

THE ILL WHICH REMAINS WITHIN:
EXPLORING THE LIMITS OF HOPE AS A PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS FOR EDUCATION

JUSTIN GORDON-DEACON

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCATION

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

June 2017

© Justin Gordon-Deacon, 2017

Abstract

Being particularly at home in critical theories of education, hope is invoked widely by theorists to render bearable perspectives of the politics and practices of education which leave the reader with little reason for optimism in education. Despite much knowledge from critical pedagogues and theorists on the threat of neoliberal ideologies to systems and subjects of education, one is hard-pressed to find cited research that would suggest educationists ought to be anything but hopeful in their teaching. In this paper, I use the theoretical tools of psychoanalysis as interpreted by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek to critically examine how hope, rather than freeing us from the present, traps us in a version of the future. Working with Freirean theories of subjectivity in education, I argue that hope holds us captive to our potential future enjoyment, and that it is thinking on and bearing the miseries of the present that can offer greater freedom for the subject.

Dedication

To my mentor, friend, and former teacher Joy Martyr-Andre: for her unshakable belief in the power of teaching over education, truth over bullshit, and me over myself.

Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis has been a two-year-long, carnivalesque marathon of personal tragedies and transformations through a valley of the academically obscure, intellectually dubious, and climatically humid. Finishing this project forced me to confront myself with both the consequences of my desires and the choices I made in perpetually futile and only sometimes fulfilling pursuit of them. In consciously and begrudgingly shackling myself to the completion of this paper I have finally begun to learn how to discern what I need from what I used to want, and to face how I have shaped my life in pursuit of the latter. I have learned two critical lessons from my research: I am deeply grateful to my friends, family, colleagues, and mentors for not allowing me to abandon this paper to the landfill of projects I have started but never finished, and that I will *always* regret not having done the coursework-only option.

Thank you to my many parents, Chris, Mark, Merritt, and Sharon for their enduring and international love, comfort, wisdom, and support. Thank you for always asking if I was finished yet, insisting that I do so, and for so often asking me to explain my ideas, even though they had no clue what the hell I was talking about (sparing me the humiliation that, most of the time, neither did I). I love and miss you all.

Thank you to my friends and queer family Dave, Tara, Alex, Fariya, (and everyone else I drunkenly held hostage at parties to rant about the contemporary importance of psychoanalysis and communism) you will never know how much your friendship means and has meant to me. Our broken brains and shared neuroses brought us together and I know that our ongoing project of aging without a shred of grace or dignity will hold us together—because if you can't love yourself how in the hell you gonna love somebody else?! Can I get an amen up in here?! I love all of you and I miss most of you.

Thank you to my supervisor Mario for always being the first to hear my ideas out loud and choosing to support them (and me) anyway. Thank you also to: The Faculty of Education at York (especially to Jen) and to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council for their generous funding of this project and of me moving out of my parents' house.

Finally, thank you to my friend and former partner Tyler Carson. Your pathological dedication to getting what you want is the reason this project exists at all. Our relationship, in its various forms, has shaped me in ways my beleaguered therapist and I will spend the next decade trying to understand; I am me because of you. I hope you find what you have been looking for in work and in love in New Jersey and beyond—ideally beyond.

Also, a special thank you to Slavoj Žižek, without whose work my project would collapse into less than nothing. May you never read this. May we never meet.

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	v
Introduction: Hope Is A Waking Dream	1
Chapter One: The Cogito of the Oppressed	
I. Hope and Subjectivity in Freire	8
II. The Impossible Subject	9
III. The Subject's Secret Sadness	12
Chapter Two: On Dutiful Jouissance	
I. (Enjoy) Your Self	18
II. Hope and the Political Unconscious	24
III. The Society of Enjoyment and a Society of Hope	28
Chapter Three: Indifference and Repetition	
I. Half Truths and Whole Lies	33
II. Eyes Forward, Looking Back	41
III. Hope in the Future Tense	44
IV. Present Effects of a Future Child	48
V. Help Me, Subjective Destitution; You're My Only Hope	54
Conclusion: Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here	64
Bibliography	67

Introduction: Hope Is a Waking Dream

In his analytical work on philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek, Charles Wells writes that “every universe of meaning eventually encounters an obstacle that is somehow simultaneously an irrevocable lack (a lost object, a missing signifier) and an unavoidable excess (an excessive attachment, a meaningless signifier that insists and repeats).”¹ In the universe of meaning structuring the philosophy of education, it is hope, the seemingly ubiquitous social and political affect, that serves as the excessive and lacking signifier which insists and repeats. Being particularly at home in critical/leftist theories of education, hope is invoked widely by philosophers of education to render bearable critical perspectives of the politics and practices of education which might otherwise leave the reader with a deep suspicion that there is little reason for optimism in education. Despite a wealth of knowledge from critical pedagogues and Marxist theorists on the threat of neoliberal capital to contemporary systems, theories, and subjects of education, one is hard-pressed to find widely (or even narrowly) cited research that would suggest educationists ought to be anything but hopeful in (or about) their teaching or their political advocacy.

As a young queer educator, my own relationship to the meanings of hope, truth, and education have changed significantly over the past decade. Over this time, my understandings of these concepts have shifted from one of belief in the promises of the enlightenment, that education can serve as a vanguard of transformative and liberatory knowledge (I even have a large tattoo permanently testifying to this belief), to a position of great doubt in the power of education or even knowledge itself to change the minds of more than a few individual subjects at a time, let alone usher in a utopian social form through mass enlightenment. Perhaps the time in

¹ Wells, Charles H. *The subject of liberation: Žižek, politics, psychoanalysis*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, p.3

my life that has most precipitated this project was during my year of initial teacher education. One of the few students in my program with a background in critical theory, I was confused by my classmates optimistic reactions to course readings that suggested, with slightly more nuance (and a much lighter tone), that, in theory, teaching was an absurd and futile endeavour, harshly limited in practice, operating in a neoliberal cultural and political climate that reinforced both this abstract theoretical futility and practical absurdity, with diminishing material conditions and outcomes for students and educators. While we spoke of the technocratic and capitalist values that have always shaped teaching and learning to the detriment of the enlightenment values that attracted so many of us to the profession, my classmates and I passionately emulated the model of (unconsciously cynical) teaching set out by critical philosophers of education from Giroux to hooks: they know very well what they are doing but they are nonetheless doing it.

Renowned educational theorist Paulo Freire argued that hope must dominate all our political and educational praxis as it is an “ontological necessity.”² Freire’s subjective hope is comprised of both an element of lack (in that the subject of politics and education is born incomplete and must seek completion through politics and education) and of excess (that the subject must be perpetually aware of and driven by futurity of their hope, that the object of their hopes is in excess of their images of it³). For Freire, true hope, unlike naive hope or simple optimism, is one of the spoils of enduringly critical psycho-social and political self-reflection and action—much like freedom from English tyranny was eventually won through the enlightened affective passions and skill in combat of the True Scotsmen of old. Despair is the spectre that haunts Freire’s writing on the subject of hope; for Freire despair is both a cause and consequence of political inertia, a trap, which is produced by and serves the political status quo.

² Jacobs, Dale. "What's Hope Got to Do With It? Toward a Theory of Hope and Pedagogy." *JAC* 24, no. 4 (2012): 783-802. Accessed December 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20866715>

³ As I will discuss, this object is both non-existent and impossible to imagine (but not to contemplate).

In my project, it is the subject's desire and the process by which those desires are formed which will be the cornerstone of my understanding of hope. I will argue that educational theory's relationship to hope, and the hopeful subject's relation to their desires, has become a relationship of what Lauren Berlant calls 'cruel optimism'. For Berlant, cruel optimism is "the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object *in advance* of its loss."⁴ While hope is meant to be the affective drive of progressive political and educational projects "where cruel optimism operates, the very vitalizing or animating potency of an object or scene of desire contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of attachment in the first place."⁵ We remain attached to our hopes, and to hope itself, not because we cannot live without the objects of our desires, but because, more than anything, we fear what we will become, what we will cease to be, if we lose our desire for those objects.

To understand the role of hope in educational theory we need a theoretical framework capable of dealing with the complexities of both psychological desire and its socio-symbolic meaning. In *The Excessive Subject*, Molly Anne Rothenberg bemoans that psychoanalysis, despite being repudiated by eminent poststructuralist and postmodern scholars and laypeople alike, continues to represent "the most interesting discourse available to the humanities" for understanding the ontology of the subject.⁶ Throughout my project I will be analogously following Wells' line of inquiry regarding theories of liberation and meaning amongst contemporary leftists: if educators are fighting for hope, what is the hope they are fighting for and who, or what, is the subject that hopes?⁷

⁴ Berlant, Lauren. "Cruel Optimism" in *The affect theory reader*. Edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, p.94

⁵ *Ibid.*, 94

⁶ Rothenberg, Molly Anne. *The excessive subject: a new theory of social change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010, p.

11

⁷ Wells, 1.

In their works, both Rothenberg and Wells work through theories put forward by Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek. As one reads further into the body of this project it will quickly become obvious that I privilege Žižek’s work over, perhaps, more academically rigorous and reputable scholars of education. A pragmatic reason for Žižek’s theoretical priority here is that he represents pre-eminence in contemporary heterodox interpretations of the works of Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Jacques Lacan (a disciple of both Freud and, less directly, Marx). Žižek’s work encompasses and draws upon large swaths of continental philosophy but refuses strict intra/interdisciplinary boundaries. Žižek has dedicated his scholarly life to enmeshing the theories of the professional disciplines (and personal intellectual passions), which Sigmund Freud called impossible: healing, governing, and educating. Most importantly, it is Žižek who has done the critical work of translating the Freudian subject, as understood by Lacan, into the language of socio-political theory, interpretation, and the symbolic world outside the limited purview of psychoanalytic theorizing of life within the psychoanalytic clinic—a task long ago initiated by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, continued in *The Future of an Illusion*, and epitomized in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.⁸ A more personal reason for Žižek’s priority in my work is my admiration for his well-earned reputation as crassly intellectual iconoclast whose critiques of well-established psychoanalytic and political theories invoke a defensiveness in postmodern scholars that reveals almost as much about the limits of postmodern philosophy as it hopes to hide.

The intimate link between lack, excess, subjectivity, and hope in education demands a unique kind of analysis. Wells argues that it is the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek which is best suited to aid us in understanding the “singular[ly] motive force” of “our striving to retrieve our lost objects, to be rid of our excessive attachments or at least come to

⁸ 1913 and 1930 respectively.

grips with these impossibilities that move us.”⁹ It is psychoanalysis more so than other modes of critical analysis that provokes us, as subjects of our unconscious minds, with the fundamentally unsettling nature of our desires. Sigmund Freud, through both Lacan and Žižek, requires that we consider “that when it seems most obvious to us what we want that we are at our most blind, ideological and manipulated.”¹⁰ It is psychoanalysis above other theories of mind and behaviour which can help us confront our subjective unconscious desires and help us understand how they take shape not only in the form of objects of hope, but in the very form of hope itself.

The impossible disciplines (healing, governing, and educating) are so identified because their object of study is the subject and its universe of meaning, the embodied manifestation of the realm of symbolic relations. All three impossible professions take as axiomatic a subject of (un)consciousness, a subject who can learn, know, and reflect, but can also repress what they learn and experience into their unconscious. Studying the individual subject alone would be enough to qualify disciplines of the symbolic as impossible, but it is *intersubjectivity*, the dynamics of the relationship between subjects (and objects) which lends the most weight to the impossibility of the helping professions. It is within the psycho-social relations studied and engaged in by the impossible professions, relations necessarily mediated by ordered systems of meaning, that hope finds its natural home.

In her work on subjectivity and social change Rothenberg argues that, as a being in/of language, the subject cannot be bound by simple understandings of external and immanent causes.¹¹ Here I am following Žižek in his belief that the ontological perspective of both Marxism and Freud-Lacanian psychoanalysis serve as superior frameworks for analysing social relations. In discussing the nature of the Freudian dreamwork, Žižek argues that it is a fetishistic

⁹ Wells, 3.

¹⁰ Wells, 2.

¹¹ Rothenberg, 3.

error to focus on an analysis of the content of the dream; the true secret of the dream, writes Žižek, is not a symbolic interpretation of the sign-objects within the dream, but in the form of the dream itself—why did the subject’s unconscious desire take the form of a dream?¹² This psychoanalytic perspective will frame my discussion of hope in this project; in turning to psychoanalysis, I seek to question not so much the specific objects of hope desired by the subject of the impossible professions, but why the subject’s unconscious desires, anxieties, pleasures, and so on, have taken the form of a hope.

Deborah Britzman¹³ and K. Daniel Cho have identified the central importance of language, pedagogy, and subjectivity as three aspects of education and psychoanalysis which make them “intertwined, coterminous.”¹⁴ The unique involvement of language and knowledge in these two disciplines introduces a subject of both which renders the “Cartesian quest for certainty” impossible.¹⁵ Our only access to the psychic world of others is through the dual filter of language and experience; by our nature, humans must mediate their interactions symbolically, lacking as we are a direct psychic connection to the inner world of others.

The subjective position of the teacher and the student—analogous to the relationship between the analyst and the analysand in a clinical setting—is a vexing one where knowledge of the self and the other are intimately linked despite the inability of the subject to fully assess their own knowledge or the knowledge of others. In education and psychoanalysis, to think is not to be and to be is not necessarily to think oneself as such. Our inability to know what others want from us creates anxiety and opens a space for the subject to imagine what it is the other wants. In my project, I will argue that it is in this gap between (mis)recognition of our own desires and our

¹² Žižek, Slavoj. *The sublime object of ideology*. London: Verso, 1989, p.4

¹³ Britzman, Deborah P. *Freud and education*. New York: Routledge, 2011, p.3

¹⁴ Cho, K. Daniel. *Psychopedagogy: Freud, Lacan, and the psychoanalytic theory of education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.3

¹⁵ Cooper xiii

(mis)recognition of the desires of the Other that neoliberal ideology gains access to our desires and shapes them into a fantasy-form for maintaining capitalism's ideological hegemony: hope.

