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Why won't the philosopher go to therapy? Psychoanalysis at the end of the world

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Abstract: For centuries, the imperative to 'change the world' has driven political and intellectual movements, each offering answers to an ill society. From the activist and innovator's call for practical solutions to the theorist and philosopher's plea for thought itself as a radical act, the uncertainty between action and interpretation has conditioned our approach to social change. But what if this very framework—the split between theory and practice—is, in essence, the obstruction? What if the impulse to solve, act, or reinterpret is symptomatic of a deeper condition that remains unexamined? Rather than offering another panacea for change, the most radical space for transformation is not found in solution-oriented practice or theoretical interpretation alone but in the space created by the separation of the Two. The gap that opens between the Two allows for a theoretical practice that I will deem as the practical systematizing of rigorous thought: the act of undergoing psychoanalysis. It is in the paradoxically isolated and connected experience of freely associating on the couch, where speech confronts its failure and contradictions come to light, that actual change may occur.

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PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY. Philosophy cannot bake bread—but it can bring us God, freedom, and immortality. Which is more practical then—philosophy or economics? — Novalis[1]

Introduction: An Ill Society

In 1888, Karl Marx's Theses on Feuerbach was posthumously released. This text consists of eleven short notes focusing on one of the great influences on Marx, the German anthropologist and philosopher Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach. Feuerbach, a student of the German idealist tradition, took what he saw as the idealist domination in philosophy at the time and inverted it into a materialist philosophy. Marx was able to interpret Feuerbach as taking God away from the heavens and bringing him down to earth. No longer an external figure in control of human life, but a projection from the human mind of our perfect ideals onto what we imagine as God.[2]

Marx took this inversion as an essential step, but did not think Feuerbach went far enough. Marx viewed Feuerbach's analysis of the human being and their relationship to God as too abstract and idealistic. Feuerbach and his troop of old materialists were unable to disengage from the realm of mere contemplation and truly enter into what Marx thought was the inevitable logic of the materialist turn: practice. Only practical engagement with the world can result in understanding and change.

Where Feuerbach saw God as a psychological or anthropological projective mechanism, Marx saw it as a social and historical one. For Feuerbach, man can never escape his nature, and therefore this limitation is projected, through imagination, onto entities of a higher kind.[3] Yet, for Marx, this turn to earth as the starting point is valuable, but it gives way to solutions for earth's tribulations that are contemplative rather than truly practical. It is not human perfection projected onto the divine but the contradiction on earth, presumably between classes, that stretches back throughout history. For Feuerbach, human self-consciousness led the way,[4] but for Marx, the division of society itself was the engine driving the species forward.

In other words, Feuerbach saw man not as made in the image of God, but God as made in the image of man. Marx, reversing this while maintaining the rejection of the heavens as

[1] Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1997), 128.
[2] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Marian Evans (London, U.K.: Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill, 1881), 1-32.
[3] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 11
[4] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 12

determinative, held that it was not human subjectivity that creates objectivity, but rather the opposite: material conditions give rise to human subjectivity. To free our subjectivity and achieve Feuerbach's point in a sense, we must put into practice our ideas to change the world. This is why Marx concludes his Theses on Feuerbach with the famous eleventh thesis stating, "Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."[5]

Through his extensive body of work, Marx's project integrated moral criticism, economic analysis, revolutionary activism, social science, and the longing for community, all while analyzing the acceptance of economic rationality and capitalist progress.[6] However, the eleventh thesis privileges revolutionary activism over the rest, allowing the enduring question to be how we interpret and respond to the insights of the rest. How do we act in the face of historic income inequality, resurgent bigotry, perpetual war, ecological devastation, and the ceaseless more? For centuries, thinkers and activists alike have grappled with the meaning of Marx's Eleventh Thesis, in which he passes the baton from philosopher to revolutionary, insisting on action over interpretation.

Before answering the above questions, it is essential to understand what exactly it means to designate a society as 'ill.' At its core, a Marxist diagnosis points to structural conditions designed to appease capital that systematically produce suffering, inequality, and disconnection. The empirical evidence supports this[7]—the widening gap between the rich and the working class, the fact that the bottom 50% of global wealth holders contribute 12% of carbon emissions while the top 10% account for nearly 50%, or that despite holding more wealth than any other nation, the U.S. harbors communities with persistent poverty rates above 20%, disproportionately affecting people of color. Not to mention the significant universal crises—genocide, homelessness, global pandemics, and the list goes on. Aside from empirical evidence, the political divide never shrinks but widens globally, where feud and violence are not outliers but the very makings of the political world. Perhaps one of the most significant indicators is the disagreement over whether the world is ill or not.

Today, we see two dominant and prevailing practical solutions that actively address an ill society. On the one hand, we have heavily tech-influenced private interests that privilege innovation and technological advancement as the cure for this illness. Opposing them are activists, often self-identified as anti-capitalists, more directly responding to Marx's call to action, who believe the solution to the universal ailment lies in opposition to the powers that

[5] Karl Marx, *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (Middlesex: Viking Penguin Inc., 1983), 158
[6] Marx, *The Portable Karl Marx*, xii.
[7] Inequality.org, n.d., https://inequality.org/

be, by putting forth a more collectivist response. The former response ensures that billions of dollars flood various industries every year, allowing them to produce products such as 'green' commodities to combat climate change, AI technology to streamline industries where human labor may not be optimal for the bottom line, or marketing campaigns that align major corporations with social justice initiatives. The latter response lacks the funds to match the scale of the former, yet it often has the manpower to enlist folks in large-scale protests, strikes, electoral political participation, and mass education.

Each response draws on a private and a public ideology, respectively, to guide its path, seemingly opposing the two. However, what aligns them is that, through their resistance to society's ills, they reveal a shared commitment to those ills. Both accept the imperative that the answer to society's ills comes from the future, as soon as the correct result, product, explanation, or class consciousness has been achieved. This allows for a shared throughline in these seemingly oppositional responses: the assumption that the problem lies in a lack of solutions. Both groups are responding to Marx's thesis (knowingly or unknowingly) as the imperative to act; there is now sufficient interpretation, and it is time to take action. Society's illness is no longer a diagnosis but a muse that inspires the production of prophetic, concrete, and profitable solutions, allowing us to conclude that the most revealing symptom of our shared malaise is not any particular atrocity nor the empirical evidence of global decline. The most telling sign of our crisis is the relentless imperative to produce solutions. We see a society in disarray, driven by our demand to create practices, innovate, and provide answers—answers that are ultimately ineffective because the opportunity to produce more solutions persists.

Despite their passion, these agents of change find themselves in a civilization that continues to deteriorate because they fail to recognize the theoretical structures that shape their efforts. Believing themselves to be free agents, unmoored from ideological constraints, they proceed as if their efforts arise from an unmediated will or from the standpoint of the end of history, where theory is no longer needed, as we have all the knowledge we will need, and it is now time to act. The activist, calling for revolution, assumes that resistance is inherently oppositional, failing to recognize that their demands are often subsumed by the logic of the system they oppose. Protest becomes a commodified spectacle, radical rhetoric is watered down, and revolutionary movements are co-opted into the machinery of reform.

