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THE PARADOXES OF THE LIMPING CAUSE  
IN KIERKEGAARD, HEGEL AND LACAN

*At this point, I should define unconscious cause, neither as an existent, nor as a  $\text{o}\nu\chi$   $\text{o}\nu$ , a non-existent... It is  $\text{a}\mu\eta$   $\text{o}\nu$  of the prohibition that brings to being an existent in spite of its non-advent, it is a function of the impossible on which a certainty is based.<sup>1</sup>*

The constitution of the psychoanalytic subject is essentially determined by a certain leap of causality. This leap does not take place as an effect of the signifying chain, *automaton*, but rather as an effect of the *automaton* always already being barred by *tyche*, the impossible encounter with the real, or the encounter with the real as impossible. It is precisely this inherent impossibility, which does not allow for things to combine in a causal chain, but also does not let them surrender to coincidence, that determines the function of the limping cause operating in the unconscious.

The limping cause is a lost cause, but not a cause that was lost—precisely as lost it is essentially at work. It grounds the subject, but it grounds it by way of undermining the ground itself. It grounds it in the gap that always establishes a certain delay between cause and effect and thereby prevents the subject from arising as an effect of a causal series structuring its history. Repetition in psychoanalysis means exactly this: in the moment the subject emerges in the signifying chain, it retroactively produces its own cause, but is at the same time prevented from establishing itself as the effect of this cause.

The psychoanalytic conception of repetition and the limping cause as articulated by Lacan through his reinterpretation of Aristotle's coincidental causes *automaton* and *tyche* can be read through Kierkegaard's *double paradox of repetition*. By introducing this paradox, Kierkegaard carries out a surprising *tour de force*: it is exactly the structural impossibility of repetition that is the only condition of its possibility. He thereby delineates a subversive ontology that departs from the classical ontology of being: instead of the strict delimitation of the area of being and the area of non-being, he claims that they mutually condition each other and structurally

belong to one another. Through the prism of the limping cause we can read also Hegel's dialectics: negation is the constitutive moment of repetition as a co-determination of determinacy and indeterminacy, being and nothing, indistinction and distinction, finitude and infinity.

*The double paradox of repetition*

In Kierkegaard's famous book on repetition, published in 1843 under the pseudonym Constantin Constantius,<sup>2</sup> we can trace a certain *double paradox of repetition*, which Kierkegaard himself did not expressly articulate, but whose exceptional structure practically offers itself to thought, as it were. This paradox consists of two premises, with each premise itself being a paradox.

The first premise of Kierkegaard's double paradox of repetition is established when Kierkegaard faces a *fundamental failure of repetition*—the radical impossibility for a given event to be repeated in the same form. This was precisely why he was disappointed with his experimental trip to Berlin, which ended with his finding that repetition is not possible:

After several days' repetition of this, I became bitter, so tired of repetition that I decided to return home. I made no great discovery, yet it was strange, because I had discovered that there was no such thing as repetition. I became aware of this by having it repeated in every possible way.<sup>3</sup>

Repetition, says Kierkegaard, the pure repetition of the same, is not possible. All that constantly and stubbornly keeps returning is merely the failure of repetition. There is a paradox here: nothing can be repeated, but this is also precisely what keeps repeating.

At this point, Kierkegaard carries out an unexpected and key *tour de force* that determines modernity: it is exactly the failure of repetition, says Kierkegaard, that is the key to its success. The fact that it is merely the impossibility of repetition that keeps repeating is what first even establishes the actual terrain of repetition, whose condition of possibility is nothing but its fundamental impossibility: *this stubborn return of the failure of repetition is already repetition itself*.

Kierkegaard thereby traces a new, modern logic of failure that does not bring resignation and destruction, but is rather constructive insofar as it operates as the condition of possibility of every kind of motion or change. Failure is not a hindrance to the perfect repetition of the same, but is itself the very constitutive moment of repetition. In psychoanalysis, the failure of repetition is the constitutive moment of repetition as the movement of the signifying structure and the logic of alienation through which the subject emerges in this signifying structure: "The function of missing lies at the centre of analytic repetition. The appointment is always missed – this is what constitutes, in comparison with *tyche*, the vanity of repetition, its constitutive occultation."<sup>4</sup>

The second premise of Kierkegaard's double paradox consists of another contradictory situation traversing the logic of repetition: difference, the exception, will not be reached beyond repetition, it will not be discovered in pure transgression, deviation or variation, but will be produced only where it is impossible to look for it—in the pure repetition of the same. The paradox here is that *the deviation from the repetition of the same is possible only through the repetition of the same*:

Hope is a pretty girl, who slips away from one's grasp. Recollection is a beautiful older woman who never quite suits the moment. Repetition is a beloved wife of whom one never tires because it is only the new of which one tires. One never tires of the old, and when one has it before oneself, one is happy, and only a person who does not delude himself that repetition ought to be something new, for then he tires of it, is genuinely happy.<sup>5</sup>

Here, Kierkegaard again carries out a speculative twist similar to the first premise, turning the impasse of the paradox into the stem cell of thought: the new, says Kierkegaard, is not something we must look for beyond repetition, beyond the structures we are inscribed in. The greatest diversity, claims Kierkegaard, is the greatest boredom—what is more boring than buying a different yoghurt every day, sleeping with a different person every night, and changing our political affiliation every month? Is not this the pure routine of the same? For Kierkegaard, diversity is merely what is externalised, designated as *interesting*, which does not establish difference, but forms the order of the general. The interesting, which Kierkegaard's aesthete indulges in—is nothing but exchangeability, which does not have the subversive power of *exception*: exception, the Kierkegaardian impossible moment of the ultimate realization of existence in repetition, precisely cannot be captured in variations, but takes place through a radical repetition of the same.

