

Is There A Post-Human Sexuality?

Slavoj Žižek 

Professor of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis, The European Graduate School (EGS), Saas Fee- Switzerland. Email: szizek@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Will human sexuality survive the passage to Artificial Intelligence? To answer this question properly, we should first analyze the paradoxical inner structure of sexuality itself, which is never simply binary: it always involves a third element that gives body to the deadlock of sexual difference – this is what Lacan meant by “there is no sexual difference.” This is why sexuality is in itself excessive and perverse. For this reason, all attempts to “normalize” sexuality by way of keeping it within the limits of moderation miserably fail: today, we find on the market products deprived of their dangerous element (coffee without caffeine, chocolate without sugar...), and the moderate sexuality is sexuality without sex. The Buddhist attempts to contain the excess sexuality miss the point of sexuality: intense sexuality is in itself the greatest sacrifice (the sacrifice of peaceful moderate life) – in sexuality, we enjoy the pain, the renunciation itself. However, today, in our world pervaded by commodification and technological inventions, real human partners are more and more replaced by what Lacan called lathouses, artificial objects aimed at satisfying our sexual desire without another human being (plastic phalluses, digitalized pornography). The result is that we are thrown into a space of limitless pleasures where, although “everything is permitted,” our intense sexual desire gets anaestheticized.

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Officers, Maids, and Chimney Sweeps

What better way to begin a treatise on sexual difference than with Kierkegaard's "immortal division"(Lacan 1966, 600) of mankind:

A wit has said that one might divide mankind into officers, serving maids, and chimney sweeps. To my mind this remark is not only witty but profound, and it would require a great speculative talent to devise a better classification. When a classification does not ideally exhaust its object, a haphazard classification is altogether preferable, because it sets imagination in motion."(Kierkegaard 1983, 162)¹

In a first approach, it appears that sexuality is grounded in the classification of human beings: human genus is divided into two main species (masculine and feminine), or we reject this binary view and assert a new more complex classification, a plurality of gender identities. Lacan leaves behind all such options: his starting point are not Two or Three (men, women, and some higher androgynous unity of the Two) or a multiplicity but a Two whose terms cannot form a full relationship because of a third disturbing element which enables the two and simultaneously serves as an obstacle to their complementarity. One should note that in Marx, Kierkegaard's contemporary, we find two different versions of the same paradoxical classification. First, there is, in *Capital*, Marx's characterization of the market exchange between worker and capitalist as

a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labor-power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to, is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to himself. The only force that brings them together and puts them in relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interests of each.²

One is tempted to submit this passage from Marx to a double Kierkegaardian correction: first, the terms should be just three, not four - freedom, equality, *and Bentham*; then, one should bring to light the underlying triad of the French Revolution to which Marx obviously refers- freedom, equality, *fraternity*. We are thus dealing with a metaphoric substitution (fraternity is pushed below

¹ Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and trembling / Repetition*) Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983, p. 162. I am indebted to Mladen Dolar for this reference to Kierkegaard, Heine and Marx.

² Quoted from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch06.htm>

the bar, out of sight, substituted by Bentham) which makes a clear point: the actual result of the bourgeois revolution is that, instead of fraternity of free people, we get narrow egotism... The second version of paradoxical classification we get in *Capital* concerns the status of the “general equivalent among other commodities:

It is as if, alongside and external to lions, tigers, rabbits, and all other actual animals, which form when grouped together the various kinds, species, subspecies, families, etc. of the animal kingdom, there existed in addition *the animal*, the individual incarnation of the entire animal kingdom¹

The two types of paradoxical classification are clearly opposed: in the second case, the supplementary element (money, THE animal) directly gives body to the universal dimension as such, i.e., in it, the universal (of commodities or of animals) encounters itself among its species; in the first case, the supplementary element (Bentham) stands for ridiculous particularity (which is also universal in the precise sense that it provides a specific color to the universality – in Marx's case, the key to what freedom and equality effectively mean in capitalist society). The difference relies on the structure of the preceding set: if it is a couple (man and woman, rich class and poor class), the third element is the »lowest« one (chimney sweeper who disturbs harmonious sex relationship, or, in anti-Semitism, the Jew who disturbs harmonious class relationship); if it is an (open, in principle) series (of commodities, of people, etc.), the supplementary term is the highest one (Money, King, gold among metals, etc.). In the first case, the excessive element disunites, introduces antagonism, struggle; in the second case, it introduces unity, it totalizes.

Or, in the terms of Lacan's formulas of sexuation: the stand-in for universality (money among commodities) follows the “masculine” logic of the exception which grounds universality, while the supplement to the Two (chimney sweep, rabble) follows the “feminine” logic, i.e., it makes the couple non-All, inconsistent. In the case of Bentham, we can also introduce the same triadic logic of the antagonistic couple plus its supplement - there is an antagonism between freedom and equality (which Etienne Balibar tries to overcome with his formula *equaliberte*), and »Bentham« names the cause of this antagonism: it is because freedom means freedom of market exchange that, when we are dealing with the »free« exchange between capital and labour, formal equality turns into factual inequality, and *vice versa*, it is because equality is the formal equality in the eyes of the law that the free exchange on the market turns into unfreedom for the one selling his/her labour force. In short, the condition of *equaliberte* is to obliterate »Bentham« from the picture.

True, the chimney-sweep-element is a particular supplement which provides the specific coloring of all the preceding terms (what they “really mean” in the concrete historical totality); however, this is not to be read as if the chimney-sweep-element stands for the touch of commonsense, as in Heinrich Heine's (yet another contemporary of Marx and Kierkegaard) well-

¹ Quoted from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/commodity.htm>

known saying that one should value above everything else “love, truth, freedom, and crab soup.” “Crab soup” stands here for all the small pleasures in the absence of which we become (mental, if not real) terrorists following an abstract idea and enforcing it onto reality without any consideration of concrete circumstances... One should emphasize here that such a “wisdom” is precisely what Kierkegaard and Marx did NOT have in mind – their message is rather the opposite one: the principle itself, in its purity, is already stained by the particularity of crab soup, i.e., the particularity sustains the very purity of the principle. The difference that separates Heine from Marx is thus clear, it concerns the status of universality: while Heine advocates the commonsense wisdom which warns us against direct literal devotion to and application of universal norms, Marx point is the opposite one – the addition of “Bentham” implies that, in the capitalist society, freedom/equality is not authentic, so we should get rid of “Bentham” and strive to actualize freedom/equality in its true universality.

One should also note here the difference between this supplementary element and the Derridean supplement: the latter is a supplement to One (to Presence, to Origin), while for Kierkegaard, Marx, and Lacan (whose name should be added here as the chimney sweep to both of them), the excessive element is a supplement to the Two, to the harmonious couple (*yin* and *yang*, the two classes, etc.) - capitalist, worker, and the Jew; or, maybe, high class, low class, *plus rabble*.¹ In the triad of officer, maid and the chimney sweep, the chimney sweep can effectively be perceived as the *Liebes-Stoerer*, the obscene intruder who cuts short their love-making. (Let us go to the end and imagine the ultimate obscenity: sexual act between the officer and the maid, with the chimney sweeper who intervenes afterwards with the act of belated contraception, cleaning up her "channel" with his brush...)²

Insofar as this supplementary element embodies trash with no proper place in the hierarchy of things, no wonder that the same paradox reproduces itself within trash itself. Public trash bins are more and more differentiated today: there are special bins for paper, glass, metal cans, cardboard package, plastic, etc. Here already, things get sometimes complicated: if I have to dispose of a paper bag or a notebook with a tiny plastic band, where does it belong, to paper or to package? No wonder than we often get on the bins detailed instruction beneath the general designation: PAPER – books, newspapers, etc., but NOT hardcover books or books with plasticized cover, etc. In such cases, to properly dispose of one's waste would have taken up to half an hour or more of detailed reading and touch decisions. To make things easier, we then get a supplementary trash bin for GENERAL WASTE where we throw all that did not meet the specific criteria of other bins – again, as if, apart from paper trash, plastic trash, etc., there is trash as such, universal trash. Chimney sweep is the element embodying the non-relationship, sustaining it as a non-relationship: if we take

¹ Stalin's position seems ambiguous here: one can imagine a Stalinist purge as the veffort to liquidate all chimney sweepers who disturb socialist harmony – but was Stalin himself also not the supreme sweeper?

² One should also not forget that a maid and a chimney sweeper themselves form a couple - recall the old myth of chimney sweeper as the seducer of innocent maids.

it away, we get a simple duality of polar opposite, like the eternal struggle of masculine and feminine cosmic principles, instead of a true antagonism.

The place of this excessive element can also be discerned through the imbalance between the universal and the particular – the excess of the universal over its actual particularities points towards a weird excessive particular element, as in Chesterton’s well-known remark addressed at “my readers most of whom are human” – or, as a well-known Slovene soccer player once put it after an important victory: “My gratitude goes to my parents, especially my mom and my dad.” Who is then the remaining parent, the third one, neither mother nor father?