The innovator, in turn, views progress as a matter of specialized solutions, blind (or joyous) to the fact that their efforts merely strengthen the logic of capital, where every crisis becomes an opportunity for market expansion. In their negligence to acknowledge the underlying theoretical canvas that authorizes the painting of their actions, they unknowingly

serve the powers they seek to disrupt. They take Marx's eleventh thesis as a commandment—"the point is to change it"—without recognizing that the impulse to act, fix, and provide solutions is a symptom of the deeper ideological condition. In this way, action becomes the very mechanism through which the status quo sustains itself, ensuring that the imperative for change never disrupts the logic that necessitates it.

Theoretical Revolutions

While Marx is well known for his calls to action, whether in *Thesis XI* or his famous proclamation at the end of *The Communist Manifesto*: "Let the ruling class tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose, but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!,"[8] there is another, subtler register in his work that reorients the very notion of a revolutionary act. In a lesser-known passage from *Capital, Volume II*, Marx offers a striking formulation: "Capitalism is abolished root and branch by the bare assumption that it is personal consumption and not enrichment that works as the compelling motive."[9] While the *Theses on Feuerbach* encourages the reader to move beyond interpretation into practice, this passage from *Capital, Volume II,* suggests that interpretation itself holds revolutionary potential. By assuming a new theoretical position (consumption, rather than enrichment, as the issue), we change the very coordinates from which we act. In other words, Marx advocates shifting the locus of revolution from physical action to the realm of thought, suggesting that radical change results not only from what we do but also from the assumptions underlying our actions. This Marx, seemingly opposed to himself, also appears when he says, "We do not anticipate the world dogmatically, but seek to find a new world through criticism of the old."[10] There is still a reliance on human action and not divine ordinance here, but the action is no longer in the realm of physical collective measures, but in contemplative criticism of the world that passes by in every moment.

Just as tech entrepreneurs and social justice activists have taken up the mantle of *Thesis XI*, philosophers and theorists have developed an oeuvre centered on the more idealist Marx. They take the insight of criticism's power as a subversive instruction in opposition to the direct call to action of *Thesis XI*. The idealist Marx aligns much more comfortably with the

[8] Marx, *The Portable Marx*, 241.
[9] Karl Marx, *Capital Volume Two*, Marxists Internet Archive, n.d., https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1885-c2/index.htm, Part One, Chapter 4.
[10] Marx, *The Portable Marx*, 93.

philosophical predecessor and teacher to himself and Feuerbach (and to whom many consider Marx the critical heir), German Philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (G.W.F.). Hegel. In 1808, Hegel issued a contemplative call to action of his own, unthinkable in today's era of constant solutions. In a letter he wrote to his friend Friedrich Philipp Immanuel Niethammer, Hegel writes that "once the realm of representation [*Vorstellung*] is revolutionized, actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] will not hold out."[11] In other words, if we change the world in theory, practice cannot hold out much longer.[12]

While Marx seemed to have moved away from his dedication to philosophical thought as an agent of change throughout his career, remnants of this subtly disruptive idea remain in his early writings, both professionally and personally. In a letter Marx wrote to his father in 1837, he professes his reading of Hegel to be an unpalatable experience, yet it nevertheless left him with a new recognition of the importance of our intellectual nature.[13]

Considered as the originator of the German Idealist movement, and the precursor to Hegel, even Immanuel Kant asserted his devotion to theory as not that which practice leaves behind, but that which practice cannot act without.[14] There is no practice not founded on a theory; we do not act from nowhere, but from a theoretical space that has been created to allow for a particular practice to move forward. The issue with bad practices is not that theory has no practical use; it is that there is not enough theory.

Masters of None

Is the solution, then, to simply produce more theory? These theoretical calls to action, the hesitance to produce a solution in favor of instead producing new thought, find their most poignant and potent effects in the work of contemporary psychoanalytic philosophers. If Marx, Hegel, and Kant teach us that theory, as the ground upon which practice rests, is the method to follow, psychoanalysis forces us to ask a more unsettling question: in what way are we to walk the ground? Here is where the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, intervenes with his necessary insights. Psychoanalytic theoretical work, building on the lineage established by German philosophers, subverts mere mobilization to reinterpret our perspectives, in the hope

[11] G.W.F. Hegel, "Hegel to Niethammer October 28, 1808," Marxists Internet Archive, 2012, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/letters/1808-10-28.htm
[12] Todd McGowan, "We Should Be Willing to Go to the End - Symposium on Slavoj Žižek (Day Two)," YouTube, August 31, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6NOaczpLbA&t=3346
[13] Karl Marx, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 15.
[14] Immanuel Kant, *Kant Political Writings*, ed. H.S. Reiss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 61.

that this theoretical activity will reshape our reality. The distance between 'interpret' and 'change' in *Thesis XI* is collapsed in psychoanalysis as an interpretation is deemed as the change agent itself. Freud, through his invention of psychoanalysis, brought to the world what he insisted was the third great narcissistic wound to humanity. The first wound was the Copernican insult: the Earth is not the center of the universe, displacing humanity from the cosmic center. The second wound was the Darwinian insult: humans are not distinct from the animal kingdom, but descended from other animals. However, the final wound, and the most devastating according to Freud, was the Freudian insult: the ego is not master in its own house.[15] This final wound, revealing that the ego is not sovereign but subject to forces beyond its control, radically destabilized faith in self-mastery. Producing solutions can no longer claim certainty in a post-Freudian world; the ego cannot know its motivations in full, and therefore a solution falls prey to this human weakness.

In this sense, the psychoanalytic act is not a retreat into speculation, simply producing theory for theory's sake, but a lived practice of theory itself, one that refuses the lure of immediate solutions and instead reckons with thought's limitations in order to enact the slow, rigorous labor of thought as transformation. Psychoanalysis not only reconfigured the structure of the human being but also reframed how we interpret history, ideology, and social life. In the decades following this discovery, Freud's thinking increasingly turned to the broader implications of psychoanalysis for civilization itself. For instance, as Freud approached the end of his life, he expressed a certain pessimism regarding the future. He cautioned that while "Future ages will bring with them new and probably unimaginably great advances in this field of civilization" and continue to foster humanity's Godlike image, this advancement cannot be untangled from the actuality "that present-day man does not feel happy in his Godlike character."[16] Not only did this serve as Freud's most pointed critique of capitalism, but it also held to the belief that humanity, even in its most significant endeavours, fails to master its own ego. This subversive and controversial theoretical stance is not simply a factory-line production of academic theory, but a possibility to reorient our very approach to society's ills.