The new will not be reached with its—always different—designation, or the variation of meaning, for, the moment we try to name difference, we necessarily lose it. The new is not marked, named *new*, but always emerges behind our backs as an uncodifiable and uncontrollable moment of repetition itself, as its inherent surplus—lack. If we want to reach the movement of true repetition, we have to persist in its paradoxical structure, *the impossible repetition of the same*, which in itself produces difference, the new. *The possibility of repetition lies precisely in its own impossibility*: this is the realization that elevates Kierkegaardian existence from an ethical to a religious level.

The double Kierkegaardian paradox binds together its two premises, two commitments of the impossible as the condition of possibility of repetition, which are themselves paradoxes, that is: the *paradox that repetition as repetition of the same is not possible, and yet this impossibility keeps repeating*, and, on the other hand, the *paradox that the condition of possibility of the emergence of difference is precisely the perfect repetition of the same*. The double paradox, the paradox of two paradoxes, is therefore the following: *although the repetition of the same is impossible, although difference cannot be eliminated in order to achieve a perfect repetition, the condition of*

*possibility of the emergence of difference is, on the other hand, exactly the perfect repetition of the same.*

Behind this exceptional supposition lies Kierkegaard's theory of paradox as developed in *Repetition* and in *Philosophical crumbs*. Kierkegaard does not consider paradox as such to be a hindrance to thought, but rather a revelation of the only legitimate field of thought: a paradox is nothing but the very liveliness of thought—it is only in a paradox that thought actually comes across itself (but precisely in coming apart):

One should not think ill though of paradoxes, because the paradox is the passion of thought and a thinker without a paradox is like a lover without passion: a poor model. But the highest power of every passion is to will its own annihilation. Thus it is also the highest passion of the understanding to desire an obstacle, despite the fact that the obstacle in one way or another may be its downfall. This is the highest paradox of thought, to want to discover something it cannot think.<sup>6</sup>

With the double paradox of repetition Kierkegaard carries out a twist that determines the modern subject—it is the fundamental, structural impossibility of repetition that is the only condition of its possibility. Consequently, Kierkegaard's ontology differs from the classical ontology of being in that the area of being and the area of non-being are not strictly delimited, but mutually condition each other and structurally belong to one another. Non-being is not beyond being, but is its inner incision. Difference as the absolute other, as non-identity, is not ejected from the field of the identity of one as its external limit, but determines it from within.

Because the ontology of being builds on a strict delimitation of identity and non-identity, it can understand repetition only as *reproduction* of identical elements where non-identity cannot enter. Difference as negation is ejected from the system: non-identity is beyond the series, beyond the field of the thinkable. That is why classical ontology can think difference only in the form of *variation*, as a specific difference that establishes variety within the very identity of being, without thereby curtailing the formal division between the area of being and the area of non-being. However, in order for the ontology of being to think difference that does not introduce negation into the system, that does not desecrate the field of being with the traces of non-being, it has to establish another delimitation: the delimitation between the general and the particular, the universality of form and the particularity of its individual material realisations. The identity of one establishes pure form that, as such, is unchangeable and absolutely reproducible, but insofar as it is realised in material particularities, it generates diversity, an innumerable multiplicity of variations. Thus, difference is inscribed in the ontology of being as variation, as a positive material differentiating moment, which does not influence the form of being itself—it cannot stand against it as negation, as non-being.

Kierkegaard's theory of repetition brings a critique of two mechanisms of the ontology of being: the critique of the mechanism of *reproduction* as the repetition of

identical elements, which, at the level of form, perpetuates the unchangeability of the one, and the critique of *variation* as merely material diversity, which does not have the power of difference as negation, an exception that would cut into the very identity of the one, the very form of being. Repetition is not reproduction insofar as a certain difference is always already inscribed in every turn of the repetition of the same and *a priori* undermines any pretension to identity from within, but, at the same time, difference is not variation insofar as it does not operate merely in the material area of positive diversities, but cuts into the very form of identity as a subversive power of exception, as its internal other, as its constitutive negation.

However, Kierkegaard's ontology, insofar as it turns away from the ontology of being, is not an ontology of non-being, an ontology of an eternally flowing becoming of non-identities, an ontology of substitutivity and groundlessness, as traced in a certain postmodern theory of simulacra. In Kierkegaard's conception of repetition, a certain identity is established—but this identity does not persist in time: in every moment, the subject is born anew through the dialectics of repetition that retroactively posits every identity as an identity of identity and non-identity and, through it, *a priori* generates its history.

Non-being is always already inscribed in being or, as Lacan puts it, the *one* of the unconscious is precisely the *one* of the rift, gap. The unconscious is not the field of one, being. But it is also not the field of non-being. The unconscious, says Lacan, opens the gap, which is pre-ontological; it is neither being nor non-being, but belongs to the register of the *un-realized*. As such, the unconscious is essentially a discontinuity, inconstancy. There is no closed *one* here, no whole that precedes this discontinuity and into which a difference cuts subsequently, making a fissure, a break in the original oneness. But, on the other hand, just as there is no pre-existing identity, there is also no pre-existing non-identity; absence is also not the basis. Lacan stresses this with his famous metaphor of silence and voice: there is no initial silence into which a voice shouts, he says, but it is the shout that yet establishes the silence.<sup>7</sup> Being and non-being as co-determining are produced at once with the original cut: the unconscious is, says Lacan, “in profound, initial, inaugural, relation with the function of the concept of the *Unbegriff*—or *Begriff* of the original *Un*, namely, the cut.”<sup>8</sup>

The double critique of reproduction and variation can also be found in Hegel, in the rare passages where he discusses repetition. Even though Hegel does not develop a theory of repetition, his theses on repetition concern the core of his dialectics.