Everyone knows Winston Churchill’s quip about democracy usually quoted as: "Democracy is the worst possible system, except for all others." What Churchill effectively said (in the House of Commons on November 11 1947) was slightly less paradoxical and scintillating: “Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it had been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”¹ The underlying logic is best rendered if one applies to Churchill’s dictum Lacan’s “formulae of sexuation” and rephrases it in as follows: “Democracy is the worst of all systems; however, compared to it, any other system is worse.” If one takes all possible system as a whole and ranges them with regard to their worth, democracy is the worst and finishes at the bottom; if, however, one compares democracy one to one with all other system, it is better than any of them.

Does something similar not hold (or seem to hold) for capitalism? If one analyses it in an abstract way, trying to locate it into the hierarchy of all possible systems, it appears as the worst - chaotic, unjust, destructive, etc.; however, if one compares it in a concrete pragmatic way to every alternative, it is still better than any of them. This “illogical” imbalance between the universal and the particular is a direct indication of the efficiency of ideology. An opinion poll in the US at the end of June 2012, just before the Supreme Court decision about Obama’s healthcare reform, showed that “strong majorities favor most of what is in the law”:

Most Americans oppose President Barack Obama's healthcare reform even though they strongly support most of its provisions, a Reuters/Ipsos poll showed. /.../ The survey results suggest that Republicans are convincing voters to reject Obama's reform even when they like much of what is in it, such as allowing children to stay on their parents' insurance until age 26.²

Here we encounter ideology at its purest: the majority wants to have its (ideological) cake and to eat it (the real cake), i.e., they want the real profits of the healthcare reform, while rejecting its

¹ Incidentally, it is not known to whom “it had been said” refers – is it a determinate individual or just a reference to common wisdom.

² For a more detailed account of this topic, see the first part of Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, London: Verso Books <http://news.yahoo.com/most-americans-oppose-health-law-provisions-040810861.html> .

ideological form (which they perceive as the threat to the “freedom of choice”) - they reject water, but accept H₂O, or, rather, they reject (the concept of) fruit, but they want apples, plums, strawberries... Towards the beginning of Jo Nesbo’s thriller *Headhunters*, there is a joke which involves a similar paradoxical series: “The tangy saline taste of exhaust fumes in the autumn air evoked associations of sea, oil extraction and gross national product”(Nesbo, 2011, 18). The eccentric moment which adds itself to the series of natural and physical elements is here the GNP, a shorthand for the brutal exploitation of nature.

There is a similar categorization in which a set is divided into ridiculously unbalanced subsets - recall Eugene Wigner’s claim: “There are two kinds of people in the world: Johnny von Neumann and the rest of us.” Recall also the cynical-wisdom-formula: “There are two kinds of people, those who... and those who...”, where the point is the ridiculously-arbitrary nature of the distinction: those who get hanged and those who hold the rope; those who enjoy drinking armagnac and those who hate it... And wouldn’t the ultimate categorization be the very division into something and nothing? “There are two kinds of people in the world: those who will die and no one else.” Or: “There are two kinds of people in the world: those who will die and the immortals” – the point being that the second set is empty.

Along the same lines, one should celebrate the genius of Walter Benjamin which shines through in the very title of his early essay “On Language in General and Human Language in Particular.” The point here is not that human language is a species of some universal language „as such“ which comprises also other species (language of gods and angels? animal language? the language of some other intelligent beings out there in space? computer language? the language of the DNA?): there is no actually-existing language other than human language – but, in order to comprehend this „particular“ language, one HAS to introduce a minimal difference, conceiving it with regard to the gap which separates it from language „as such“ (the pure structure of language deprived of the insignia of the human finitude, of erotic passions and mortality, of the struggles for domination and the obscenity of power). The particular language is thus the “really-existing language,” language as the series of actually uttered statements, in contrast to the formal linguistic structure. This Benjaminian lesson is the lesson missed by Habermas: what Habermas does is precisely what one should NOT do – he posits the ideal „language in general“ (the pragmatic universals) DIRECTLY as the norm of the actually-existing language. So, along the lines of Benjamin’s title, one should describe the basic constellation of the social law as that of the “Law in general and its obscene superego underside in particular”...

The “Part” as such is thus the “sinful” unredeemed and unredeemable aspect of the Universal – to put it in actual political terms, every politics which grounds itself in the reference to some substantial (ethnic, religious, sexual, life-style...) particularity is by definition reactionary. Consequently, the division introduced and sustained by the emancipatory (“class”) struggle is NOT the one between the two particular classes of the Whole, but the one between the Whole-in-its-

parts and its Remainder which, within the Particulars, stands for the Universal, for the Whole “as such,” opposed to its parts.

So is the triad of the two opposites plus the chimney sweep Hegelian or not? Does the fact that we referred to Kierkegaard, Heine, and Marx, each of whom tried to break out of the constraints of Hegel's idealist logic, not indicate that the target of such paradoxical classifications or divisions is precisely to unsettle the consistent logical frame of the Hegelian schemes? Upon a closer look, things get complicated: does the Monarch in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* not display the coincidence of the highest (pure signifier) and lowest (biology, contingency) which characterized the excessive element? Was on account of this overlapping of the pure symbolic element (the royal title) and a contingent bodily element (penis) the young Marx not more right than he was aware of when, in his early critique of Hegel's philosophy of right, he acerbically remarked that the Hegelian Monarch is just an appendix to his phallus?¹

In Lacan's precise sense of the term, the chimney sweep effectively stands for the phallic element – how? Insofar as he stands for pure difference: officer, maid and chimney sweeper are the masculine, the feminine, *plus their difference as such*, as a particular contingent object – again, why? Because not only is difference differential, but, in an antagonistic (non)relationship, it precedes the terms it differentiates: not only is woman not-man and *vice versa*, but woman is what prevents man to be fully man and *vice versa*. It is like the difference between the Left and the Right in the political space: their difference is the difference in the very way difference is perceived: the whole political space appears differently structured if we look at it from the Left or from the Right, there is no third “objective” way (for a Leftist, the political divide cuts across the entire social body, while for a Rightist, society is a hierarchic Whole disturbed by marginal intruders). Difference “in itself” is thus not symbolic/differential, but real-impossible – something that eludes and resists the symbolic grasp.

This difference is the universal as such – universal not as a neutral frame elevated above its two species, but as their constitutive antagonism, and the third element (chimney sweep, Jew, *object a*) stands for the difference as such, for the “pure” difference/antagonism which precedes the differentiated terms. If the division of the social body into two classes would have been complete, without the excessive element (Jew, rabble...), there would have been no class struggle, just two clearly divided classes - this third element is not the mark of an empirical remainder that escapes the class classification (the pure division of society into two classes), but *the materialization of their antagonistic difference itself*, insofar as this difference precedes the differentiated terms. In

¹ Alexander Sokurov's film *Telec (Body)* depicts a day in the life of Lenin when he was already approaching death, living isolated in a forest mansion; it renders the painfully-desublimated body of a Leader: Lenin is shown as a helplessly-fragile individual unable to stand and walk alone, prattling nonsense and making obscene gestures, oscillating between senile smiles and outbursts of suppressed rage.

the space of anti-Semitism, the “Jew” stands for the social antagonism as such: without the Jewish intruder, the two classes would live in harmony...

Insofar as the antagonism is another name for non-relationship (*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*, there is no class relationship), this third excessive element which always haunts the Two (sexes, classes) as their obscene shadow can also be said to stand for Lacan's »there is (something of the) One (*y'a de l'Un*)« which is the obverse of *il n'y a pas de l'Autre* is strictly correlative to his *y'a de l'Un*, “there is something of the One.” Or, to put it with a slightly different accent, insofar as the One of *y'a de l'un* is an “indivisible remainder” which makes sexual relationship inexistent, *y'a de l'un* is also strictly correlative to *il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*: it is the very object-obstacle to this rapport. The One of *y'a de l'Un* is not the mystical all-encompassing One of the infamous “oceanic feeling” derided by Freud, but a “little piece of the real,” the excremental remainder which disturbs the harmony of the Two.

Clarifying this crucial distinction, le Gaufey drew attention to a subtle passage in late Lacan from “*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*” to “*il y a du non-rapport (sexuel)*”, the shift which precisely fits Kant's distinction between negative judgment (the negation of a predicate) and infinite judgment (the affirmation of a non-predicate), as in “he isn't dead” versus the much more uncanny “he is un-dead.” “There is no sexual relationship” can still be read as a variation on the old motif of the eternal conflict between the sexes: there is no harmony between men and women because men are from Mars and women from Venus, they move in different universes, so their encounter is always missed. “There is a non-relationship” implies something much more radical: the positivization of this impossibility of the sexual relationship in a paradoxical “trans-finite” object which overlaps with its own lack or which is in excess with regard to itself.