Freud's legacy and work have been heavily debated, dismissed, mangled, and ignored throughout the 20th century by psychoanalysts, psychologists, philosophers, laypeople, and more. However, there was one psychoanalyst whose work was positioned as a *return to Freud*

[15] Sigmund Freud, *The Revised Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. Mark Solms, trans. James Strachey, Vol. 17 (Lanham, MD: Rowman &; Littlefield, 2024), 129-130. (All further citations will be referred to as RSE).
[16] Freud, RSE, Vol. 21, 84.

and subsequently integrated into the theoretical work of the aforementioned psychoanalytic philosophers: Jacques Lacan. This gesture of thinking as doing reaches one of its most radical articulations in Lacanian psychoanalysis. While Lacan, similar to Freud, leaves a complex legacy behind for psychoanalytic thinkers of all stripes, his work fits snugly into the lineage of the idealist Hegel and Marx, as well as their theoretical and political insights. Lacan proclaims that theory is not merely contemplative or abstract as it is made out to be, but theory is praxis itself.[17]

Even though activists and innovators privilege practice as the urgent and necessary reaction to an ill society, philosophers in the Lacanian lineage view working through this specific theory that privileges the ego's non-mastery as a practice in itself. They find rigorous theoretical work as the embodiment of the destruction of the theory/practice dualism and the birth of its emancipatory nature through the destruction of the split; to interpret is a revolutionary action.

To avoid providing mere solutions and continue to reproduce a society welcoming these continued solutions, Lacan, in the lineage of Freud, built a theoretical construct of the human psyche that (somewhat infamously) rejects the solely autonomous mind and brings new perspectives to what it may mean to embody a political act. As Hegel insists, this type of work does not prescribe concrete measures but requests an extreme change in perspective and is the driving force that theoretically changes the world.

Even though Lacan was first and foremost a practitioner of psychoanalytic talk therapy, the withdrawal of his work from the clinic and its reorientation alongside the product of philosophical reflection encouraged theorists to pursue an emancipatory knowledge as a gesture that renders theory a type of practice. However, for these thinkers, the intellectual drive toward self-knowledge does not aim to lead to the same mastery with which someone may proclaim a solution, but to an encounter with its impossibility; amassing knowledge serves instead to undermine the promises of mastery and masters as perpetuated by capitalism.

While approaching mastery to reveal its impossibility is not what the psychoanalytic philosopher may refer to as a solution in the same breath as the practical solution (instead, a shift in frame of reference), it is still a particular instruction in the form of a call for more thought. This philosopher of today works within the psychoanalytic conception of the human psyche, distinct from the idiomatic psyches that find homes in hard science or religious dogma,

[17] Jacques Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VIII*, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 79.

to offer a contemplative call to action, albeit a call to action nonetheless. They all have extensive bodies of work that target not only capitalism but also many facets of contemporary and historical society. Yet, the group's work, for the most part, converges around their resistance to an ill society and capital's dominance through thought. More specifically, this thought centers on an essential idea that lies at the heart of Freud's insult to humanity: an acceptance of a constitutive *negativity*.

Negativity here is not an expression of criticism nor is it any other material feature of human life, but, instead, is a structural lack; a nonappearance that marks us precisely through its missing presence. The ego that is not master of its own house shares its house with a spectre of sorts; yet this spectre is only known as what is not known to the ego. All living creatures, when compared to their lifeless counterparts, differentiate themselves by the prerogative to act. Birds, Bees, Dogs, Humans, and more choose to act, while cement, glass, fabric, and even arguably plant life cannot. The human being, though, is determined to act not simply by their intention or spoken reasoning for why they may have done something or will do something, but often acts out of a lack of knowledge for why they took action, often forcing the human being to interpret why they may have acted, why something may have happened to them, or why the world is the way it is. This unknown determination becomes the very space of negativity. One way to exemplify this is through the history of how drug and alcohol addiction has evolved. As treatment has moved away from the moral panic of drug and alcohol consumption into a medicalized model of disease,[18] society moves away from conceptualizing this affliction as a bad intentional choice to a choice that lacks full autonomy. There emerges a contradiction between our intention and an Other's intention; a certain push and pull, where, if I am pushing, an opposing force pulls me in the opposite direction.

This contradictory state of being, where what is chosen or intended does not necessarily dictate the outcome, is evident on a grand scale: political actions meant to oppose capitalism (or even those that seem apolitical) strengthen capital's dominance over the world. Pushing capital away only tends to bring it back toward us. Yet, the push is not an identifiable external force but the very negativity of human existence disrupting the intentional positivity. The contemporary psychoanalytic philosopher does not, per se, preach that negativity must be systematized and named as the disease model does. Instead, they preach that to fight the ills of the world through theoretical endeavours, rather than practical action, is not just to analyze society rigorously but to embrace what analysis has produced as central to society: negativity.

[18] William L. White, "Addiction as a Disease: Birth of a Concept," Counselor, 2000, 46-51, 73.

This particular instruction on coming to terms with negativity is not only about resisting an ill society through a retreat into thought, but also about offering an alternative to relying on saviors to produce solutions. Negativity is not something we have, but something we are with only in the mode of its absence; a kind of "with-without";[19] but a with-without that drives us to act. Science, religion, and education have attempted to qualify and quantify all that is not known about unintentional behavior, yet the psychoanalytic philosopher asks, what if there is an aspect of that behavior that is not qualifiable or quantifiable? What if the ego cannot know who is the master of its house?

Under a capitalist regime, responding to negativity by naming it with certainty—'this behavior was caused for this reason'—allows for commodified, productive outcomes. This is the logic of the solution: The problem is *this*, and the answer is *that*. Psychoanalytic logic does not dictate that the solution's logic is always incorrect, but that the enunciator and actor of the solution can never know beforehand the result of their solution with full certainty. More often than not, the solution is incorporated into the capitalist hegemonic ideology, which furthers its dominance through generations. The response to the disease model for addiction allowed for cures through purchasing injections, bottled cures, and other products promising healing qualities.[20] This is precisely why an embrace of negativity as unknown, rather than its excavation for its known-ness, is the radical, psychoanalytic, and true political act; and this can only be done at the level of thought.

The human psyche is not only what is known, but it must also include what is un-known, or rather, what is known as un-known. Negativity is not just a mystery to be solved, but something closer to a permanent cut in Being. It is the sense that something is missing, not by accident, but by structure. Rather than being a flaw to overcome, this missing piece is what gives shape to everything we are. To be human is to live with this gap, to circle around it, to feel its pull and push. And for the psychoanalytic philosopher, the task is not to fill this gap, but to face it and to begin, in thought, the difficult work of staying with what doesn't quite add up. To change the world in theory, one must change the most fundamental aspect of human life. If a theoretical framework underwrites practice, then altering the theory as opposed to the practice will affect the kinds of practices available to the world. Accordingly, altering how we encounter and relate to these unintentional determinants can change what is being determined itself.

[19] Alenka Zupančič, *What IS Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), p. 58.
[20] White, "Addiction as a Disease: Birth of a Concept."