#### *The dialectics of repetition*

Hegel very rarely talks about repetition, but we nevertheless have to say that Hegelian dialectics is nothing but repetition *par excellence*. The classical field of reflection on Hegel's theory of repetition is related to his famous idea of historical repetition, which—in line with the retroactive logic of the productive conception of repetition<sup>9</sup>—was first actually inscribed in the history of thought by Marx's (but in

reality Engels') retort on repetition in history.<sup>10</sup> Instead of the classical discussions on repetition that draw on Hegel's perception of history, we will here proceed from his *The Science of Logic*.

There is a passage in which Hegel briefly, but very clearly says something about repetition as a purely structural matter. This passage can be found in Volume One of *The Science of Logic*, in Remark 3 of the section on Becoming. This is how Hegel defines becoming:

The unity, whose moments, being and nothing, are inseparable, is at the same time different from these moments. It thus stands as a *third* with respect to them—a third which, in its most proper form, is *becoming*.<sup>11</sup>

Hegel's development of the initial hypothesis of *The Science of Logic* that pure being and pure nothing are the same, and as such basically inseparable, which is also the fundamental point of his dialectics, is that it is precisely this inseparability of being and nothing that constitutes their difference. It is exactly this difference, this necessary shift within every statement of identity, that is the inner motor that establishes his dialectics as the dynamism of becoming and transition.

Being and nothing, says Hegel, do not exist for themselves, but are present only through becoming or transition. Wherever there is talk of being and nothing, this third, becoming, which is the truth of pure being and pure nothing, must be present as their condition of possibility.

This third, Hegel continues, has different empirical shapes that abstraction sets aside or neglects for the sake of "holding fast to its two products, being and nothing, each for itself, and showing them as protected against transition."<sup>12</sup> The most eloquent accounts of the impossibility of advancing from an abstraction to something beyond it, and of uniting the two, claims Hegel, are given by Jacobi in support of his polemic against the Kantian *a priori synthesis* of self-consciousness, in his *Treatise Concerning the Undertaking of Critique to Reduce Reason to the Understanding* (Jacobi, *Werke*, Vol. III). Jacobi defines the task as follows:

[...] demonstrating the originating or the producing of a synthesis in a *pure somewhat*, be it consciousness, space or time. Let space be *a one*; time *a one*; consciousness *a one*. Now, do say how any of these three 'ones' *purely* turns itself internally into a manifold: each is *a one* and *no other*. What brings *finitude* into these three infinitudes? What impregnates space and time *a priori* with number and measure, and turns them into a *pure manifold*? What brings *pure spontaneity* ('I') into oscillation? How does its pure vowel sound come to its concomitant sound, the consonant, or better, how does its *soundless*, uninterrupted *sounding* interrupt itself and break off in order to gain at least some kind of self-sound, an *accent*?<sup>13</sup>

Hegel comments on Jacobi's task as follows:

One sees that Jacobi very distinctly recognized that abstraction is a *nonentity*, whether this *nonentity* is the so-called absolute (only abstract) space, or the equally abstract time or abstract pure consciousness, the “I.” He insists on this nonentity for the sake of maintaining the impossibility of any advance to an other, which is the condition of a synthesis, and to a synthesis itself.<sup>14</sup>

Especially graphic is Jacobi’s description of the procedure for attaining the abstraction of space:

For a time I must try clean to forget that I ever saw anything, heard, touched or moved anything, myself expressly not exempted. Clean, clean, clean must I forget all movement, and let precisely this *forgetting* be my most pressing concern, since it is the hardest. Just as I have thought all things away, so must I also get perfectly *rid* of them all, retaining nothing at all except the intuition, which *violently* held its ground, of the infinite *immutable* space. I may not, therefore, *think* even myself *back into it* as something distinguished from it yet equally bound to it; I may not let myself even be merely *surrounded* and *pervaded* by it, but I must rather *give myself over* to it totally, become a one with it, transform myself into it; I must allow no leftover of myself except *this my intuition* itself, in order to behold it as a truly self-subsisting, independent, single and sole representation.<sup>15</sup>

In this void, states Jacobi, he encounters the opposite of what should happen to him according to Kant’s assurance. He does not find himself to be a *many* and a *manifold* but to be rather a one without any plurality and manifoldness; even more, he himself is nothing but the impossibility itself, the nihilating of all things manifold and plural. This is how Jacobi concludes: “any manifoldness and plurality ... are revealed in this purity as a *pure impossibility*”<sup>16</sup>. Hegel responds that “the meaning of this impossibility is nothing else than the tautology: I hold fast to abstract unity and exclude all plurality and manifoldness; I keep myself in indistinctness and indeterminacy, and look away from anything distinguished and determinate.”<sup>17</sup>

Kant’s *a priori* synthesis of self-consciousness, says Hegel, is diluted by Jacobi to pure abstraction. He reduced the synthesis in itself to “the copula in itself;—an ‘*is, is, is*’ without beginning and end, without ‘what,’ ‘who,’ or ‘which.’”<sup>18</sup> This, says Jacobi—and here we finally arrive at repetition—“this repetition of repetition *ad infinitum* is the one single occupation, function, and production of the purest of all pure syntheses; the synthesis is itself this mere, pure, absolute repetition.”<sup>19</sup>

The copula ‘*is, is, is*’ expresses abstract being, which allows no advance to the other, is completely indeterminate, has no predicate and is not even a substance, but rather a pure void, an empty space, a soundless sounding, a highly general sameness. For Jacobi, repetition is thus precisely a sort of a stubborn persistence in the same, a movement that produces nothing, a reproduction of the identical, whose most perfect form is possible precisely as a reproduction of the void, pure contentless form. However, notes Hegel—and we must be careful here—“since there is no pause in it,

that is, no negation, no distinguishing, the synthesis is not a repetition but rather undifferentiated simple being.”<sup>20</sup>

What Jacobi names the purest repetition of repetition itself—the return of the copula ‘is, is, is’ as the supposed absolute identity is for Hegel precisely *not* repetition, but is, quite the opposite, an *a priori* structural abolishment of any possibility of repetition.