This is why we shouldn't say for the *objet a* that it simply isn't sexual: it is un-sexual in exactly the same sense in which vampires are un-dead: the “undead” are neither alive nor dead but the monstrous living dead, and, in the same way, *objet a* is neither sexual nor non-sexual but “sexually asexual,” a monstrosity which doesn't fit the coordinates of any of the two sexes, but is still sexual (Žižek, 2012).¹

For A Joyfully-Painful Excess Against the Buddhist Moderation

In Buddhism, we are taught to sacrifice desire in order to attain the inner peace of Enlightenment in which sacrifice cancels itself. For Lacan, the true sacrifice is desire itself: desire is an intrusion which throws off the rails the rhythm of our life, it compels us to forfeit everyday pleasures and comforts for discipline and hard work in the pursuit of the object of our desire, be it love, a political Cause, science... or, as Neil Gaiman put it in a memorable passage:

Have you ever been in love? Horrible isn't it? It makes you so vulnerable. It opens your chest and it opens up your heart and it means that someone can get

¹ I resume here the line of thought from Chapter 11 of Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, London: Verso Books 2012.

inside you and mess you up. You build up all these defenses, you build up a whole suit of armor, so that nothing can hurt you, then one stupid person, no different from any other stupid person, wanders into your stupid life... You give them a piece of you. They didn't ask for it. They did something dumb one day, like kiss you or smile at you, and then your life isn't your own anymore. Love takes hostages. It gets inside you. It eats you out and leaves you crying in the darkness, so simple a phrase like 'maybe we should be just friends' turns into a glass splinter working its way into your heart. It hurts. Not just in the imagination. Not just in the mind. It's a soul-hurt, a real gets-inside-you-and-rips-you-apart pain. I hate love.¹

There is a cure against this horror of intense love – it's called marriage. A (not too) vulgar joke provides an insight into a truly happy marriage. Late in the evening, a wife and a husband lie in bed; the wife is trying to fall asleep, while the husband is reading a book. Every couple of minutes, he reaches with his hand over to the wife and gently rubs his finger into her vaginal lips. After this goes on for half an hour, the wife explodes: "I am trying to fall asleep! If you want to have sex, do it fast, don't play with me like that!" The husband replies: "Sorry, it is not about sex. I am just reading a book and every couple of minutes I need to wet my finger to turn a new page..." This brings us to Pascal: the true Pascalean formula of marriage is not "You don't love your partner? Then marry him or her, go through the ritual of shared life, and love will emerge by itself!"; it is, on the contrary: "Are you too much in love with somebody? Then get married, ritualize your love relationship, in order to cure yourself of the excessive passionate attachment, to replace it with the boring daily custom..." Marriage is thus a means of re-normalization which cures us of the violence of falling in love. And, incidentally, are many "radical" Leftist intellectuals not doing something similar to the unfortunate husband? Afraid to approach the real of actual political struggle they just touch it fleetingly to wet their finger and go on reading writing academic books (criticizing actual fighters).

Today, in our time of permissiveness, a passionate sexual love for a single person is dismissed as too fixating – you can play (consensual) sexual games with many people, just don't get stuck on one of them. The love preferred today is the Western Buddhist loving acceptance of all of reality. However, the ultimate postmodern irony is the strange exchange between Europe and Asia: at the very moment when, at the level of the economic infrastructure, European technology and capitalism are triumphing worldwide, at the level of ideological superstructure, the Judeo-Christian legacy is threatened in the European space itself by the onslaught of the New Age "Asiatic" thought, which, in its different guises, from the "Western Buddhism" (today's counterpoint to Western

¹ Available online at <http://thinkexist.com/quotes/neilgaiman>.

Marxism, as opposed to the "Asiatic" Marxism-Leninism) to different "Taos," is establishing itself as the hegemonic ideology of the global capitalism (Sloterdijk 1989).¹

The highest speculative identity of the opposites in today's global civilization is the one between capitalist dynamics and Buddhism: although "Western Buddhism" presents itself as the remedy against the stressful tension of the capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain the inner peace and *Gelassenheit*, it actually functions as its perfect ideological supplement. One should mention here the well-known topic of the "future shock," i.e. of how, today, people are no longer psychologically able to cope with the dazzling rhythm of the technological development and the social changes that accompany it - things simply move too fast, before one can accustom oneself to an invention, this invention is already supplanted by a new one, so that one more and more lacks the most elementary "cognitive mapping." The recourse to Taoism or Buddhism offers a way out of this predicament which definitely work better than the desperate escape into old traditions: instead of trying to cope with the accelerating rhythm of the technological progress and social changes, one should rather renounce the very endeavor to retain control over what goes on, rejecting it as the expression of the modern logic of domination - one should, instead, "let oneself go," drift along, while retaining an inner distance and indifference towards the mad dance of the accelerated process, a distance based on the insight that all this social and technological upheaval is ultimately just a non-substantial proliferation of semblances which do not really concern the innermost kernel of our being...

One is almost tempted to resuscitate here the old infamous Marxist cliché of religion as the "opium of the people," as the imaginary supplement of the terrestrial misery: the "Western Buddhist" meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way, for us, to fully participate in the capitalist dynamics, while retaining the appearance of mental sanity. If Max Weber were to live today, he would definitely wrote a second, supplementary, volume to his *Protestant Ethic*, entitled *The Buddhist Ethic and the Spirit of the Global Capitalism*.

A wonderfully-ambiguous indicator of this predicament of ours is *Sandcastles. Buddhism and Global Finance*, a documentary by Alexander Oey shot almost two decades ago (in 2005) with commentaries from economist Arnoud Boot, sociologist Saskia Sassen, and the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Dzongzhar Khyentse Rinpoche. Sassen and Boot discuss the gigantic scope, power, as well as social and economic effects of global finance: capital markets, then valued at an estimated \$83 trillion, exist within a system based purely on self-interest, in which herd behavior, often based on rumors, can inflate or destroy the value of companies - or whole economies - in a matter of hours. Khyentse Rinpoche counters them with ruminations about the nature of human perception, illusion, and enlightenment; his philosophico-ethical statement "Release your attachment to something that is not there in reality, but is a perception," is supposed to throw a new light on the mad dance of billion-dollars-speculations. Echoing the Buddhist notion that there is no Self, only a stream of

¹ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag 1989.

continuous perceptions, Sassen comments about global capital: "It's not that there are \$83 trillion. It is essentially a continuous set of movements. It disappears and it reappears"...

The problem here is, of course, how are we to read this parallel between the Buddhist ontology and the structure of virtual capitalism's universe? The film tends towards the humanist reading: seen through a Buddhist lens, the exuberance of global financial wealth is illusory, divorced from the objective reality - the very real human suffering created by deals made on trading floors and in boardrooms invisible to most of us. If, however, one accepts the premise that the value of material wealth, and one's experience of reality, is subjective, and that desire plays a decisive role in both daily life and neo-liberal economics, is it not possible to draw from it the exact opposite conclusion? Is it not that our traditional life world was based on the naïve-realist substantialist notions of external reality composed of fixed objects, while the unheard-of dynamics of "virtual capitalism" confronts us with the illusory nature of reality? What better proof of the non-substantial character of reality than a gigantic fortune which can dissolve into nothing in a couple of hours, due to a sudden false rumor?

Consequently, why complain that financial speculations with futures are "divorced from the objective reality," when the basic premise of the Buddhist ontology IS that there is no "objective reality"? The only "critical" lesson to be drawn from the Buddhist perspective about today's virtual capitalism is thus that one should be aware that we are dealing with a mere theatre of shadows, with non-substantial virtual entities, and, consequently, that we should not fully engage ourselves in the capitalist game, that we should play the game with an inner distance. Virtual capitalism could thus act as a first step towards liberation: it confronts us with the fact that the cause of our suffering and enslavement is not objective reality itself (there is no such thing), but our Desire, our craving for material things, our excessive attachment to them; all one has to do, after one gets rid of the false notion of substantialist reality, is thus to renounce one's desire itself, to adopt the attitude of inner peace and distance... no wonder such Buddhism can function as the perfect ideological supplement of today's virtual capitalism: it allows us to participate in it with an inner distance, with our fingers crossed as it were.

It is against this background that we should interpret the ultimate paradox of our predicament: we hear all the time that we live in an era of relativization of truth, that there is no objective reality but just different subjective perspectives; however, the result of this global subjectivization is not that „objective reality“ disappears but that our subjectivity itself disappears, turns into a trifling whim, while the social reality continues its run. No wonder that in our era whose basic stance is best encapsulated by the title of a recent Phillip McGraw's bestseller, *Self Matters*, teaching us how to "create your life from the inside out," finds its logical supplement in books with titles like *How*

to Disappear Completely - manuals about how to erase all traces of one's previous existence and "reinvent" oneself completely (Richmond 1999).¹

It is here that one should trace the difference between Zen proper and its Western version: the proper greatness of Zen is that it cannot be reduced to an »inner journey« into one's »true Self«; the aim of the Zen mediation is, quite on the contrary, a total voidance of the Self, the acceptance that there is no Self, no »inner truth« to be discovered. Which is why the authentic Zen masters are fully justified to interpret the basic Zen message (the liberation resides in losing one's Self, in immediately uniting with the primordial Void) as identical to the utter military fidelity, to immediately following orders and performing one's duty without consideration for the Self and its interests, i.e., to assert the standard antimilitaristic cliché about soldiers being drilled to attain the stain of mindless subordination and act out orders as blind puppets, as identical to the Zen Enlightenment. Here is how Ishihara Shummyo made this point in almost Althusserian terms of an act of interpellation which grasps the subject directly, by-passing hysterical doubt or questioning:

"Zen is very particular about the need not to stop one's mind. As soon as flintstone is struck, a spark bursts forth. There is not even the most momentary lapse of time between these two events. If ordered to face right, one simply faces right as quickly as a flash of lightning. /.../ if one's name were called, for example, 'Uemon,' one should simply answer 'Yes,' and not stop to consider the reason why one's name was called. /.../ I believe that if one is called upon to die, one should not be the least bit agitated" (Victoria 1998, 103).²

