

# **The Sublime Object of Genocide: Writing During/After the Destruction of Palestine**

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the various conceptions and dimensions of the Real. Through Badiou's formulation of the 'passion for the Real' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and various attempts at dealing with it to the psychoanalytic clinic of the Real. It will be argued that a reformulation of the relation to the Real is needed due to the change in the very structure of the social field. Following Zupančič's argument of redoubled disavowal, it will be shown that a very different passion is at stake. Placing this argument at the center of the ongoing genocide in Palestine and rethinking what it would mean to have a 'civilized attitude towards death', as Freud suggested, in times of accelerated conflicts. At the very core of the antagonism, a new sublime object is produced.

**Key words:** antagonism, psychoanalysis, Gaza, real, sublimation

## **Izvleček**

Ta prispevek se osredotoča na različne koncepcije in dimenzije realnega. Skozi Badioujevo formulacijo »strasti do realnega« 20. stoletja in različne poskuse obvladovanja z njim, do psihoanalitične klinike realnega. Dokazovalo se bo, da je potrebna preoblikovitev odnosa do realnega zaradi spremembe v sami strukturi družbenega polja. Sledec argumentu Zupančičeve o podvojenem zanikanju, bo prikazano, da je v igri povsem drugačna strast. Postavitev tega argumenta v središče trenutnega genocida v Palestini in premislek, kaj bi pomenilo imeti »civiliziran odnos do smrti«, kot je predlagal Freud, v časih pospešenih konfliktov. V samem jedru antagonizma se proizvaja nov sublimni objekt.

**Ključne besede:** antagonizem, psihoanaliza, Gaza, realno, sublimacija

## The Sublime Object of Genocide: Writing During/After the Destruction of Palestine

“But war cannot be abolished; so long as the conditions of existence among nations are so different and their mutual repulsion so violent, there are bound to be wars. The question then arises: Is it not we who should give in, who should adapt ourselves to war? Should we not confess that in our civilized attitude towards death we are once again living psychologically beyond our means, and should we not rather turn back and recognize the truth? Would it not be better to give death the place in reality and in our thoughts which is its due, and to give a little more prominence to the unconscious attitude towards death which we have hitherto so carefully suppressed? This hardly seems an advance to higher achievement, but rather in some respects a backward step — a regression; but it has the advantage of taking the truth more into account, and of making life more tolerable for us once again. To tolerate life remains, after all, the first duty of all living beings. Illusion becomes valueless if it makes this harder for us. We recall the old saying: *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. If you want to preserve peace, arm for war. It would be in keeping with the times to alter it: *Si vis vitam, para mortem*. If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death!”<sup>1</sup>

It is not superfluous to quote Freud in full here, namely, the concluding paragraph of his essay written in 1915 — a few months after the outbreak of the First World War — entitled *Our Attitude Towards Death*. This timely and timeless reflection on the conditions of humanity and the inevitable event of war in all civilized societies perhaps highlights Freud’s staunch pessimism. Equally, it opens the space for reflection on our attitude towards death, which time and again indicates that we are living psychologically beyond our means. This is true if we accept the fact that “no one believes in their death, or to put it differently, that in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of their immortality”.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the best option according to Freud is to accept the

<sup>1</sup> Freud, S. *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*. London: Vintage. p. 299, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, S. *II Our Attitude Towards Death*. p.289, 2001.

inevitability of war and killing because until there is the unconscious, there is the unconscious belief of one's immortality. In other words, the definition of human — a speaking being is a being that is constituted by the split that makes him live beyond means, psychologically, and otherwise despite the finite resources and life.

How should this thought be read today, 100 years later when again, whole peoples are being eradicated in several parts of the world at the same time, and it seems that on the whole, humanity failed to address the attitude towards death sufficiently, thus it remains conveniently repressed, just as in Freud's times. Nevertheless, it seems that one sound advice was indeed considered and well adopted, namely, 'To tolerate life remains, after all, the first duty of all living beings<sup>3</sup>'.