If mental abstraction that tries to conceive something pure, for example, pure being (or pure consciousness or pure space or pure nothing), gets stuck in absolute indeterminacy and cannot advance to anything determinate, cannot descend from infinity to finitude, and if all that this abstraction manages to repeat is merely its identity with itself, an ‘is, is, is’ or ‘I, I, I,’ then what we have here, says Hegel, is *precisely not repetition*.

#### *The correlation of content and form*

Repetition is a process of the identity of identity and non-identity, within which every identity is always the identity of identity and non-identity—in dialectical transition, a difference is always at work.

Because this difference is nothing but negation, the minimal mark of this difference is not substantive, but quite formal—it does not concern any special signifier but the signifying logic itself. Difference is not designated, named, bonded with a signifier (it does not name a void, absence etc.), but appears merely in mediation, through the form of the repetition of dialectical structure. And, yet—and herein lies the fundamental twist of Hegel’s concept of repetition—it is precisely difference as contentless and merely structural, as a connective-separative bond between being and non-being, that can produce a meaning on its flip side and enable the descent of the indeterminate to the determinate, the infinite to the finite. That repetition is not reproduction, that repetition as reproduction is not possible, therefore means for Hegel that there *is no pure form*.

It is exactly in this vein that Hegel’s criticism of Jacobi continues. First, says Hegel, when Jacobi assumes his position in an absolute, abstract space, time and consciousness, he transposes himself into something which is empirically false:

*There is no such thing as a spatially or temporally unlimited space or time, that is, none is empirically at hand which would not be filled with continuous manifold of limited existence and of change, so that these limits and these changes would not belong, unseparated and inseparably, to spatiality. Consciousness is likewise filled with determinate sensation, representation, desire, and so forth; it does not exist *in concreto* apart from some particular content or other. ... Consciousness can indeed make empty space, empty time, and even empty consciousness or pure being, its intended object and content, but it does not stay with them. Rather, from this emptiness it passes over—more than that, it forces itself over to a better content, that is, one*



which is somehow more concrete and to this extent, however bad as content, still better and truer. Precisely such a content is the synthetic as such, “synthetic” understood in its more general sense. ... The synthesis contains as well as exposes the untruth of those abstractions; in it they are in unity with their other, are not therefore as self-subsistent, not as absolute but strictly as relative.<sup>21</sup>

Hegel goes on to say that

it is the thought of pure space etc. (that is, pure space etc. taken *in themselves*) which is to be demonstrated to be null, that is, what must be demonstrated is that, as such a thought, its opposite has already forced its way into it, that by itself it is already being that has gone outside itself, a determinateness.<sup>22</sup>

It is precisely through the perversion of the relation between abstraction and determinateness, the classical differentiation between form and content, that the logic of the signifier is unfolded in Hegel. This is something that Žižek also points out:

What is supposed to be the internal content expressed or externalised in form is actually always already form, an effect of a decentralised process, a surface effect; and, vice versa, what is supposed to be form, the medium of the externalization of content, is actually the only content, i.e., a network of mediations that produces the interior of meaning as its effect.<sup>23</sup>

Form and content always already correlate in the sense that the law of their correlation is always established retroactively, as the product of the signifying chain.

Jacobi, who abstracts one and its other, avoiding their empirical shapes in order to, as Hegel puts it, keep them far apart, cannot advance from one to many, from pure indistinction to diversity. He presupposes pure formal being-in-itself of one and the other, subject and object, and then tries to connect them *from the outside, subsequently*. In this way, he excludes difference from the relation between one and the other, which is why he conceives difference itself, that is, the distinction between one and the other, being and non-being—as something in itself, something external.

However, in Kant’s *a priori* synthesis, one and the other, for example, I and the world, concept and the thing in itself, subject and object, do not correlate *a priori* as fixed given entities—which is what Hegel points out when he says that *synthesis must not be taken as a tying together of external determinations already at hand*. On the contrary, one and the other, that is, I and the world, concept and the thing in itself, subject and object, correlate in mutual co-becoming: the synthesis of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, says Hegel, is not external, subsequent, but *immanent*:

The synthesis which is the point of interest here must not be taken as a tying together of *external* determinations already at hand. Rather, the issue is twofold: one of the genesis of a second next to a first, of a determinate something next to something which is initially indeterminate, but also one of *im-*

*manent* synthesis, of synthesis *a priori*—a unity of distinct terms that exists in and for itself. *Becoming* is this immanent synthesis of being and nothing.<sup>24</sup>

Difference is not external to being and nothing, it is not established as their distinction in itself that puts them in an impossible relation from the outside, but is inscribed in being itself as its internal gap: being is always already nothing, being is fundamentally subjected to its own negation.<sup>25</sup> Being as one already refers to its other—and precisely herein lies the logic of Hegel’s dialectics. Being is its own other and it is exactly this transition of one out of itself into its other, of indeterminacy into determinacy and infinity into finitude (and vice versa) that is for Hegel the *true movement of repetition*. The Hegelian formula of dialectics as the transition of being-in-itself into its otherness and of this otherness back into being-for-itself is therefore nothing other than the fundamental formula of repetition.