Far from denouncing this stance as a monstrous perversion, one should perceive in it an index of how authentic Zen differs from its Western appropriation which reinscribes it into the matrix of »discovery of one's true Self.« The logic of »inner journey,« when brought to the end, confronts us with the void of subjectivity and thus compels the subject to assume his full desubjectivization; the paradoxical Pascalian conclusion of this radical version of Zen is that, since there is no inner substance to religion, the essence of faith is the proper decorum, the obedience to the ritual as such. What Western Buddhism is not ready to accept is thus that the ultimate victim of the "journey into one's Self" is this Self itself. And, more generally, is this not the same lesson as that of Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*? The ultimate victim of positivism are not confused metaphysical notions, but facts themselves; the radical pursuit of secularization, the turn towards our worldly life, transforms this life itself into an „abstract“ anemic process – and nowhere is this paradoxical reversal more palpable than in the work of de Sade, where the unconstrained assertion

¹ See Doug Richmond, *How to Disappear Completely and Never be Found*, Secausus: A Citadel Press Book 1999. This book belongs to the series of how-to-do manuals which effectively form a refreshing obscene double of the official manual of how to live an authentic spiritual life: books which directly address our publicly unacceptable desires – other titles in the series are: *Cheaters Always Prosper*, *Advanced Backstabbing and Mudslinging Techniques*, *Revenge Tactics*, *Spying on Your Spouse*, etc.

² Quoted from Brian A. Victoria, *Zen at War*, New York: Weatherhilt 1998, p. 103.

of sexuality deprived of the last vestiges of spiritual transcendence turns sexuality itself into a mechanic exercise lacking any authentic sensual passion.

And is not a similar reversal clearly discernible in the deadlock of today's Last Men, postmodern individuals who reject all "higher" goals as terrorist and dedicate their life to survival, to a life filled with more and more refined and artificially excited/aroused small pleasures? What if we are »really alive« only if we engage ourselves with an excessive intensity which puts us beyond "mere life"? What if, when we focus on mere survival, even if it is qualified as "having a good time," what we ultimately lose is life itself? What if the Palestinian suicide bomber on the point of blowing himself (and others) up is, in an emphatic sense, "more alive" than the American soldier engaged in a war in front of a computer screen hundred of miles away of the enemy?

But what about the Buddhist attempts to articulate its own economy which, avoiding the trap of infinite expansion, follows the goal of moderate balance? It remains caught in the opposition between false limitless desires which only bring suffering and the authentic spiritual desire for well-being. What psychoanalysis taught us is that sensual desires are in themselves moderate, constrained to their direct goals, they become infinite and self-destructive only when they are infected by a spiritual dimension. As already F.W.J. Schelling knew, only spirituality is self-destructive in its longing for infinity, which is why Evil is much more spiritual than our sensual reality. In other words, the root of Evil is not our egotism but, on the contrary, a perverted self-destructive spirituality which can also bring us to sacrifice our lives. This dimension is missing in Buddhist economics, which is why its declared goal of the proper measure, when one attempts to practice it, tends to end up in some form of (not always) soft Fascism. (Recall that Fascism also presents itself as the middle road between the two extremes, capitalist individualism and Communist collectivism.) The cases usually mentioned are Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Japan, even China, but the main reference is Bhutan where

“King Jigme Singye Wangchuck and its government have promoted the concept of ‘gross national happiness’ (GNH) since 1972, based on Buddhist spiritual values, as a counter to gauging a nation's development by gross domestic product (GDP). This represents a commitment to building an economy that would serve Bhutan's culture based on Buddhist spiritual values instead of material development, such as being gauged by only GDP.”¹

Sounds OK, if it were not for an event which somehow spoils the picture:

Often overlooked in all the attention received by the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan's much-touted ‘Gross National Happiness’ program is that the government's version of happiness includes being free of any unwelcome ethnic minorities. More than 100,000 ethnic Nepalese – a Hindu minority in Bhutan for

¹ Buddhist economics - Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_economics

centuries – were forced out of Bhutan in the early 1990s by authorities who wanted to impose the country’s dominant Buddhist culture.”¹

It is thus a properly Nietzschean paradox that the greatest loser of the attempts to assert moderate life against all transcendent Causes is actual life itself. What makes life "worth living" is the very EXCESS OF LIFE: the awareness that there is something for which one is ready risking one’s life (we may call this excess “freedom“, “honor“, “dignity“, “autonomy“, “justice“, “emancipation”...). Only when we are ready to take this risk, we are REALLY ALIVE – or, to conclude with Gilbert Keith Chesterton’s perspicuous comment on the paradox of courage:

A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine.“(Chesterton 1995, 9)

One of the most disturbing TV episodes of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (“The Glass Eye,” the first episode of the third season) perfectly stages such a reversal of the excessive supplement to a human body into an object more alive than the living. body itself. Jessica Tandy plays here a lone woman who falls for a handsome ventriloquist, Max Collodi (a reference to the author of *Pinocchio*); when she gathers the courage to approach him alone in his quarters, she declares her love for him and steps forward to embrace him, only to find that she is holding in her hands a wooden dummy’s head; after she withdraws in horror, the “dummy” stands up and pulls off its mask, and we see the face of a sad older dwarf who start to jump desperately on the table, asking the woman to go away... the ventriloquist is in fact the dummy, while the hideous dummy is the actual ventriloquist. Is this not the perfect rendering of an “organ without bodies”? It is the detachable “dead” organ, the partial object, which is effectively alive, and whose dead puppet the “real” person is: the “real” person is merely alive, a survival machine, a “human animal,” while the apparently “dead” supplement is the focus of excessive Life.

Lacan’s lesson is here that subject is strictly correlative to such an excessive object. In his Seminar XIV², he mentions the “weird correspondence between subject and object” (“l’etrange correspondance entre sujet et objet”) – why is this correspondence strange? For two interconnected reasons. First, this correspondence is not what philosophers usually mean by the correlation between subject and object – it is almost its opposite, a kind of negative e correlation, since subject is defined precisely by being a non-object. Subject and object are two sides of the same coin, lack

¹ Ethnic cleansing in the kingdom of happiness – Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/12/13/ethnic-cleansing-in-the-kingdom-of-happiness/>

² See S14 LOGIQUE.docx (live.com)

and excess; they cannot be “synthesized” so that excess will fill in the lack because they are strictly co-existent, one and the same thing at two different levels – if the lack were to be filled in, there would no longer be a subject, the subject would fall into reality as one of the objects. Second, this correspondence is not properly dialectical but a non-dialectical foundation, a gap which opens up and sustains the very space of dialectics, in some sense even its non-dialectical presupposition.

Here we clearly see the difference between Lacan and Badiou. For Badiou, subject is object-less, while for Lacan, subject is strictly correlative to a paradoxical object, *objet a*. Badiou’s point is, of course, that subject should not be constrained to the transcendental correlation between subject and object, where “object” stands for the order of objective reality; not without irony, the best term to designate Lacan’s operation left out by Badiou is the Badiouian one, *subtraction*. And, again, not without irony, it is Lacan who is materialist here, i.e., who adds a pathological “stain,” a contingent remainder and/or excess, as the (im)material support of the subject correlative to transcendently-constituted objective reality. *Objet a* is that what has to be subtracted from reality so that reality can emerge as a transcendently-constituted field of phenomena. Lacan’s thesis is that *there are (transcendentally constituted) objects (of the “external reality”) because there is a split subject*.

This constitutive split of the subject (which precedes the split between subject and object) is the split between the void that “is” the subject (\$) and the impossible-real objectal counterpart of the subject, the purely virtual *objet a*. What we call “external reality” (as a consistent field of positively-existing objects) arises through subtraction, when something is subtracted from it, and this something is *objet a*. The correlation between subject and object (objective reality) is thus sustained by the correlation between this same subject and its objectal correlate, the impossible-real *objet a*, and this second correlation is of a totally different kind: it is a kind of negative correlation, an impossible link, a non-relationship, between the two moments which cannot ever meet within the same space (like subject and object) not because they are too far away, but because they are one and the same entity on the two sides of the Moebius band... And we should not be surprised to find a strictly homologous paradox in a totally different domain, that of the Cold War strategy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD):

It is a strange paradox of our time that one of the crucial factors which make the /nuclear/ dissuasion effectively function, and function so well, is the underlying fear that, in a really serious crisis, it can fail. In such circumstances, *one does not play with fate*. If we were absolutely certain that the nuclear dissuasion is one hundred per cent efficient in its role of protecting us against a nuclear assault, then its dissuasive value against a conventional war would have dropped to close to zero” (Brodie 1973, 430-43).