The heart of the capitalist system lies in our relation not just to production relations between workers and capitalists, but also to the consumer and their relation to commodities, and the capitalist and their relation to their wealth. Are we truly driven by the commodity's usefulness or even pleasure, or rather are we driven by something in ourselves and the commodity that reaches us at a level not consciously thought; perhaps a certain negativity? Is the ultra-rich capitalist hoarding his/her wealth solely out of greed or, similar to the consumer, attempting to master negativity, yet in the constant failure of this endeavor, they produce more wealth in the place of their failed attempts at finality, breaking the backs of the workers carrying the load for this attempt at mastery. This is not, of course, a plea to pity the capitalist as they hoard their wealth. It is a reframing of their relation to capital, where, in centralizing the means of production in a few hands, a point is reached where their capitalist cloak becomes a fetter.

This negativity can be seen in something as simple as the purchasing of a brand-new dream car. This dream car is never the answer to the purchaser's ultimate dream but a stopgap that constantly drains itself of the dream in its realization, causing the purchase of many more 'dream' cars, allowing the dreaming to continue endlessly, and lining the pockets of the corporation's executive class. The purchase of the vehicle aims to fill this negative space, but the moment it does, the negative space shifts to ask, 'Ok, what is next?' In the same way that the consumer feeds their constant desire to purchase commodities, for personal or political reasons, the corporation is on a (doomed) pilgrimage to accumulate capital. Following the consumer, the corporation and its executive class seem to be on a never-ending quest to accumulate capital, whether justified by a greedy capitalist's belief that they deserve the money or the result of ethical concerns for a better world. It is the philosopher's job to explore the gaps in our thought that produce actions that misrecognize their own result. Commodity purchases and wealth accumulation may be justified in many ways, yet they all fail to rid us of our relation to incompleteness. Subsequently, we see CEOs amass wealth that is unthinkable to the majority of the population, individuals finding disappointment in their dream purchases, and a society that always provides the next solution before the previous one has been analyzed. In all cases, the pursuit mistakes movement for arrival, as if the act of accumulating, whether dreams or dollars, could ever close the structural gap that first animated it. This is the fundamental misrecognition of ideology: the failure of fulfillment is seen not as structural to the human condition, but as a personal shortcoming or an insufficient accumulation.

In the centering of negativity, Lacan sets the stage for the contemporary psychoanalytic philosopher who preaches the particular instruction of coming to terms with negativity as what it means to resist capital through thought. This resistance, and what merges the thought of the

various contemporary psychoanalytic philosophers, converges around a kind of grammatical element that expresses an action, occurrence, or state of being that typically serves as the predicate of a sentence: *the verb*. Instead of plugging the unknown hole of the human psyche with empty actions that only create room for more actions and not less of a need for action in the face of an ill society, the psychoanalytic philosopher recommends the theoretical act of bringing thought to its limit and finding an acceptance of negativity. In other words, and through the shared method of the verb in these thinkers' work, liberatory political action comes in the **recognition**, **embrace**, **acknowledgment**, **apprehension**, and/or **reconciliation**[21] with what is unknown. Capitalism thrives on filling the unknown or the negative aspects of the human psyche with innovative methods to consume more commodities and accumulate more capital. The psychoanalytic philosopher, then, instructs us that instead of practical solutions to combat capitalism's ills that lead to consumption and accumulation, the embrace of this theory can instead bring us to confront negativity and not flood it with solutions, but recognize its power to produce solutions only by subtracting the illusion that a final solution exists; a significant blow to capitalism's promise of Oneness through a purchase or accumulation.

To think and act psychoanalytically, then, is to inhabit Hegel's call for a theoretical change in the world and Marx's declaration that it is personal consumption that acts as capitalism's rudder. It is not that psychoanalysis offers an escape from capitalism's circuits, but that it allows us to see how those circuits are sustained by our ignorance of the negativity at their core. The capitalist who monetarily benefits from capitalism's dominance is not the sole bolster of said dominance, but rather is accompanied by the universal acceptance of capitalist ideology, or capitalist realism. This shift moves the consumer from being a victim of corporate marketing (which, of course, is not entirely untrue) to being a victim of one's own perpetual lack of knowledge about the consequences of one's actions. However, in resisting the compulsion to accumulate, to purchase, or to dictate what to do, psychoanalytic thought teaches a different kind of resistance; one founded on not prescribing solutions but questioning the role of solutions under capitalism.

Political liberation, from a psychoanalytic perspective, involves reconciling with the

[21] Todd McGowan, *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 24.; Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London, U.K.: Verso, 2014), 341.; Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 88.; Colby Chubbs and Joan Copjec, Psychoanalysis and Consequences: Joan Copjec interviewed by Colby Chubbs, other, Chiasma: A Site For Thought, 2020, 200.; Richard Boothby, *Embracing the Void: Rethinking the Origin of the Sacred* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2023), 140.; Boothby, *Embracing the Void, 142.*; Zupančič, *What IS Sex?*, 72.

contradiction between positivity and negativity, not as something to be overcome, but as something to be established as necessary. Thought, unlike action, can sustain a relation to contradiction, grasping it not as a problem to be solved but as the very condition of subjectivity. This reconciliation does not eliminate contradiction, it embraces its necessity as constitutive of our experience. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel reveals that consciousness, as it apprehends contradiction, suffers from indecisiveness between collapsing the contradiction to one side or sustaining it as a free-standing entity.[22] This theoretical project aims to bring the latter to life. Apprehending the constitutive contradiction of human life, especially as it pertains to capitalism, neither resolves nor rids us of contradiction but instead simply reveals its necessity. It is only when there is a certain tension between what is known and what is not known about action that this tension becomes apprehension. Subsequently, this apprehension then becomes a suspense for what comes next. In this moment of suspense, the psychoanalytic philosopher urges a reconciliation with suspense as opposed to the capitalist imposition to act, produce, purchase, or consume as the response to any moment of uncertainty. It is this revelation that, instead of meeting what is unknown to the human mind as a problem in need of a solution, one can encounter it as a contradictory structure of the human condition, which allows for something new to ensue.

The capitalist regime shapes subjects who cling fervently to their own dissatisfaction, continually confronting the ubiquitous promise of escape through capital accumulation or the acquisition of commodities, all while, paradoxically, capitalism strengthens its ascendancy through this promise. A psychic appeal to capitalism that remains hidden behind conscious demands for commodity satisfaction or monetary accumulation drives this lack of satisfaction and staying power, which is why the psychoanalytic philosopher proposes confronting and subsequently transforming one's relation to the unknown psychic investment.