It also seems that the only duty towards life is to merely tolerate it. Would this not be precisely the main attitude today, while witnessing — practically on live stream — the genocide in Gaza, mass destruction, killing, and displacement of Palestinians? This duty to tolerate life is also granted only to the privileged few — in the West. The limitations of this attitude can be encountered quickly considering, for example, a scenario in which a psychoanalyst would travel to the current battlefield in Gaza, offering analysis to remaining Palestinians and professing the duties of tolerating life and all that this experience encompasses, including war and the inevitability of (premature) death. At this point a question arises about the limitations of psychoanalysis and whether it can actually address the complexity of situations such as war and even more so, genocide. To go further, how can a discourse, a psychoanalytic one, for example, even be possible today, in witnessing the terror of the Real, that escapes all words, impossible to translate to any symbolic level, let alone any theoretical formalization? Certain events are beyond psychoanalysis, beyond certain discourses, and most certainly, the current situation echoes strongly the prophetic, much-quoted words of Theodor Adorno; "To write

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 299.

poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today<sup>4</sup>."

Certainly, what psychoanalysis can do is offer a way to understand this internal antagonism, inherent in every societal fabric, how it is sublimated, seemingly unifying the social body again, canceling all splits and tensions, of course at the expense of the other, the designated excluded other. We have seen this in Nazi Germany, where that role was assigned precisely to the Jews. It is worth recounting the lessons that history provided, two such examples that are often compared and seen as the two sides of the same problematic coin: Nazism and Stalinism.

## Nazism, Stalinism and Gaza

One of the fundamental differences between Nazism and Stalinism can be described as follows; in Nazism, a Jew is ultimately guilty simply because he is a Jew, because of his natural properties, what he fundamentally is; while even in the darkest days of Stalinism a member of the bourgeoisie or aristocracy is not guilty *per se*, he is guilty because of his social status, there is always a minimum of subjectivization involved; participation in the class struggle relies on the subjective act of decision<sup>5</sup>. But one cannot decide to be a Jew, it is a question of belonging to a community and sharing a specific culture. This underlines the difference between Nazism and Stalinism even more, namely, what for the Stalinists was the antagonism that dwells in the very kernel of the social edifice<sup>6</sup> was in the Nazi ideology 'naturalized' into

4 Adorno, T.W. *Cultural Criticism and Society (1949) in Prisms*. 1st MIT Press. ed. Cambridge. p. 34, 1983.

5 An act of decision—subjectivation—depends on class consciousness, the very basic understanding that the class struggle revolves around the surplus value. The bourgeoisie and the working class have opposing interests, where the former wants to appropriate the value, the latter wants to enjoy the product of labour that workers create.

6 The antagonism is created from the material basis on which the capitalist society functions, namely, the economy of exploitation driven by profit. Marx, K. (1981) *Capital: a critique of political economy*. London ; New York, N.Y: Penguin Books.

the biological property of a specific race, the Jews. So instead of the notion of society that is traversed or divided by class struggle, in which everybody is compelled to take sides, we get the notion of society as a corporate body threatened by an external enemy; the Jew as a foreign intruder<sup>7</sup>. But this intruder is not simply somewhere 'outside', he is already part of the very tissue that constitutes the social body. This is what the Nazi propaganda constantly tried to emphasize, that even the so-called '*assimilated Jews*' were secretly still Jews at their very core, there is an unalienable core that cannot be changed, thus there is no possibility for peaceful coexistence. In that sense, Jews were not seen as the lower race in the hierarchy of races, they were the absolute Other, the principle of corruption embodied.

Žižek wrote extensively on this particular issue and formulated the question of the Jew, namely, Why does the Nazi need the Jew to constitute himself? According to Žižek, the sublime object of ideology is the spectral object which has no positive ontological consistency but merely fills in the gap of a certain constitutive impossibility<sup>8</sup>. This is the case for the anti-Semitic figure of the Jew, he bears witness to the fact that the ideological desire that sustains anti-Semitism is inconsistent in itself, it is self-contradictory, for example, the capitalist competition, the idea of some kind of pre-modern organic solidarity. To maintain the desire a specific object must be invented, which gives the body to, and externalizes the cause of the non-satisfaction of this desire, through this very logic; for example, a Jew is responsible for the social disintegration. It is rather obvious that it is not the Jew who prevents society from existing as some harmonious whole, from realizing its potential of full organic solidarity, rather it is the antagonism that is primordial, constitutive of the society, that undermines itself. The Jew comes later, he is a secondary formation, a fetish that materializes as it were, the primordial hindrance and impossibility. The Jew merely gives body to the negativity, the impossibility of social antagonism<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the Jews were not some external