It is my intention that, in seeking to understand the psycho-social causes and effects of hope in education that this project answer Žižek's call for thinkers to develop theoretical "short circuits" in dominant or hegemonic concepts that "interrupt the smooth functioning of a network of meaning" and, in doing so, "[bring] to light its 'unthought', its disavowed presuppositions and consequences."¹⁶ Identifying the primacy of hope in education is not itself novel; one need only read text in (critical) educational theory on the political or the cultural to surmise the strength of hope's grip on educational philosophy. My goal is, however, that "the readers should not simply have learned something new: the point is, rather, to make [them] aware of another—disturbing—side of something [they] knew all the time."¹⁷

In chapter one I discuss the form and function of subjectivity in some of the works of educational and political theorist Paulo Freire to understand their intimate connection to his project of hope. In this chapter my focus is on the limitations of Freire's use of the Cartesian subject as a framework for understanding the subject in relation to hope and the political. In chapter two I outline Jacques Lacan's theory of subjectivity and discuss how both the subject and their hopes find shape and substance only through immersion in ideological discourses. In this chapter I emphasise the importance of *jouissance* (enjoyment) in Lacan's work and how it can help us understand how hope paradoxically propels and limits the subject. In chapter three I detail some of the limitations of the enlightenment project as represented in both political and educational philosophy and discuss possible alternatives to education projects oriented toward future hopes rather than present problems.

¹⁶ Žižek, Slavoj. *The parallax view*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006, p.ix

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ix

Chapter One: The Cogito of the Oppressed

I. Hope and Subjectivity in Freire

“There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope.”
-Paulo Freire¹⁸

Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire is perhaps the best example of a theorist of education who both understood the subjective nature of education and desired mass popular education as a vehicle for radical, (leftist) social change; as a political and pedagogical theorist of the subject, we ought not see Freire merely as a philosopher of education, but as a theorist and practitioner of all of Freud’s impossible disciplines. In his extensive and widely read books and essays of progressive, critical educational theory, Freire is often deeply concerned with the structure and function of hope in the educational subject. In his analysis of Freire’s understanding of the role of hope in education, Darren Webb goes so far as to argue that, “Freire’s entire philosophy of education was founded on his ontology of hope.”¹⁹

Freire’s ontology of hope is conceptually bound to his educational theory with a subjectivity that he often described but did not explicitly name as a theory of subjectivity. Freire based his pedagogy and theory of the subject on the belief that hope and education were both rooted in “men’s incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search.”²⁰ Born with all the worldly knowledge of a *tabula rasa*, the subject is born with an inherent lack, which necessitates a lifelong search for fulfilment. As social creatures, Freire believed that the human’s search for completion could not be endeavoured alone, writing that our search was one “which

¹⁸ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of hope: reliving Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1994, p.91

¹⁹ Webb, Darren. "Paulo Freire and 'the need for a kind of education in hope'." *Cambridge Journal of Education* 40, no. 4 (December 2010): 327-39. doi:10.1080/0305764x.2010.526591.

²⁰ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 2000, p.64

can be carried out only in communion with others.”²¹ Our shared lack and its concomitant collective need for satisfaction start us on a journey that for Freire is the very process of our becoming-human. “The incessant pursuit of humanity” driven by the subject’s incompleteness was not only the basis of hope for Freire, but the basis of our educability.²² Education obtains its political character through its structural position as a scene of our becoming, as a site where the raw materials of subjective hope and lack are transformed into consciousness.

II. The Impossible Subject

In his book *Psychopedagogy*, K. Daniel Cho argues that the model of subjectivity outlined after the theories of mind of René Descartes, the Cogito²³, the subject that thinks (and therefore is) has deeply influenced education’s own models of subjectivity. The model of Cartesian subjectivity posited by the Cogito finds accord in contemporary pedagogical praxis, including Freire’s, which emphasize and prioritize students’ cognition, how they think, over knowledge accumulation, what they know. The emphasis on cognition in educational practice is well captured in the educational cliché that teachers ought to instruct students not in what to think, but how to think—and, with the recent turn to metacognition in educational theory and practice, how to think about what they think. Descartes’ model of subjectivity stands opposed to classical European pedagogies and epistemologies that primarily emphasize the guided attainment of knowledge as an/the end of education. Central to the ontology of the subject of the Cogito is a self-reflexive gap between what the subject knows and their metacognition, what the subject thinks about what they know.

²¹ Ibid., 72.

²² Ibid., 64

²³ Stemming from Descartes most famous quotation “*cogito ergo sum*,” I think; therefore, I am (from *Discourse on Method*)

The Cogito provides educational theory with a justification of the Enlightenment ideal that personal, social, and cultural progress is possible as individuals transform themselves through modes of thought superior to tradition and superstition. A project of mass education based on a Cartesian model of subjectivity provides hope that we are not doomed to remain as we are, both as individuals and individual members of socio-cultural groups; through the Cogito, we, as individuals and social beings, can reason our way through and beyond personal and social dilemmas. One of the axiomatic assumptions of Cogito-subjectivity is that there is a gap between what one thinks and what one is; the subject of the Cogito is an agent whose existence depends on their ability to curate the forms and contents of their thoughts and can in turn be transformed by them. In the Cartesian model of subjectivity, it is the fact that the subject relates agentially to what they know through reflective reasoning, not the content of the knowledge itself, which determines the subject's being. As Cho notes, “the Cartesian model of doubt proves handy for creating a critical distance between the thinking *I* and its knowledge,”²⁴ in that the subject can determine the veracity of their knowledge through reflection and doubt, and thus change their thinking, and themselves, according to the outcome of their reflection. The subject changes themselves through critical integration of new knowledge or new doubts regarding their knowledge and by discarding out-dated or irrelevant knowledge— how the subject comes to discursively ontologize knowledge as relevant or irrelevant, true or untrue, will return later as a problematic.

In this paper, I understand the limits of this interpretation of the Cogito as arising from within the very gap it enforces between what we know and who/what we are. It is no coincidence that the Cartesian model of agentic subjectivity dominates both the theoretical and practical fields of pedagogy/teaching, psychology (through theories and practices like cognitive behavioural therapy) and politics/governance (through theories of propaganda, opinion polling,

²⁴ Cho, 73.

voting one's beliefs etc.). These three fields comprise what Freud called the impossible professions, concerned as they are with the abstract and unquantifiable realm of subjective transformation, "in which one can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfying results."²⁵ The subject of these professions is one that can know itself, knowing what they know, knowing how they know it, and reporting this knowledge and meta-knowledge to others. In non-psychodynamic psychotherapy, the therapist relies on the client to accurately report mental and emotional experiences, the cognitive patterns that influence them, and the material consequences of this interaction. In political and governmental research, pollsters rely on subjects to faithfully report their political perspectives and moral and ethical positions to discern how these affect their voting habits. The axiom of Cogito-subjectivity is that the subjects of these professions are both willing and able to disclose, to themselves and others, the objects of their thoughts and feelings and the subjective value of their knowledge.

In the field of pedagogy, Cho argues that the standard interpretation of the Cartesian model of subjectivity functions well when students are confronted with curricular knowledge and epistemic schematics with which they are already comfortable. Learning that the sky appears blue during the day because of the inherent qualities of light is a mundane factum that ought not to trouble a subject's sense of self or their worldview; in contrast, we need only to look at the reactions of a significant number of people to the science of anthropogenic climate change and the consequences of such (facts considered to be mundane by the scientific community) to see how new knowledge can provoke severe subjective reaction. The subjectivity of the Cogito begins to break down, argues Cho, when students are confronted with difficult or traumatic knowledge, with ways of thinking that challenge their existing epistemologies.²⁶ Because the

²⁵ Freud, S., "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 18, 1937: 400

²⁶ Cho, 71.

Cogito necessarily links thought and being, to radically change one's thinking is to change one's being. Far from encouraging critical reflection and personal transformation, Freud argues that traumatic knowledge and experiences of confronting it are usually rejected, repressed, by the subject to maintain their self-consistency. For Lacan, the axiomatic assumption that our conscious thoughts maintain the subject's sole agentic relationship to knowledge is a fundamental theoretical error of the ego-psychology: the psychological theory that the ego, or the conscious self, is the seat of subjectivity. Ego-psychology in one form or another dominates much contemporary educational and psychological theory.²⁷

III. The Subject's Secret Sadness

One of Freire's greatest socio-political concerns is that the link between the subject's desire for completion or fulfilment and their drive towards a communal, progressive political education was not at all a foregone conclusion. Freire's fear for the subject of education was that their incompleteness would lead them not towards fulfilment through *conscientização*,²⁸ consciousness raising and politico-subjective transformation, but to seek pleasures in consumerist materialism, commodities, or political ideologies that reinforced the materialism and consumerism of the capitalist status quo. Freire was prescient in his concern that neoliberalism and its ideological emphasis on self-improvement (in as much as one's skills, abilities, and traits relate to their output as labourers), economic self-sufficiency and the concurrent destruction of the welfare state, socio-hierarchical advancement, and the privatization or elimination of social goods and state institutions, represent a grave threat to mass education and required an explicitly

²⁷ Ibid., 76.

²⁸ Introduced by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

political pedagogy to combat.²⁹ Jacobs writes that Freire's critique of neoliberal ideology, like the material effects of the ideology itself, extended into the classroom. Jacobs notes, per Freire, that competitive systems of hierarchical assessment and evaluation in education further shape student's object-desires around the false promises of individualism and inspire a withdrawal from collective thought, action, and struggle.³⁰

Subjective despair in the face of the intransigence of neoliberal capital is the spectre that haunts Freire's writing on the subject of hope. It is important to note that Freire described hope not merely as a desirable political or educational affect, but as "an ontological necessity"³¹ without which educators and students would "succumb to despair" and "fall into stasis."³² Hope in this sense constitutes an essential orientation and affect of the subject forced between a natural lack and a concomitant drive towards fulfilment. Without hope, the subject is no longer driven by the lack at the core of their being and will melancholically cease to pursue fulfilment through means outside of those forced upon the subject by capital.

Jacobs' argues that despair represents a threat to the subject because it introduces political inertia and is, as Freire writes, "a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it."³³ This "fleeing from the world" means that the subject takes itself out of dialogue with the necessary social communion of pedagogy. The despairing subject no longer strives toward "completion" and in doing so, no longer strives toward the utopian political goals of the hopeful subject. A disciplined approach to critical thought and helping the student to move beyond mere critique of the status quo into direct political action was Freire's prescription for avoiding facile or simplistic manifestations of hope that encourage students to rely on fantasies of intervention

²⁹ Webb, 331.

³⁰ Jacobs, 788.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 787.

³² Webb, 329.

³³ Jacobs, 795.

of some deity or other-worldly power to end their political subjugation.³⁴ Hope, for Freire, was what could drive students to see the future as lacking determination, and inspire them to imagine the future in a way that was not simply an ideological repetition of the present.

Even though Freire's ontology of hope was thin on detail regarding acceptable or important objects of hope, Webb argues that Freire maintains the four qualities which are still the hallmarks of the archetypical philosophical conception of hope: situated in the near or distant future, moral and ethical goodness, difficult to obtain, and possible to obtain.³⁵ Utopia is the problematically vague moniker of Freire's ideal goal toward which the subject's hope and the teacher's educational projects should be directed. While Freire did not describe his utopian, future-oriented moral good in detail, he was careful to emphasize the aspects of his ontology of hope addressing the inevitable difficulty of attaining any such goal. Webb argues that Freire's ontology requires a "non-acceptance" of reality that "is distinguished from impatient revolt by virtue of its humility, modesty, serenity, and security."³⁶ Freire argues that teachers should not wait with a "patient hope" merely so that they can endure the miseries of the present, but should instead seek to mobilize their students with passion and critical reflection.³⁷ Pre-emptively countering any criticism of political passivity or an acceptance of injustice, Webb writes that such virtues should be tempered with courage, boldness, and endurance to challenge injustices not just with personal resistance, but with political action.³⁸

Freire's understood hope as a necessary form of relating to self and other without which personal and political transformation are impossible; Freire knew very well that hope was

³⁴ Webb, 336. Even in the utopian, post-scarcity, post-capitalist, pro-humanist *Star Trek* universe (one of the best pop cultural examples of hopeful futurity) humanity was doomed to a slow extinction following a nuclear apocalypse until First Contact with an alien species sparks a sustained ideological, cultural, and technological renaissance.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 333.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 335.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

necessary, but not sufficient, for political change, and that the subject must still agentially choose to take communal action to change material circumstances for themselves and others. The subject's critical knowledge of their (more-than-likely) difficult material circumstance and the challenges they will surely face in attempting to change them is not theorized as an impediment in Freire's work, but as another necessary condition of change. In his theory of hope, Freire maintains the essential structure of Cartesian subjectivity, with the understanding that despair is merely a form of (non) relation with the world. Despair, for Freire, is ideologically and discursively encouraged in students and teachers by institutions of the status quo and must be critically combatted by the subject—in other words, despair is a kind of doubt not in the subject's knowledge, but in their image of utopia and their belief in the possibility of reaching it. Despair induces in the subject a sense of negative determinism, of melancholy, and thus denies agency to the subject.

In Freire's conception of the subject, hope is the fundamental link between the subject's lack and their drive towards humanization, or the elimination of the lack at the core of their being.³⁹ With a subject so structured, despair is a symptom of a political sickness introduced in the subject by their material circumstances and the determinism of the neoliberalized future. For Freire, it is hope above all other affects and perspectives that must be consciously cultivated by the subject to avert a despair-induced stasis, developed in the subject as a reaction to the material structures of capitalist ideological hegemony. Freire understands well the challenge of neoliberalism on a material level and on the level of socio-psychological despair in the conscious subject. Where Freire's understanding of the power of the hope/despair dichotomy fails is when we consider the more insidious material, psychic, social, and cultural traumas of neoliberalism and their effect on the subject of the unconscious.