The paradox is here a very precise one: the MAD strategy works not because it is perfect, but *on account of its very imperfection*. That is to say, a perfect strategy (if one sides nukes the other,

the other will automatically respond, and both sides will thus be destroyed) has a fatal flaw: what if the attacking side counts on the fact that, even after its first strike, the opponent continues to act as a rational agent? His choice is now: with his country mostly destroyed, he can either strike back, thus causing total catastrophe, the end of humanity, or not strike back, thus enabling the survival of humanity and thereby at least the possibility of a later revival of his own country? A rational agent would choose the second option... What makes the strategy efficient is the very fact that we cannot ever be sure that it will work perfectly: what if a situation spirals out of control for a variety of easily imaginable reasons (from the »irrational« aggressivity of the one part to simple technological failures or miscommunications)? It is because of this permanent threat that both sides do not want to come even too close to the prospect of MAD, *so they avoid even conventional war*: if the strategy were perfect, it would, on the opposite, endorse the attitude “Let's fight a full conventional war, since we both know that no side will risk the fateful step towards a nuclear strike!

So the actual constellation of MAD is not »If we follow the MAD strategy, the nuclear catastrophe will not take place, «but» If we follow the MAD strategy, the nuclear catastrophe will not take place, *expect for some imprevisible incident*. «And the same goes today for the prospect of the ecological catastrophe: if we do nothing, it will occur, and if we do all we can do, it will not occur, *expect for some imprevisible accident*. This» imprevisible factor *e* «is precisely the remainder of the Real which disturbs the perfect self-closure of projected perfect strategy – it is a cut which prevents the full closure of the circle (exactly the way Lacan writes *l'objet petit a*). What confirms this paradoxical status of *e* is that, in it, possibility and impossibility, positive and negative, coincide: *it renders the strategy of prevention effective precisely insofar as it hinders its full efficiency*. In short, is this factor not quite literally (a something that is) *less than nothing*? It is negative, an obstacle, an index that something was taken away from the thing (in this case, the perfectly functioning dissuasion strategy), but if we abolish the obstacle and fill in this lack, we lose what it is an obstacle to, i.e., we get less than we had before.

This twisted space of *objet a* brings us to the erotic dimension. A voluptuous lady from Portugal told me a wonderful anecdote: when her last lover first saw her fully naked, he told her that, with just one or two kilos less weight, her body would have been perfect. The truth is, of course, that, with one or two kilos less, she would probably have looked more ordinary - it is the very excessive element which generates the illusion of disturbing perfection, so that if we were to subtract it, the result would be perfect. In short, the very element which seems to disturb perfection creates the illusion of perfection that it disturbs: when we take away the excessive element which disturbs perfection, we lose perfection itself.

There is no place for this excessive element in today's predominant behavioral and chemotherapeutic approach which directly ground our inner experience in neuronal-biological processes, leaving no space open for the Freudian Unconscious. And although the LGBT+ and new feminists reject such an approach, they also reject psychoanalysis which is, as they like to repeat, mostly

practiced by “old white men.” However, the conceptual frame within which they operate – “yes means yes,” mutual consent – relies on a decidedly pre-Freudian notion of subject: individuals are supposed to know what they really want. Pathological phenomena arise from external social oppression, and individuals should just get rid of this oppression in order to regain the ability to realize their innermost sexual desires. There is no place here for the Freudian notion of the divided subject, for the immanent inconsistency of our desires (we don’t know what we want, we often really desire what we don’t want, we find pleasure in suffering and self-humiliation).

In § 29 of his *Minima Moralia*, Adorno proposed a claim which makes him totally incompatible with today’s woke ideology: “Erster und einziger Grundsatz der Sexualethik: der Ankläger hat immer unrecht. / “First and only principle of sexual ethics: the accuser is always in the wrong.” / He goes on to explain it: “What is merely identical with itself is without happiness.” Adorno’s claim is directed against (what we call today) identity politics as well as against sex as act of exchange between self-identical egos whose interaction is based on mutual consent - or, as Antonia Hofstätter formulated it in a courageous and brilliant reading: “Every ‘I accuse you’ drags into the sphere of sexuality the expectations and entitlements of conscientious consumers and those citizens who know their rights.” This is why Adorno’s claim “takes its impulse not from the ubiquitous demand for ‘safety’ that echoes across campuses from Berlin to Boston, but from a sexual utopia in which power relations are divested of their scarring force.” Sex is by definition not safe, it involves exposing oneself to the loss of identity:

The dim light of ambiguity that nourishes Adorno’s outrageous line is inseparable from its promise: the promise of a wealth – however murky and repellent – that exists beyond the conscious life of the subject, a wealth in which it nevertheless partakes.¹

One should not be afraid to draw the ultimate conclusion from these insights: The Politically Correct safe and controlled sex is a desexualized sex, to put in the series with decaffeinated coffee and communication with others who are deprived of the abyss of Otherness. The PC rejection of claims like Adorno’s rejects precisely its “dim light of ambiguity” which is considered a threat to unambiguous interaction where yes means yes and no means no: it refuses to engage itself in the “promise of wealth” and is satisfied with the direct reading of Adorno’s claim which reduces it to the prohibition of the victim’s right to accuse the assailant.

Adorno is, of course, ridiculously one-sided: should a woman who was brutally raped not accuse her assailant? We are dealing here not with transgressive ecstatic blurring of boundaries but a simple direct brutality: the rapist gets a surplus-enjoyment from the fact that his victim is terrified by his act... Nonetheless, we should remain open to the “dim light of ambiguity” which pertains

¹ Antonia Hofstätter, “J’Accuse,” available online at [J'accuse | Krisis | Journal for Contemporary Philosophy](https://krisis.eu/article/view/38361). <https://krisis.eu/article/view/38361> Vol. 41 No. 2 (2021): 70 Years *Minima Moralia* / 70 Years *Minima Moralia*

to language as a social link: there is no meta-language, especially in the domain of sexuality, which means that every rejection or condemnation of a sexual act, no matter how clear and unambiguous it sounds, is in principle open to the possibility of becoming sexually invested, giving birth to its own surplus-enjoyment. Unacceptable as it may sound within the Politically Correct parlance, even a brutal rape which is not part of any sado-masochist contract can be perversely enjoyed in a way disavowed by its victim. To avoid a fatal misunderstanding: not only does this fact not justify the rape (in the sense of “she really wanted it”), it makes the rape even more terrifying since it opens up the path to the psychic self-destruction of the victim – assuming openly this enjoyment-in-being-raped ruins the basic subjective consistency of the victim.

Welcome To the Desert Of *Lathouses*

But will all these paradoxes and ambiguities not disappear with the prospect of what is often referred to as »posthumanity«? One thing is sure: from the psychoanalytic standpoint, what the shift to the post-human amounts to at its most fundamental is the overcoming (leaving behind) of sexuality in its most radical ontological dimension – not just “sexuality” as a specific sphere of human existence but the Sexual as an antagonism, the bar of an impossibility, constitutive of being-human in its finitude. And the issue carefully avoided by the partisans of the new asexual man is: to what extent are many other features usually identified with being-human, features like art, creativity, consciousness, etc., dependent on the antagonism that constitutes the Sexual. This is why the addition of “asexual” to the series of positions that compose LGBT+ is crucial and unavoidable: the endeavor to liberate sexuality from all “binary” oppressions to set it free in its entire polymorphous perversity, necessarily ends up in the abandoning of the very sphere of sexuality – the liberation OF sexuality has to end up in the liberation (of humanity) FROM sexuality.

The rise of Artificial Intelligence confronts all of us with a choice: will humans show enough antifragility to survive and emerge even stronger from integrating the AI into their daily lives, or will they be extinct as humans? If humanity survives, will it remain the same humanity, the same substantial content of being-human, just enriched by a new dimension of experience and interaction, or will the very core of “being-human” be imperceptibly transformed? The key to this enigma is provided by cloning – only in cloning sexual difference disappears: an organ(ism) reproduces itself (or is reproduced) through genetic self-copying. Not only is human sexuality always-already symbolized, symbolization itself emerges through a certain cut in animal sexuality called by Lacan “symbolic castration.” This disturbing nature of sex is rendered palpable in a negative way by the desperate attempts to define “healthy” pornography – here is one of the latest attempts:

While pornography can be made for hollow gratification, with no regard for wellbeing, healthy pornography can actually contribute to disease free, safe sex,

that actually helps enable healthy sexual development. The criteria are: a variety of sexual practices; a variety of body types, genders and races; a negotiation of consent on screen; ethical production; a focus on pleasure for all participants; and depictions of safe sex.¹

But is sex not in its innermost “unhealthy,” a deviation from its “natural” goal of reproduction? Is it not by definition enacted for “hollow gratification”? Is applying politically correct rules on pornography (showing negotiation of consent, depiction of safe sex with condoms, presenting a variety of sexual practices, genders and races...) not a ridiculous strategy which may bring additional arousal only if is perceived as a redoubled irony? Once sexual reproduction is symbolized, we get the difference between the two deaths, the biological death and the symbolic death, and what is located in this interspace is *jouissance* as a surplus beyond the pleasure-principle:

“The (mythical) immortal, irrepressible life, being by definition lost, returns as something more accurately called undead life, something indestructible because it is undead (libido, the drive). Better yet, this mythical irrepressible life instinct exists in reality only as the death drive: not a drive aiming at death but the drive to repeat the surplus(-enjoyment) that occurs at the point of the cut/loss involved in sexual division. The death drive is essentially related to surplus-enjoyment, which emerges in the process of the death drive circling around something that is not there.”(Zupančič 2017, 35).