This call for thought, as the radically necessary act, is of course not exclusive to a few thinkers, as the tradition of philosophy largely embraces thought as its lover. However, not all embraces of thought also embrace thought's limitations as the goal of the embrace. This distinction between those who love thought and those who love negativity, as what thought cannot master, marks a crucial divergence within the philosophical tradition. It is one thing to think; it is another to think through failure, finitude, or impossibility. This latter gesture, thought's self-awareness of its own limits, often gives rise to genuinely transformative

[22] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4.

potential. Capital is no longer a means to an end, but the end itself. It is here that philosophy becomes more than system or critique; it becomes an act of rebellion. Non-rebellious philosophy becomes a certain pathology, where the "absolute drive toward perfection and completeness"[23] is an illness that only finds a cure in the rejection of aversion to the imperfect and incomplete. Furthermore, to radically philosophize, one must not provide solutions but instead accept the philosopher's position as a thinker who turns their head to look back: "Only the backwards directed gaze brings us forwards, since the forwards-directed gaze leads backwards."[24]

In the preface to *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel identifies the philosopher's role by situating the philosopher not as he who can prescribe solutions, but he who peers into the past to describe a dying empire, and ideally produces change through this reinscription: "The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering."[25] Even the younger Marx saw the philosophers role as to critique: the philosopher should not be met with the task of delivering an ultimate, identifiable truth of the future, nor to point out that a particular struggle will be useless in its endeavors. Instead, the philosopher must look back and translate the past to announce why the world has been struggling, and subsequently, erase the old world in that translation.[26] However, what psychoanalytic Work makes clear in the post-Hegel world is that negativity is the condition for the Owl of Minerva ever to need to fly or for the philosopher to turn their head back. Reality is never fully graspable at the moment. By virtue of the notion that there is always an unknown element in understanding, and especially in prescribing solutions, we are compelled to try to make sense of it retroactively.

Enjoying Our Theory

However, if we are to argue, following the footsteps left behind by Hegel, Marx, Freud, Lacan, and the contemporary psychoanalytic philosophers, that we must reorient ourselves to ourselves as there are still possibilities for new theoretical perspectives, and furthermore, peering into the past can itself become generative (changing the world in theory will ensure practice must change as well) do we risk contradicting the very theoretical project on which these theorists emerged? The demand for relentless theoretical work is no longer distinct from

[23] Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 131.
[24] Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 131.
[25] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and S.W. Dyde, *Philosophy of Right* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2005), xxi.
[26] Marx, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 95-96.

the practice that is chastised but has become the practice itself. The theorists, in their lifelong dedication to theory over practice, have produced another solution in response to our existing dystopia, akin to the solutions proposed by activists and innovators.

If the practice flank of the theory-practice split is presented to us in the gift box of empty actions, the theoretical response to an ill society is given to us through the plethora of empty verbs. In the philosopher's call for *recognition, embrace, acknowledgment, apprehension*, and/or **reconciliation** of negativity, these verbs become a call to action that is presented less as a response to the rejection of practical solutions and more in line with the Marx of *Thesis XI*.

The issue with these verbs is not in their content but in their presentation. If we are to accept that liberation must assume the theoretical action of embracing negativity, there lies a much larger problem with this call to action: are we able to 'think' or 'act' differently once presented with the insights of new analysis? In other words, do we combat this negative force simply by stating 'I will embrace you, not reject you'? The new heights that the content of theoretical work brings us to are stifled as we fall back to the ground when faced with its delivery method, i.e., in books, lectures, media, and then accepting the knowledge through willpower. Is simply immersing ourselves in philosophy enough? Philosophy, a discipline perpetually thirsting for more knowledge, sustains itself through perpetual inquiry in the same way capitalism sustains itself through perpetual commodity dissatisfaction. Philosophy can reveal that theorizing is a state of practice, but in not providing a method to enact this realization, it transforms its insight into empty verbs. Of course, if it did provide tangible action, we would find ourselves back where we started, trapped in the realm of practice and solutions, the very framework the theorist seeks to move beyond. Even though theoretical reflection claims to influence practice by stepping back and gaining new perspectives on existing practices, it has merely produced (and reproduced) more knowledge about our relationship to why we may be repeating and perpetuating societal misery, rather than this knowledge changing our practical trajectory.

In some sense, it is simpler to excuse someone who claims that more theoretical work is unnecessary than an expert who admits theory's great value, yet maintains its value within a teaching practice and ensures its separation from its inherent practical applications. What is needed to avoid either of these fates is a link between theory and practice. A link that does not collapse one into the other, ignore one for the other, or blindly claim a cohesiveness of the Two while maintaining a dedication to one over the other.[27] What exactly is this link?

[27] Kant, *Political Writings*, p. 62.

To identify this very unique link between theory and practice, and how we are to use the insights of theory in a way that does not simply result in the accumulation of knowledge perpetuating capitalism's logic of endless accumulation, we must turn to Freud's 1910 paper titled *Wild Psychoanalysis*. In this short paper, Freud details his interaction with a recent divorcée who comes to see him only after visiting a previous doctor due to an unpleasant onset of anxiety following her divorce. This first doctor informs the woman (from his believed understanding of psychoanalysis) that she suffers from a lack of sexual satisfaction, and the doctor ensures a cure if she takes back her husband, finds a new lover, or sexually satisfies herself. While appalled by these options and unwilling to take this advice, the woman comes to Freud to complain about this predicament.

Freud's concern is not so much with the content of the advice given as with the integrity of psychoanalysis. He expresses his disbelief that anyone could misinterpret and transmit psychoanalytic knowledge in the manner exhibited by the woman's previous clinician. Freud briefly addresses this first doctor's misunderstanding of sex in psychoanalysis—his failure to grasp the relationship sex maintains with the psyche as a conflictual pairing of libido and repression. However, Freud's real point of disdain lies in the transmission of knowledge as a cure.

Freud argues that one cannot resolve psychological distress through simple instruction or education. He maintains that some individuals are inherently resistant to satisfaction, not because they lack knowledge but because their inner conflicts prevent it. 'Inner conflicts' represents the simplest conceptualization of what 'negativity' could mean. This antagonism suggests the need for a more profound form of libidinal transformation that knowledge transmission and accumulation cannot provide; a shift not only in conscious understanding but also in the underlying structures of a negative determinant that lays its claim external to our knowledge. Without such a change, we remain entangled in the circle of knowledge for knowledge's sake, continuously investing in the same forms of solution that sustain our own dissatisfaction. Uncovering unknown causalities in a didactic fashion does not guarantee healing but instead produces an intellectual understanding. Ignoring more profound psychological work in favor of intellectual understanding is as futile as distributing food menus in a famine.

Similar to the first doctor, philosophers offer us fresh perspectives to contemplate complex issues, but are not capable, through their work, of providing a serious encounter with the unknown yet profound inner conflicts that are central to their teaching. We can even interpolate the prominent metaphor about the "menu cards" from *Wild Psychoanalysis* to reflect

our developing understanding:

> If knowledge about the unconscious were as important for the patient as people inexperienced in psychoanalysis imagine, listening to lectures or reading books would be enough to cure him. Such measures, however, have as much influence on the symptoms of nervous illness as [distributing copies of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*] in a time of [global catastrophe].[28]

Even Lacan is explicit that "it is not on the basis of an accumulation of facts that light can shine forth."[29] Freud takes this a step further by asserting that directly transmitting information to the patient could intensify the conflict and exacerbate their troubles. Here, both Freud and Lacan identify why the theoretical response is doomed to fail. By acquiring more knowledge, we can fetishize expertise and continue down the same path despite the availability of a cure. Psychoanalytically speaking, we gain knowledge and then continue to dream. The capitalist counterpart would be our ability to engage with rigorous thought and go on to "consume [or accumulate] with impunity,"[30] furthering the longevity of the capitalist system.

