is always a 'virtual' take on the Real; a virtuality that is haunted by an essential impotence: an incapacity to complete, to find the missing signifiers and deliver us from the Real.[4] At the same time, if reality is haunted by impotency it also produces the fantasy of a successful exorcism. This may be seen at the point of social antagonism whereby a concrete identity comes to 'embody' the very lack and immanent impossibility of the Real itself.

Žižek illustrates this argument in relation to anti-Semitism and the ideological construction of 'the Jew'. In Nazi discourse the Jew comes to embody the fundamental blockage which prevents society from establishing itself as a fully integrated whole: the fantasy 'but for the Jews we would have social harmony and the riches we deserve.' Thus the Jew constitutes 'a point at which social negativity as such assumes positive existence' (1989: 127). In this way the universal experience of social antagonism - and the traumatic and ontological failure of symbolisation - is projected onto, and is constitutive of, the particular identity of 'Jew':

'Society is not prevented from achieving its full identity because of Jews: it is prevented by its own antagonistic nature, by its own immanent blockage, and it 'projects' this internal negativity into the figure of the 'Jew'. In other words, what is excluded from the symbolic (from the frame of the corporatist socio-symbolic order) returns in the Real as a paranoid construction of the 'Jew'' (1989: 127).

The fact that 'Jews' could not be integrated into the Nazi community was symptomatic of the transcendental condition of the impossibility of the full realisation of Identity: the fantasy of subjugating the Real and mastering history within a transparent symbolic order. Or as Žižek puts it, 'Society does not exist; and the Jew is its symptom' (1989: 125).

Jouissance Park
Theft, Enjoyment and Fear of Dinosaurs

In every attempt to command the social terrain - to create an antagonism-free new order - various culprits are identified and made responsible for the original loss, or theft, of the fantastical object: Society, Harmony, Salvation, etc. Indeed the very construction(s) of the social might be understood as a never-ending attempt to solve the original 'crime': to identify who has possession of the lost/stolen objects that would enable the full realisation/representation of 'us'.

In this connection the mark of ideology is not that it reflects, or conceals, something more solid - economic interests, human nature, etc. - but, on the contrary, that it attempts to conceal an existential void and the traumatic knowledge that it cannot be filled out or fully represented. More especially, ideology subsists in the fantasy of suturing the unsuturable by providing straw enemies - 'fictional' embodiments of a transcendental lack - which 'if only they could be eliminated' would enable the realisation of the holistic dream.[5] The Lacanian perspective on ideology, therefore, is one that identifies its tautological character.[6] As Žižek puts it, 'the real goal (of ideology) is the consistency of the ideological attitude itself' (1989: 84). In this way, ideology provides a fantastical solidity against the distorting presence of the Real. At the same time, Žižek argues that (apropos of Kant) ideology may be regarded as a sublime object insofar as it is through ideology itself that the very impossibility of a full representation of the Real is also experienced.

However, if ideology reveals any 'substance' at work it might be said to be the *jouissance*, or enjoyment, of tautology. This idea is elaborated by Žižek in respect to the constitution of nationhood:

'The element which holds together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship toward a Thing, toward enjoyment incarnated.... If we are asked how we can recognise the presence of this Thing, the only consistent answer is that the Thing is present in that elusive entity called our 'way of life'. All we can do is enumerate disconnected fragments of the way our community organises its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiation ceremonies, in short, all the details by which is made visible the unique way a community organises its enjoyment' (1993: 201).

The Nation as a *jouissance*-Thing cannot finally be explained or represented within nationalist discourse. The latter, however, constantly alludes to the Thing - underlines its existence - and 'promises' its full realisation. The paradoxical qualities of the Thing may be illustrated with Terry Gilliam's film *Time Bandits*. Here the protagonists are lured to an infernal game show with the promise of 'the most fantastic object in the world'. This object, of course, is never revealed. However, each mundane substitute - cooker, refrigerator, microwave, etc. - only serves to underline its existence and to drive the desire for it. Similarly the narrative of *Pulp Fiction* is ultimately constructed around a lost/stolen object inside a case which must be retrieved and returned by Vincent and Jules. This object cannot be seen, it is only alluded to in the reflective glow of the protagonists' faces. Thus, this 'object' - without any substantiality - becomes the very illumination/reflection of the possessive desire itself.

The Thing, therefore, may be regarded as a lost mythical object, permanently obscure, which has to be found in the Real and which drives the symbolic-fantasy process to secure its impossible representation. To this effect, the Thing is located at a point at which the meaning(s) of the nationalist discourse collapses in upon itself - and thereby shows its tautological character - and, so to speak, reveals the surplus enjoyment in the act of inscription itself (i.e. the sense of national duty, honour, belonging, etc.).

In this regard, Žižek is critical of the perspective of deconstruction and its attempt to 'dissolve every substantial identity into a network of non-substantial, differential relations' (1989: 72). In respect to the nation, for example, Žižek argues that such an emphasis 'overlooks the remainder of some real, non-discursive kernel of

enjoyment which must be present for the Nation qua discursive entity-effect to achieve its ontological consistency' (1993: 202).

Taking up the argument of Jacques-Alain Miller (1985), Žižek reminds us that it is the defensive posture taken in regard to the Thing which is at the root of racism and national antagonisms:

'What is at stake in ethnic tensions is always the possession of the National Thing. We always impute to the 'other' an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret perverse enjoyment. In short what really bothers us about the 'other' is the peculiar way he organises his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the 'excess' that pertains to this way: the smell of 'their' food, 'their' noisy songs and dances, 'their' attitude to work. To the racist, the 'other' is either a workaholic stealing our jobs or an idler living on our labour.... The basic paradox is that our Thing is conceived as something inaccessible to the other and at the same time threatened by him' (1993: 202-03).

The 'other', who can never be like 'us' and is permanently excluded from sharing our Thing, nevertheless wants to steal our special stuff: to dilute, or in Thatcher's words, to 'swamp' It. The central paradox is that '(w)hat we conceal by imputing to the Other the theft of enjoyment is the traumatic fact that we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us' (1993: 203).