And this is why, from the strict Freudian standpoint, the human finitude (symbolic castration) and immortality (death drive) are the two sides of the same operation, i.e., it’s not that the substance of life, the immortal *Jouissance*-Thing, is “castrated” by the arrival of the symbolic order. As in the case of lack and excess, the structure is that of parallax: the undead Thing is the remainder of castration, it is generated by castration, and *vice versa*, there is no “pure” castration, castration itself is sustained by the immortal excess which eludes it. Castration and excess are not two different entities, but the front and the back of one and the same entity, that is, one and the same entity inscribed onto the two surfaces of a Möbius strip.

So what if cloning will effectively become a mode of human reproduction? Will we get a different symbolic order or the end of the symbolic order? The first thing to note is that what will disappear is libido itself as the remainder/excess of sexual difference. We will be compelled to accept that, in human life, finitude is constitutive of the very transcendence which emerges against its background. Insofar as posthumanity is, from our finite/mortal human standpoint, in some sense the point of the Absolute towards which we strive, the zero-point at which the gap between thinking and acting disappears, the point at which I became *homo deus*, we encounter here gain the paradox of our brush with the Absolute: the Absolute persists as the virtual point of perfection in our finitude, as that X we always fail to reach, but when we get over the limitation of our finitude we

¹ Can pornography be healthy? If it follows six rules, perhaps, Australian lifestyle, The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/jun/10/can-pornography-be-healthy-if-it-follows-six-rules-perhaps>

lose also the Absolute itself. Something new will emerge, but it will not be creative spirituality relieved of mortality and sexuality — in this passage to the New, we will definitely lose both, we will be neither *homo* nor *deus*.

So, what happens with God – our name for the Absolute - in the universe pervaded by science? Two interconnected things. First, a comical notion of God enters the scene, a God who depends on human approbation. As one would expect it, such a God is evoked by Kierkegaard who, in his *Concept of Anxiety*, describes in a mockingly-antihegelian way how Simon Tornacensis (the 13th century scholastic theologian from Paris)

thought that God must be obliged to him for having furnished a proof of the Trinity /.../ This story has numerous analogies, and in our time, speculation has assumed such authority that it has practically tried to make God feel uncertain of himself, like a monarch who is anxiously waiting to learn whether the general assembly will make him an absolute or a limited monarch.” (Kierkegaard 1980, 151).

Such a “God of philosophers” whose existence is logically demonstrated is a dead god, so Tornacensis was wrong or at least he should be read in a more ambiguous way: if a philosopher proves the existence of God, is the god who comes to exist in this way not a dead god? So, maybe, what God really dreads are the very success of the proof of his existence, and the situation is here the same as in the well-known anecdote about the Hearst editor: God fears that the proof of his existence will fail, but he fears even more that it will *not* fail. In short, god’s impasse is that he is either alive (but as such caught in a terrifying suspension about his existence) or existing, but dead. Kierkegaard of course dismisses the attempts to logically demonstrate the existence of god as absurd and pointless logical exercises (his model of such professorial blindness for the authentic religious experience was Hegel’s dialectical machinery); however, his sense of humor cannot withstand the wonderful image of a god in anxiety, dreading for his own status as if it depends on the logical exercises of a philosopher, as if the philosopher’s reasoning has consequences in the real, so that, if the proof fails, god’s existence itself is threatened.

And one can go even further in this line of Kierkegaardian reasoning: what undoubtedly attracted him to the remark of Tornacensis was the blasphemous idea of a god himself in anxiety. The divine impasse thus resides in the fact that the god whose existence is proven is like a monarch whom the assembly makes an absolute one: the very form of confirming his absolute power (it depends on the whim of the assembly) undermines it. The political parallel is here crucial, since Kierkegaard himself resorts to the comparison of God and king: god exposed to the philosopher’s whimsy wit is like a king exposed to the whimsy wit of a popular assembly. But what is his point here? Is it simply that, in both cases, we should reject liberal decadence and opt for absolute monarchy? What complicates this simple and apparently obvious solution is that, for Kierkegaard, the (properly comical) point of the Incarnation is that that god-king becomes a beggar, a low

ordinary human. Would it thus not be more correct to conceive Christianity as the paradox of God's abdication – God steps down to be replaced by the assembly of believers called the Holy Spirit?

Our conclusion should be here that *every subject is ultimately in the position of Tornacensis's god*, forever in anxiety as to what happens if others will stop to believe in him, to pre-suppose him/her as subject (subject is for Lacan as such a presupposed subject) – we are dealing here with belief, not with knowledge. And here love enters: the most radical moment of love is not the belief of others which sustains the subject in its ex-sistence, but the subject's own counter-gesture, the terrifyingly-daring act of fully accepting that my very existence depends on others, that – to put it in somewhat inappropriate poetic terms – I am nothing but a figure in the dreamspace of an inconsistent other. This insight also compels us to renounce the cynical view that the treasure the loving one sees in the beloved is just an illusory projection: Lacan is not a cynic who thinks that there is really no treasure, that the subject is in itself only an excremental void. Recall the paradox of Kierkegaard's notion of "sickness unto death": the truly dreadful thing is not to accept the fact that one is a mere mortal being who will disappear into dust, leaving no traces behind, but to accept the hard fact that one is immortal and that, as such, one cannot escape one's conscience and the sins one has committed. In a homologous way, one should say that the truly dreadful thing is not to accept the fact that I am an excremental void, that the treasure others see in me is their projection which has nothing to do with the real core of my being – such a position ("what can I do, I'm in it for nothing, I am not responsible for what others project onto me") is an all too easy one, it offers an all too easy escape.

The truly dreadful thing is to accept the fact that there IS a treasure in me and that I cannot escape from it – this is why the notion of a treasure in me triggers anxiety, since, as Lacan pointed out, anxiety is caused by the over-proximity of the object, not by its lack. This treasure is not a secret object that the beloved HAS deep in him/herself – the true treasure IS the (beloved) subject him/herself. In other words, love does not occur when the loving subject is desperately searching in the beloved for some hidden treasure; love occurs when the loving subject discovers that the treasure in the beloved is just a deceiving fetish, that the true treasure is the fragile beloved, perplexed, at a loss, unable to relate his/her subjectivity to the treasure the beloved sees in him/her. It is this reflexive reversal from objet hidden in the subject to the subject itself which defines love, the move from blind fascination to love.

This is why the basic paradox of sex with love is that the tender consideration for the beloved Other (sexual partner) and its ruthless objectivization (reduction to a thing expected to provide intense enjoyment) do not exclude each other: the more love that binds the sexual partners is truly profound, the more each of the partners is ready to offer him/herself as the object of the other's enjoyment, or to exploit/use the other for his/her enjoyment *as an act of love*. If, on the contrary, in the midst of an intense sexual encounter, one of the partners craves for "deeper" tender acts, as if naked sexuality is somehow not enough, as if it needs some kind of "spiritual" supplement, such

craving is an infallible sign that his/her spiritual love for his/her partner is not an authentic one. Years ago, I read a Catholic sexual manual which recommended missionary position, claiming that it offers the easiest way to avoid reduction to bare sex, since, during the act, the two partners can exchange tender words – the brutal misreading of sexual activity, its implicit reduction to animal coupling in need of a “spiritual” supplement, couldn’t be more palpable.

It is this coincidence of the apparent radical opposites – absolute subjectivity of love and radical self-objectivization into an object of enjoyment – which renders the Hegelian “infinite judgment” of sexual love. Without this step into complete self-objectivization, into becoming an object-instrument of the Other’s enjoyment, there is no proper subjectivity in the act. A proof: in the most thorough self-objectivization, the subject is still here, i.e., the whole point of this self-objectivization is that it is performed by the two unique subjects/lovers. We are not dealing with some dissolution of subjectivity in an impersonal cosmic Enjoyment, but with something that takes place exclusively between the two subjects, me and my lover. This is why, in a link of love, intense sexual enjoyment is necessarily followed by the act (or, rather, process) of re-subjectivization, arguably the most tender act in the world through which the beloved Other re-emerges as a singular vulnerable and fragile human being.

This fragile coincidence of subjectivity and thorough self-objectivization which characterizes authentic love gets lost in in our post-modern universe which imposes another coincidence of the opposites: that of the scientific self-objectivization (naturalization) of man with its elevation into a prothetic divinity. This brings us to the second effect of science on our idea of God – to the notion of a prosthetic god. In his *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud deployed his vision of the human being as a “prosthetic God,” manufacturing and using technological supplements to his finite and limited body to approach the ideal of omnipotence and omniscience. As expected from Freud, his point is properly dialectical: it is not that man cannot approach these ideals, troubles emerge precisely when he seems to approach them, but things take an unexpected turn:

Long ago /man/ formed an ideal conception of omnipotence and omniscience which he embodied in his gods. To these gods he attributed everything that seemed unattainable to his wishes, or that was forbidden to him. One may say, therefore, that these gods were cultural ideals. Today he has come very close to the attainment of this ideal, he has almost become a god himself. Only, it is true, in the fashion in which ideals are usually attained according to the general judgment of humanity: not completely, in some respects not at all, in others only half way. Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs, he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times. /.../ Future ages will bring with them new and probably unimaginably great achievements in this field of civilization and will increase man's likeness to God still more. But in the

interests of our investigations, we will not forget that present-day man does not feel happy in his Godlike character” (Freud 1961, 39).