³⁹ Ibid., 327.

Fundamental to Freud's psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity is that there is an agency at work within the subject's psyche beyond the ego, the conscious self: the unconscious. The unconscious is the psychic space in which repressed traumatic knowledge resides, beyond the subject's awareness. For Freud, the unconscious is the true site of personal motivation and transformation according to the maxim that plays off the Cogito, "where it was, there I shall become."⁴⁰ With this maxim Freud means to argue that repressed traumatic knowledge or memories constitute an unconscious body of knowledge out of which the subject is formed, both through their object-interactions and their internal psychic life, and without the need for acknowledgment of the presence of such knowledge. Far from the image of critical self-reflection and transformation posited by standard interpretations of the Cogito, the subject of the unconscious navigates the social world transformed by knowledge of which they have no awareness, but which is acted out by and through the conscious subject. Psychoanalysis as outlined by Freud, and later Lacan, provides a model of subjectivity which considers this alien "other side" of knowledge, thought, and being resting just beneath the conceptual bridge between the shores of thinking and being.

While Freire's theory rings true in its enticing fantasies of powerful revolutionary archetypes resisting the poisonous influence of bourgeois ideology, his reliance on the subject of the Cogito and his implicit ontologizing of hope as necessarily morally good causes him to miss how hope can potentially work as a greater source of political inertia than despair if it is co-opted in/by capitalist ideologies. Freire's assumption is that the subject is able and willing, through critical self-reflection, to confront capitalist ideology and their subjective desires and fantasies which stem from such reflection and in doing so avoid stasis in despair. However, if Freire is correct, and that the inertia of despair in the subject is the fruit of capital, then why do capitalist

⁴⁰ Cho, 75.

subjects seem to be so animated, to enjoy capitalism so thoroughly? In my next chapter I will discuss Lacan's theory of the subject to examine how a subject so thoroughly repulsed by their life-world can, nonetheless, be both enthralled to its maintenance.

Chapter Two: On Dutiful Jouissance

I. (Enjoy) Your Self

“The dreams remained the old dreams...and they turned into the ultimate nightmare.”
-Slavoj Žižek⁴¹

In psychoanalysis, to say that the subject *is* is deeply problematic. For Lacan, the subject is not equivalent to the self, the thinking self of the Cogito, but is an existential void around which an imaginary and symbolic identity is constructed. In Lacanian theory, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real are the three interconnected and interdependent registers of psychical subjectivity. The Imaginary represented the primarily visual and experiential core of the subject's unconscious. Adding to the terms with which Freud argued the nature unconscious in terms of trauma, Lacan conceptualizes the unconscious as being made of “imaginary fixations which could not be have been assimilated to the symbolic development” of the subject's self.⁴² Images and experiences that cannot be symbolized, that cannot be integrated by the subject into their experiences, is itself the definition of trauma in Freudian psychoanalysis.

Though the unconscious is a place of Imaginary fixations, Lacan also argues that it is structured like a language. The language of the unconscious is not like a communicative language as such, but it does function as a site of symbolic mediation. For Žižek, the Symbolic order is “a formal order which supplements and/or disrupts the dual relationships of ‘external’ factual reality and ‘internal’ subjective experience.”⁴³ The register of the Symbolic refers to the spoken and unspoken socio-symbolic norms and regulations of all societies. The Symbolic is the

⁴¹ *Pervert's Guide to Ideology*. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. Performed by Slavoj Žižek. Unites States of America: Zeitgeist Films, 2012. Digital Download.

⁴² Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*. Translated by Jacques-Alain Miller. Book 1. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.159

⁴³ Žižek, 1989, 13.

register that confers and regulates meaning in symbolic communication and determines for the subject the medium of their interactions with their self and the Other.

The only aspect of the subject that can be said to have substance, the only aspect of the subject that can truly be said to exist outside of images and symbolism, is the subject's *jouissance*, their enjoyment.⁴⁴ *Jouissance* represents the register of the Real in Lacanian theories of the subject. The Real is that which cannot be imagined or experienced directly nor can it be symbolized in language or other means of representations. As an aspect of reality that defies representations, the Real disrupts all attempts to form complete symbolic systems of representation. The Real exists in excess of phenomenal reality but does exert a disruptive causal influence on it by inserting a negativity into the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

The Imaginary and Symbolic identities of the subject are structurally necessary in psychoanalysis and in the realm of psychic relations (both to the self and to the Other), but are contingent on each subject's lived experience. As an aspect of the Real, the subject's experience of *jouissance* is not contingent on their individuality; each subject's Imaginary and Symbolic identity will contingently organize their enjoyment, but that they will seek out enjoyment is not contingent on any particular identity. Whereas Freud once believed that the pleasure principle dictated that subjects will seek out pleasurable experiences, over time he theorized that subjects were, in fact, driven by a principle beyond pleasure and contrary to their own good.⁴⁵ This drive, the so-called death drive, compels the subject to unconsciously and repeatedly seek out pleasurable experiences in ways that are detrimental to the subject's self-interest and are experienced by the subject as excessive and even painful.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 73. In this paper, *jouissance* and enjoyment will be used interchangeably.

⁴⁵ Copjec, Joan in McGowan, Todd. *The end of dissatisfaction?: Jacques Lacan and the emerging society of enjoyment*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004, p.5

⁴⁶ Wells, 49.

The subject's introduction to jouissance and its organization, the logic of how each individual subject enjoys, arrives in and through their primary relationship and first love object: their caregiver.⁴⁷ In responding to the child's many needs, the caregiver allows their own unconscious jouissance to disturb the psychic stasis of the child.⁴⁸ While the relationship between the caregiver and the child exist prior to the child's entrance into language (the infant communicates through physical and pre-verbal responses to the caregiver) the child has no way of knowing exactly who their caregiver is, what it is that they want, and cannot communicate directly with the caregiver about what they themselves want. In their inability to assimilate the unconscious desires and enjoyment (or lack thereof) of the caregiver the child becomes so anxious that it is forced to ask itself "What does the other want from me? What am I for them?"⁴⁹

For Lacan, this traumatic experience of the impenetrability of the desire of the other creates such anxiety that the child's psyche necessarily creates imaginary answers as a defence. These imaginary answers represent the birth of fantasy/ies in the subject. The child's answer to the desire of the Other is called by Lacan the fundamental fantasy: an enjoyable but imaginary explanation for the enigmatic desire of the other that protects the subject's psyche from the traumatic anxiety of ignorance which the subject is otherwise unable to discharge.⁵⁰ Although the fundamental fantasy protects the subject from the trauma of ignorance, its birth in anxiety lends the subject's jouissance a perpetual quality of unease or even pain—very much in the spirit of having too much of a good thing. The knowledge of one's own ignorance of the desires of the other is deeply repressed into the unconscious. This repression is glossed over by fantasy and any

⁴⁷ In Lacanian theory the primary caregiver is referred to as the Mother. However, the title of Mother is merely a continuation of Lacan's "return to Freud." The role of the Mother is a structural one and need not be fulfilled by the subject's actual mother. As such I will refer to them simply as the subject's (primary) caregiver.

⁴⁸ Wells, 47.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 48.

attempts to provoke an awareness of this knowledge are inescapably painful, resisted strongly by the subject so that they may continue to find some semblance of enjoyment in them.⁵¹

It is important to emphasize that the fundamental fantasy serves the subject as a protective answer to a question that not only cannot be answered by the subject, but indeed does not have an answer at all. The subject's failure to interpret the Other's desire is not a prematurity in a child's symbolic reasoning, it is a necessarily-missed opportunity for intersubjective recognition that the Other "is not actually the master of [their] acts or words" and that the meaning and organization of the Other's enjoyment is unknown to both the subject and the Other—it is unconscious.⁵² For Lacan, this moment of misrecognition not of one's self, but of an Other, cements the unconscious in the realm of the social and renders the structure of subject fundamentally intersubjective; the subject cannot exist without the promise of enjoyment in the Other. In this intersubjective stance, both the subject and the Other are defined by a lack: the subject lacks an answer to the enigma of the Other's desire, and the Other itself lacks this answer.⁵³ This is perhaps the most traumatic revelation of Freudian psychoanalysis: that no one possesses the secret to the final satisfying desire because there is no such secret, there never has been, and there never will be.

It is the intersubjective nature of fantasy and lack that allows and teaches the subject to desire, preparing them for entry into the social network of symbolic relations. Until the subject enters the socio-symbolic world, they imagine themselves to be fulfilled and without lack; the fundamental fantasy provides a satisfying answer, however false, to the mystery of the Other's desire. Though this fulfilment is fundamentally a lie, the fantasy provides the subject with excessive jouissance—the subject enjoys the satisfaction of a moment in time where they do not

⁵¹ Cho, 78.

⁵² Wells, 50.

⁵³ Žižek, 1989, 137.

desire or feel the urgency and anxiety of unfulfilled desires. My emphasis on the imaginary aspects of the fundamental fantasy should here be taken quite literally. The fundamental fantasy is, above all else, a specular image imbued with a feeling of deep satisfaction.

The excessiveness of *jouissance* stems from its position as the lacking aspect of an image or fantasy or object of desire that provokes the psychological existence of the image/object itself in the subject. An excess of *jouissance* is an extra-linguistic drive, an imperative-feeling, beyond symbolic meaning, which exerts great influence on and over the subject. Lacan called this object-cause of the subject's desire the *objet a*. The *objet a* is not itself imaginary in that it exists in excesses of the subject's fulfilment in fantasy, which was and is, of course, illusory. The *objet a* represents the lack of an answer to the enigma of the Other's desire; it is present in our fantasies and mental images only in that its absence from them conjures our desire for them and the objects in which it is imbued. The *objet a* is the unconscious cause of both conscious and unconscious fantasies produced by the subject's psyche as an answer to the enigma its absence provokes.⁵⁴ In its absence, the *objet a* causes our desiring of objects and our fantasy images of our object relations⁵⁵ but it remains unconscious and is not itself represented as an object of desire. While the subject may describe their conscious desire for a specific object (an expensive computer, an attractive lover etc.) or their fantasy of finding satisfaction in their relation to an object (emotional fulfilment in a romantic relationship with a specific person), the *objet a* is not itself that fantasy-object; the *objet a* is the object cause of desire in the subject for objects, but is not itself a material object. Lacan describes the *objet a* through the Greek concept of the *agalma*. The subject is merely a worthless box containing a hidden gem, the *agalma*.⁵⁶ The *objet a* is an

⁵⁴ McGowan, 19.

⁵⁵ Object relations in psychoanalysis includes what we would normally consider interpersonal relationships.

⁵⁶ Lacan, Jacques. *The ethics of psychoanalysis: 1959-1960*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Dennis Porter. London: Routledge, 1992.

immaterial object which exists in excess of the material object desired by the subject. Being in excess of material objects means, of course, that the *objet a* is eternally elusive and thus no one object can bring the subject the enjoyment they unconsciously seek in it.

Entry into the social world outside the subject's primary relations introduces them to a brand-new range of Others in whom they might potentially find enjoyment. The Others of the social world are both material, as in actual people, and abstract, as in social codes and conventions which the subject may experience as familiar or well-known but are nonetheless Other to them. Everyone and everything that exists outside the subject is Other to them—and, as we will see, even those objects internalized by the subject are Other to them. Being intersubjective, the foundation of the subject's fundamental desire is the same as it was before they entered the symbolic world of language; in the symbolic structures of language and social relations the subject continues seeking an answer to the enigma of the Other's desire, to the *jouissance* of the Other. The intersubjectivity of the social world pushes the subject to seek their illusory satisfaction in Others and thus creates a powerful and enduring psychological bond between them.⁵⁷

As the subject ages and enters into the social world of language, bringing with them their existing psychic world of images, feelings, and imaginary *jouissance*, the *jouissance* organized by the subject around their fundamental fantasy is abandoned in order to adapt to a realm of social relations; the toll for entry into the social realm is that the subject reorganize their *jouissance* into, and according to, socio-culturally contingent symbolic relations and their regulations (the Law, cultural mores, moral and ethical imperatives, acceptable objects of desire etc.)⁵⁸ As Lacan wrote, “*jouissance* is prohibited to whomever *speaks*...since the Law is founded

⁵⁷ McGowan, 17.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

on that very prohibition.”⁵⁹ In order to find social comprehensibility, the subject finds itself bound to a forced choice of total social alienation by refusing the meaning-structure of their society, or alienation from their enjoyment. After their entrance into language and the Symbolic, the subject now finds their fantasies, desires, and enjoyment organized according to the “institutional unconscious” of their inducted society and will be driven to seek, or commanded not to seek, enjoyment in ideologically structured ways.⁶⁰ McGowan argues that the imaginary does not exist “outside of or prior to the symbolic” and that the two are complimentary, with the imaginary world of fantasy finding shape based on the structure of the symbolic.⁶¹

The problem of the unconscious, *jouissance*, and the *objet a*, for Freire lays in the distance between the Cogito and the subject of the unconscious. The subject of the Cogito fits nicely with Freire’s undetermined utopian vision; as a subject who can self-direct both their desires and actions, the subject of the Cogito is the ultimate political actor. For them, the marginalising forces of neoliberal capital are wholly external while conscious, subject-shaping, political visions of a better future are held internally. The problematic aroused by the unconscious is an introduction of internality to the desires of capital and an externalising of the desires of the subject. Unlike the self-determining subject of the Cogito, the subject of the unconscious is a small vessel with a lacking hull, battered about by the visible waves and unseen currents in an ocean of ideology.