The threat by the other is not simply that she presumes to raid our *jouissance*-Thing, but also that the very existence of the other's enjoyment perturbs and fascinates us.[7] In particular, it is the sexual enjoyment of the other which is most worrying and fascinating. On the one hand, this manifests itself in the fear/allure of abandoning oneself (e.g. racial identity, sexual identity, social responsibility, etc.) to the mysterious enjoyment of the other - the well known themes of potent blacks, fornicating Jews, exotic Orientals, over-sexed lesbians and gays (etc.). At another level this manifests itself in the fear of the reproductive capacities of the other and their 'demographic time-bomb' (Catholics, Moslems, Blacks, Palestinians, etc.).

Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* is instructive. In the film Richard Attenborough's showman has re-animated dinosaurs from their state of fossilisation to place them in the ultimate theme park (the symbolic). And then one dark night the dinosaurs break out (the return of the Real). The revelatory horror, however, is that despite all the best available technological expertise and methods in controlling sexual

reproduction, the dinosaurs - as embodiments of the wild untameable *jouissance* of nature - find a way to reproduce themselves independently of 'us'. This presents a much deeper threat against which the universal prototypical (white) family is constituted as the guardians of 'our' enjoyment. The paradoxical message of the film might be: 'not only are dinosaurs extinct, you can't even trust them!' And this, of course, is homologous with numerous racist sentiments of the type: 'not only are blacks inferior, they threaten the dissolution of our entire way of life.'

It is this paranoia in the attempt to regulate/suppress the 'surplus' enjoyment of the (reproducing) other which drives ethnic antagonisms and is simultaneously fuelled by it. In one of its more extreme forms, it is revealed in the systematic rape of Moslem women in ex-Yugoslavia. Not only does this rape take away the woman's dignity and her sense of herself (see R.Salecl, 1994) it also involves a more general theft of the sexual/reproductive enjoyment of the Moslem community as such. Rape in this sense becomes an intrusion into, and defilement of, the very 'source' of the other's enjoyment (i.e. rape as pillage): 'how can they enjoy themselves after this?' This calculation is an annihilation beyond rape/death: a shattering of a community's enjoyment so that it cannot re-make itself.

However, on this last point we would argue that Žižek has not paid sufficient attention to the way in which national communities are not only defensive in relation to their Thing but are also active in attempting to colonise/consume the secret treasure, or *agalma*, of the other. In this regard we might say that the Thing is not only a tautological distillation of metastatic enjoyment,[8] it also makes a gesture to the universal (revealing a constant interplay between the particular and the universal). The manifestations of the Thing are paradoxically evangelical: 'our civilisation is a universal good, but you can never fully imitate or be fully part of it'. The Thing, therefore, also involves a kind of directive to bear witness, to go forth and colonise by providing 'us' with a superior 'passport'. This passport from the Thing ('I'm an American!') has not only functioned as a literal licence to explore, discover, convert and colonise but is also evident in the contemporary explosion of 'cultural tourism' - the consumption of what is of real/authentic value in the various (ancient/ecological/thematic) regions of the world even though this may be 'hidden' from, or 'unappreciated' by, the inhabitants themselves (our Thing bestows sophistication, knowledge, sensibility, etc.). The other cannot penetrate/consume our

Thing because they have inferior, or 'literal', passports. Indeed, many black people in Britain have experienced the frustration of not possessing the real/magical passport behind the British passport (they are frequently asked to produce their passports precisely because 'we know they don't possess the real passport'). Indeed, under the terms of the British Nationality Act (and various pieces of subsequent legislation), we have the official determination of peripheral forms of belonging - lower levels of 'Britishness' - in which 'fake' passports are solemnly issued to people from the former colonies. The idea of a British passport that has the built-in proviso of 'stay put' or 'stay elsewhere' is, of course, rich with Kafkean absurdity.

An early example of symbolic colonisation can be found in the well-known tale of Rumpelstiltskin. In this tale we have the figure of an excluded other - a dwarf - who is able to spin gold out of straw for an aspiring princess (in this sense the dwarf may be considered to represent immigrant labour). However, in exchange for this service the princess must give up her first-born child to him. Immediately we see the threat posed by the dwarf's surplus enjoyment - what does he want with the child? What is his desire? (This is the Lacanian *Che vuoi?*) - which again insinuates itself in the domain of sexuality/reproduction. In the nick of time, however, the princess discovers his real name - the hidden signifier which is the source of his power and enjoyment: his essential *jouissance*-Thing - and the threat of the desirous other is vanquished as the dwarf, in an act of symbolic castration, pulls off his leg in rage and disappears into the distance.

What we see in the tale, therefore, is a process of colonisation by re-presenting the other in a way, which becomes acceptable to 'us' (i.e. devoid of threat/challenge). This, of course, is the shamanism at the root of racist name-calling: identifying the inferior reality of 'their' forms of enjoyment. Representation, in this sense, may be seen as a form of symbolic 'castration' in attempting to dissolve the power of the other (and, more generally, the power of the Real: i.e. to 'castrate' the original 'castration' of the Real itself). In this way, the other is reduced to an ontological description, devoid of the power of metaphor and unable to describe 'us'.[9]

The racist paradox, however, is that we must be constantly vigilant against the impotency and the inferiority of the other. This again is illustrated in *Jurassic Park*, and much of the horror genre, where fossilisation (acceptable representation) is, in fact, a dormant menace: 'just when you thought they were a fossil they are at their

most dangerous'. What if Rumpelstiltskin returns - like Freddie Krueger - with a new secret signifier which re-animates the threat of his surplus enjoyment?

This also reveals the original 'impotence' of representation: the more it identifies the more impotent it becomes; the more it tries to establish a total representation the more it fears it has not done so (this is why totalitarian regimes tend to collapse under the weight of their own paranoia: i.e. they cannot achieve Totalitarianism and the paranoia eventually 'produces' the threat/dissent they fear most). This is the 'psychosis' within the structure of all reality: the drive to represent the unrepresentable and the impenetrable *jouissance* of the beyond of reality

The Decline of Britain
Mr Poffenheimer and the Body-Snatchers

What is missing in the more familiar debates about the 'decline of Britain' (see A.Gamble, 1981) is a consideration of its phantasmic dimension - particularly in relation to the idea of 'loss' (e.g. Empire, the industrial spirit, Britain's greatness, etc.) - and the way it has been variously 'projected' in the constitution of the nation. Here psychoanalytic theory makes an important contribution.