<sup>7</sup> Žižek, S. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. New ed. London: Verso (The Essential Žižek). p. 275, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Žižek, S. *The Plague of Fantasies*. New ed. London: Verso (The Essential Žižek). p. 97, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 98.

threats but to use Lacan's term, *ex-timate*, indicating that what is inside is in a radical sense exterior, hence a foreign intruder is at the very heart of our civilization<sup>10</sup>. Certainly, history provides multiple examples of how under the master signifier, the most atrocious crimes were justified and committed. Today, again, the attempt at justifications for the onset of genocidal efforts in Gaza — the final stage of a long-standing conflict — in the name of settler colonialism in Palestine, points to the decline and deep crisis of imperialist capitalism.

A great Hassidic Master Rabbi of Kotsk used to say “There are truths which can be communicated by the word; there are deeper truths that can be transmitted only by silence; and, on another level are those which cannot be expressed not even by silence. And yet they must be communicated<sup>11</sup>.” The truth that cannot be expressed, not even by silence, is the truth of the concentration camps, gulags, and mass exterminations that with the weight of horror defy words, but also silence. The event that defies language, that makes it impossible to ‘put into words’ is precisely because of the dimension that makes this event, which constitutes it as such — the notion of the encounter with the Real. The Real is not something that has any bodily materiality or a spatial dimension, it has neither of those, it is suspended, an in-between space. The Real in Lacan's definition is this impossibility ‘embodied’, the impossibility to be signified, that is to say, the signifier circles it. According to Lacan, the Real is the impossible itself, a signifying impasse or the impasse of formalization<sup>12</sup>. The signifier circles this impasse in the same way that the signifier is giving flesh to the object of desire, which is never really there, the *objet petit a*, the cause of desire. The Real is not in any non-relation to the signifying structure. To put it in another way, the signifier constitutes the impossibility of the Real as the radical alterity. As Zupančič argues, the signifier does not appertain to the symbolic field only, or exclusively, it is

<sup>10</sup> Žižek, S. *Surplus-Enjoyment: A Guide for the Non-Perplexed*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. p.108, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Žižek, S. *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*. London; New York: Verso (The Essential Žižek), 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Soler, C. The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan. First published in *Quarto*, May 1984, 1984.

registered in another dimension, the dimension of the Real. Thus, it is the Real that points back to the symbolic as a testimony of its insufficiencies, the impossibility and contradictions of the symbolic as such. What follows is that the impasse of the Real is always already a residue, the remainder of the symbolic gap, a testimony of the negativity already constitutive of the symbolic structure. The stain in the symbolic is the Real that is included in the very symbolic, the disturbing dimension haunts within the symbolic order, giving body and maintaining the out-of-jointness, the status of the speaking being that is caught in the tripartite constellation of jouissance, drive and the sexed body<sup>13</sup>.

What does this question of the signifier and the Real have to do with the current predicament? Very much like the Rabbi of Kotsk articulated the differences between the different truths; those that can be communicated by words, the deeper ones that can be transmitted only by silence, to the level of truths that cannot even be transmitted by silence.

Positioning the Real in a privileged position is not a new thing, and as it was accounted for and articulated by Badiou the 'passion for the Real' produces a paradoxical situation in which no real is real enough, meaning that passion for the Real inevitably has its other side which is the doubt. Every attempt to reach the Real — many instances in the Moscow trials, and the terror recounts of this — fails and reproduces the inherent doubt that furthers the terror<sup>14</sup>. This fundamental truth or something that might be on the side of the Real, which seems to evade any attempts at conception or possibility of minimal apprehension, is fundamentally devoid of sense or meaning.

The dimension of concentration camps and the sheer brutality of the calculated extermination in Nazism, similarly to mass starvations and liquidations during Stalinism are brutal because they are fundamentally nonsensical.

<sup>13</sup> Zupančič, A. *What Is Sex?* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (Short circuits), p. 41, 2017b.