We don't only dream when we are asleep; we wake up to continue dreaming. This endless dreaming implicates the famous statement attributed to both Slavoj Žižek and Fredric Jameson: It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. This statement is misguided because capitalism's endurance can be attributed to the imperative to continually imagine the end of capitalism as we know it through new practices, and now, new knowledge on resistance. The only reason we are able to discuss ideas of 'late capitalism' is because of capitalism's strength to sustain itself for however long we support its dominance. Late capitalism never signifies an end to come, but instead signifies its enduring presence.

The activist follows the capitalist logic of production for production's sake by engaging in protests, worker strikes, and language policing to avoid harm. Even when these efforts succeed, capitalism adapts and continues to persist. In the absence of a compelling alternative, capitalism can easily rebrand itself through softer reforms or harsher controls, all while remaining the dominant structure shaping our political, economic, and libidinal imagination.

The crux of the matter is that the theorist is intricately entangled with this critique. Their willingness to invest in our walking daydream is revealed through their calls to action. The pedagogical transmission of content allows us to revel in our understanding (to, again, be absolutely clear, their content is of immense significance; this critique is explicitly aimed at the

[28] Freud, RSE, Vol. 11, 217.
[29] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 321.
[30] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*: Is There No Alternative? (London, UK: Zero Books, 2009), 12.

presentation). Our understanding is met with the limits of understanding, even and especially if we inhabit understanding in the abandoning of change.

Since the discovery of the ego's lack of complete autonomy and the fundamental limit that our conscious knowledge runs up against as a result—the negative side of knowledge—philosophers have stripped these psychoanalytic discoveries of their clinical relevance and re-homed them in theory. The psychoanalytic philosopher puts forth a radically different response to contemporary crises and an ill society than the activist or innovator. However, their very success is in the failure to produce the change they preach. We find the theorists' work successful in, and only in, materializing the insight without falling victim to empty actions and verbs. It becomes incumbent upon the theoretical reader to develop a practice for engaging with radical thought. This is not to say that the theoretical reader must find practical solutions, but rather that they are responsible for applying theoretical insight (specifically the insight theorized by the psychoanalytic philosopher) in new and meaningful ways. The political assignment the theorist asks of us is one of "recognizing," "apprehending," and "embracing" negativity. This assignment sheds light on the contradictions in the emancipatory work of intellectuals. The verb acts as a call to action, but any call to action will contradict the philosopher's role. However, the identity of the philosopher is not nearly as important as the opportunity of said philosopher to bridge the gap between theory and practice without collapsing one into the other.

The question persists: what is the theoretical practice that does not fall victim to empty actions or empty verbs and brings to life the call to embrace negativity? The answer to this question is realized *not as psychoanalytic theoretical work but the Work of undergoing a clinical psychoanalysis*. In the psychoanalytic clinic, where psychoanalysis is no longer just a theoretical lens for viewing a decaying society but a practice of encountering the conflicts of thought, a situation emerges in which, through the encounter with negativity in thought, a genuine change becomes possible. Transformation does not come from, as Marx envisioned, a "bare assumption." If so, psychoanalysis would have no staying power. The psychoanalyst's couch, instead, becomes the ultimate site where theory and practice merge as a practical solution that incorporates philosophical reflection. More precisely, a practice that centers the theoretical importance of negativity in thought. The psychoanalyst's couch is where radical thought becomes lived experience. To change the world, in theory, we must change ourselves, in theory. Yet this transformation is not about finding definitive answers, but about learning to think differently, tolerating uncertainty, and poetically redescribing our lives, not through knowledge accumulation, but as a result of working through the inner conflicts that block

change, resulting in a romanticized view of the world anew. The task is not simply to theorize change or to act blindly but to clinically occupy the space where thought and action intersect: to embody not theory nor practice but the very split that separates the Two. Serendipitously, the split that separates theory and practice happens to resemble the elongated couch on which the psychoanalytic patient may lie to actively reflect on their consciousness, encompassing both what they know and what remains unknown to them.

Just as the psychoanalytic couch becomes the site where inner conflict and transformation unfold, the same logic of negativity extends outward, illuminating how the world itself is bound together through a shared confrontation with destruction and the potential for renewal. The looming threat of destruction interconnects the world we currently inhabit. Only through the possibility of annihilation does a cohesive community come into existence. People are united not by a genuine global community, but by the common threat of their own disappearance. The totality does not actually exist, but it is conditioned on its own extinction.[31] However, with the introduction of a universal and singular human reliance on negativity, we establish a new bond to connect the global community. Instead of sharing a fear for the future, we may all be able to share a future that has not yet been written. In other words, negativity remains out of knowledge's reach yet is precisely what knowledge relies on to keep reaching. However, this call for a communal embrace of negativity is reliant on the transformative process that modifies existing reality to correct a human error, which we can name *Work*.[32] Work embodies the capacity to negate the given and bring about real change, exemplified by how technological creation can turn a poetic or imaginative 'error' into a concrete truth. Clinical psychoanalytic Work addresses and rectifies the structural errors inherent in the discourse of a capitalist society, the contemporary activist and innovator, and the psychoanalytic philosopher, effectively transforming them into a new formation of truth. This is not necessarily a project that requires courage to act, but rather a project that demands a genuine shift in our perspectives towards both society at large and ourselves. This change in perspective can only come from a relentless reckoning with thought. A relentless reckoning with thought arises from a practice that fosters the conditions for this to occur.

[31] Alenka Zupančič, "THE APOCALYPSE IS (STILL) DISSAPOINTING," Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique, 2017.
[32] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction To The Reading Of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 17.

This, Too, Fails

Before concluding by entering the clinic, some potential criticisms must be addressed. Firstly, undergoing psychoanalysis is not an inexpensive endeavour. If there is something liberating in the act of seeing a psychoanalyst, potentially at a frequency higher than once a week, one must have the means to do so. Thus, it is a massive obstacle for psychoanalysis to become accessible. However, part of what makes psychoanalysis a liberatory act in the face of capitalist domination is the relation it takes towards capital. What can be freeing is giving up financial gain for the chance to speak freely, perhaps for the first time. There are those who can afford but choose not to, precisely because they hold onto their capital like a prized possession they cannot part with. But to combat capital, the combatant must combat their attachment to capital, making the payment itself a psychic issue. For those who are not choosing not to afford analysis but cannot afford it (and there are many), then accessibility must become a political issue. If the psychoanalytic project I have proposed is credible, then the political project may need to be one of making psychoanalytic therapy more accessible to all. It cannot only be the well-to-do who can throw away capital for speech, but all of us.