The themes of theft and enjoyment are clearly visible in the reactivation of British nationalism from the 1960s onwards. After the trauma of the Suez crisis, continuing economic decline and the corresponding (and unthinkable) rise of European and other nations - viz. those 'who had lost the war' (Japan and Germany), those 'who had been rescued by us' (France and Western Europe), and those 'who had not suffered like we had' (the USA) - Britain was undergoing a widespread identity crisis.

In a revealing article entitled 'Reviving Poffenheimer', *The Economist* addressed the issue of decline in the context of Britain's cultural baggage. The journal argued: 'A main reason for our recent disappointment lies in the borderland between economics and national psychology: British manufacturers, representing in this the ethos of the British people, have not put so determined an effort into selling their goods abroad as European manufacturers have done' (1960: 245)

The reason for this it argued was a kind of easy-going snobbery that was peculiarly, and forgivably, British.[10] By contrast 'foreigners', without the burden of heritage, social status and cultural sophistication were able to achieve increasing economic success (albeit of a purely quantitative kind: the idea of qualitative success would also have been unthinkable). The high achievement of foreigners, therefore, was the result of the fact that they did not possess the excess baggage of tradition or the cultural richness of Britain. Their enjoyment was totally inferior and yet at the same time - indeed because of this - it posed an enormous threat to our enjoyment (our just desserts, economic reward for national sacrifice, etc.). This paradoxical construction is given expression in Graham Greene's description of a foreign trader's dinner in Havana:

'The Germans formed a group apart, rather suitably against the West wall; they carried the superiority of the deutschmark on their features like duelling scars: national honour which had survived Belsen depended now on a rate of exchange' (1962: 170)

More recently, of course, this type of sentiment persists in the intense deliberations over the activities of the Bundesbank in the European Union and the whole issue of German reunification/expansionism. Again the Lacanian *Che vuoi?* 'what is their real agenda?'; 'can we trust them?'; 'how far will German desire/ambition go?' And, of course, underlying this is the view that Germans may be successful but they have to remain German: to bear the indelible stain of Belsen which the mighty Deutsche Mark tries to conceal (a substitute for inferior national enjoyment).

Against this background, *The Economist* characterised the parvenu threat from the international economy in terms of a fictitious stereotype called 'Mr Poffenheimer'. All richness of identity is immediately subsumed under the patronising sobriquet of Poffenheimer who is clearly foreign, pushy and (given the name root) Jewish; skilfully combining a set of equivalences between anti-Semitism and a more general anti-German/European/American xenophobia). More particularly, Poffenheimer is described as a 'go getter, an orthodox and established worshipper of the Almighty dollar, the sort of chap that better-class Britons devoutly hoped that they would not be obliged to invite to dinner.' (1960: 246).

Here again we see elements of the Rumpelstiltskin myth. Poffenheimer can make gold, and is to be admired for that, but he can never become part of 'our' community or be one of 'us'. We can fully identify him, penetrate his inferior enjoyment (material wealth, ambition, etc.) and thereby locate/steal his *Dasein*. Thus the threat he poses is (partially) dissolved in finding his 'real' name, his secret sign: he cannot be anything other than a Poffenheimer, no matter what he does.

However, *The Economist* is even more interesting in its prognosis for halting decline and rebuilding Britain:

'The need there is to mobilise the dynamic of an economic nationalism...The policy must be to produce a new race of Poffenheimers - giving to them only the honours, the royal handshakes, the social kudos which a snobbish society can bestow' (1960: 246)

Again this is a paradox. In order to protect/reproduce the enjoyment of a British way of life 'we' had to become more like Poffenheimers. This involved the production of a kind of 'double agency' which was not simply a duality but an articulated identity which would enable the British to steal the enjoyment of Poffenheimers and thereby restore 'Britishness'. And, in this regard, we see a reversal of Žižek's formulation of the infiltrating 'body-snatching' other (1989: 89). Britons, in order to preserve their way of life, would have to infiltrate the identity of Poffenheimers - to become the body snatchers (or *jouissance* thieves) themselves - in order to affirm difference. Indeed, in a campaigning role, *The Economist* launched its own project in the 1960s called 'Spies for Prosperity' - actively invoking this kind of double agency - in which journalists and businessmen were encouraged to 'spy' for Britain (steal the best ideas/techniques, etc.) in order to restore the national economy. What enables the British to do this, of course, is their magical passport from the Thing; a passport which bestows the gift of infinite mutability (to be like Poffenheimers, etc.) and infinite immutability (to bear witness as part of an inimitable theft-proof culture).[11]

If we look at the question of decline in the present conjuncture then we can see that various culprits have been identified (and sometimes combined) as responsible for the loss of Britain's 'Greatness'. In the 'two nations' discourses of Thatcherism and Majorism, for example, a whole range of figures - 'over-powerful' trade unions, 'officious Eurocrats', single mothers, 1960s 'decadence', black people, lesbians and

gays, travellers (etc.) - were made responsible for thwarting the development of 'UK II - Britain Great Again'.[12] With Blair's 'one nation' discourse, on the other hand, the attempt to embody an impossible universality around 'New Labour, New Britain' also proceeds through a set of exclusions (not least within the Labour party itself). Some of these (constitutive) exclusions are already very familiar in, for example, the stigmatising of 'single mothers' as a dependent burden on the welfare state; a state which, in turn, occupies an ambiguous position in contemporary liberal-democratic discourse.

The paradoxical quality of the welfare state is well captured in an episode from *Time Bandits* in which John Cleese's Robin Hood is concerned to re-distribute wealth to the peasants with aristocratic benediction. At the very moment of receiving, however, each peasant is summarily clobbered by one of Hood's cronies. When Hood, who is clearly puzzled by this, inquires as to whether the violence is absolutely necessary he is informed that it is and the process continues in the same way as before.