⁵⁹ Lacan, Jacques, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Newton, p.306

⁶⁰ Wells, 60.

⁶¹ McGowan, 19.

II. Hope and the Political Unconscious

In *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, theorist Slavoj Žižek analyses the political message of the song “Officer Krupke” in Bernstein and Sondheim’s *West Side Story*. In the song, the characters perform a fantasized interaction with Krupke, a local police officer. The substance of the song is a series of rationalizations for the group’s frequent criminal mischief. A broad range of sociological and psychological issues from parental abuse to unbearable boredom are cited as psycho-social determinants of the group’s behaviours and outline the material circumstances in which the group members are forced to operate. While the tone of the song is cheerful and self-aware, the substantive issues sung about in the song reveal a miserable situation of genuine hopelessness. The youth's situation of hopelessness, however, has not engendered any kind of psychic or social inertia; the group continues to delight in their delinquency much to the confusion and frustration of symbolic authorities (police, judges, parents, and so on). The young delinquents seem to enjoy their state of despair.

The youth in *West Side Story* display not a despairing withdrawal from their hopes for a better life nor an explicit adoption of the values of capitalist consumerism; hopelessness has not sapped them of their will to live or to struggle against their circumstance. Their hopelessness and disillusionment with the so-called better life offered to them by capitalist careerism have been sublimated into the substantive ideal offered to them by the failure of their integration into either form of hope: resistance to their offered social forms and material conditions. Žižek uses the paradox posed by the delinquents in *West Side Story* as an analogy for the London riots of 2011. Lacking a clear political or ideological motive, Žižek argues that widespread theft during the riots was a consequence of the protesters having been symbolically determined solely as consumers, as subjects of dominant ideological paradigms who are driven by both the desire for

material consumer goods and the symbolic status they endow. The contradiction born of such a consumerist ideology amongst economically marginalized youth is that they lack the social mobility and material wealth to legitimately obtain the goods they are taught to desire and value so highly. In other words, as neoliberalism slowly renders traditional liberal-democratic ideology obsolete, it replaces the object ideals of sociality, equality, and justice with those of pure individualist consumerism—psychically, neoliberal ideology replaces political and social goals with personal desires for wealth and status.⁶²

The alienation which motivates the youth from *West Side Story* illustrates the contradictions at the heart of subjectivity introduced by a socio-cultural shift from what Todd McGowan terms a society of prohibition to a society of enjoyment. In *The End of Dissatisfaction?*, McGowan argues that prohibition, the social and symbolic enforcement of forbidden objects, serves as the foundation of social relations, “demanding that subjects sacrifice enjoyment for the sake of work, community, and progress.”⁶³ In a society of prohibition, subjects are not entitled or expected to seek out fulfilment of their desires or discover unsanctioned avenues of enjoyment. McGowan relays a common sentiment—a sentiment that is all too familiar to educators—in the ideologies of societies of prohibition and societies which stem from them that a subject who is enjoying themselves or is in pursuit of their own desires is not productive.⁶⁴

In a society of prohibition, the subject’s discomfort in their awareness of their own lack is compounded in the sense that they are prohibited by the symbolic dictates of their social systems from satisfying their desires, or in most cases even pursuing satisfaction of their desires. McGowan’s argument mirrors Lacan’s in relation to the alienation of the subject in language; the

⁶² Fiennes, 2012.

⁶³ McGowan, 11.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

subject's access to jouissance is sacrificed in a forced choice in exchange for the benefits of intersubjectivity required for entry into the symbolic. No matter the prohibition, the structure of the subject wins out and their drive toward satisfaction expresses itself in a medium bound to, but outside, the constraints of the symbolic: the imaginary. For the frustrated or dissatisfied subject, there are two available avenues of action: rebellion against the prohibitive symbolic order, or acquiescence to the status quo, living in a state of denial of their original sacrifice of jouissance. Absent a spirit of rebelliousness, the subject instead prefers to imagine that "we haven't made the initial sacrifice of enjoyment or that we are able to overcome this sacrifice and enjoy within the social order" (18). In a society of prohibition, the subject's imaginary "[houses] the image of the denied enjoyment" and allows the subject to keep calm and carry on, so to speak (19).

As Žižek argues in *Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, a capitalist society of prohibition creates a perverse duty to the circulation of capital. In inevitable times of recession, subjects are expected to renounce their personal desires and concede to regimes of austerity and a duty toward capitalist economic systems, "and for this duty anything can be sacrificed."⁶⁵ As Lacan argues, the imaginary is not a psychic space of total freedom; it is intimately connected to the symbolic structures in which the subject exists and which forms the horizons of what the subject can imagine.⁶⁶ Though the subject may find enjoyment in the imaginary, this enjoyment continues to occur within the symbolic constraints which shape the subject themselves and who usually remain ignorant that such constraints exist even in their wildest imagination. Perhaps the most devastating sacrifice capital demands from us may be not the loss of our freedom, but the loss of our very ability to even imagine ourselves as free.

⁶⁵ Fiennes, 2012.

⁶⁶ McGowan, 20.

III. The Society of Enjoyment and a Society of Hope

Lacan gave the name Law to the quality of the symbolic order that prohibits the subject's enjoyment either inside or outside of that order.⁶⁷ Since the subject's jouissance is a structural consequence of the split between the conscious and unconscious mind, the symbolic Law is incapable of eliminating the drive towards jouissance. Instead, the Law demands that the subject internalize its own prescriptions and prohibitions for accessing jouissance. Though the Law is primarily a prohibitive socio-psychological force, the drive of the subject's jouissance remains immensely powerful; jouissance remains the subject's primary concern in both their relations with itself and with Others. After entering the world of the symbolic, the subject's enjoyment is organized such as they are now driven to find enjoyment in what they are denied. The superego, both Freud and Lacan's name for the internalized imperatives of the Law, now elicits the subject's enjoyment in the form of an obscene command, an "unconditional injunction": enjoy!⁶⁸

The society of enjoyment however, transforms the notion of duty emphasized by the society of prohibition from one of renunciation of enjoyment, desires, or personal pleasures, to one of a responsibility to Others to enjoy ourselves both for our sake and for theirs. This trend can most easily be seen in the discourses of what Lacan termed ego-psychology, the dominant towards which mainstream (non-psychodynamic) psychology in the United States drifted during Lacan's life.⁶⁹ Ego psychology has, in recent years, taken a turn toward positive psychology: a psychological perspective which argues that enjoyment, rather than dissatisfaction, is the baseline human psychological state. Dennis Prager argues that happiness and enjoyment, which

⁶⁷ McGowan, 28.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁹ Lacan lived from 1901-1981

were personal concerns in the society of prohibition, become a moral obligation under a society of enjoyment.⁷⁰

Under the dominance of the internalized Law—the Freudian superego—in the society of enjoyment, we are never distant enough from the Other’s enjoyment. Where once we could find respite in various social prohibitions stifling the imperative to enjoy, in the society of enjoyment you find only a persistent social duty to do so. We are surrounded by enjoyment; surrounded not only by actual others and their enjoyment, but by images, symbolic media and other near-constant reminders of their enjoyment. Žižek argues that when enjoyment becomes obligatory, the demands of the superego, the internalisation of symbolic imperatives, generate a psychic state in which the subject is never satisfied. While the subject is commanded to enjoy, it is not ever able to feel that it has enjoyed itself sufficiently. The superego imperative to enjoy creates in the subject a cruel guilt, which drives it to repeatedly seek out new sources of enjoyment, always unsure that any one source provides enough of it.⁷¹ The repetitive seeking out of new enjoyment is sustained perfectly by the problem and the small piece of the Real, which originally grounded the subject itself: the *jouissance* of the question “what does the Other want from me?”

For Freire, neoliberal capital (being within a society of enjoyment) creates either misery or provides subjects with false images and values that support only the continued flow of capital. On first glance it would seem that Žižek’s analysis of the delinquents in *West Side Story* would support Freire’s arguments on hope and subjectivity. Neoliberal ideology has indeed co-opted the students’ drive towards humanization with personal desires for enjoyment in commodities and mischief. The youth, however, do not seem to be miserable or to have taken up the offers of legitimate enjoyment offered by a long and productive suburban life. Not only have the group

⁷⁰ Prager, Dennis. *Happiness is a serious problem: a human nature repair manual*. New York: ReganBooks, 1999, p.3

⁷¹ Žižek, Slavoj. *For they know not what they do: enjoyment as a political factor*. London: Verso, 1991, p.237

members found a kind of communion in their socio-economic self-awareness, they hardly seem to be stuck, unmoving, or hiding from the world as Freire predicted. Dramatically prescient self-knowledge of their social and material circumstances has not frozen these youths or forced their withdrawal from the world, but has instead motivated their withdrawal from a certain version of their world, a certain organization of meaning and enjoyment. Žižek argues that this paradox, that “they know very well what they are doing, but they are nonetheless doing it,” is a material manifestation and psychic consequence of neoliberal capitalist ideology.⁷² Unlike the misinterpreted subject of the Cogito, for whom self-knowledge ought to be transformative, the subject of the unconscious is shaped by the paradox of knowing better, but not knowing they know better, or refusing such knowledge, and thus behaving as if they do not. Consequently, the subject of the unconscious resists strongly any use of new or transformed knowledge to change the subject.

According to McGowan, cynicism pretends to know the secrets of the Other despite the fact, of course, that there are no such secrets. The cynic wants to avoid the naiveté of the desiring subject; it refuses to allow any point of potential enjoyment to be unknown to them and therefore within the cycle of seeking and failing to enjoy sufficiently. However, argues McGowan, “this triumph over non-knowledge does not transform the subject or its situation.”⁷³ The cynic believes that they can transcend symbolic mediation and directly access the secret of the Other, the ideological motivation behind the command to enjoy. The cynic refuses to be caught in the symbolic network, forgetting that this network is what gives their lives, their entire frame of reference, any meaning.

⁷² Fiennes, 2012.

⁷³ McGowan, 121.

The cynic thus attempts to rebel against the symbolic through acts of defiance. The meaningfulness of this defiance, however, is an obvious dupe. The symbolic simply absorbs rebellion against it as to rebel is to acknowledge or create an investment in the meaning against which one rebels. “The cynic stages their act publicly in order that symbolic authority will see it” in turn legitimizing the perspective of the big Other, the symbolic guarantor of meaning.⁷⁴ If knowledge and self-reflection on one's social and political circumstances is the progressive goal of education, and the cynic can claim they already have the necessary knowledge, and yet they—and their circumstances—do not change. Enjoyment and movement against the constraints of prohibition keep the youth enthralled to petty rebellion, but what keeps the uncynical beholden to their determined social and psychic coordinates?

According to McGowan, our ability to discover an alternative path depends on our ability to understand and interpret the present, not our capacity to imagine the future. Our thought cannot arrive at the future bypassing the present; we must be able to recognize the status of the subject in our time before we can change it.⁷⁵ Freire conceptualized the political fight in education as being between two dichotomous subjective states in relation to their material and ideological condition: one of politically static ignorance and one of politically active conscious awareness. Freire's proportion of concern for the quantity of neoliberal capital's effect on our social, psychic, and political lives, but his worry was merely that the specific qualities of neoliberal capital would keep the subject ignorant or would alternatively force upon them perspectives and values which serve only itself. Neoliberal capital's promotion of symbolic system which prioritize the values of individualism, self-promotion, and rejection of collectivity

⁷⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 7.

are, however, merely surface concerns when we consider the ideological effect of neoliberalism on the subject's enjoyment.

The challenge to Freire's theory of subjectivity I have described here is not so much one critique of his courageous vision for popular political education, but one of a deep concern for how we understand the subject of these political changes. Like the post-soviet Marxists who expressed their disillusionment with the working class as the natural revolutionary subject, I worry that the subjectivity imagined by Freire is not as it seems. The natural subject of the revolution was one driven by class consciousness to fight against theory class-enemy in a war of economic interests. Just as Marx once did, Freire did not consider that self-interest might be overridden by enjoyment in those objects which are not our own, which do not help us achieve our interests. As an educator, Freire concerned himself with what the subject knew or could come to know with time and effort; what he seems to have overlooked is what the subject does or can do with what they know and, perhaps more importantly, what they do not know they know, and what they refuse to know.

Chapter Three: Indifference and Repetition

I. Half Truths and Whole Lies

If we assume the position taken by Heidegger when he argued that truth is not a “correctness or correspondence” with a metaphysical reality but the revelation of something hidden or distorted, then we are left with difficult questions concerning the ontology of truth.⁷⁶ If the truth is a revelation, then what is revealed? If we accept that what is revealed is an object that corresponds to some metaphysical reality, then a notion of truth as finding what is hidden is merely a formality. Perhaps an even more troubling situation involves the productive capacity of hiding. If a hidden truth, distorted or covered with a lie, begins to shape not just our perception of the truth, but our social reality itself, then what effect will its revelation have—if any? Here, I want to explore some of the implications of parrhesia, the conscious revelation of difficult truths, as discussed in Maria Tamboukou’s *Truth telling in Foucault and Arendt: parrhesia, the pariah and academics in dark times* in relation to Žižek’s readings of critique of ideology and psychoanalysis in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. In working with Žižek’s definition of ideology as the symbolic structure of our material reality, I hope to bring into question the use of parrhesia and consciousness-raising as effective tools for shaping the nature of knowledge and truth in the politics of dark times; how can we best use parrhesia in the age of cynical politics, a time when the educational project of the enlightenment has transformed into a dystopian post-modernism where each of us is entitled to their own truth and lies are no longer secrets.