Hegel precisely defines the double critique of reproduction and variation in an exceptional sentence, which is also the only sentence in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that explicitly addresses the problem of repetition. We find this sentence in *Paragraph 14* of the *Preface*. The sentence about repetition is placed in the context of the critique of scientific culture, which has not yet realised that pure knowledge is precisely the path to it. Thus, says Hegel, one side “boasts of its wealth of material and intelligibility,” that is, loses itself in pure empiricism and collecting examples, while the other side, on the contrary, “scorns this intelligibility, and flaunts its immediate rationality and divinity.”<sup>26</sup>

The first side thus deals with variation, the collection of diversity, while the second side is the absolute as pure abstraction separated from any content. The two poles are then externally reconciled and the principle of the masters of scientific culture is that:

They appropriate a lot of already familiar and well-ordered material; by focusing on rare and exotic instances they give the impression that they have hold of everything else which scientific knowledge had already embraced in its scope, and that they are also in command of such material as is as yet unordered. It thus appears that everything has been subjected to the absolute Idea, which therefore seems to be cognized in everything and to have matured into an expanded science.<sup>27</sup>

It is at this point that we come across the key sentence:

But a closer inspection shows that this expansion has not come about through one and the same principle having spontaneously assumed different shapes, but rather through the shapeless repetition of one and the same formula, only externally applied to diverse materials, thereby obtaining merely a boring show of diversity.<sup>28</sup>

The real difference, difference as form that introduces negation into being itself and, precisely through change, which pertains to substance as such, also has an effect in the material, will not be found in the boring show of diversity, which is

only an external application of the shapeless repetition of one and the same, it will not be found in the diversity of the interesting, as Kierkegaard would say, rather, difference as pure otherness can happen only as an inherent moment of repetition that twists the same from within, changes it into a new relation between determinacy and indeterminacy. Dialectics does not unfold through the reproduction of the identical, which in the sense of variation imprints its unchangeable form in always diverse materiality, but through the inner negation of the very form of identity, which on its flip side, as a sort of a side effect, produces a *novum*, a difference as an exception that has an effect in the material. It is exactly this material effect that triggers a new change of form, a new turn of the dialectics.

*Repetition beyond reproduction and variation*

Kierkegaard's double paradox of repetition can be discerned in Lacan's conception of repetition as the double movement of *automaton* and *tyche*, which establishes the return of signs, repetition at the level of the *symbolic*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the elusive circling of the non-representable remainder, gap, repetition that circles the field of the *real*. In Lacanian theory, *automaton* refers to a network of signifiers established in the register of the pleasure principle, while *tyche* operates "beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle."<sup>29</sup> *Tyche*, says Lacan, *is the encounter with the real*. Repetition traces the return of structure, but only in constantly perverting the structure itself, turning it through its own failure, through the slip of representation that appears as its insufferable remainder, as that whose meeting is essentially failed for the subject. However, this failure is also the condition of possibility of representation and subject as such. *Automaton* and *tyche* are two inclinations of the same process; they condition each other and are inseparable. Or, as Dolar writes in a pithy formula: "*tyche* is the gap of the *automaton*."<sup>30</sup>

Repetition results from the endeavour to abolish difference, to establish indistinction between both objects of repetition, but it is the very endeavour to do away with difference that produces something that *a priori* terminates sameness and that causes there to always be too much or too little repetition. The difference that emerges as something superfluous, something that sticks out and as such prevents the repeated to coincide with its own repetition is at the same time also a lack, a complex of the repeated driven to another repetition. But what from the viewpoint of the repeated is its unhealable wound is from the viewpoint of repetition its condition of possibility.

We must refrain here from, on the one hand, jumping to the conclusion that assigns reproduction to the symbolic repeatability of signs and, on the other, reserving the thesis that repetition is not reproduction for 'real' repetition beyond the symbolic. It is not the case that there is *automaton* as reproduction, on the one hand, and *tyche*, which is beyond reproduction, on the other. On the contrary, *tyche* and *automaton* are two sides of one and the same movement of repetition—repetition

that is not reproduction. The repetition of difference is involved in the movement of the signifying structure, while, on the other hand, the signifying structure can establish the platform for repeatability only through difference. Or, put differently: *it is precisely their intertwining—tyche as gap is automaton—that separates repetition from reproduction.*

Observing children at play, Freud discovered something unusual—in their games and activities, adults always search for something new, while children tirelessly repeat the same game: “If a joke is heard for a second time it produces almost no effect; a theatrical production never creates so great impression the second time as the first; indeed it is hardly possible to persuade an adult who has very much enjoyed reading a book to re-read it immediately. Novelty is always the condition of enjoyment. But children will never tire of asking an adult to repeat a game that he has shown them or played with them, till he is too exhausted to go on.”<sup>31</sup>

Adults always demand something new, different, and in this demand extend the symbolic field in which they are placed by varying meanings. But this demand for the new, says Lacan, precisely “conceals what is the true secret of the ludic, namely, the most radical diversity constituted by repetition in itself.”<sup>32</sup> Variation, the designation of the new as *interesting*, precisely does not produce anything new: “Whatever, in repetition, is varied, modulated, is merely alienation of its meaning.”<sup>33</sup> The child’s “requirement of a distinct consistency in the details of its telling signifies that the realization of the signifier will never be able to be careful enough in its memorization to succeed in designating the primacy of the significance (*signifiance*) as such. To develop it by varying the significations is, therefore, it would seem, to elude it. This variation makes one forget the aim (*visée*) of the significance by transforming its act into a game, and giving it certain outlets that go some way to satisfying the pleasure principle.”<sup>34</sup>