The same movement of the invisible hand between provision and punishment is clearly apparent in the system of welfare (what Tony Blair calls 'compassion with a hard edge') and in a way which hystericises/divides the subject. But this hystericisation is the result of an opposite process to the one identified in Copjec's analysis of democracy. Copjec identifies the basic paradox of liberal democracy as being one where the particularity of the individual, contained in the right to vote, is immediately annulled in the expression of that right where it is transformed into an abstract statistic (1994, p.150). To this effect, the subject of democracy is constantly 'divided between the signifiers that seek to name it (universal franchise) and the enigma that refuses to be named (individual particularity)' (1994, p.150). In welfarist discourse, by contrast, while individuals can receive benefits on the basis of universal welfare rights, in the very act of exercising those rights it is the particularity of the individual which eliminates the former as s/he is made responsible for their own circumstances ('You are an Individual', as the New Deal posters declare). Thus at the moment of recognising the universal validity of welfare recipiency this is immediately repressed as it 're-empowers' the subject through a discourse of guilt and individual responsibility. Such a discourse is deeply embedded in the inquisitorial practices of the welfare and unemployment agencies: 'are you actively looking for work?', 'what have you been doing to find work?', 'what else do you think you could do?', 'what

alternatives would you consider?' (and so on, as an equivalential series of questions whose central purpose, independently of content, is to affirm individual culpability and the authority of the gaze). In this connection the authoritarian nature of the big Other does not lie with it being a rigid orthodoxy in possession of all the answers but, on the contrary, with its critical posture in possession of all the questions [13] (see A. Bodenheimer, 1984).

The essential issue at stake is the belief in the power of the big Other as an embodiment of interrogative mastery: it's as if outside every welfare and unemployment agency there is an invisible sign which reads, 'We know that liberal-democratic-capitalism fails, but you must not believe that this is because of liberal-democratic- capitalism'. This is exemplified in the perspective of Blair on single mothers: 'We want single mothers…at least to visit a Job Centre, not just stay at home waiting for the benefit cheque every week…' (Labour Party Conference, Sept.30th, 1997). In other words, while we sympathise with the circumstances of single mothers, they must nevertheless be made to believe that this is not the fault of the system and that they are ultimately responsible. In this regard, it is indicative of a secular form of Pascalian theology, the imposition of a regime of ideological ritual (visits to job centres, etc.), designed to bring about a belief in the authority of the system and obeisance to the doctrine of individual culpability. As the object of so much attention, and so little influence, disaffected groups like single mothers are therefore caught up in a curious paradox: it is their very powerlessness, insofar as they reflect the failure of the system and symbolise its impotence, that poses such a radical threat to the authority of the big Other. And here we see an opposite paradox to that of the Lacanian phallus. While the phallus is ultimately a signifier of its own lack, with single mothers it is their very lack (of social integration) which presents an immediate challenge to the big Other.

Similarly, major questions have been raised recently about the problem of a nebulous and indefinable 'underclass' (an equivalential assortment of 'social failures' constituting an ideological unity around 'not us'). In particular, the stubborn persistence of an 'underclass' - with its mysterious, and self-reproducing, enjoyment of drugs, 'recreational crime', alternative language, 'anti-family' values (etc.) - has been made responsible for the general theft of a successful and fully integrated society. In Britain, the fear of the underclass has been recently mobilised through the

widespread image of 'dogs with attitude' (Pit-Bull Terriers, Rotweillers, etc.) roaming estates and symbolising the untameable *jouissance* of the underclass which refuses to be integrated into the socio-symbolic order and which, therefore, must be castrated. To this effect, we see how the underclass crucially performs the role of 'non-society' in order for 'society' to exist.[14]

However, it is precisely on the question of the continuous subversions and interplay *between* society and non-society, and between the hegemonic processes of filling and emptying, that the very compelling perspective of Žižek encounters certain problems of theoretical rigidity. These problems, we would argue, can be successfully overcome through the strategic development of deconstruction in the context of a post-marxist analysis.

Mission Impossible
Politics, Deconstruction and Radical Democracy

In addressing the problems of nationalist excess the perspective of Žižek appears unduly circumspect with regard to its general prognosis. In particular, this paper argues that in Žižek there exists an artificial limiting of political possibilities which can only be transcended by moving beyond 'the traumatic relationship between Derrida and Lacan' (1994: 193) and establishing a new perspective which combines the positive insights of *both* deconstruction and psychoanalysis.[15] In addition, it is argued that such a perspective must crucially be supplemented by a theory of politics and hegemony.

A useful starting point is the treatment of the idea of the sovereign and that of democracy in Žižek. Following the argument of Lefort (1988), the defining feature of democracy is taken to be that its locus of power is an 'empty place' (1989: 147). By contrast the King - which Žižek derives from Hegel - is seen to completely fill this empty place. In this way, the King is reduced to a pure functionary - as an empty signifier - whose very lack of particular content enables him to represent the totality of society: 'the State as the rational totality exists effectively only in so far as it is embodied in the inert presence of the King's body' (1989: 184). Thus a total

representation of the social is made possible through the total emptiness of the signifier (the 'idiotic body of the Monarch' as a kind of regal mannequin).

From the perspective of the theory of deconstruction, however, such a situation never obtains. In Derridean terms, there is always an element of the remainder - in which case a signifier cannot be completely empty - such that all signification is essentially 'impure' and prone to distortion through iteration.[16] In the case of the King, therefore, the concrete individual is never totally eliminated in such a representation. The historical particularity of the royal personage will always have some unique (iterable) effect, which contaminates and distorts the universality of the sovereign function.[17] Conversely, in the case of democracy, power can never be a completely empty place (even during elections). While, in the absence of the sovereign, there is certainly a process of emptying there will always be relative forms of structuration, which convey the particularity of those communities attempting to embody a democratic universality.

Thus what is absent in both Žižek and Lefort is a conception of the partial processes of emptying and filling which can never be finally resolved. In the terms of Laclau and Mouffe, we are always operating on the terrain of hegemony in which a particularity attempts to carry out the impossible task of representing a universality or fullness. By drawing on the insights of deconstruction and hegemony, therefore, an alternative perspective can be developed which opens greater possibilities for political and subversive practices than Žižek appears willing to allow. And here a different approach to the question of nationalism and radical politics presents itself.