For Tamboukou, it is the role of the academic to criticize, to speak truth the power, to bring about “understanding [of] complex truth games through which practices and discourses are

⁷⁶ Tamboukou, Maria. "Truth Telling in Foucault and Arendt: Parrhesia, the Pariah and Academics in Dark times." *Journal of Education Policy* 27.6 (2012): 849-65. 851.

scientifically validated and become dominant.”⁷⁷ What Tamboukou seeks to establish with the adoption of parrhesia as an academic duty is not new “valid knowledges” with which we can replace untruths but to uncover “the material conditions and fierce power relations at play through which ‘dominant truths’ and ‘master narratives’ are constituted and established.”⁷⁸ For Tamboukou, with each truth told, with each process of truth construction deconstructed, the pretence of the supposed truth becomes weaker and thus the liar’s position is weakened as well. A fundamental aspect of parrhesia, and of Heidegger’s understanding of truth, is a certain lack of knowledge on the part of both the person to whom the truth is told as well as the People who have had the truth distorted or hidden from them. For Tamboukou, the revelation of truth objects (a parent revealing to a child that Santa is not real) is far less important to politics than ensuring that the People understand how they come to know and live according to such untruths (a Marxist revealing to the child’s parents that it was not love but capitalist jouissance that motivated them to perpetuate the lie of Santa Claus). Parrhesia as an unveiling of a dangerous truth presents us with a serious theoretical and political problem: anyone who lived during the Red Scare knows very well that the emperor has no clothes. Žižek argues that simple ‘unmasking’ narratives in relation to ideological critique fails to understand the psychoanalytic implications of truth-telling.⁷⁹ All the emperor’s subjects are perfectly aware that the emperor has no clothes; no one misrecognizes the situation in which the emperor finds himself except for the emperor. The more radical truth here would be if a subject dared to question why all the People were so terrified to tell the emperor of his naked state.

For Žižek, a better example than the “emperor” metaphor of how dominant narratives distort not only our perception of reality but also reality itself is the old joke “somebody points to

⁷⁷ Tamboukou, 860.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 860

⁷⁹ Žižek, 1989, 25.

a woman and utters a horrified cry: look at her, what a shame, under her clothes she is totally naked!”⁸⁰ The truth of the woman’s nakedness is overlooked by all who see her because she is indeed clothed; her clothes are merely a cover for the startling reality of her born-nakedness. This fetishistic denial, of how when we interact with one another we do not imagine the other person to be naked under their clothes—or to vomit, to shit, to spit when they speak—our perception is strikingly (perhaps thankfully) limited by ideological distortion. “The mask is not simply hiding the real state of things; the ideological distortion is written into its very essence.” The trouble with parrhesia as imagined by Tamboukou is that the emperor’s ignorance of his nakedness can indeed be corrected with a harsh truth; the truth reveals an unseen reality. The problem of hope and enjoyment is that, in the joke about the clothed woman, the people are totally aware that under her clothes she is naked. The people know they, like the woman, are naked beneath their clothes, but they live as if they are ignorant of this reality.⁸¹

The trouble with a parrhesia grounded in revelation is that our fundamental social fantasy is unlike the simple false consciousness imagined by Marx. The so-called End of History arrived after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1991, marking the victory of liberal capitalist democracy over Soviet-style socialism/communism.⁸² No longer would the world be split by two totalizing ideologies struggling for the subjectivization of hearts and minds. Socialism had for nearly a century forced capital’s subjects to tarry with the spectre of Marx, openly debating and explicitly outlining the ideals of liberal democracy for those not yet convinced. The curricula of capitalist education systems could ill afford a coy presumption that students would recognize capitalism’s

⁸⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁸¹ Ideological enjoyment can be found both in both reality and its cover. While the people note the woman’s fundamental nakedness, what she wears as a woman goes unrecognized. Playing with the gap between our nakedness and how we cover it is a form of play beloved by queer people. As noted by legendary American drag queen RuPaul Charles, “we’re born naked, and the rest is drag.”

⁸² I use the term “End of History” as outlined in Fukuyama, Francis. *The end of history and the last man*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.

superiority over socialism; the correct choice was inevitable, obvious, and socio-culturally (en)forced, but was acknowledged as a kind of choice nonetheless—capitalist and workers were encouraged to fight on the side of capital against the spectre of revolution. After the End of History, the dominant narratives of capital, like the Devil himself, pulled off a fantastic trick: they convinced the world that grand narratives did not exist.

Žižek's understanding of truth and ideology as inherently elusive disrupts the liberatory possibilities of a politics of parrhesia. Fundamentally, parrhesia works on the level of knowledge; per Žižek, however, ideology functions both on the level of knowledge and as “a fantasy structuring our social reality itself.”⁸³ The subject of ideology is no longer an ideologue, but an astute and cynical consumer of narratives. A revelation involving a hard truth, a criticism of the assumptions of the Other is unlikely to convince them that the underlying structures of our social and cultural reality themselves constitute that reality. This cynical distance from dominant ideologies, this misrecognition of their role in shaping our lives is the very mechanism that allows them to reproduce—like shared ignorance, uncomfortable truths go unthought, at least consciously. Žižek argues that if the ignorance of the People truly resided in knowledge and not in action, then parrhesia would be incredibly effective as a political tool; political subjects would harbour no illusions as to the nature of their social and cultural worlds.⁸⁴

The world of shattered illusions that widespread, duty-bound parrhesia would usher in represents the collapse of the realm of symbolic and approaches the realm of the unsymbolizable, noumenal, Real. For Žižek, ideology serves as a mask for antagonisms inherent in any symbolically mediated system.⁸⁵ As before, misrecognition of these antagonisms is crucial to the reproduction of ideology: no symbolic system is ever capable of fully representing the object

⁸³ Žižek, 1989, 30.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 30

⁸⁵ Ibid., 45.

reality it claims to capture, but the system cannot function effectively if this is both known and acted on by its subjects. The trouble with parrhesia is that it offers the subject no illusions, only a traumatic encounter with the rock of the Real on which ideology stumbles in its efforts to capture and shape reality. Like the truth offered to us by Heidegger, the Real is not a substantial thing, its existence—if we can agree that it exists at all—can only be found retroactively in the effects that it causes. For Žižek, the most important of these effects is the *objet a*, a “pure void which functions as the object-cause of desire.”⁸⁶

In his book *Violence*, Žižek discusses the dystopian social landscape described in the novel [and film] *Children of Men*. The film’s drama centres on the social and cultural consequences of sudden, incurable, and universal infertility in humans. Žižek argues that the film is not about the biological inability to reproduce but rather the collapse of “great passion [and] commitment” in a post-political age.⁸⁷ While infertility arouses the spectre of the apocalypse, of the possibility of living as the humans on Earth, Žižek argues that political infertility (see the United States Congress under President Obama) in our post-political era moves us in the direction of Nietzsche’s Last Man, the model somatic citizen of Huxely’s *Brave New World*. The Last Man are radically risk averse; “tired of life” they seek only “comfort and security” and are totally “unable to dream.”⁸⁸ The Last Man “renounces ideological causes” and “what remains is only the efficient administration of life.”⁸⁹

The fundamental role of ideology is to fill in this void with some vacant signifier; freedom, love, wealth, success, can all serve as ideologically shaped objects that capture the desire of political subjects. The *objet a* is the carrot, and the Real is the stick. The renunciation of

⁸⁶ Ibid., 184.

⁸⁷ Žižek, Slavoj. *Violence: six sideways reflections*. New York: Picador, 2008, p.28

⁸⁸ Ibid., 28

⁸⁹ Ibid., 40

ideological causes would seem to be an ideal conclusion to a program of parrhesia. Without the illusion of truth perpetuated by ideology we would finally be able to shape the world honestly, according to our given material conditions. Even if this satisfaction were possible, as Žižek notes in *Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, “desire is always also a desire for desire itself.”⁹⁰ The sublime nature of the *objet a* requires that we circulate around it in perpetuity. To approach the object would have two consequences: the first is that we would realize the false idealism of the object and find that it is only a regular, vulgar thing and not the impossibly fulfilling object of our desires. The second consequence is somewhat more troubling. As the *objet a* functions as an object cause of desire, for it to collapse would be a collapse of not just a specific desire but of desire itself. The collapse of ideological edifices in *The Children of Men* was not the end of ideology, but the end of the fantasies that support ideologically interpolated reality—without a future for humanity, those still living would face a radical crisis of subjectivity that would force them to reform their most fundamental fantasies. The satisfaction promised by parrhesia is both impossible and represents an undesirable cessation of desire for those still fully within ideology. In other words, as neoliberalism slowly renders traditional liberal ideology obsolete, it replaces the object ideals of sociality, equality, and justice with those of mere life, an ostensible non-ideology, a pure injection of *objet a*.

Consumerism is the ideal object of cynical ideology. Just as neoliberalism encourages subjects to identify with only themselves, consumerism positions the idealized object not as one specific object, but as the act of consumption itself. A life consisting of the potential consumption of anything is the means through which the subject is promised the infinite pleasure of total libidinal satisfaction—any *objet a* can be yours for a series of low monthly payments. Of course, if the idealized object is not itself a material object but rather a performative act, then

⁹⁰ Fiennes, 2012.

ideality is projected onto nothing—a truly impossible object—and desire’s promised satisfaction is endlessly deferred; Freud’s reality principle tests the promised satisfaction against the actual psychic satisfaction of consumption and, consciously or not, finds it wanting.⁹¹

Tamboukou’s proposal for a parrhesiastic duty falls in line with a concomitant duty to listen to others when they speak difficult truths to us. She writes that teachers and academics have “extra responsibilities” in sustaining critiques of harmful ideologies even as they shape reality against such a possibility.⁹² While Tamboukou’s focus on parrhesia is a political one, I hope to have demonstrated the philosophical and psychoanalytic barriers to its effectiveness as a tool for widespread psychic, if not political liberation— I hope only that I have made an effective argument and not that my pessimism is well grounded. Despite these barriers, one of Tamboukou’s minor arguments opens opportunities to advance the project of parrhesia on a smaller scale: Foucault’s link between logos and bios. Foucault believed that parrhesia was, in particular, a project of self-reflection where the truth-teller brought him/herself in line with the “true life” or the life lived in the shadow of the parrhesiastic duty.⁹³ While it may be impossible to restructure or replace the fantasies that determine our commitments to ideological structures, we may be able to change the ideals to which the ego can adapt itself— this is to say, provide an aesthetic that can be followed even within an indomitable ideology.

⁹¹ Langer, B. "Commodified Enchantment: Children and Consumer Capitalism." Thesis Eleven 69.1 (2002): 67-81: The psychical capacity of children to dream and imagine the world creatively serves as the vehicle with which children were driven to desire more and more the satisfaction promised to them by corporate interests (73). Lacking the necessary means to attain material goods independently, children become “sites of consumption” whereby parents provide the means for the child’s consumption. The pedagogy of desire at work in the commodification of childhood is an especially devious one; the object of the child’s desire—material goods endowed with excessive symbolic meaning through corporate marketing—are wholly unable to satisfy the child’s desire. The mechanism of dissatisfaction here works on two levels: the level of symbolic meaning and the level of desire. As toys are endowed with meaning by their makers, as opposed to having inherent meaning for the child, they cannot ever truly satisfy the desire they provoke. The dissatisfaction produced and exploited in childhood by capital interests is carried by children into adolescence. Langer writes that our continual dissatisfaction represents a tension between our ability to fantasize impossible worlds and the inability of the real world to satisfy our fantasies (73).

⁹² Tamboukou, 861.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 855.

Žižek proposes such an aesthetic solution when he outlines a broad pedagogical and ethical project where we must “draw a line of distinction within the very field of our dreams between those that are the right dreams, pointing to a dimension effectively beyond our existing society, and the wrong dreams, the dreams that are just an idealized consumerist reflection...of our society.”⁹⁴ The dreams that Žižek refers to are not simply self-made; we give assent to dreams that have been imposed on us by our social, cultural, and economic order from birth until death. Žižek’s agentic subjectivization of our dreams is offering us a chance to “become realists by way of demanding what appears to be impossible in the [ideological] domain,” to reflect on the *objet a* we are presented and perhaps to replace it. How then are we to escape the infernal cycle of ideological manipulation? Žižek proposes a pedagogical example in the form of direct passive experience of the end-result of capital production. Žižek believes that scenes of “apocalypse,” in films or in places like airplane graveyards in the Mojave desert, allow us to experience what Lacan called the “inertia of the Real,” what Žižek calls “a mute presence beyond meaning.”⁹⁵ Žižek is describing a passive agentic experience where we can witness, outside of its proper (symbolic) functioning, the breakdown of our system of production; to see the reality of our waste, and the consequences of our desires, we must see the resulting material products outside of their utilitarian and socio-cultural meanings. In other words, to look upon Capital’s works and despair.

Žižek’s moment of passivity stands in contrast to the active emancipatory efforts put forward by Freire and critical pedagogues like him. Far from simply doing nothing, casting aside ambition in the face of difficulty, Žižek argues that the doing-something of emancipation is not inherently emancipatory. Frantic movement through a hedge-maze of inconceivable enormity

⁹⁴ Fiennes, 2012.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

may feel emancipatory but it does not necessary bring the subject closer to the exit. A moment of refusal to participate in the maze running allows the subject to take stock of the nature and scale of the challenge facing them. Moments of passivity and refusal can allow the subject to consider the conditions that seek to overwhelm them, to interpret their nature, and to consider their relationship to them. This is not a suggestion that the subject trapped in the maze should simply sit, starve, and die; it is a suggestion that the subject fully come to terms with the reality that they were born to play a game not designed to be won by consciously choosing the conditions upon which they will play the game.