For us, common mortals, there is an unmistakable dimension of “beyond the pleasure-principle” in our dealings with artificial organs and gadgets: instead of just enhancing our pleasures and powers, they cause fear and anxiety. In the last decades, due to bio-technological breakthroughs, prostheses exploded and wiring our brains is around the corner, and “trouble” also exploded. Even the proverbial Stephen Hawking’s little finger – the minimal link between his mind and the outside reality, the only part of his paralyzed body that Hawking could move – will no longer be necessary: with my mind, I can DIRECTLY cause objects to move, i.e., it is the brain itself which will directly serve as the remote-control machine.

In the terms of German Idealism, this means that what Kant called “intellectual intuition /*intellektuelle Anschauung*/” - the closing of the gap between mind and reality, a mind-process which, in a causal way, directly influences reality, this capacity that Kant attributed only to the infinite mind of God – is now potentially available to all of us, i.e., that we are potentially deprived of one of the basic features of our finitude. And since, as we learned from Kant as well as from Freud, this gap of finitude is at the same time the resource of our creativity (the distance between “mere thought” and causal intervention into external reality enables us to test the hypotheses in our mind and, as Karl Popper put it, let them die instead of ourselves), the direct short-circuit between mind and reality implies the prospect of a radical closure.

In his *Ethics* seminar, Lacan invokes the “point of the apocalypse,” (Lacan 1992, 207) the impossible saturation of the Symbolic by the Real of *jouissance*, the full immersion into massive *jouissance*. When, in a Heideggerian way, he asks, “Have we crossed the line /.../ in the world in which we live?” (Lacan, 231.), he aims at the fact that “the possibility of the death of the Symbolic has become a tangible reality” (Chiesa, 2004, 233). Lacan mentions the threat of atomic holocaust; today, however, we are in a position to offer other versions of this death of the Symbolic, principal among them the full scientific naturalization of the human mind. The apocalyptic process will reach its zero point when prostheses will no longer merely supplement the human body (and brain) but in a way supplant it, leaving behind the notion of human being as a worker whose know-how enables him to use prosthetic instruments. One should note that Lacan engages in these reflections as part of his critical confrontation with the Maoist notion of knowledge inherent to manual work (which is why intellectuals should learn from physical workers), a notion which is not foreign even to Heidegger who, in 1933, answered Jaspers (who raised the question how can a man as coarse as Hitler govern Germany) with: “Culture is of no importance, just look at his marvelous hands!” (Maier-Katkin, 2010, 99) – a weird Maoist idea of the primacy of manual work. Lacan draws attention to

how, in a world in which there has emerged, in a way that indeed exists and is a presence in the world, not the thinking of science, but science in some way

objectified, I mean these things entirely forged by science, Hertzian waves, simply these little things, gadgets and things, which for the moment occupy the same space as us, in a world in which this emergence has taken place, can know-how at the level of manual work carry enough weight to be a subversive factor? This is how, for me, the question arises (Lacan 2007, 149).

When Lacan mentions Hertzian waves, he draws attention to another uncanny aspect of prosthetic gadgets: they are more and more becoming invisible to us, doing their job at a level well below the threshold of our perception. What makes nanotechnology so thrilling is the prospect of constructing objects and processes in such a small dimension that all correlation with our ordinary life world is lost, so that it is effectively as if we are dealing with an alternate reality: there are no shared scales between nano-reality and our ordinary reality, and yet nonetheless we can influence our reality through nano-processes. Ray Kurzweil remarked apropos *Blade Runner*:

The scenario of humans hunting cyborgs doesn't wash because those entities won't be separate. Today, we treat Parkinson's with a pea-sized brain implant. Increase that device's capability by a billion and decrease its size by a hundred thousand, and you get some idea of what will be feasible in 25 years. It won't be, 'OK, cyborgs on the left, humans on the right.' The two will be all mixed up.¹

While this is in principle true, the problem is that with such an increase and decrease the prosthesis is no longer experienced as such, but becomes invisible, part of our immediate-organic self-experience, so that those who technologically control the prosthesis control us in the very heart of our self-experience. This option – the prosthesis becomes invisible – compels us to introduce another crucial distinction: not between human and posthuman but between posthuman and *inhuman*. The paradox at work here is that maybe posthumans will continue to experience their activity as humans, but what they will lose is the very inhumanity that characterizes sexuality. That is to say, the axiom of Hegel and Lacan is that, in the very core of a human being, there is the abyss of self-relating negativity (“night of the world” for Hegel, “death drive” for Freud) which is in some (far from merely metaphorical) sense inhuman: an excess which undermines what we perceive and/or experience as a human person, and the basic form of this excess is sexuality as a self-destructive drive. We are truly human only insofar as we succeed in (minimally, at least) sublimating this deadly excess. And the paradox of the passage from the inhuman to the posthuman is the one detected by Jean-Pierre Dupuy: a weird reversal of the traditional Cartesian anthropocentric arrogance which grounded human technology, the reversal clearly discernible in today's robotics, genetics, nanotechnology, artificial life and AI researches:

¹ Quoted from Ian Sample, “Frankenstein's Mycoplasma,” *The Guardian*, June 8 2007.

how are we to explain that science became such a ‘risky’ activity that, according to some top scientists, it poses today the principal threat to the survival of humanity? Some philosophers reply to this question by saying that Descartes’s dream — ‘to become master and possessor of nature’ — has turned wrong, and that we should urgently return to the ‘mastery of mastery’. They have understood nothing. They don’t see that the technology profiling itself at our horizon through ‘convergence’ of all disciplines aims precisely at nonmastery. The engineer of tomorrow will not be a sorcerer’s apprentice because of his negligence or ignorance, but by choice. He will ‘give’ himself complex structures or organizations and he will try to learn what they are capable of by way of exploring their functional properties—an ascending, bottom-up approach. He will be an explorer and experimenter at least as much as an executor. The measure of his success will be more the extent to which his own creations will surprise him than the conformity of his realization to the list of preestablished tasks.”¹

The motor of this self-surpassing of humans is the ongoing scientific progress in evolutionary biology, neurology, and cognitivist brain sciences which is sustained by a weird form of shame: the shame about our biological limitations, our mortality, the ridiculous way we reproduce ourselves—what Gunther Anders called the “Promethean shame,”² ultimately simply the shame that “we were born and not manufactured.” Nietzsche’s idea that we are the “last men” laying the ground for our own extinction and the arrival of a new Overman is thereby given a scientific-technological twist...

The topic that haunts our media in the last decades is: can Artificial Intelligence actually think? This topic was till now mostly dominated by the idea that AI can only imitate human intelligence, reducing it to abstract forms of reasoning, missing the true “spirit” of human intelligence. AI is thinking reduced to automatization: machines can adapt themselves to new situations, they can learn new things and new procedures, they can perform complex operations far beyond the scope a human mind. But AI is not really alive, it is literally artificial, a grey mechanistic shadow of human intelligence in which no sudden sparks explode which characterize the working of a human mind... insofar as we reflect in this way, our victory over machines is secured in advance.

However, things radically changed with the development of Artificial Neural Networks (ANN), connected units or nodes called *artificial neurons*, which loosely model the neurons in a brain. These are connected by *edges*, which model the synapses in a brain. They are used for various tasks, including predictive modeling, [adaptive control](#), and solving problems in artificial

¹ See Jean-Pierre Dupuy’s contribution in *Le Débat*, no. 129 (March–April 2004), quoted from Jean-Michel Besnier, *Demain les posthumains*, Paris: Fayard, 2012, p. 195.

² Gunther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* [The outdatedness of human beings], Munich: Beck, 1956.

intelligence. They can learn from experience, and can derive conclusions from a complex and seemingly unrelated set of information.¹ In this way, they do not imitate human thinking: what we are really encountering lately are *machines which don't think like humans*: they really think, but not simply better than us, humans – they think in a way which is radically *foreign* to human thinking.² From this perspective, the organic human intellectuality (our inner reflection or contemplation) – in other words, what I referred to above as the sparks of spirit - is not a sign of our priority or advantage over AI but a sign of its *inferiority*:

Human intellectuality is seriously limited, it has already reached its zenith early in the development of the species *homo sapiens*. Today we do not think more deeply or in a more sophisticated way than the eldest Antique philosophers, and *The Illiad* can move us in the same way it would have moved us three thousand years ago. /.../ Intellectuality is linked to the stagnant organic side of the human species, and the only dimension of human intelligence which effectively develops beyond slow and unpredictable rhythms of biological evolution is technical intelligence. This means that human intelligence can expand and perfect itself only through its autonomization from organic intellectuality through technological self-overcoming. /.../ the use of intellectuality as the measure of (today's) artificial intelligence effectively only demonstrate their difference, not the superiority of human intellectuality (Krašovec, 1980, 158)

I disagree with this conclusion for two reasons. First, there is nothing natural or organic in “intellectuality”; intellectuality is rather a sign of the radical rupture between humans and animals, it breaks and disturbs organic rhythms. Second, yes, there effectively is something constrained or limited in the very foundation of human intellectuality, but it is precisely this limitation (what Heidegger called finitude) which gives birth to human transcendence, to specific human spirituality. If this limitation is abolished, we enter a totally different domain. So we should turn the terms around: human is more than over-man. What human intellectuality implies is a gap between inside and outside, between so-called inner life and outside reality, and it is not clear what will happen (or, rather, is happening) with this gap in developed AI – in allprobability, it will disappear, since machines are part of reality.