Using the same type of argument as before, Žižek asserts that in nationalism the empty place of the Thing is filled out by the Nation (1993: 221-22). As we have seen, the notion of a completely empty place and its total occupation is a false one. Moreover, when we look at actual cases of nationalism, a far more complex picture of (undecidable) interplay and competing hegemonic representations emerges. The construction of Palestinian nationalism is a relevant example, which has been well documented by E. Said (1986). Here we see how a number of different groups - religious, secular, military, cultural (etc.) - compete (and, at times, openly conflict) with each other in the attempt to fill out the idea of Palestine. Thus the 'nation' is not simply given as a Thing of enjoyment; rather it exists as a dynamic and inherently

unstable *terrain* of political constitution (with competing forms of 'national enjoyment' and 'ways of life').

Similar problems are encountered in Žižek's thesis that the very framework of liberal democracy (in its international dimension) tends to produce nationalist closure as its 'inherent opposite' (1993: 220). In the case of Britain, for example, we can immediately see how various kinds of nationalist discourse have been articulated *within* its liberal democratic framework (see S. Hall's analysis of Thatcherism in Hall and Jacques (eds.), 1983). More generally, however, Žižek appears to overlook the extent to which the particularity of a national closure is contaminated by a universality which distorts and supersedes it - and thereby prevents (ontologically) a total representation or filling out in its own terms.[18] In this sense - and this point has been well made by Ernesto Laclau (1992) - the universal may be said to grow out of the particular. Thus, with any form of nationalism, we can see how the particularism is always linked to the universality of a set of 'rights' to self-determination, autonomy, equality (etc.) which transcends any nationalist closure. And in this regard, the latter can always subvert and modify the former, in a more radical way, through a hegemonic operation. To this effect we could say that the very deconstructability of the relationship between the particular and the universal is something which inscribes the essential possibility of a politics of doubt and transformation such that all forms of national enjoyment and ways of life can be ultimately drawn into question and modified.

From this point of view, Žižek's analysis of liberal democracy, especially with regard to its potential for radical subversion, appears rather underdeveloped. His critique of liberal democracy is elaborated in the following way: 'The problem with the liberal democracy is that a priori, for structural reasons, it cannot be universalized. Hegel said that the moment of victory of a political force is the very moment of its splitting: the triumphant liberal-democratic 'new world order' is more and more marked by a frontier separating its 'inside' from its 'outside'' (1993: 222).

Moreover, when Žižek refers to the 'liberal-democratic framework' it is clear that he actually means 'liberal-democratic capitalism' (1993: 220). For Žižek, liberal democracy is fundamentally linked to the logic of capital in a 'vicious circle of late-capitalist Spinozism' (1993: 219), which because of its exclusivist nature tends to

produce fundamentalism and nationalism. Žižek's solution (which is not very fully developed) is the following:

'The way to break out of this vicious circle is not to fight the 'irrational' nationalist particularism but to invent forms of political practice that contain a dimension of universality beyond Capital; their exemplary case today, of course, is the ecological movement' (1993: 220)

There are a number of difficulties with this perspective. A first observation is that the existence of an exclusivist frontier is not peculiar to liberal democracy. The construction of *any* political order - if it is to perform its ordering function - will always be constitutively split between its 'inside' and its 'outside', between its 'we' and its 'them'.[19]

More important, however, is Žižek's conceptualisation of liberal democracy. And here we see an opposite problem to that which we find in Rorty.[20] Whereas Rorty feels obliged to defend, *in toto*, all the 'institutions and practices of the rich North Atlantic democracies' (1983: 584), Žižek is concerned to negate/displace the liberal-democratic-capitalist totality with a genuine and inclusive universalism (e.g. the ecological movement). Both positions are unsatisfactory. The point is rather to see how the different elements - liberal, democratic, capitalism - have been put together, in an undecidable manner, as an eminently *political* construction (and not a Spinozist totality).[21] In this way it becomes possible to radicalise and extend the democratic element - as it is possible to deepen the universalist dimension of democracy that is present in a nationalist particularism - beyond its existing configuration and to establish an alternative hegemonic formation. Indeed the dangers of not fighting, and of simply disengaging from the political terrain in the hope of inventing a genuine counter-model of universality, are all too apparent in the way in which socialist internationalists failed to politically engage with the fascism of interwar Germany.[22] Thus it cannot be a question of counterposing the 'bad' and 'false' universalism of liberal democracy with the 'good' and 'true' universalism of the ecological movement (as if there were intrinsic connections here). On the contrary, it is a question of critiquing the myth of a naturalistic unity on which *both* are based and, thereby, to develop a more interventionist and radical politics of subversion and hegemonic recomposition rather than universalist displacement.

A similar kind of absolutist tendency is present in Žižek's analysis of the contemporary mutations in social and political subjectivity:

'Far from containing any kind of subversive potentials, the dispersed, plural, constructed subject hailed by post-modern theory (the subject prone to particular, inconsistent modes of enjoyment, etc.) simply designates *the form of subjectivity that corresponds to late capitalism*. Perhaps the time has come to resuscitate the Marxian insight that Capital is the ultimate power of 'deterritorialisation' which undermines every fixed social identity, and to conceive of 'late capitalism' as the epoch in which the traditional fixity of ideological positions (patriarchal authority, fixed sexual roles, etc.) becomes an obstacle to the unbridled commodification of everyday life.' (1993: 216 - original emphasis)

Now while it is certainly true that 'post-modern' forms of subjectivity are not necessarily subversive, this does not consequently mean that they necessarily do not have any subversive potential (despite his critique of the theory of interpellation, this appears to savour far too strongly of a kind of Althusserian functionalism). There can be no doubt that the logic of commodification generates a widening set of dislocations and antagonisms around which new identifications are made. But to simply reduce the latter to the former would be a mistake. Indeed if we take Žižek's own example of the ecological movement we can see that while this has been 'generated' by capitalist enterprise - pollution, the destruction of natural resources, etc. - it is, in many cases, wholly opposed to it. Thus the subversive potential of such dislocated identities subsists precisely in their undecidable character.[23] In other words there is always an unbridgeable gap between a dislocated identity and its recomposition, which is the 'source' of the political, and which allows for alternative forms of hegemonic constitution in opposition to capitalism and its logics.[24]

In general terms, therefore, we would argue that the perspective of Žižek, despite its many compelling insights, has a tendency to be unnecessarily restrictive in its conception of politics and, correspondingly, to be too absolutist in its response to the Lacanian identification of lack: there is an empty place which must be filled out by a master signifier (the King, liberal-democratic-capitalism, the ecological movement, etc.) which will codify all subsequent forms of identification. However, it is clear that between the extremes of Universality/Particularity and emptiness/fullness there are wider deconstructive possibilities for subversive and hegemonic practices. In

particular, an alternative perspective presents itself, which combines the Lacanian insight of a constitutive lack with a more positive approach to politics. Such a perspective would be one that does not simply 'tarry with the negative' but actively conjures with negativity as such.