II. Eyes Forward, Looking Back

“I never watch the stars, there’s so much down here”
-Lorde, *Yellow Flicker Beat*

The problem of hope is that, as a utopian, future-oriented vision, the subject is encouraged to imagine the future as lacking in determinism but does not itself present a solution to the problem of imaginary enjoyment in the false determinism of capitalism. As a source of imaginary enjoyment, hope is but merely another avenue to jouissance within the otherwise miserable structural and material elements of life under capitalism. The future orientation of hope as a speculative and specular fantasy endows it with two constituent problems: the first is that, as an image of a social life-world, economy, and so on, which is (imagined to be) better than the subject’s current one, they can conjure jouissance where their material circumstances are not able to provide it for them. This specular enjoyment is, far from a vehicle for progressive social change, a source of inertia even more troublesome for its implications to political progress than the inertia of neoliberal capital. The second problem is that hopeful images and fantasies are based constructed entirely with the images and symbolism already available and familiar to the subject of capital themselves. The symbolic structures of capitalist ideology have so limited our

imagination as to make it nigh impossible to imagine a world free of it. The problem of available imagery under capital is the reason Žižek asks us “why is it easier to imagine an end to all life on earth than a modest change to our economic system?”⁹⁶ Any hopeful image of a future without the oppressions of capital we might conjure will inevitably be built on a foundation of neoliberal capitalist ideology. Freire himself expressed concern over the presentist emphasis of neoliberalism arguing that “the dominators have nothing to announce but the preservation of the status quo, they continually strive to domesticate the future and render it merely a repetition of the present.”⁹⁷ The challenge for Freire’s hope is that ‘the dominators’ have not domesticated the future, they have domesticated what it is possible for the subject to imagine in the present and rendered hope, as a future oriented affect, inert.

Contextualizing the notion that the Law, the external and the internalized symbolic structure of the subject’s life-world, shapes and directs even the subject’s inner-most images and fantasies, Charles Wells writes in *The Subject of Liberation* that “the Law has no power on its own and must therefore find a way to turn desire to its own purpose.”⁹⁸ Symbolism and imagery alone are insufficient to compel the subject to action. Thus, the subject’s desires are shaped by, amongst countless other symbolic structures, the Law of neoliberal capital. We enjoy our hope in capitalism because no other symbolic system on offer promises an/the answer to the enigma of desire. For Freire, writes Webb, “progressive education is conceived as an inspirational process through which the educator seeks to mobilize the [student] with a dream...through which the impossible, by the strength and conviction with which it is dreamed and announced, becomes possible.”⁹⁹ In dreaming, in teaching, and in doing, Freire asks us to transgress against the

⁹⁶ Fiennes, 2012.

⁹⁷ Freire, Paulo. *Cultural action for freedom*. Cambridge: Harvard educational review, 1970, p.41

⁹⁸ Wells, 28.

⁹⁹ Webb, 336.

boundaries and limits imposed by capitalist ideologies in order to break through to the enjoyment of achieving our progressive utopian vision. Freire is right in that hope and transgression is a part of who we are, but this hope is not, as he believes a source of freedom; Freire's hopeful subjective position is, in the Lacanian sense, a perversion.

Wells argues that when the subject is faced with conflict between their desire, perhaps a hopeful utopian desire, and the structures of the Law, the pervert attempts to act on their desire and “assumes that there is no obstacle to desire outside of the various socially constructed Laws that structure human interaction.”¹⁰⁰ While Freire was careful to ground his notion of utopian hope in some kind of empirical understanding of material reality¹⁰¹, his notion of the hopeful subject depends on a belief that they are able to transgress and thus transcend the Law in order to access a reality beyond imaginary and symbolic representation, an unrepresentable reality beyond the strictures of capitalist ideology—in Webb's interpretation of Freire, “to announce a utopian vision that defies positive representation.”¹⁰² Contained within the self-contradiction of announcing a vision which cannot be described is an invitation to the structure of the hopeful subject to view the act of hope itself as a transgression of the Law which initiates action toward emancipation; the pervert enjoys transgression and thus finds the prohibited *jouissance* in hope. Grounding one's vision of a noumenal utopian future in a materialist-phenomenal interpretation of the present is precisely analogous of the very the limits placed on the subject's imagination by neoliberal ideology and is not a theoretical solution to them.

The pervert's folly is that this enjoyment in transgression is inherently imaginary and is easily integrated into the Law itself. One need only look at the Hope and Change promised by Barack Obama during his 2008 run for the Presidency to see how hope provided an initial burst

¹⁰⁰ Wells, 28.

¹⁰¹ Webb, 331 & 335.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 337.

of transgressive enjoyment and the action/promise of a change to, and from outside of, the Law—as a black man in a deeply racist nation, Obama’s desire and active intention to be president was an iconic transgression of American socio-symbolic structures. How quickly this hope turned to apathy and despair as the political energies of Obama’s supporters were absorbed and dissipated by an intransigent political system and the promised change never materialized. In a political context more familiar to Freire’s time, Žižek argues that it was the dreams of leftist political leaders that brought them to the ultimate transgression, revolution against the Law. Once they had succeeded in, and enjoyed, their revolution, Žižek argues that their old dreams did not change or adapt to the new situation. The Law was not destroyed, merely dormant within the leaders’ political imaginaries. Once the new Law was established, as it is structurally required to be, “the dreams remained the old dreams and they turned into the ultimate nightmare,” ending in the abject failure of every leftist political revolution in history.¹⁰³ Freire writes that, “We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water.”¹⁰⁴ We need the dream of a utopian futures to survive. What he forgets is that, while the fish may need unpolluted water, what if the entire ocean is polluted? What if our very dreams are not the place of freedom we imagine?

III. Hope in the Future Tense

The challenge of Freire’s belief in hoping for and setting out to create a utopian future “without form”, a utopian project of action without a determined vision of its final form, is made clearer by the ontological and materialist arguments of Annette Baier in “The Rights of Past and Future Persons.” Baier sets out an argument that future persons, people who do not yet exist but the fact of human procreation demands will almost inevitably exist eventually, have a claim

¹⁰³ Fiennes, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Freire, 1994, 8.

against the living for some general rights. Baier justifies her claim analogously, arguing that it is conceptually consistent for social and legal institutions that recognize the rights of the no-longer-living to also recognize that the yet-to-live might also have interests that place obligations on the living.¹⁰⁵ Qualitatively distinct from the rights of the dead, the rights of future persons would not be specific rights based on the deceased person's will (speaking both existentially and legally) but would instead be general human rights to the necessities of life (clean air, water, soil, etc.).¹⁰⁶ Baier argues that, unlike rights intended for the living, rights of future person's need not be based on the undetermined roles or identities of those future persons. Determining these roles, writes Baier, is both pragmatically impossible and conceptually unnecessary as we can safely imagine that the physiological needs of future generations will not differ significantly from our own.¹⁰⁷ According to Baier the obligation on the living to ensure future generations' access to these rights is grounded in the fact that the rights represent natural demands of human existence and to ignore them would be to threaten that existence. Baier frames the rights of future persons as the ontological and metaphysical basis for the rights of the living—if our rights cannot ensure sustainability of access to those rights, then they are not rights at all.¹⁰⁸

Baier is less committed to arguing that future persons have an absolute and enforceable right to the institutions (broadly defined) of the living than to her argument for their general human rights. Baier employs a broad historicism in her debate on a moral *right* to social institutions noting that such rights would be only morally justified—as opposed to formal, legal ones—and might “commit us more than may be realistic or wise to fixing the details of our

¹⁰⁵ Baier, Annette. "The rights of past and future persons." *Responsibilities to future generations* (1981): 172.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

moral priorities in advance of relevant knowledge that only history can provide.”¹⁰⁹ Despite the difficulty in claiming absolutely which rights future persons can assert in the present, Baier argues that as “especially self-conscious members of a cross-generational community” we have the ability (scientific and philosophical) and duty to predict the consequences of our contemporary action—or inaction—for future generations.¹¹⁰ More so than ever we have the strength of hindsight and foresight to reasonably debate which social goods are not simply ours to consume in the present, but, morally, should be passed on to future persons.¹¹¹ Baier argues that future generations can claim we are obligated to maintain our institutions through our ability to know the original intention of the institution’s creators for them to be cross-generational ‘goods,’ as well as our ability to predict that they may be as important in the future as they are today. The obligation placed on us now, perhaps more than any previous generation, is one stemming from both the past and the present.¹¹²

Baier’s task for the living, to consider the basic needs of those who will come after us, obliges us to do, quite literally, the bare minimum to ensure to continued existence of the human population. It should come to the more cynical or misanthropic among us then as no surprise that we are failing at even this basic task. The rapid decline of the welfare state in favour of neoliberal aristocracy was something that Baier, writing in the American economic boom-time of the 1970’s, was unable to foresee. Baier’s own (perhaps misplaced) optimism serves as an excellent example of the very ethical challenges she describes in her essay. The temporal shift in thinking that Baier asks of us, from considering only the demands of the past on the present, towards obligations on the living on behalf of future persons is a social, cultural, and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 182.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 177.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 176.

¹¹² Ibid., 177.

psychological one which demands that we, the living, construct a world that serves the imagined interests of those who do not exist, and whom will live in socio-cultural conditions that we cannot necessarily predict empirically. Despite these impossible conditions, the future person demands both social and psychic representation.

In “the Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons,”¹¹³ Elaine Scarry argues that individual and collective cruelty towards Other persons stems from a lack in the human inability to imagine them as whole, feeling persons. Scarry argues that our failure of imagination regarding the Other is not limited to ethno-racial Others but can also be expanded to explain our injurious relations with the other persons who are closest to us. Scarry argues that our perceptual inability to fully imagine Others, as well as our more intimate relations, is tied intrinsically to a prior, constitutive, epistemological flaw. In this vein, she writes that “our injuring of others, therefore, results from our failure to know them; and conversely, our injuring of persons within arm’s reach, itself demonstrates their unknowability.”¹¹⁴ Not only do our injurious actions demonstrate our lack of knowledge of the Other, but also that people, by their nature as subjects, cannot be known. Baier’s concern for futurity places our epistemological inabilities in a double-bind: not only is the Other, future person unknowable, the nature of the future is itself unknowable. The inconceivability of the future person, argues Scarry, has resulted in a political deadlock where “we are as a population almost empty of ethical worry about the future.”¹¹⁵ Unlike the ancient Romans, as described by Baier, who were ignorant of the destructive consequences of their slash-and-burn “forestry management” techniques, denizens of the present are either unaware of

¹¹³ Scarry, Elaine. "The difficulty of imagining other persons." *The handbook of interethnic coexistence* (1998): 53-66.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹⁵ See note 106 above.

the anthropomorphically driven decline of the biosphere or simply lack any ethical concern for the consequences of that decline for future persons—an option as worrying as it is likely.

Both Baier and Scarry suggest several normative political techniques that can help the living compensate for their fundamental lack of imagination. In “Imagining the Future”, Baier asks us to imagine a temporal space inhabited by imaginary but inevitable virtual persons for whom we act, politically, in the present: these future persons can be represented by an actual person living in the present who advocates for their rights on their behalf. For Baier, liberal politics is a forum where the consequences of present actions for future persons can be debated in the framework of those persons’ present rights. To ensure that the living are respectful of the limited rights of future generations, Baier suggests that there be an agent, or agency, chosen to be responsible for enforcing the fulfilment of obligations that those rights place on the living.¹¹⁶

Like a parent who is legally responsible for the safety and well-being of their child, we are asked to serve as an agent who is duty-bound to enforce the rights of future children. I believe that Baier stumbles quite accidentally on the politico-ideological technique that most closely resembles the perverse contemporary instantiation of our imaginative lack regarding future persons. Baier’s reasoning on the socio-cultural and political aspects of intergenerational goods and on the necessity of a representative of the future in the present opens a political and epistemological moment where the child of the present becomes the Child of the Future.

IV. Present Effects of a Future Child

In *No Future*, Lee Edelman imagines politics not as a presentist system with eyes towards the future, but as an *ostensibly* adaptive system that is fundamentally conservative, working to

¹¹⁶ Baier, 181.

“*affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it intends to transmit to the future...”¹¹⁷

Edelman argues that, in our psychic and cultural imaginary, the formulation of futurity is embodied in the image of the Child. For Baier, future persons are virtual others on whose behalf we act in the present. Future persons will eventually become actual and our relation to them as objects of thought, through our actions in the present, will determine the material conditions in which they live in the future—and the meaning of our actions on their behalf will be understood historically by them. We do not need to fully imagine them aside from imagining that their basic physiological needs will be the same as ours.

The Child’s role in the symbolic order is different from the future person in that they are not a signifier for the deferred-but- eventual subjectivity of an actual future person—we have named the future person to comprehend their function symbolically, but their actuality, their subjectivity, exists only in the abyss of the Real future. The Child exists as a teleological cultural justification for maintaining the existing social order now and always; the Child is the fully-imagined-future for whom—or which—our social order and its contingent social goods are “held in perpetual trust.”¹¹⁸ The difference between the Child and Baier’s future persons is one of our relation to them in the present. The Child is a symbolic staging ground of our *self*-realization, onto which those in the present project the impossibly perfect image of a desired future that will never, and can never, become actual.¹¹⁹

The Child is no actual, specific child, past, present, or future, on whose behalf we act politically. For Edelman, the Child is merely an image, endowed with conservative symbolism, that enables a political ideology of reproductive futurism: “an ideological limit on political

¹¹⁷ Lee Edelman. *No future: Queer theory and the death drive*. Duke University Press, 2004, p.3 [emphasis in original]

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privileging of heteronormativity” by position the image of the child as “the fantastic beneficiary of every political intervention...the perpetual horizon of every acknowledge politics.”¹²⁰ In Baier’s politics, the future person is a virtual rights bearer who places obligations on us to consider them in our political decisions specifically as they relate to actions that might infringe those rights. The rights of Baier’s future persons are limited both in number and scope. In Edelman’s thinking, the Child is the hegemonic justification for politics, full stop; each of our political deliberations and decisions must be understood under the symbolic authority of the Child—inversely, the image of the Child gives symbolic authority to those who invoke it, who claim themselves as its spokesperson. In positioning the Child as the end of politics, reproductive futurism externalizes those whose thinking is external to the Child. The image of the queer is the ultimate externality in the politics of reproductive futurism as their procreative lack embodies the end of the Child and therefore destroys the future—the queer embodies death in and of the social order.