As Elon Musk put it back in 2017 not long after he founded Neuralink: “If I were to communicate a concept to you, you would essentially engage in consensual telepathy. You wouldn't need to verbalise unless you want to add a little flair to the conversation or something, but the conversation would be conceptual interaction on a level that's difficult to conceive of right

¹ See Neural network (machine learning) - Wikipedia.

² I rely here on the insights of Primož Krašovec – for a resume of his ideas, see “Inteligenca, ki opušča intelektualnost” (in Slovene) in *Cukr*, Ljubljana 2024, p. 94-100.

now.”¹ Extend this idea to the domain of sex, for example: you could save a great sex experience in the cloud to enjoy again later – or, if you’re not too private a person, you could send it over to a friend to experience. However, what Neuralink promises is not only the abolition of language but also the abolition of human sexuality. What constitutes human sexuality is an unnecessary complication that prevents direct access to a goal: failure (measured by the standards of simple instinctual mating) is cultivated as the resource of new sexual pleasures. Can we imagine something more stupid (from the standpoint of successful reproduction), for example, than the tradition of courtly love in which the completion of sex is endlessly postponed? So how could courtly love become the model of high eroticism? And what about our perverted games, in which a particular object or gesture that should be constrained to a subordinated moment of erotic foreplay turns into the central feature, the focus of libidinal intensity, which eclipses the big procreative Act? Is this dimension of erotic mediation not threatened by a direct brain-to-brain link?

Darian Leader mentions an anecdote from his analytic work, when a patient reported to him a slip of tongue that embarrassed him: he was taking a lady to a restaurant in a luxury hotel, secretly planning to take her to a room for sex after lunch; when a waiter approached them, the patient: “A bed for two, please!” instead of “A table for two, please!”. Leader rejects the obvious “Freudian” reading (his real wish for sex erupted directly) and proposes the opposite one: the slip of tongue should be read as a warning not to enjoy the food too much, as a reminder that the shared lunch is just a pretext, a *Vorlust*, and that the true goal is sex. The slip of tongue was thus a desperate attempt to repress the gnawing suspicion that even sex is not “the real thing,” that something is missing in it also... But Lacan goes a step further in this direction and elaborates the changed status of science implied by the profusion of objects »entirely forged by science«:

what is involved in science as we are now, as I might say, lumbered with it – I mean have it present in our world in a manner that goes well beyond anything that might be speculated on as a result of knowledge (or, rather, cognition - *connaissance*). In effect we should all the same not forget that the characteristic of our science is not that it introduced a better and more extensive knowledge of the world, but that it made emerge into the world things that did not exist in it in any way at the level of our perception (Lacan, 1966, 158).

Science and technology today no longer aim only at understanding and reproducing natural processes, but at generating new forms of life that will surprise us; the goal is no longer just to dominate nature (the way it is), but to generate something new, greater, stronger than ordinary nature, including ourselves – exemplary is here the obsession with artificial intelligence, which aims at producing a brain stronger than human brain. The dream that sustains the scientific-technological endeavor is to trigger a process with no return, a process that would exponentially

¹ Quoted from <https://waitbutwhy.com/2017/04/neuralink.html>.

reproduce itself and go on on its own. The notion of “second nature” is therefore today more pertinent than ever, in both its main meanings. First, literally, as the artificially generated new nature: monsters of nature, deformed cows and trees, or – a more positive dream – genetically manipulated organisms, “enhanced” in the direction that fits us. Then, the “second nature” in the more standard sense of the autonomization of the results of our own activity: the way our acts elude us in their consequences, the way they generate a monster with a life on its own. It is *this* horror at the unforeseen results of our own acts that causes shock and awe, not the power of nature over which we have no control; it is *this* horror that religion tries to domesticate. What is new today is the short-circuit between these two senses of “second nature”: “second nature” in the sense of objective Fate, of the autonomized social process, is generating “second nature” in the sense of artificially created nature, of natural monsters, i.e., the process which threatens to run out of control is no longer just the social process of economic and political development, but new forms of natural processes themselves, from the unforeseen nuclear catastrophe to global warming and the unforeseen consequences of biogenetic manipulations. Can one even imagine what can be the unforeseen result of nanotechnological experiments: new life forms reproducing themselves out of control in a cancer-like way. Here is a standard description of this fear:

Within fifty to a hundred years, a new class of organisms is likely to emerge. These organisms will be artificial in the sense that they will originally be designed by humans. However, they will reproduce, and will ‘evolve’ into something other than their original form; they will be ‘alive’ under any reasonable definition of the word. /.../ the pace of evolutionary change will be extremely rapid. /.../ The impact on humanity and the biosphere could be enormous, larger than the industrial revolution, nuclear weapons, or environmental pollution (Farmer & Belin, 1992, 815).

This fear also has its clear libidinal dimension: it is the fear of the asexual reproduction of Life, the fear of an “undead” life that is indestructible, constantly expanding, reproducing itself through self-division – in short, the fear of the mythic creature called by Lacan „lamella“ (which can vaguely be translated as „manlet“, a condensation of „man“ and „omelet“), libido as an organ, the inhuman-human “undead” organ without a body, the mythical pre-subjective "undead" life-substance. The line that leads from simple techno-gadgets to the undead *lamella* is not difficult to reconstruct: what makes gadgets so uncanny is that, far from simply supplementing human organs, they introduce a logic which fundamentally differs from and unsettles the “normal” libidinal economy of sexed human beings *qua* beings of language. Techno-gadgets are potentially “undead,” they function as parasitic “organs without bodies” which impose their repetitive rhythm onto beings they are supposed to serve and supplement. Recall *The Mask* with Jim Carrey in which a plastic mask changes the ordinary guy into a superhero. The Mask is the a-sexual “partial object” which allows the subject to remain in (or regress to) the pre-Oedipal anal-oral universe where there is no

death and guilt, just endless fun and fight – no wonder the Jim Carrey character in *The Mask* is obsessed with cartoons: the universe of cartoons is such an undead universe without sex and guilt, a universe of infinite plasticity in which every time after a person (or animal) is destroyed it magically recomposes itself and the struggle goes on... Lacan proposes the neologism *lathouses* as the name for these »things that did not exist« prior to the scientific intervention into the real, from mobile phones to remote-controlled toys, from air conditioners to artificial hearts:

The world is increasingly populated by *lathouses*. Since you seem to find that amusing, I am going to show you how it is written. Notice that I could have called it *lathousies*. That would have gone better with *ousia*, it is open to all sorts of ambiguity. /.../ And for the tiny little *a*-objects that you are going to encounter when you leave, on the pavement at every street corner, behind every shop window, in the superabundance of these objects designed to cause your desire in so far as it is now science that governs it, think of them as *lathouses*. I notice a bit late since I invented it not too long ago that it rhymes with *ventouse* [windy] (Farmer & Belin, 1992, 162).¹²

(And it echoes *vente*, sale, we might add, to bring out the capitalist link.) As such, *lathouse* is to be opposed to symptom (in the precise Freudian sense of the term): *lathouse* is knowledge embodied (in a new “unnatural” object). Now we can see why, apropos *lathouses*, we have to include capitalism – we are dealing with a whole chain of surpluses: scientific technology with its surplus-knowledge (a knowledge beyond mere *connaissance* of already existing reality, a knowledge which gets embodied in new objects); the capitalist surplus-value (the commodification of this surplus-knowledge in the overflow of gadgets); and, last but not least, the surplus-enjoyment (gadgets as forms of *objet a*) which accounts for the libidinal economy of the hold of *lathouses* over us. / Maybe, *lathouses* at the same time open up the way to overcome sexual activity by outsourcing it. Dildos (plastic penises which vibrate) recently acquired a counterpart, the so-called “Stamina Training Unit,” a masturbatory device that resembles a battery-powered light (so we're not embarrassed when carrying it around). You put the erect penis into the opening at the top, push the button, and the object vibrates till satisfaction ... So let's say I am flirting with a lady and we decide to do it: we meet at her of my place, she brings her vibrator and I my Stamina training Unit, we plug both toys into a source of electricity, then we push the vibrator into the Stamina Training Unit, turn them both on and leave all the fun to this ideal couple. Accompanied by the pleasant background buzzing, we - the two real human partners – then sit down at a nearby table, drink tea and eat cake, both of us calmly enjoying the fact that, without great effort, we have fulfilled our

¹ Doyne Farmer and Aletta Belin, “Artificial Life: The Coming Evolution,” in *Artificial Life*, ed. by C.G. Langton, C. Taylor, J.D. Farmer and S. Rasmussen, Redwood City: Addison-.

² Op.cit.,162.

duty to enjoy through the machines. In this way, we are free to engage in a nice talk, with no pressure that this talk must lead to sexuality: we can just enjoy it and become asexual friends.

So what is our hope here? That, while engaged in a livid conversation, our hands touch unintentionally and we end up in bed together, performing sex without any superego pressure (because the machines already satisfied the superego demand).

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