This type of approach has been crucial to the development of the idea of 'radical democracy' as elaborated in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985). The central insight here has been the identification of two movements which are ultimately contradictory but which, at the same time, sustain the possibility of democracy through the very impossibility of any resolution. On the one hand there exists the attempt by various groups in a democratic framework to realise the fullness of society (to fill the 'empty place') through the development of a particular political project. On the other hand there is a second movement which involves the recognition that such a realisation is always impossible and that the happy hour of total fulfilment never comes. Radical democracy, therefore, subsists in this constitutive interplay: that between the (false) extremes of the total possibility/impossibility of the fullness of society there exists a plurality of partial and provisional hegemonic projects which attempt to perform the filling function.

Now this clearly goes beyond the Žižekian perspective of attempting a total concealment of the constitutive lack. The attempt by a group/individual to bring about an effect of concealment can only be seen in purely artificial and provisional terms: as a 'strategic essentialism' , which tries to constitute the impossible object. In this way, radical democracy is able to build into its 'vision' the very sense of its own incompletion and incompletability as a positive feature of its political culture.[25] Thus while radical democracy, like all political projects, is a power construct which seeks to establish some kind of closure, at the same time - and unlike other political projects - it is one which actively conjures with its impossibility and potential for transformation; in Derrida's terms, it remains alive to the promise of a democracy 'to come'.

At the same time, however, the Derridean perspective raises crucial questions about the status of this 'to come' (*à venir*) which, it is argued here, cannot be adequately answered within the terms of deconstruction itself. Throughout *Specters of Marx* Derrida speaks of this *à venir* in terms of a general obligation to be open to the other in order to sustain the emancipatory promise of an always-becoming of justice

and democracy. This markedly contrasts with Žižek where the emphasis tends to be on otherness as a focused projection of immanent loss. For Derrida, the relationship to otherness is a far more fluid one of continuous development and exchange with disquietude over existing certainties. It is in this sense that Derrida develops the logic of spectrality in terms of an essential (hauntological) undecidability between flesh and spirit (1994: 6 & 126). All being is ultimately a matter of 'trade' with a 'commerce of spectres' (1994: 8). It is precisely because there is always an undecidability between the particular embodiments of flesh and the universal possibilities of spirit transcending the latter that Derrida affirms a fundamental obligation/debt to the ghosts of the past, present and future. For Derrida the ghost invigilates the impossibility of a final closure and, at the same time, bears witness to an emancipatory promise of the future: 'If he loves justice at least, the "scholar" of the future, the "intellectual" of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other in oneself: they are always *there*, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet' (1994: 176).[26]

But here it appears that Derrida has attempted to resolve matters too swiftly and we encounter an opposite problem to that which we find in Žižek: instead of an absolutist resolution of the political terrain, in Derrida there is an implicit tendency to affirm an openness to the radical heterogeneity of the other as the 'ground' of a more progressive ethics and politics. However, as Laclau has recently pointed out (1995) there is no relationship of necessity that can be automatically derived from deconstructive premises. If deconstruction is the assertion of an ultimate undecidability then it cannot be made the source of any decision or ethico-political imperative (it is perfectly possible to be a deconstructivist and a fascist). Similarly, it cannot be a question of an obligation to be open to the heterogeneity of the other simply because s/he is different (like Hannibal Lecter). Indeed, a democratic culture - if it is to remain democratic - will always have to impose a certain closure against anti-democratic otherness.[27] Just as there is the promise of a democracy to come there is also always the threat/challenge of an opposing form of to come. While democratic transformation must undoubtedly pass through deconstruction (of the law, etc.) the latter does not guarantee the former. In this sense, deconstruction - in its affirmation of

a radical undecidability - needs to be supplemented with a political determination, which gives shape to democracy and the hegemonic constitution of its decisional framework.

Thus between Žižek and Derrida we could say that there are respective difficulties of too much and too little closure. The problem, therefore, is one of striking some kind of balance. And this returns us to the essential issue of politics: that of constructing frontiers between the 'inside' and the 'outside', and the 'we' and the 'them', of any social order.

The perspective of radical democracy, therefore, conjures differently with the arguments of Žižek and Derrida and in such a way that a positive development is effected which moves beyond the limitations of both. While radical democracy inscribes the notion of lack - and the avoidance of the Real - as constitutive of all order, this is not taken to constrain political activity to the filling of the empty place through absolutism or universalist dialectics. Wider subversive possibilities are conceived in the discursive interplay between emptying and filling and the universal and the particular. To this effect, a radical democratic approach would be one that actively developed a deconstructivist 'sensibility': i.e. a political culture that extends the principle of undecidability to wider areas of the social, and deepens the sense of responsibility to the other, beyond the legal and socio-political fixity of any order. At the same time, however, this sensibility would have to be constitutively balanced with a set of hegemonic determinations and exclusivist frontiers which would give radical democracy its historical consistency and enable it to sustain its democratic character against that which would overwhelm it.[28]

In this connection it might be said that we arrive at something approaching a *modus vivendi* with the primal sense of lack. That is to say, in the hegemonic attempts to embody an impossible fullness, lack itself may be articulated as a positive feature of an ongoing political project of attempting to realise the promise of democracy. In this manner, a positive transcendence of the psychoanalysis/deconstruction opposition is envisaged in a way which not only enlarges the scope for political engagement but which underscores the very sense of the political in social relations. Such a transcendence would be perhaps, finally, reflected in the paradoxical *jouissance* of radical democracy itself: a driving enthusiasm for its impossible mission.