Secondly, does this project amount to some sort of re-education camp? In other words, is there a forced psychoanalytic teaching that is being proposed through the clinic that inputs suffering individuals and outputs activists? This project has no goal in the sense of an object expecting to be achieved. It instead has an aim: to transform the relation with what we do not know. To undergo analysis is not to be taught what to think, but to confront the contradictions within our own thinking. If there is a transformation, it is not into a predefined subject but into a subject more capable of bearing the uncertainties of desire, language, enjoyment, and the social bond. It can be argued that a subject who elides predefined meaning is predefined all the same. I will accept this self-critique precisely because, if it is the case that there is no subject that cannot be approached as predetermined, then it becomes even more urgent to define the subject as never fully definable. In other words, for psychoanalysis, there can never be a predefined first principle, except one that is retroactively assigned meaning in the place of its absence. Therefore, the task is not to escape determination entirely, but to insist on a form of subjectivity that resists closure, even as it is inevitably marked by structure. The clinic is not a factory for activists but a space where something of the subject can emerge in its singularity, sometimes politicized, sometimes not, but always with the potential for new political thought. If this leads to a greater engagement with the world, it is not because it was prescribed, but because it was spoken. Psychoanalysis does not fall in line with worldviews; it does not feed

reality with more meaning but allows the human being the very space to produce a transformative act.[33]

Thirdly, in this polemic against knowledge transmission as a cure, am I not merely transmitting knowledge by writing this? To put it another way, what is my role in all of this? The very irony of this text is that it also comes up against the limits of knowledge. However, as Lacan often states throughout his career, his primary goal is to create analysts. And so, the primary aim of this text is to create *analysands*. My demand is clear: there is something oppositional to capital in undergoing a psychoanalysis. Yet, in every clear demand, there is an unclear desire. And it is perhaps in the confrontation with this unclear desire that both the political and clinical stakes of psychoanalysis ultimately reside. The secret of my demand and of this text is that neither holds any concrete answers. The space left for thought—the space of negativity that results from the impossibility for me to provide a clear and cut solution—should be precisely where the reader proceeds forward. My suggestion is for this procession to lead into a clinical office.

Lastly, the radical act of stepping back into thought as opposed to stepping forward into action is not a popularly held position, as stepping back in the face of global atrocity is easily mistaken as apathetic. However, contrary to popular belief, this alternative response is not one of apathy or a fear of action; critiquing the idea of providing a solution itself need not be a disillusioning experience. This seemingly depressive realization should leave us damned to forever fail. The fear of political quietism is a valid rejection of theory for action. Yet, in a time where the imperative is to act—provide solutions, provide answers, provide something—saying no is a revolutionary act simply for the reason that it is not what capitalism asks of us. This project is not one of staying quiet to do nothing, though. In fact, it is surely not a project of staying quiet in general, but instead of speaking wildly and freely. If capitalism encourages individual and private pleasures, then we must accept it to show capitalism how far it can go until it finds its own limitation. To speak within the confines of a clinical room to one person may seem like a private act, one where the private and public separate completely. But in this speech of one, we find that whether facing the analyst or not, it is always aimed at the Other, or at the world at large. The private act of speaking, when done with a psychoanalyst, can bring someone to the very universal element that is shared by all: the negative space that separates one from the Other. Finding a space off the capitalist grid from where one can challenge capitalism is unthinkable. However, the psychoanalytic clinic becomes the exact space in the

[33] Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan* (London, U.K.: Verso, 2015), 83.

very center of capitalism where the system's rupture becomes perceptible and inhabitable. It is not a space off the capitalist grid, but the very site where capitalism must rely on to continue; where new thought creation and free association are encouraged.

Welcome to the Clinic

Within the clinic, Lacan offers a mechanism through which psychoanalytic practice orients itself toward the subject's encounter with negativity, rather than toward the capitalist imperative of producing knowledge, skills, or self-improvement. This mechanism is the *interior eight* schema.[34] This is a structure that analysts can choose to take up to avoid the narcissistic deliverance of the therapeutic cure (allowing the psychoanalyst to produce a patient who sees themselves from the vantage point of where the analyst would like them to be seen providing the analyst with the fantasy of Oneness or completion) and allow the patient the space to meet themselves in a brand new way.

The interior eight is a Mobius strip-like schema that charts the path analysis can, and ideally, should, take. The patient enters analysis with a demand, seeking the analyst's help to alleviate their suffering. Whether they voice this demand explicitly or arrive with a deep understanding of psychoanalysis, their very presence in the analytic room signifies a demand for a cure. On the interior eight, demand is on a counterclockwise trajectory leading to a central point of transference. Transference, often conceived as the unconscious revival of earlier relational patterns that are projected onto the therapist, is perhaps better understood as the repetition not of a specific relation, but of the constitutive human condition of lack that is constantly desiring the one who knows to collapse lack into completion, Oneness, wholeness. This is the same promise capitalism is fueled by: the final knowledge, commodity, wealth will complete the lacking individual. This is what brings the patient into the analyst's office in the first place: they have reckoned with the unknown in their life. Whether a symptom, a traumatic event, or any other misfortune encountered in the ongoing process of life, the patient is in need of someone to translate the untranslatable, to turn negative nonsense into positivity that makes sense. Once transference is established (the moment the patient demands help, a cure, etc.) and a rapport has been built, the schema presents the analyst with two options: either to provide a remedy for the negativity at hand or to guide the patient in facing their own negativity.

[34] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, N.Y, Cambridge, U.K.: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 155-156, 271.

The former option leads to *identification* on the schema. This choice, which is taken by many therapists and analysts alike, involves providing knowledge from the perspective of the expert who knows what is best for the patient. This may give the patient a satisfactory answer, but their ego-ideal, the symbolic space from which they see themselves and the world from, will be attached to the person of the analyst. However, the analyst, if they so choose, can guide the patient toward *desire* (the latter choice), rather than identification (the former). This is not a step-by-step guide with correct and incorrect decisions to make at each moment with a patient. There will be failures where the patient will not take the route of desire but instead follow the path of identification. However, these failures are necessary and, in a sense, inherent to the process of analysis. The patient who desires to identify with the analyst's knowledge expects to be told the hidden meanings behind their dreams, slips, symptoms, and other behaviors. The analyst, however, does not have to provide this knowledge and can instead guide the patient toward identifying with their desire, which resides in the space of negativity and is always in conflict with demand.

In Chapter 4 of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud encounters a young woman who comes to him for analysis but aims to disprove his theory that every dream serves as a vehicle for wish fulfillment. This young woman describes her two nephews, Karl and Otto. Otto, the older nephew, had a very close relationship with the young woman. She had a great deal of love for Karl, but admitted she had a bit more affection for Otto. Otto, unfortunately, passes away, leaving the young woman devastated. One night, she dreams that Karl is lying in a little coffin, just like Otto did, with his arms folded, and no life left in him. The young woman, having heard of Freud's dream theory, angrily accosts Freud, asking him where the wish could be in this.

Before Freud's interpretation, the young woman, after describing her dream, says to Freud, "Now tell me, what can that mean? You know me. Am I such a wicked person that I can wish my sister to lose the one child she still has? Or does the dream mean that I would rather Karl were dead than Otto, whom I was so much fonder of?" Freud responds by "[assuring] her that this last interpretation was out of the question. And after reflecting a little I was able to give her the correct interpretation of the dream, which she afterwards confirmed."[35]

He tells her that because she had taken so much joy in seeing a certain man who showed up after Otto's death, her wish was to see this man again, and this is why she dreamt of Karl's death. While still a morbid thought, Freud manages to wipe away much of the morbidity of the

[35] Freud, RSE, Vol. 4, 135.

wish and clean it up, seemingly for the betterment of the young woman's ego. Ironically, in this interpretation, we may even find aspects of Victorian-era misogyny. Freud tried to avoid a radical yet horrific and singular truth by interpreting the woman's desires as simply for a man.