<sup>14</sup> A moment that demonstrates this moment most clearly is Bukharin's trial, where a slip, a mistake in the confession disturbed the whole process, the semblance interrupted the smooth functioning of the interrogation machine. What follows is that no real is real enough, thus producing the other side of the *passion for the real* — suspicion. Badiou, A. (2005). *The Century*. p.52.

They are beyond meaning, devoid of material necessity. The same logic applies to the ultimate or radical freedom, which is not grounded in any idea of ethics or moral ground, there is no dimension of ethics or guarantee that it is inherently 'good'<sup>15</sup>. The level of meaning or sense is then attributed retroactively, to tame the radical brutality of the meaningless violence (or radical freedom). An example of this would be the depoliticization of the Holocaust, thus elevating the event to a kind of sublime evil, the exception that is ripped away from the historical time, isolated, fixed in one particular historical moment, and essentially suspended<sup>16</sup>. The suspension from historical time also means that the event is deprived of the radical dimension of the break (crisis) that interrupted or derailed the historical flow of time.

## Passion for "Gaza"

This suspension of historical time is the crucial point concerning the current Israel-Palestine struggle, namely, the depoliticization of the Holocaust eventually leads to the objectification and creation of the ideologico-political constellation whereby elevation of the Holocaust to the abyssal absolute evil becomes a political act in itself. Perpetrated by Zionist and Western right-wing anti-Semites in a joint venture to destroy any potentiality of a radical political possibility<sup>17</sup>. Thus, in one gesture two things coincide, the obfuscation of the Real that is at the same time the only dimension from which the radical political dimension can emerge and equally furthers the negation of the historical dimension of anti-Semitism.

Since the onset of the recent events in the region that caused widespread and numerous protests in the West, something has changed. As if the act

<sup>15</sup> Pfaller, R. *Za kaj je vredno živeti. Elementi materialistične filozofije*. Studia Humanitatis, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the suspension can be thought in parallel with suppression. Because the suppressed material keeps returning as Freud argues — the return of the repressed. All material fixated and isolated, 'removed' has a tendency to return in different symptoms.

<sup>17</sup> Žižek, S. *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*. London; New York: Verso (The Essential Žižek). p, 2011.

of protesting was declaring something that should not have been said. This begs the question; why are certain words or phrases prohibited today? The level of censorship that is present today perhaps resembles the atmosphere of the Second World War Europe. The other side of censorship is the forced propaganda and narratives that are repeated like mantras, indoctrinating and reshaping the historical narratives, those of the ruling class. Days following October 7 — although there is a long historical precedence attesting to these events — the main or almost exclusive narrative was that the attack organized by Hamas were acts of terrorism. In the first instance denounced by Israel, shortly after followed by Western governments, where Hamas was officially recognized as a terrorist organization. At the same time, the Israeli bombings of civilians in Gaza, deaths of by now tens of thousands and counting, displacement of millions — currently the numbers have almost surpassed those of Al-Nakba in 1948<sup>18</sup> — these acts were denounced as state terrorism, although this time only by Palestinian organizations and a few supporters of the Palestinian cause<sup>19</sup>. In the current climate of endless accusations and condemnations, the light use of signifiers such as terrorist act, state terrorism etc., Insel makes the point that more than ever it is essential to question the vague conception of terrorism and its use and to refer to the repertoire of clearly defined acts as crimes under current equally clear international law. The concepts in this repertoire are not terror, terrorism, or terrorist organization but rather, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide<sup>20</sup>.

These are clearly defined concepts with clear and precise conditions that should counteract the misuse and deliberate obfuscation of situations of conflict. Hence, assassinations and hostage-taking of hundreds of civilians in the Kibbutzim settlement, deaths of thousands of civilians in Gaza, bombings

<sup>18</sup> Nakba Day: What Happened in Palestine in 1948? <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/15/nakba-mapping-palestinian-villages-destroyed-by-israel-in-1948>.