Insofar as repetition is not reproduction, variation as a possible way out of the vicious circle of the supposed reproductive repetition turns out to be a pointless task—a sort of a quixotic struggle with windmills. Variation stands against reproduction as a malevolent representative of a repressive instance of repetition, which is nothing but an illusory notion of repetition as a pure repetition of the same (sign, example, event) and is therefore itself illusory in its stand. Even more—insofar as variation operates at the level of the return of signs where it wants to capture the new in the field of *meaning*—it not only creates a phantom representative of difference, but thereby also annuls every possibility of difference. Meaning here is not established as one of the walls of the subject’s impossibility, which within the movement of separation and alienation is again and again established only in the form of an empty signifier, but as an ossified signifier, a sort of a signifying buffer that embeds itself in the gap of the signifying structure and precisely prevents for something new in itself and as a necessary remainder to be produced in the movement of the return of signs, in (the necessary and at the same time necessarily impossible) return of the same. Variation as a signifying representative of difference is not only its lookalike, but actually operates as its uncanny double—it takes its place

and drives it out of its field: variation with a supposed departure from reproduction not only stops the uncanny return of the same, but abolishes the very possibility of difference.

*The Zufall and the limping cause*

Aristotle “manipulates two terms that are absolutely resistant to his theory, which is nevertheless the most elaborate that has ever been made on the function of cause,”<sup>35</sup> says Lacan. Those two terms are *tyche* and *automaton*. And their stubbornness, their inherent resistance towards Aristotle’s system, functions exactly within the realm of what Lacan calls the *resistance of discourse*: it is the indicator that points to the flip side of discourse itself, where a certain compulsion is always at work. A compulsion of thought, which has to deal with its own surplus, with something standing out, something that cannot be incorporated into the system, but which precisely in this deviation from itself defines the system as such. From one perspective, what has emerged in the system appears as an interposition, but at the same time it also functions as a gain: without the concept of *coincidence* (*as privation*), Aristotle’s theory would not be what it is since it is what it is exactly in the difference, the addition, the turns it brings in relation to Plato and the Eleatics. Here, precisely through the most resistant concepts, the theoretical repetition producing a *novum*, a difference, takes place.

The Eleatics believed that non-being cannot come out of being, which is why there is no motion or becoming. Aristotle gets out of this conceptual squeeze, which Plato also followed, by positing different ways of talking about being. He suggests two possibilities (of talking about being in several ways): 1. introducing the aspects of potentiality and actuality—this theoretical crutch helped the history of philosophy get out of many an ontological quandary, and 2. introducing the concept of privation (στέρησις), which in Aristotle is not merely the name for absence, but also for something that is hardly or barely present. It is precisely the idea of privation that the concept of coincidence draws on.

Among coincidental causes (κατα συμβεβηκός), Aristotle points out two that stand out, almost become independent and take the place of causes in themselves. They are *tyche* (τυχη), *fortuna* in Latin, chance, and *automaton* (τό αυτόματον), *casus* in Latin, spontaneity. While *automaton* operates as a coincidental cause for all beings and events in nature, *tyche* is a coincidental cause only for those things that can be chosen and for those being capable of choice: “however, these events are said to be chance events if they are choice-worthy and happen spontaneously to agents who are capable of exercising choice.”<sup>36</sup> Chance is actually a type of spontaneity: “The difference between chance and spontaneity is that ‘spontaneity’ is the more general term, in the sense that every chance event is a spontaneous event, but not every spontaneous event is a chance event.”<sup>37</sup>

Chance and spontaneity are something inexplicable and *indeterminate*: “It is also correct to say that chance is inexplicable (*paralogon*), because explanations can

only be given for things that happen either always or usually, but the province of chance is things which do not happen always or usually. Since these kinds of causes are indeterminate, chance is indeterminate as well.”<sup>38</sup> Despite their indeterminate status and inexplicability, *automaton* and *tyche* in Aristotle are nevertheless *defined as causes*. Even though it operates beyond a clear end and purpose, coincidence clearly has a certain key.

Coincidence, as that which is neither necessary nor usually, neither determinate nor itself, but something fundamentally different, differentiating, is Aristotle’s great (and of course heretic) invention, which resolves Hamlet’s dilemma—from the viewpoint of becoming, to be or not to be precisely cannot be the question: “Nothing comes in an unqualified sense from what is not, but we maintain that there still is a sense in which things do come from what is not—that is, coincidentally: they come to be something from the privation, which is in its own right something that is not, and which does not remain.”<sup>39</sup>

With the concept of chance, *Zufall*, says Lacan, Freud takes us to “the heart of the question posed by the modern development of the sciences, insofar as they demonstrate what we can ground on chance.”<sup>40</sup> Repetition is always something, says Lacan, that happens *as if by chance*. But analysts do not let this deceive them. Why? Lacan’s point here is not that nothing is coincidental, in the sense of pre-determination that does not allow for deviation. If we must not let ourselves think that something happened as if by accident, then there must be something in the background, something that precisely *makes a coincidence appear as a coincidence*. This is precisely what coincidence wants—to seem as a coincidence, a split, a mistake, a failure.

However, claims Lacan, this must not deceive us—us slipping or misspeaking is not innocent, there is a cause behind this apparent coincidence. There is a cause, but this cause is not a law. On the other hand, this cause is also not the key to the puzzle, it is a key that opens Lynch’s blue box in which we will not find Meaning. Coincidence must not deceive us in a triple sense: firstly, it must not deceive us that there is nothing behind it, that it is merely a coincidence—for we know that it is always a coincidence according to something; secondly, it must not deceive us that—because we do not believe in coincidence as such—there is a necessity as determination, a sort of a law, behind it; and thirdly, it must not deceive us into believing that there is meaning behind coincidence revealing the actual truth.