Freud's failure here is not in the wrong interpretation but in an interpretation of certainty. The woman brought forth her own interpretation that she denied—"does the dream mean that I would rather Karl were dead than Otto, whom I was so much fonder of?" This is not to say that her words speak the truth of the meaning behind the dream, but rather the truth of negativity. If Freud had asked her to explore her own relation to what she did not and could not know, instead of filling the blank for her, she may have found her own associations and her own meaning to this horrifying dream. She may have even had to reckon with the truth that perhaps no one knows why she dreamt this, giving her the room to create meaning. By requesting her to take the route of identification, she now sees herself through the eyes of Freud. This denial of negativity allows the woman to continue ignoring not only the human condition (one that will continue to return as nonsense) but also the larger societal role negativity plays. In other words, dreams of identity completion persist on the tail of capital accumulation.

The ultimate fantasy is that the patient is a non-lacking being, and identity is a defense against this very lack. The lack in the patient is a defense against the lack in the Other. Thus, to believe in a synthesis in the Other—the analyst who can provide the demanded truth in a dream—is to believe in a synthesis of the self. On the interior eight, the turn towards identification is not the identification of the imaginary register, which fulfills the specular image, but the identification of the symbolic register, the place from which the patient would like to be seen. A patient who comes to an analyst for help can leave as seen through the analyst's eyes.

The interior eight model enables the analyst to help the patient become an artist rather than a craftsman. The piece of art is not a utility to be used but a divine entity to be spoken about. Yet, in speech, unlike the craftsman's chair, which is meant to be used, there can never be a thought that fully encapsulates the art piece's divinity, allowing it to be discussed forever. The analyst who turns the patient's truth into a craft to be delivered back to the patient for use is simply slapping a label on truth. A label can serve others in their need to make sense of you, and oneself in the need to make sense of oneself, yet it has no authority to end the task of doing either.

This choice between returning truth back to the patient as a crafted object or allowing it to exist as inexhaustible negativity implicates the analyst's position. It is, of course, foolish to assume that countertransference is non-existent. However, the difference that can be stated

is that when there is a genuine desire for negativity (something the analyst can foster through their own analysis), the analyst's desire is not aimed at the patient recognizing the correct interpretation or receiving the unconscious as an object, but rather at the patient's own desire as inexhaustible. And the pathway to the patient's desire is only available in the very words they choose, or don't choose, to say. This is precisely what Lacan means when he takes his position on love as giving what one does not have. The analyst provides the patient with their desire through the analyst's lack of knowledge. In rejecting the patient's desire for narcissistic love, the analyst opens up the space for a new, Real love.

The analyst's desire, which remains unknown, becomes the patient's desire for the unknown. At this moment, when the Two make the turn from transference to desire instead of identification, a bond is formed that showcases a universal truth of humanity: we are not bonded by our identity groups, by our class status, by our shared demands; we are bonded by our shared relation to what we all do not know—our shared negativity.

Conclusion

Clinically, all this amounts to ensuring that the work of psychoanalysis remains within the analytic discourse. The analytic discourse, unlike the discourse of the master, the university, or the hysteric, consists of a psychoanalyst playing the role of negativity, never confirming not denying what may be right or wrong for the patient but simply encouraging them to speak, occasionally intervening in order to punctuate the moments where negativity show its head: what is un-articulatable, moments of great affect, what is contradictory, and what is unthinkable. The patient produces more speech through this process, and is forced to reckon with their speech without the ability to turn back to the analyst for recognition (in the master's discourse, the master confirms or denies all production).

Discourses can change at any time during an analysis. But in this space of changing discourses, where negativity finds its flow, there always exists the analyst's discourse. A discourse of fluidity that rests on the knowledge that knowledge itself flounders, and in response, can only produce. The move into the analyst's discourse enables the harnessing of the production as a new shared ideal, rather than simply ignoring it, limiting it, or transforming it into profit (or identity) for the master. In our positivising of the negativity without a signifier of mastery, the psychoanalytic process chooses to bring to life the speech of nonsense that serves no purpose. That is precisely the dagger to capitalist ideology, which always requires production to mean something, to be in the service of profit, to produce for production's sake.

The psychoanalytic clinic is one of the few places where nonsense is not rejected but brought into the light as the truth of the human condition.

What any analyst does by taking up the analytic discourse is to choose desire and choose a very particular human condition that does not reject negativity but instead embraces it. By selecting the analytic discourse, the analyst chooses the very discourse that allows for choice itself. Subjectivity can only result from a discourse that will enable it, and discourse can only produce human beings in their current existence if the discourse is incomplete. Between free choice and structural imposition, it is not one or the other, but rather a combination of both.

In the single preservation of action over thought or thought over action, we fail to recognize the liberating potential of the cut that separates the Two. Rather than siding with one or endeavoring to synthesize both, the real question lies in the cut itself. It is not a stalemate to be solved, but the very space where something fresh becomes possible. Nowhere is this more evident than in the psychoanalytic clinic, where the subject enters precisely at the point of this collapse, suspended between knowing and acting, between understanding and transformation. If society is ill, the response is not to cure by mustering up immediate action nor to retreat into theory, but to procure a movement that erupts from the failure of both. In this gap, theory and practice are dialectically related, allowing something new to emerge.

Psychoanalytic work, as developed by Freud and Lacan, is not necessarily a guide for therapeutic practice, nor is it a philosophical text for societal analysis. This Work has been crafted as a narrative of truth about the ever-elusive human psyche. From that creation, we have developed both a clinical practice for the individual and a theoretical analysis of society. Psychoanalytic theory and practice, therefore, are interventions into distinct spaces based on this psychic narrative; the former is an intervention into societal analysis through philosophical reflection, and the latter, an intervention into the suffering of an individual through talk therapy. Both interventions share a common foundation, which serves as the central tenet of this psychoanalytic work: the constructed theoretical narrative of a human being and human psyche that does not center on mastery or autonomy, but instead on heteronomy through the constant presence of negativity, or an unknown element that knowledge constantly encounters. The philosopher lays claim to analysis and critique of society as inherently the producer of societal change, and the psychoanalyst is the producer of individual change. However, if society is ill, and both theory and practice center their work on the same construction of a new kind of understanding concerning the human psyche, then perhaps the antidote to an ill society does not result from societal analysis but instead the disruptive act of the individual's encounter with their own psyche. Treating philosophy as the sole bearer of the labor of working with this

psychic creation is a gross misidentification of the sweeping radicality of the psychoanalytic clinic. The clinic, not the philosopher's books and lectures, emerges as the new site of societal change through a change in what society is composed of: the singular individual.

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