<sup>19</sup> Insel, A. Crimes Against humanity in Israel and Palestine. *The Philosophical Salon*. November 13, 2023. <https://thephilosophsalsalon.com/crimes-against-humanity-in-israel-and-palestine/>. (Accessed: November 20, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

of schools and hospitals<sup>21</sup>, and forced displacement of millions are concrete, premeditated, and large-scale actions that fulfil the conditions of what is termed a crime against humanity. Insel further suggests that the use of ‘fight against terrorism’ is a primary justification for the aim of restricting the rights and freedoms and targeting opponents. In a certain sense, the attack by Hamas on October 7, exhibits some characteristics of a terrorist attack, its objective being instilling fear within the Israeli society, however, these massacres — a deliberate killing of civilian population — firstly, did not occur in the vacuum as it was suggested numerous times, but can equally be defined as war crimes, because these occurred in the context of an ongoing *de facto* war<sup>22</sup>.

On the other side, the collective punishment, extermination and mass displacement of the civilian population identified as Palestinians can be defined effectively as genocide, a crime against humanity. A new era of violence, fear, and oppression will not stay in Palestine or the wider region, but as it is already becoming increasingly clear, is leaking through, thus the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not be limited to the temporal and spatial context of Israel and Palestine alone.

Indeed, Palestine is currently the disturbing element, disrupting the smooth functioning of the European group, and inconveniencing life under common values — democracy and welfare — which unite societies and communities across Europe. Paradoxically, the very element that disturbs is the embodiment of antagonism, disavowed by the West and delegated to the Middle East, it is the very element that legitimizes, and confirms the Western community. As long as Palestinians exist, there will be no peace, and equally, the antagonism will be kept at a seemingly safe distance. By actively supporting and funding the genocide in Gaza, Europe and the United States function under the logic of anti-group<sup>23</sup>, precisely with the attempt to secure the integrity of

<sup>21</sup> Under international humanitarian law, hospitals are protected civilian objects and should not be targeted unless it can be proven they are being used by a party to commit an ‘act harmful to the enemy’.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> The defining characteristics of the anti-group, according to Nitsun are determined as ‘negative attitudes towards the group, and if not recognized and contained, can disrupt the group and undermine the therapeutic task. The key aspect is precisely not just the potential

the group, the social bond on which it functions, the values that define the borders, and limitations, are constituted by the necessary exclusion of certain elements from the group. The values and rights apply to all except of course the exception, which constitutes the all. What needs to be articulated clearly is precisely that this disappearance of one group constitutes the existence of the larger group of interest, namely the capital. Thus, with this event, the universal difference is excluded.

Repeating Freud's question about tolerating life, what does this mean in today's circumstances — faced with the genocide in Gaza — what does it effectively mean to tolerate life? Does this mean tolerating the number of deaths in Gaza? Does this mean tolerating the counting? Probably, because if today's neoliberal capitalism excels in something, it is the practice of counting. The market functions by numbers, and equally, a society that is organized according to the market logic is to some extent forced to function under the dictate of numbers.

As Badiou develops this in his book *The Century*, namely, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a century obsessed with numbers, reality secured and governed by the predictability of numbers, all to say that now radical cuts such as revolutions are impossible and something to be avoided at all costs alongside the register of the Real. There is no possible relation with the Real. Instead of the Real, we get numbers and instead of thoughts, we get opinions and polls. So, if the new fetish of the day is numbers — accounting, budgeting, the stock market speculations, shares, mortgage etc. — it is because in this way the presence of the Real is obfuscated, held behind numbers that Badiou calls blind numbers<sup>24</sup>.

Is this not the case today where we are faced with the incessant counting of the victims in Gaza, which are constantly being updated and categorized, how many adults have been killed, how many of these were women, and then the

destructiveness in the group, but also aggression toward the group as such. Nitsun, M. (1998). THE ANTI-GROUP: Destructive and Creative Forces in Groups. *Mikbatz: The Israel Journal of Group Psychotherapy / זקבטם תעה בתכ:* 4(1), I-XVIII, p. VII.