<u>NOTES</u>

(1) Žižek clarifies this distinction in this way: 'if we make an abstraction, if we subtract all the richness of the different modes of subjectivation, all the fullness of experience present in the way the individuals are 'living' their subject-positions, what remains is an empty place which was filled out with this richness; this original void, this lack of symbolic structure, *is* the subject, the subject of the signifier. The *subject* is therefore to be strictly opposed to the effect of *subjectivation*: what subjectivation masks is not a pre- or trans- subjective process of writing but a lack in structure, a lack which is the subject'. (1989, p.175).

Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* is informative in this connection. Using the 'voigt-kampff' machine, Deckard interrogates Rachel at the Tyrell Corporation and tests her empathic responses. Rachel's answers are slick and sure-fire and indicate well-rounded subjectivation. The final question, however, leaves Rachel floundering in the real as she cannot find a point of identification and the machine registers a chilling wipe-out, the void of $. What is compelling about this scene is that, far from separating Rachel (and the other replicants) from 'us', it serves to underscore her human status as a being whose subjectivation is also prone to failure and the distorting effects of the real. Thus what is masked in this projection of failure onto Rachel and the replicants, is the traumatic knowledge that it is 'us' who cannot resolve the question of 'who am I?' (in an ultimate sense) or completely fill out the void of $.

(2) Thus what is missing - or indeed denied - in the post-modern celebration of 'differences', 'hybridisation', 'multiple identities', (etc.), is the deeper reality that individuals are *driven* towards identification/subjectification in order to resolve the uncertainty as to what they are for the other and to avoid falling into the traumatic real of $. Graham Taylor, a previous England football manager, illustrates the point. In an interview, after a particularly disastrous game for England in the European championship, the manager could no longer contain his sense of dislocation and frustration and ranted at the interviewer: 'I'll be whatever you want you want me to be. If you want me to be happy, I'll be happy. If you want me to be sad, I'll be sad….(and so on).' In other words, against a background of intense public scrutiny and disappointment, Taylor could no longer resolve what he was for the other ('I'll be whatever you want me to be..') and began to emerge in his condition as subject ($), the failure/breakdown of subjectivation, which resides in the traumatic 'who am I?' and to which all forms of identification, ultimately, are aimed at concealing/repressing. The same drive to resolve what the subject is for the other can be found in the repeated injunction in the song by Michael Jackson, following accusations of child abuse, of 'stop questioning me!'.

At the same time, the impossibility of finally resolving the gap between subject and subjectivation is the very condition of possibility for an ongoing history of identification and representation (the name for this gap, of course, is the political). This is why Žižek speaks of the subject as a 'constitutive void' and the 'subject of the signifier'.

(3) Again the point should be made here that 'objectivity' itself is always a symbolic order (the latter is not a secondary construction).

(4) This gives a different spin to the debates on 'virtual reality' and the emphasis on a certain 'blurring' between the domains of actuality and artificiality. For Lacan, blurring is already inscribed in the very possibility of the experience of reality as such. Actual reality is always a representation, a virtualisation of the Real, which can only make sense within a determinate, and ideologically consistent, discursive matrix. C. Norris misses the broader point, therefore, in his castigation of 'post-modern sophisticates' in regard to the Gulf War (1992). While computer-generated imagery did at times lend an air of 'un-reality' to the conflict, this does not mean, conversely, that we have a transparent access to the 'real truth'. All war is 'virtual' in the sense that its meanings, ideas of 'just-ness', 'crime', 'pity', 'humanity' (etc.) have to be represented - whether through song, epic poetry, journalism, cartoons, computer imagery (etc.). In this regard there is nothing new about virtual reality: it is as old as the symbolic order itself and its ideological promise of a rule-bound graspable reality which fits our vocabulary, desires and expectations.

(5) The issue of 'false memory syndrome' is illuminating in this connection. In Lacanian terms this syndrome might be termed 'false memory enjoyment' whereby a 'cause' is retroactively invented (the classic 'future anterior') for a set of 'symptoms'. In recent psychotherapy, for example, the subject is 'encouraged' to find a cause/culprit (e.g. parental abuse) which would 'explain' his/her symptoms of depression, eating disorders (etc.) and thereby re-organise enjoyment in the symbolic (emotional relief, focused anger, projection, etc.). Such a memory-cause assumes a tenacious phantasmic potency in filling out the subject's identity ('now at last I understand myself/now I can liberate the real me...'). For what is truly horrific is not the memory-cause itself but the possibility that it might indeed be 'false': that the subject might be left with a cause-less set of symptoms which could not be explained or domesticated in the symbolic. This is underpinned by the 'common-sense' assertion that there are only two answers to the question 'have you been abused?': 'yes' or 'I don't know'. Thus what is being posited is a kind of anti-verificationism (the impossibility of any falsification) which permanently sustains the potential for a positivistic account; which, of course, is the promise of the symbolic.

Within the terms of British conservatism we find a similar discursive operation: the various symptoms of declining economic performance, social and urban decay (etc.) are located with the generational abuses/betrayal of the 1960s.

(6) Perhaps it is appropriate here to recall Barthes' view of tautology as 'a magical act ashamed of itself' (1972:153). The universal 'work' of ideology, therefore, might be understood as the attempt to exorcise that shame through a set of linear narratives that try to conceal their circularity.

(7) For example, while this writer has no sympathy with the 'unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable', it is revealing that the ultimate objection to fox hunters is not an environmental one but that 'they enjoy it'.

(8) By metastatic, or the metastses of, enjoyment, Žižek means that the forms of enjoyment cannot be predicted according to any pre-given code or structure (as in a cancerous growth). Enjoyment has a primary, even ontological, status precisely

because it pre-exists the socio-symbolic order and always threatens the distortion and mutation of any order.