Edelman’s Child returns us to Baier and Scarry’s challenge of knowability. For Baier, the unknowability of future persons’ subjectivities was an obstacle to knowledge of which social goods can or should be preserved for future generations but not an obstacle to preserving the necessities of life. For Edelman, analysing our political relations through Lacanian psychoanalysis, this unknowability is a fundamental, but hidden, constituent of the image of the Child. Edelman argues that politics serves as the symbolic framework in which we (attempt to) enact the fantasies of order we achieve in our adoption of totalizing Imaginary subjectivities; in other words, to understand, to know, Others as subjects in a social reality, we must submit to a fantasy that is structured by absolute and complete images that are supported by linguistic

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2-3.

structures.¹²¹ In this way, we can recognize the meaning of our political reality by filtering it through the symbolic authority, structured by impossibly perfect images, of the Child. Social reality and the subjectivities that make it up demand meaning. Something meaningless cannot be explained or integrated into our symbolic understanding of the world. The Child, as our image of the future, is the symbolic answer to the question of meaning. Why should we build enduring institutions? Why should we regulate social behaviour? Why does what we do *matter* at all? Why do I exist? If we ask, where are we going? then the Child is the answer. For Edelman, the Child is the perpetually deferred destination of history, the end of our narratives of progress.¹²² This is what it means for the image of the Child to signify the future: the Child gives our actions, our very lives meaning. As Edelman writes, “no baby...no future.”¹²³

The difference between future persons and the Child is here, I think, clear: The Child never arrives. The laws of time demand that it always be the present, and that we may only know the past, however imperfect that knowledge; the future is as Imaginary and unknowable as the Child. Our insistence on identifying with the future, argues Edelman, is an attempt to hide from the death drive.¹²⁴ Because our subjectivities are signified in a linguistically defined symbolic order, according to Lacan, there is an element of our humanity that can never be truly represented in that order; this is what Edelman means when he describes the Child as a grounds for our *self*-realization.¹²⁵ The death drive is what exist as a surplus to our subjectivity and forces us to endlessly repeat our actions in the symbolic order in a futile attempt to fully symbolize ourselves. The Child is the image of the future in which we have finally achieved this impossible fulfilment, that we may live, though dead, forever; our utopian political desire of fulfilment and

¹²¹ Ibid., 7-8.

¹²² Ibid., 12.

¹²³ Ibid., 13.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹²⁵ See note 116 above.

of perfect links between meaning and actions drives us to deny that history is a cycle of repetition, a permutation of the same social order, and assert it is instead a chain of progression with an eventual End. Baier both accepts and encourages the endless cycle of repetition by attempting to enforce a right to the material conditions that would allow such a repetition to continue. Baier advocates for the ongoing existence of humans who, in their own time, must be allowed to create political and social meaning. In doing this, Baier finds peace in the death drive, comfortable in the knowledge that all must die, and insisting that those doomed to die allow future persons the same opportunity. The cult of the Child denies this repetition aggressively by attempting to re-create, in perpetuity, the unsustainable and metaphysically baseless material and philosophical conditions of the present.

For Edelman, the queer subject, imaged as unable to contribute to the eventual competition of humanity to be found in the future Child, is violently excluded from the social and political order. As a symbol of death, the queer subject insists on the importance of the *present* person over the figure of the Child. While the surplus and lack in the subject are symbolically determined and are unavoidable, the modes of repairs attempted in politics are diverse. Quoting Lauren Berlant, Edelman writes that the United States, a nation (at least narratively) founded on liberty for adult citizens, has become simply a support structure for the endless development of the Child.¹²⁶ The conservative characterization of gay men as child predators who threaten the innocence and pure development—through the constant threat of recruitment in the cult of (the) death (drive)—of the innocent children contains, for Edelman, the stain of the Real of queer identities. Regulations designed to protect children are often the most oppressive limits on liberty that exist formally in the law. For no reason would it be acceptable to ban books, censor television and film, and shape politics in the image of the heterosexual nuclear

¹²⁶ Ibid., 21.

family other than for the protection of the children; a reason that is only explicit in the godly justifications of those most resistant to the realities of the drive. Such is how the same political actors can forbid abortion using the language of protecting children and, in the same breath, advocate for destruction of the welfare state that supports them materially. The Child exists to provide an avenue to perfection but need not, and cannot, provide it.

We can see now that the love and hope of a teacher towards their students is not one of a professional to their client, but one of an adult to a child in the cult of the Child. The subjectivity of the teacher—even if we do not consider the contingency of the existence of teaching as a career—is dependent on their ability to figure to importance of education as towards perfection of the Child. The nonsensical refrain of “educating for the future” permeates education. Here, I believe, is where a political intervention *a la* Baier can take place. In our political imaginary, the Child has colonized the future. In the Child’s name we are eradicating the possibility of sustaining human life on Earth at a pace where recovery becomes exponentially less likely, or possible, over time. To preserve the right of future persons to exist as well as build a world that is suitable, if not good, for the living, I believe our political focus should settle in the present.

Implicit in Baier’s argument is that a kind of ideality in the present is a guarantor of the basic elements of the good life for future persons. Eschewing the perpetual deferral of the good life offered by the cult of the Child, a politics of the present—but not of presentism—offers us a political horizon that can be touched instead of simply imagined. It is noble to act politically with an eye toward the future, but our bodies remain, always, in the present; like Baier, I argue that our unique historical position, as those who can better see the causes of our effects, demands of us “new moral relationships and new obligations.”¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Baier, 176.

We cannot know the future, but we have the power to affect its material conditions in ways our ancestors would find inconceivable. We know what we are doing but we are nonetheless doing it. Edelman argues that queer people have a unique position outside the social order and therefore a unique ethical obligation to it a la Žižek: to negate it.¹²⁸ Following Lacan, Edelman's desire is for queer people, or their political allies, to insist on the truth of despair even if it denies us the hopeful promise of an eventual Good, even if it hurts. In a typically queer injunction, Edelman writes that when a political actors attempt to delimit debate with a demand to "please think of the children" we should reply: "Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie [a child who sings that happiness is only (always) a day away]; fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital Is and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop."¹²⁹

V. Help Me, Subjective Destitution; You're My Only Hope

If we are to follow Edelman's suggestion to say 'fuck it all' to the images and symbolic systems that keep subjects docile, and we accept that exposure to harsh or traumatic truths is counterproductive, how can the subject move beyond the inertia of hope? Freire's suggestion is, as before, that the subject form a political consciousness that does not accept the determinism of the future suggested by conditions of the present. Freire believes that it is hopefulness that prevents the subject from falling into despair and withdrawing from the world. Only in hope can the subject develop the consciousness they need to avoid the pitfalls of neoliberal ideology and the individualistic, egoistic subjectivity it demands.

¹²⁸ Edelman, 28.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 29.

The role of hope in the classroom and the difficulties in addressing it as an educator can be read in the context of Lauren Berlant's theorization of hope in *Cruel Optimism*. For Berlant, a cruelly optimistic relation to an object occurs when attachment to that object compromises the conditions of satisfaction promised by that object.¹³⁰ The cruelty of such an attachment exists in the form of a hope that in sustaining one's relationship with the object "provides continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep living on and to look forward to being in the world" (Berlant 24). Furthermore, the subject's fear of losing the object hides a worse fear that losing the object will forever bar the subject from feeling optimism about anything again.¹³¹ A relation of cruel optimism is easier for an outsider, a teacher or analyst, to see than the subject of the desire themselves. Despite the ease with which a relation of cruel optimism can be observed, breaking that relation has the potential to destroy the subject.

I believe that the adolescent idealization of consumption and its repetition in the neoliberal classroom is just such a relation of cruel optimism. The ideal of consumption promises endless satisfaction that, by definition, requires endless consumption and thus will never come. The conditions of attachment to idealized consumption are the very barrier to the satisfaction it promises. The frustration of consumption demanded by the reality testing teacher is not only a momentary interruption, but a denial of the possibility of ever finding satisfaction. Even if we deny that the achievement of satisfaction in consumption is impossible, on a material level we are again confronted with frustration. The nature of our planet as finite is an existential frustration to the ideal of unending satisfaction in perpetual consumption. Despite this material reality, the cycle continues.

¹³⁰ Berlant, 24.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Here I fear that the solution is cruel, deeply lacking in optimism. Britzman argues that if Freud's reality principle works as a pillar of education then the love lost by the ideal object must be dispersed onto new objects lest the capacity for love also be lost.¹³² On the compulsion to repeat, Britzman also notes that the loss of love and anxiety over (potential or actual) failures in a child's education are traumatic moments that scar the subject's psyche forever. The loss of love I am proposing in disillusioning students of their hope is a severe one: since their hope is determined by the same ideological and socio-cultural pressures that determine them as subjects in the world, to lose their love for consumption is also to lose their love for the world.

What is the cost of reorienting oneself to a world disavowed? How should education help students construct a relation to their world when the prohibitions and laws that are supposed to "provide a screen for the death drive" invite the drive in and demand that you enjoy the ride?¹³³ I cannot help but see this analysis as an instance of "a matured primal scream," an admission of helplessness that, like the adolescent who cries out for utility in knowledge, informs my ethical imperatives as a learner and as an educator.¹³⁴ Onto whom, or what, should the transference send the learner's love after it is lost by the world? I fear that the question of the loss of love in disillusionment has severe consequences if it is not handled with great care, for love is always also a kind of hate. The same man who said, "at the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love... our vanguard revolutionaries *must idealize this love of the people...*"¹³⁵ also is reported to have said "a revolutionary must become a cold killing machine motivated by *pure hate*. We must create the pedagogy of the *paredón*

¹³² Britzman, 142.

¹³³ Ibid., 149.

¹³⁴ Britzman, 138.

¹³⁵ Guevara, Che, and David Deutschmann. *Che Guevara reader: writings by Ernesto Che Guevara on guerrilla strategy, politics & revolution*. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997. Italics mine.

[execution wall].”¹³⁶ Such a pedagogy might seem melodramatic in the context of an outwardly positive affect such as hope, but I believe that making explicit the violence in such an ideality can help us build a screen that shields us from the crueler effects of our enjoyment—a translucent shield that allows (in)sight but also provides protection. Certainly, there must be a pedagogy that can help us craft a screen for the death drive of hope that is not always also covered in blood—or advertisements.

My position on the role of education, hope, and subjectivity take the form of what I have come to affectionately call a ‘classic Žižekian reversal’ of Freire’s argument. As I have argued, I believe it is hope, and not despair, that represents the inertial force maintaining the subject’s position in the psychic and socio-cultural status quo. Freire believes that despair freezes the subject and encourages them to disengage from the political and material world. Like an animal, the subject is at their most volatile, their most dangerous, when they have been backed into a corner. The corner is not a place of hope; it is the ultimate place of despair. In the corner the subject is forced to acknowledge that all the defence mechanisms that have led them there have failed and they again must make a choice: fight or die, or hope and die anyway.

When the subject lives their entire life in the corner, hope is merely the name we give to denial, repression, displacement, projection, and sublimation when they are painted by capital with the smug grinning face of Wal-Mart’s Rollbacks mascot. When one’s entire life is lived in the corner, as Shakespeare writes in *Measure for Measure*, “The miserable have no other medicine but only hope.”¹³⁷ Contrary to hope celebration as an agent, or at least precursor, of change, hope is the salve of the unchanging.

¹³⁶ Babun, Teo A., and Victor Andres Triay. *The Cuban Revolution: years of promise*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005

¹³⁷ Shakespeare, William, and Davis P. Harding. *Measure for measure*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954.

There is a sublime cinematic moment present in many films where the characters face a truly impossible threat. This moment inevitably comes toward the end of the film after the characters have spent the better part of two hours in frenetic motion, fighting or fleeing the threatening object. When the characters are cornered, when they have nowhere left to run and no will or weapons with which to fight, there is what I would identify as a moment of authentic passivity. The moment may play out in various ways, but the classic variant is a tearful hug between two characters, or a group hug or huddle between more. In this moment, the characters face the true horror of their predicament: after all their frantic action, after expending all their material and emotional resources, after fleeing an enemy they thought they could outsmart, they have changed nothing. It is in this moment that the characters finally acknowledge that their situation is as hopeless as it always was, but they refused to acknowledge as such.

The problem of education can be seen in how the next moments of the film play out. In most films, but in children's films especially, this moment of authentic acceptance of despair is interrupted by a *deus ex machina* where a hero thought dead or some other saviour rescues the characters from their fate. This moment of salvation, while often satisfying, is a moment of pure denial, of an abject refusal to bear the terror of the characters' situation. In our cultural imaginary, education is just such a hero. What I argue, however, is that there is no such hero. The moment I wish to emphasise in such films is the one in which there is no saviour, in which no external force intervenes to save the characters. In these films the choice is stark, it is not whether they will fight or die, it is whether they will die fighting. In such moments, the characters' authentic despair turns not into pathetic surrender to the inevitable nor into a redeeming affect producing an overcoming of the impossible, but into a rage against the absurdity of their situation. It did not have to be this way, but it is.

Like the structures of fantasy and desire that make hope a psychic possibility, despair is a constitutive element of our subjectivity. As McGowan paraphrases Freud's belief in the possibility of happiness, "common human misery is the best we can hope for."¹³⁸ For Lacan, alienation and a despairing anxiety are fundamental parts of what we are. Our forced choice upon entering the symbolic world is the birthplace of fantasies of a former subjective completion that never were and never will be. It is for this constitutive reason that misery, and not hope, is the component with which we ought to identify. The subject "knows" that the world is not as it should be, or at least could be, but they reject this knowledge; knowing threatens their enjoyment. The despair felt by those who know is not, and should not, be discarded as a deadening weight, as an inertia to be overcome.