<sup>24</sup> Badiou, A. 20. stoletje. 1. natis. Ljubljana: Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo. p. 43.

category of dead children and infants. How many entire families of multiple generations have been completely eradicated? On the other end, counting of bombs that were dropped over Gaza, the level of destruction that these caused, and the counting of hours and days since the onset of the genocide. This is the manifestation of the Real, however, it is the Real in Gaza, for the Palestinians, here in the West it is just the reality of numbers. These numbers that are given in the form of reports and news updates are a form of blind numbers that mask the dimension of the Real that would allow the comprehension of what the death toll effectively is. There is an impossibility to relate to these numbers that are accounted for each day as the killing in Gaza continues. "At least 23,469 Palestinians have been killed and 59,604 injured in Israeli strikes on Gaza since October 7, according to Gaza's Ministry of Health<sup>25</sup>." There is a certain repetition in the form of counting, it gives the impression of a kind of infinity, a sense of a never-ending procedure of the counting of victims, although the number of Palestinians that remain in Gaza is not infinite. According to Badiou, because these numbers are blind, they are bad in a Hegelian sense of the bad infinity<sup>26</sup>. If it is generally accepted that bad infinity cannot overcome the finiteness precisely because the operation remains the same, it is just repeated *ad infinitum* without ever reaching the destination — infinity. Thus, the difference between the number as a form of being and the number that functions as the masking of real is the absolute difference between the specific and necessary, where the necessity demands only one specific number and the case of arbitrary variability which is at the core of the system that demands blind numbers or as Badiou puts it, floating numbers<sup>27</sup>.

While the 19th century was the century of announcements, dreaming, and a promise of the future, the 20th century, on the other hand, is claiming that 'it is working' here and now<sup>28</sup>. The period of thinking and dreaming is over, now there is a new beginning, a beginning of action, situated in the present and driven by the passion for the Real. According to Badiou, there are effectively

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/gaza-daily-deaths-exceed-all-other-major-conflicts-in-21st-century-oxfam>.

<sup>26</sup> Badiou, A. 20. stoletje. 1. natis. Ljubljana: Društvo za teoretsko psihanalizo. p. 43, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50.

two ways or attempts at dealing with this real. The first one is via purification of the Real in a way that it gets isolated, somehow extricated from reality that is veiling it, which paradoxically creates a barrier at the same time, blocking the Real. This is the reactionary position because it is in the service of violent unveiling, and destruction of the illusion, which is presented as an end of ideology, a kind of post-ideology — or as Badiou puts it — a way of terroristic nihilism<sup>29</sup>. Battle against the illusion with the ambition to reach the Real and cleanse it of any residue of reality ultimately leads to the loss of the Real as such. Because of the illusion, the minimal distance from the Real is somehow connected to the Real, allowing a glimpse at a part of the Real, and one could not approach it without the imaginary support. With the desire to get rid of the illusion of reality, the destruction of illusion equates to destruction as such. When the Real is 'cleansed', which could be seen as the complete absence of reality, it equals nothing. There is no real that can be grasped without a certain reality, or the illusion that sustains it, and the encounter with the Real without the imaginary and symbolic support equals psychosis. As has been established the first option of dealing with the Real via purification is fundamentally a reactionary option and through the operation does not effectively reach the Real but can be seen perhaps as a form of disavowal. Through the separation of real and reality, through the supposed isolation we get active nihilism, or active destruction. Badiou goes on to think about the current state of things, determining that the figure of active nihilism is *passé* and that we live in times of absolute limitation and limiting of the Real. Attempts at reaching the Real were replaced by an overflow, times overburdened with reality, a kind of surplus of the imaginary or fantasy.

Today the main tendency is to avoid any contact with the Real, thus resulting in a similar operation to the attempt to purify the Real, the result is nothing, nothing of the Real. It could be argued that today the avoidance of the Real is still very much the case of disavowal with the difference that this very disavowal is redoubled<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> Zupančič, A. 'Perverse Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the End', *Filozofski vestnik*, XLIII(2), p. 89–103, 2022.

As Zupančič argues, today it is far more important to show that we know 'how things stand', the possibility of deception is more frightening than the traumatic dimension of the Real<sup>31</sup>. Thus the very mechanism of defense is radicalized; whereas the classical form of disavowal splits the knowledge and belief, one is on the level of announcing (knowledge) and the other is on the side of the fetish (belief)<sup>32</sup>, the new form of disavowal is structurally perverted (a kind of perversion of perversion), where the knowledge itself is redoubled and takes place of the fetish: "We could describe it as a configuration in which knowledge about some traumatic reality gets strangely redoubled, and starts playing itself the role of the object-fetish that protects us against this reality"<sup>33</sup>. The question that remains is, if the knowledge is on the level of annunciation and at the same time occupies the position of the fetishist object, what happens to the belief?