What essentially determines the constitution of the psychoanalytic subject is neither a pre-given cause, which relates the subject and its history to a story about the origin, the original trauma, nor any kind of a purpose that saves the subject from its unpredictable emergence in the structure. On the other hand, however, the emergence of the subject is not left to pure chance. Within the return of signs, there is something that resists the causal logic and wants to seem like a coincidence, but exactly where something wants to seem as a coincidence, says Lacan, a cause is at

work. However, this cause is itself a *limping cause*: the constitution of the psychoanalytic subject is essentially determined by a certain leap of causality.

Freud's theory of *repression* is an attempt at conceptualizing the logic of the lost cause, which essentially determines the human psychic apparatus and is established through a specific temporal and topological mechanism of repetition. *In psychoanalysis, the constitution of the subject does not involve repetition that is a consequence of repression*, repetition as a return to the originally repressed, missing signifier, that is, the failure of representation does not trigger repetition, but it is also not the case that *we repress because we repeat*—as Deleuze would have it—that we are always already in the field of the ever present quasi-causal asubjective becoming into which the process of repression is subsequently included. Rather, as Alenka Zupančič points out, *repetition and repression are part of the same process. Just as in Lacanian alienation the signifying pair emerges in the place of the first signifier*, which means that the signifying logic first starts with the dyad—logic that is, the moment it is established, already bound to repetition—and that the first signifier exists only in its own fall, so too, *in Freudian repression, the Vorstellungsrepräsentanz<sup>41</sup> as a minimal signifying mark is established only with the repetition compulsion, while repetition takes place precisely at the moment of the always already occurred repression of the Vorstellungsrepräsentanz.<sup>42</sup>* The function of Freud's hypothesis of primal repression, which proceeds from the structure of substitutivity, is not to reveal the ultimate foundation that the analysis is supposed to reach after peeling off all the layers of "real repressions," but, as Alenka Zupančič points out, to "ground the unconscious in the leap of causality itself, in its gap."<sup>43</sup>

That there is no original event functioning as the first cause in a signifying series, to which clusters of shifted and repressed representations are then attached, means not only that any signifier can assume the role of a supposed origin and that there is no deeper meaning behind this, but also that we are always already in a language, that, at the unconscious level, the subject emerges merely in a signifying field and that there is no pre-signifying thing in itself, that is, that it exists merely as non-existent, as a lack, a loss.

Moreover, what is important here is that we do not look at the fixation itself as an original signifying gesture established in childhood, to which the patient returns throughout their life through repressions and resistances, but that, looking from a slanted perspective, we see that, through shifts, through repeating substitutive forms and their repressions, in short, through the movement of repetition, the original itself is retroactively produced. Fixation is not a past event, it is not a signifying origin and it is not the cause of repression, it is rather the other way round: the repetition of repression itself operates as a fixer that simultaneously produces and solidifies its supposed origin.

However—and this is crucial,—this process does not involve only retroactivity, *nachträglichkeit*, which retroactively establishes every cause as its own effect, as a cause of a cause, it does not involve only the subject constantly producing its his-

tory anew. The point here is rather that it is precisely within retroactivity, where a certain *presence* (the presence of the now) *retroactively* produces its own origin, that a certain causal hole, gap is established, which *a priori* prevents this *presence*—that is, the subject—to establish itself as a real effect of the origin that it produced as its own cause.

As Lacan puts it: “What is realised in my history is neither the past definite as what was, since it is no more, nor even the perfect as what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming.”<sup>44</sup> Kierkegaard writes something similar in *Repetition*: “Repetition and recollection are the same movement, just in opposite directions, because what is recollected has already been and is thus repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forwards.”<sup>45</sup>

Within the logic of *Nachträglichkeit*, a certain intentionality towards the future is established, a *forward recollection*, which does not only (retroactively) fabricate the cause itself (as the cause of the cause), but also shifts, again and again (and in advance), the return to it. The consequence of this is not a retroactive phantasmatic fabrication of a traumatic event that would nevertheless somehow ground it in its function of the origin, but an avant-garde forward movement of shifting within which the phantasmatic fabrication of the origin does not operate only as a (retroactively produced) trigger of a causal chain, but also as its unpredictable side effect. And it is exactly within this side effect that a certain aspect, a certain real is established, which, as Lacan emphasises, keeps psychoanalysis from turning into an empty idealism of ‘life is a dream.’<sup>46</sup>

#### *Envoi*

With the *double paradox of repetition* which can be traced in his book *Repetition*, Kierkegaard, on the one hand, delineates a new theory of the subject and its temporality and, on the other hand, legitimises a certain logic of failure, which Lacan posits as the constitutive moment of repetition in terms of the movement of the signifying structure, in which the subject emerges through the mechanism of alienation. Kierkegaard’s double paradox of repetition carries out a *tour de force* that determines the modern subject: the structural impossibility of repetition is the only condition of its possibility. Kierkegaard thereby delineates a subversive ontology that departs from the classical ontology of being: the area of being and the area of non-being are not separated, but they mutually condition each other. Because the ontology of being builds on a strict delimitation of identity and non-identity, it can understand repetition only as a *reproduction* of identical elements and difference only in the form of *variation*, as a specific difference that establishes variety within the very identity of being. What is essential both for the constitution of the modern subject and the modern understanding of the historical moment is that repetition is structured in the conceptual departure both from the idea of *reproduction* as pure



formal repetition of the same, on the one hand, and the idea of *variation* as a substantive articulation of difference, on the other.