Cho argues that, "we cannot assume a social investigator can access society's dark underside and learn its traumatic knowledge without showing any resistance to it."¹³⁹ Even though the subject resists strongly the negative affect of political consciousness, even though they consciously attempt to maintain a hopeful outlook despite reality, even after we are conscious (in the Freirean sense) of our symptomatic misery, why does the subject not renounce it? Žižek argues that even after we discover the meaning of our repressed knowledge, how the subject can integrate what they have repressed into symbolic knowledge, we live as if we do not know. As Žižek says, "[the subject] loves his symptom more than himself."¹⁴⁰ The *sinthome*, what remains of the symptom after interpretation, is how we organize our enjoyment, how we "choose something" to "avoid madness." We love our *sinthome* more than ourselves because it is central to our existence while the self is merely contingent. Our misery is killing us, but it is "the only thing which gives [us] consistency." "The symptom is an element which causes us a great

¹³⁸ McGowan, 35.

¹³⁹ Cho, 92.

¹⁴⁰ Žižek, 1989, 80.

deal of trouble, but its absence would mean even greater trouble: total catastrophe.”¹⁴¹ Once we are able to identify with our misery as our only substance, as the very core of our being, the promises of hope and happiness fall away and though we can never truly see reality for “what it is”, we cannot ever look beyond the vale of imagery and symbolism to the Real beneath it, we can look upon it with new eyes and a new attitude: I’d rather die twice than die once.

The withdrawal of the subject from their symbolic life-world, a kind of death of the self, was called ‘subjective destitution’ by Lacan. Subjective destitution does not destroy the subject, as the subject is merely the void around which the self is formed. Subjective destitution leaves the withdrawn subject basking in the abyss of freedom and doubt, shedding the makeshift fantasy-answers to the original question that provoked the fundamental fantasy, and began the process of integration into an imaginary and symbolic life-world.¹⁴² Wells argues that in order for the subject to be able to free themselves from the cycles of desire and enjoyment demanded by neoliberal capital, they must make a conscious decision not to believe in the demand of the symbolic order of their life-world.¹⁴³ Mirroring the ethical position of *Bartleby the Scrivener*, subjective destitution requires that the subject meet the demands of the Other with a simple “I would prefer not to”.¹⁴⁴ In this position of active passivity, of agentially choosing not to engage with the material world within the symbolic coordinates set by neoliberalism, the subject is able to avoid the traps of fulfilment and enjoyment falsely promised by the symbolic as a reward for constant, unthinking, action. Like Žižek’s earlier aesthetic proposal to passively reflect on the material waste produced in capitalist economies, Bartelbian withdrawal from the subject’s life world opens up a space where they can “[withdraw] from the externally imposed system of Law

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 85.

¹⁴² The question *Che Vuoi?* What does the Other want from me? As discussed on pgs. 11-12

¹⁴³ Wells, 201

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 199.

and its superego supplement [the injunction to enjoy] into...the space within which it is possible for the subject to re-choose [their] own fundamental fantasy.”¹⁴⁵ While the structure of the mind in psychoanalysis requires the existence of both conscious and unconscious constructs like the fundamental fantasy and the imaginary/symbolic, subjective destitution introduces an opportunity for the subject to consciously orientate themselves toward the symbolic world through an unforced, unalienated, choice.

In terms of the relevance of subjective destitution to education, Wells argues that the teacher must adopt what Lacan termed the “discourse of the analyst” and serve as the Other who provides a “particular kind of silence” to the students demands for fulfilment, for instructions on how they should behave and what they should know under the gaze of the Other.¹⁴⁶ The student of the analytical teacher will invariably demand knowledge, demand to be told what to do, what to think, how to feel. They will say they have not come to school to be a subject of the analyst, but to be subject to the master. As most teachers can attest, students want to be free of the school’s constraints and the teacher’s control just until they are. The questions which every teacher whose instructions allow too much discretion, who gives their students too much freedom of thought and action are invariably expressions of anxiety regarding the teacher’s desire: but what *should* I be doing...what do you *want* me to be doing...can you bear me doing the wrong thing? As Britzman writes of Freud’s perspectives on education, “there is no preparation for existence.”¹⁴⁷ In refusing to answer students, in refusing to provide them with a closure of the antagonisms inherent in their subjectivity and in their symbolic world, the teacher forces the students into “the open, radically free space of subjective responsibility.”¹⁴⁸ Wells is

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 201.

¹⁴⁶ Wells, 203.

¹⁴⁷ Britzman, 126.

¹⁴⁸ Wells, 203.

also careful to write against the total silence of the teacher who, in refusing to say anything, imitates the subjective position of the students and refuses to take responsibility for their beliefs and decisions. The ‘objective’ teacher who claims to hold no political views merely rejects responsibility for influencing their students. Teachers must, “as it were, lead by example; not only to analyse and deconstruct [their] students’ immersion in their respective life worlds, but also to show them what it is like to take subjective responsibility for having chosen a particular perspective.”¹⁴⁹

The role of the analytical teacher is not to offer students hope for the future despite the present, or even *conscientização*, in the hope of offering such hope; the role of the analytical educator is to offer the students a choice in orienting themselves to the present. In *conscientização*, Freire offers the vital affects of humility, modesty, and serenity, as well as courage, boldness, and endurance to students and teachers struggling for a better world. Though these remain vital, even admirable affects to embody, for Freire, they merely contribute to a political and future-oriented hope. Analytical teaching grounded in the Reality of despair, in contrast, offers terms that Žižek sets out while writing of the most recent financial crisis in Greece:

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben said in an interview ‘thought is the courage of hopelessness’ — an insight that is especially pertinent for our historical moment, when even the most pessimistic diagnosis as a rule finishes with an uplifting hint of some version of the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. The true courage is not to imagine an alternative, but to accept the consequence of the fact that *there is no clearly discernable alternative*: the dream of an alternative is a sign of a theoretical cowardice; it functions as a fetish that prevents us thinking through to the end the deadlock of our predicament. In short, *the true courage is to admit that the light at the end of the tunnel is most likely the headlights of another train approaching us from the opposite direction.*¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 204.

¹⁵⁰ Žižek, Slavoj. “Slavoj Žižek on Greece: the courage of hopelessness”. <http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/07/slavoj-i-ek-greece-courage-hopelessness>

Žižek's suggestion is not the old conservative wisdom that the status quo cannot be improved upon; Žižek wants us instead to acknowledge that until we more fully understand the situation we find ourselves economically, socially, culturally, and psychically, we are doomed to run down the tracks into the oncoming trains of our refusal to stop and think. As capital demands constant motion to avoid reflection, so must we become immobile and think on the conditions and drives of our mobility.

Conclusion: Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here

“I have not loved the World, nor the World me;
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed
To its idolatries a patient knee,
Nor coined my cheek to smiles,--nor cried aloud
In worship of an echo: in the crowd

They could not deem me one of such--I stood Among them, but not of them--in a shroud
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could, Had I not filed my mind, which thus
itself subdued.”

-Lord Byron¹⁵¹

After the election of Donald Trump to the office of President of the United States of America, I was able to critically self-reflect on the effects of the intellectual argument I had been crafting for the better part of the past few years. In the ideological climate that exists today, the signs and symptoms of Trump’s coming election ought to have been obvious. Despite the painfully obvious truth that Trump was a masterful manipulator of the psychic zeitgeist, I, a queer leftist, still held out a lesser-evilist hope that he would be electorally defeated by Hillary Clinton, a politician who almost perfectly embodies of the very neoliberalism I have argued against in this paper. Such, as I have finally convinced myself, is the blinding force and power of hope. It did not have to be this way, but it is.

I first began reading and research for this paper almost three years ago and since then I have felt myself increasingly justified in choosing the topic of hope. Through this time I struggled greatly with my emotional connection to my own arguments. I struggled less with my belief that my contributions were intellectually sensical than with my belief that the intellectual sensibility of my argument resulted in a theoretical perspective sufficient for the increasingly reactionary conditions of our cultural and political, and the dreadful consequences of this for our

¹⁵¹ Byron, George Gordon Noel, sixth Baron Byron in “*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. “A Romaunt. Canto III.”

shared planet. What is the value of a post-ironic critique of hope in a time where hope may be the only psychic bulwark against the rising tide of far-right nationalism and xenophobia in Europe and its former imperial lands? Surely I cannot reasonably defend a position which would have educators such as myself, who stand atop a small mountain of privilege, should down to our increasingly marginalised students, “hey, don’t you know it sucks up here too!?”

With this paper it is not my intention to take something from those who have nothing. What I may be lacking personally in hopeful affect, my socio-cultural position allows me a comfortable life in an increasingly uncomfortable world. In this paper I have not addressed the material consequences of the disproportionately negative effects of neoliberal capital on socially marginalised groups, opting instead for an abstract-universalist approach focussed on individual psychology and interpersonal psychodynamics. Further study in this area would greatly benefit from a more material and narrative analysis of how despair and hope are specifically experienced, employed by, and used as weapons against, different racialized, religious, sexualized, gendered, and socio-economic groups.

Beset upon from all sides by “cuckservatives,”¹⁵² faggy “beta-males”, “white-knights” and “social justice warriors”¹⁵³ alike, the unbearable burden of Black Lives Matter’s ‘reverse-racism’, and the liberal pontificating of “coastal” or “intellectual” elites,¹⁵⁴ the right of Whites not only to dominate, but to take pleasure in their hegemony, is perceived to be rapidly eroding by those who live on its perilous cliffs. Trump supporters want to “make America great again,” demanding, tantrum-like, a return to a simpler time when they could reap the benefits bestowed upon them by both the ancient and contemporary traumas of the Other (the existence of which

¹⁵² Conservatives who are perceived to have conceded too much politically and ideologically to progressivism.

¹⁵³ Pejorative terms for men who do not embody hypermasculinity, male feminists, and for anyone espousing a progressive/leftist perspective respectively. Often used in online discourse.

¹⁵⁴ Jews

attest to the fact that such a simpler time never existed). Knowing nothing but enjoyment in the patriarchy whose slow death they mourn so loudly, they cry out for Papa Trump to save them from the enemy within. Trump has masterfully offered his followers the father figure they so desperately crave; a father who gives his children the chance to regain something they never possessed but nonetheless feel deprived of; a father who offers them an end to their dissatisfaction; a father who loves them for who they are. In an era deemed “post-truth” by those whose unsupported faith in enlightenment values begins, finally, to fade; free of the burden of duty and the constraint of prohibition; Trump is our Father¹⁵⁵ and aside from economic and social ruin he has but one offer and one demand of his children: enjoy!

¹⁵⁵ Trump is literally referred to as “Daddy” by gay fascist, alt-right mouthpiece, and icon of white supremacist jouissance Milo Yiannopoulos (and other gay Trump supporters).
(<http://www.breitbart.com/milo/2016/06/19/happy-fathers-day-daddy-donald/>)

Bibliography

- Babun, Teo A., and Victor Andres Triay. *The Cuban Revolution: years of promise*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005
- Baier, Annette. "The rights of past and future persons" in E. Patridge, *Responsibilities to future generations*, 1981.
- Berlant, Lauren. *The affect theory reader*. Edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Britzman, Deborah P. *Freud and education*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Byron, George Gordon Noel, sixth Baron Byron in "*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. "A Romaunt. Canto III."
- Cho, K. Daniel. *Psychopedagogy: Freud, Lacan, and the psychoanalytic theory of education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Edelman, Lee. *No future: Queer theory and the death drive*. Duke University Press, 2004.
- Freire, Paulo. *Cultural action for freedom*. Cambridge: Harvard educational review, 1970.
- . *Pedagogy of hope: reliving Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- . *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Guevara, Che, and David Deutschmann. *Che Guevara reader: writings by Ernesto Che Guevara on guerrilla strategy, politics & revolution*. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997
- Jacobs, Dale. "What's Hope Got to Do With It? Toward a Theory of Hope and Pedagogy." *JAC* 24, no. 4 (2012): 783-802. Accessed December 2015.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20866715>
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*. Translated by Jacques-Alain Miller. Vol. 1. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- . *The ethics of psychoanalysis: 1959-1960*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Dennis Porter. London: Routledge, 1992.

- McGowan, Todd. *The end of dissatisfaction?: Jacques Lacan and the emerging society of enjoyment*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.
- Pervert's Guide to Ideology*. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. Performed by Slavoj Žižek. Unites States of America: Zeitgeist Films, 2012. Digital Download.
- Prager, Dennis. *Happiness is a serious problem: a human nature repair manual*. New York: ReganBooks, 1999.
- Rothenberg, Molly Anne. *The excessive subject: a new theory of social change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010.
- Shakespeare, William, and Davis P. Harding. *Measure for measure*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954.
- Tamboukou, Maria. "Truth Telling in Foucault and Arendt: Parrhesia, the Pariah and Academics in Dark times." *Journal of Education Policy* 27.6 (2012): 849-65.
- Webb, Darren. "Paulo Freire and 'the need for a kind of education in hope'." *Cambridge Journal of Education* 40, no. 4 (December 2010): 327-39. doi:10.1080/0305764x.2010.526591.
- Wells, Charles H. *The subject of liberation: Žižek, politics, psychoanalysis*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.
- Yelich-O'Connor, Ella (Lorde), "Yellow Flicker Beat." *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1 – Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*. Republic, 2014.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *The sublime object of ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.
- . *For they know not what they do: enjoyment as a political factor*. London: Verso, 1991.
- . "Slavoj Žižek on Greece: the courage of hopelessness". *New Statesman*.
<http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/07/slavoj-i-ek-greece-courage-hopelessness>
- . *The parallax view*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.