(9) Indeed what appears to be at stake in E. Said's (1994) observation of the extremely limited availability of African, Asian and Arabic literature is that 'they' might be describing 'us'

(10) This type of sentiment is present in numerous 'explanations' of Britain's 'decline'. A well-known example is M.Wiener's <u>English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit.</u>

(11) It seems as no surprise that James Bond movies (and their genre) became so popular with the arrival of the 'global village' in the 1960s. In *You Only Live Twice*, for example, Bond actually 'becomes' Japanese and yet, for all that, his Britishness shines through all the more: his passport, 007, is rather a licence to infiltrate and steal the enjoyment of the other. In a similar vein, under Thatcherism 'we' were encouraged to be more like the Germans and the Japanese in respect to industriousness and discipline. With John Major and, more recently, Tony Blair there is the familiar view that 'we' need to be in Europe in order to shape it in 'our' image.

(12) Moreover as each of these embodiments of loss have either dissolved or become unconvincing then this undoubtedly deepened the crises of Thatcherism/Majorism (i.e. the messianism of its project became eroded and re-literalised). To put it in the terms of Hegel, British Conservative discourse has very much felt the effects of 'the loss of the loss'.

(13) As the line goes in *Carry on Columbus*: 'Nobody questions the Inquisition'.

(14) It is interesting to note the paradoxes in both 'left' and 'right' wing accounts of the underclass. For C. Murray (as well as various articles by C. Murray see R. J. Hernstein and C. Murray, 1994) the underclass are a kind of genetic detritus (low IQ's, a recalcitrant propensity to crime, etc.) - i.e. that's simply the way 'they' are - and yet are treated as if they were fully responsible for their lack of integration and, therefore, should be made responsible for their original state of debt and summarily punished (withdrawal of welfare resources, etc.).

With the more 'radical' account of B. Campbell (1993), however, the urban violence of the underclass is seen to be the product of an inherent Neanderthal 'masculinity' which, on the one hand, is regarded as an undifferentiated transcendental given, but which, on the other, men *qua* men are made responsible for. In a classic fantasy of projection, therefore, the very essence of masculinity is made responsible for the loss of social harmony. There are, of course, strong overlaps here with 'political correctness'. From this perspective the classic figure of the 'white-heterosexual-male' is constitutive of the world of political difference and specificity (the plurality of the oppressed) only insofar as this figure is denied any specificity and is barred entry to this world. As Žižek puts it, in 'the very act of emptying the white-male-heterosexual position of all positive content, the PC attitude retains it as a universal form of subjectivity' (1993: 214). Thus the problem with PC is not that it is too severe but that it is not severe enough: it is prepared to consider all identities as differential/differentiated subjectivities *except* the transcendental stereotype onto

which is projected the universal sense of loss/incompletion. The one thing PC culture cannot give up, therefore, is its ritual obeisance to the totemic embodiment of loss (in Hegelian terms, what this culture fears most is 'the loss of the loss' and the subsequent dissolution of the 'cause' behind the global forms of oppression).

(15) Perhaps we could say here that there is a need to move beyond the *jouissance* sustaining the antagonism between the opposing schools.

(16) For an excellent exposition of the concept of iteration in Derrida's work see H.Staten (1985).

(17) More recently, Derrida develops this type of argument in terms of the essential undecidability between flesh and spirit (giving rise to the logic of the specter), such that *both* are necessarily and constitutively contaminated by each other. The particularity of the flesh will always involve the expression of something transcending its limitations, while the universality of spirit always requires an embodiment of address and intelligibility which distorts it. Thus the Sovereign may very well have particularistic identifications in other areas of the social: architecture for example.

(18) In this respect, Žižek appears to overstate the case when he argues that 'the recourse to nationalism emerged in order to protect us from the traumatic disorientation, from the loss of the ground under our feet, caused by the disintegration of the 'really existing socialism'' (1993: 232). While we can agree that this is certainly the background to a 'nationalist' recomposition there is not a relation of necessity here, nor does it exhaust the possibilities of hegemonic recomposition. The types of political recomposition taking place in, for example, Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics, while they clearly have a 'nationalist' dimension, are not of the same order as those taking place in ex-Yugoslavia. What is overlooked is precisely the undecidability between a dislocated structure and its recomposition through which politics - as an 'autonomous' set of practices deriving from this very constitutive impossibility - emerges.

(19) It is of course always possible to modify the historical contents of any 'we' against its 'them', but only on condition that the we/them problematic is essentially irresolvable.

(20) See my 'Post-metaphysical Culture and Politics' for an extended discussion of this.

(21) The lack of any inherent or necessary connection between (the opposing discourses of) liberalism and democracy is a point that has been made much earlier by C.B.MacPherson (1965).

(22) Fascism was conceived as merely a symptom of the inevitable collapse of capitalism that would clear the ground for universal emancipation.

(23) Here we see an opposite problem to that which we find in Marx. Instead of capitalism resolving the political terrain into a basic antagonism (proletariat/bourgeoisie), capitalism is regarded as generating a 'post-modern'

dispersal of non-antagonistic identities. Both positions are clearly unsatisfactory. See G. Daly (1999).

(24) The point should also be made that the processes of social and political fragmentation are not simply the function of a logic of capital but are more generally linked to the dislocatory effects of modernity itself. In Eastern Europe, for example, we see how new forms of political resistance were constituted around a diversity of demands for emancipatory rights which could not be secured within that model of a society conceived in terms of a universal class of producers. In this sense the idea of a 'disorganisation' is one which may be applied to ('really existing') socialism as well as capitalism. See my 'The Discursive Construction of Economic Space' (1991) for a discussion of these points.

(25) In this sense the primal lack would also be regarded as a primal gift: an opportunity to make alternative identifications which are neither pre-given nor imprisoning.

(26) At the same time, however, perhaps we could say that Derrida should be supplemented with Spielberg. For as the film *Caspar* testifies, not all ghosts are friendly.

(27) Bearing in mind that this is never a 'boundary of essence' but rather a negotiable political frontier.

(28) This does not imply a return to a model or blueprint for democracy. There is no pre-given inventory of democratic belonging. Rather in radical democracy there exists a system of rules of political encounter - organised around the articulating principles of liberty and equality for all - such that groups will develop there own demands for autonomy/emancipation but crucially within the terms of a basic 'grammar' which ensures both a universalist consistency to a democratic culture and the potential for further transformation (see C.Mouffe, 1992).

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