The critique of repetition as reproduction and difference as variation, which can be found in Kierkegaard, Hegel and Lacan, delineates the theory of the subject that, on the one hand, turns away from every teleology or the theory of pre-given origin established by the classical ontology of being, while, on the other hand, it also moves away from the postmodern theory of non-being, pure substitutivity, simulacra, the absence of origin. By turning away from the idea of *telos* and the origin, Kierkegaard's double paradox of repetition doesn't abolish causality as such but rather establishes a new causality, which, so to say, accounts with a certain slip, with a leap that is inscribed in its very structure. It is precisely this leap of causality what Lacan calls an unconscious cause, a *limping cause*. Within the function of the limping cause, something is *at work*. And what is at work is nothing but the gap—the gap, inscribed in the very movement of repetition as its impossible condition of possibility.

## Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998) 128.
2. *Repetition*, subtitled as *An Essay in Experimental Psychology* and organized around the experimental trip to Berlin and the correspondence between Constantin Constantinus and the Young Man (who are, as Constantinus admits by the very end of the book, the two faces of the same person) reveals an exceptional structure: through the carefully planned formal composition of the book, which realizes the complex concept of repetition that it presents, and through the hidden progress of the main character (who is itself split) through the three levels of existence (the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious), Kierkegaard's theory of repetition overturns the traditional ontology of being as well as the realistic, Newtonian conception of time.
3. Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 38.
4. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 128
5. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 3-4.
6. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 111.
7. "Where is the background? Is it absent? No. Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge - just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence." Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 40.
8. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 43. Here, Lacan captures the one of the rifts in the following play on words: un- in French signifies one, while in German it means a negative prefix non- or un-.

9. In relation to the thesis on the productive conception of repetition as one of the four fundamental matrices of repetition, cf. Bara Kolenc, *Ponavljjanje in uprizoritev: Kierkegaard, psihoanaliza, gledališče [Repetition and Enactment: Kierkegaard, Psychoanalysis, Theatre]* (Ljubljana: Analecta, DTP, 2014) 21–28.
10. This is Marx's famous reference to Hegel's statement on repetition, which has become established as an indestructible aphorism, as an eternally returning sentence on the Hegelian problem of repetition: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." Marx, Karl, *The Eighteenth Brumaire Of Louis Bonaparte*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>
11. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 69.
12. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 69-70. Hegel's examples of such a conceptual—and necessarily abstract—"protection against transition" are Parmenides' doctrine of being and Spinoza's and Fichte's philosophy.
13. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 71.
14. *The Science of Logic*, 71-72.
15. *The Science of Logic*, 72.
16. *The Science of Logic*, 73.
17. *The Science of Logic*, 73.
18. *The Science of Logic*, 73.
19. *The Science of Logic*, 73.
20. *The Science of Logic*, 73.
21. *The Science of Logic*, 74.
22. *The Science of Logic*, 74.
23. Slavoj Žižek, *Hegel in označevalec [Hegel and Signifier]*, (Ljubljana: Analecta, DDU Univerzum, 1980) 170.
24. *The Science of Logic*, 72.
25. In the notes to the sections on being, nothing and becoming, Hegel explained his conception of the relation between being and nothing also by referring to Parmenides' identity philosophy. As Gregor Moder wrote: "Hegel declares that pure being, without any further determination, is a Parmenidian concept. But at the same time, he argues, Parmenides failed to see that pure being has already become pure nothingness." (Gregor Moder, "Held Out into the Nothingness of Being: Heidegger and the Grim Reaper," in *Filozofski vestnik*, Ljubljana, 2 (2013): 97-114, 105.
26. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977) 8.
27. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 8.
28. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 8.

29. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 53.
30. Mladen Dolar, "Comedy and its Double" in *Stop that Comedy!: On the Subtle Hegemony of the Tragic in Our Culture*, ed. Rober Pfaller (Wien: Sonderzahl Press, 2005) 184.
31. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, (New York: Norton, 1961) 29.
32. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 61.
33. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 61.
34. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 61-62.
35. Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 52.
36. Aristotle, *Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 47.
37. Aristotle, *Physics*, 46.
38. Aristotle, *Physics*, 45-46.
39. Aristotle, *Physics*, 29.
40. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 39.
41. There is a series of misunderstandings regarding Freud's term *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, originally named *die psychische (Vorstellungs)Repräsentanz des Triebes*, and its preinterpretation by Lacan. An extensive elaboration on this problem can be found in: Michael Tort, "V zvezi s freudovskim konceptom 'zastopnika' (Repräsentanz), in *Problemi*, 157/158 (Ljubljana): 105-108.
42. Repression is a complex process: on the border between *consciousness and the unconscious*, the mechanisms of the *return of the repressed*, which demands constant creativity from the psychic in forming substitutes, and *repression*, performed by the ego, demanding a constant use of force to be able to produce new and new resistances, since the primary struggle against the repressed continues in the secondary struggle against the substitute—the symptom, are involved in a double movement. On another border, on the edge of the *signifying and the pre-signifying*, in the impossible contact between the drive and representation, a movement whirling around the undetermined point of *Vostellungsrepräsentanz* takes place, driving the movement of repression and the return of repressed at a level fundamental for the constitution of the psychic apparatus—this is *a compulsion to repeat the very act of the repression*. *This repetition compulsion* is basic and we cannot get rid of it, for it is a constitutive function of the psychic apparatus itself.
43. Alenka Zupančič, "Ponavljjanje [Repetition]," *Filozofski vestnik* 1( 2007): 57-79, 69.
44. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 300.
45. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 3.
46. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 53.