Since the desire for purification is no longer present or it has mutated into a desire for avoidance which is located in the mechanism of redoubled disavowal, the reactionary nihilism has been deactivated, or in other words has become a passive, reactive nihilism, it does not desire the nothing but is equally hostile toward any form of organized act or form of thought<sup>34</sup>. Because thought is always driven by the Real and not the ideal, thinking as a material practice and a reminder of the dimension of the Real must thus be replaced with bureaucratic procedures that function as a stand-in, however without the surplus value produced through the thought procedure.

As the second path to dealing with the Real, Badiou proposes the path of subtraction. This path proposes the notion of minimal difference instead of the destruction of reality. Unlike the path of purification and destruction, the subtractive path is located in the gap. It is the minimal difference between what happens and the place where it happens. This gap is what constitutes

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> Mannoni, 'I Know Well, but All the Same...', p. 70. "I know well, but all the same" is the classical formulation of the fetishist disavowal, that still needs to disavow the belief, delegate the belief to the object of fetish.

<sup>33</sup> Zupančič, A. 'Perverse Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the End', *Filozofski vestnik*, XLIII(2), p. 95, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Badiou, A. *20. stoletje*. 1. natis. Ljubljana: Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo. p. 86, 2005.

the difference that barely differentiates the place of the event and the event itself, this ‘barely’ becoming the immanent exception in which the effect lies<sup>35</sup>.

In this sense, this path is structurally psychoanalytic, and it becomes possible if the gap or the split is included in the reading of reality. There lies the minimal difference that can be subtracted from the seeming unity of the image, hence following Lacan, the stain that disturbs the scopic field, the very entity constitutive of the gaze, is precisely the stain that constitutes, and defines the construction of the world<sup>36</sup>.

## Splitting the cause with absolute difference

The true problem and question lie in the split, the very mechanism, functioning as a gap, that gives rise to various formations. That which organizes, ‘cuts’ through the body and the cause. This is done via the signifier, organizing one for all, or alternatively, via *jouissance* which only causes one by one, one all alone. A different way of organizing can be thought of precisely through the split itself, which returns each to his or her aloneness, forming a different body, a body of the no-group of the psychoanalytic cause. In the violent, divided world, riddled with antagonisms, another phenomenon seems to be emerging and ever more an attractive option. With the designation and general apathy, loss of hope for the future, the only viable option left is to look back. But not back into the past with a sense of nostalgia for the old ways/ days, perhaps a more radical return to the past is needed. A pre-Oedipal past, before the moment when the individual was excluded from the exclusivity of the maternal bond and interpellated into the symbolic order that foreclosed any return to that primordial or primary bond. It can be argued that any social bond is based on exclusion. This is the minimal condition that constitutes a bond, when there is a bond (of exclusion), a community is presupposed. The question is whether this is so, and could there be a different bond envisioned,

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> Lacan, J. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. London: Karnac Books, p. 74, 2004.

constituted without the basic element of the exclusion? The Oedipal complex is essentially based on exclusion and prohibition, further, the repression of sexual desires, leading to the identification with the same-sex parent. One needs to first be excluded from the privileged primary bond with the mother (and the womb) to be included in the socio-symbolic order and group formations. This passage is not without consequences and even in the most unproblematic cases — “healthy development” — leaves a mark.

When Freud in his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, took Le Bon’s theory as a starting point, he offered a critique and opened up the space for missing elements of Le Bon’s theory of groups, questioning the ‘mechanism’ of group formations, essentially what is it that unites the individuals into a group<sup>37</sup>. What is this something that enables the passage from an individual to an individual in a group? He poses a question; if the individuals in the group are combined into a unity, there surely must be something to unite them, and this bond might be precisely the thing that is characteristic of the group. According to Freud, this question becomes fundamental, as the difference between the individual and the individual forming part of the group is rather evident. What is less evident is precisely that which causes the very difference<sup>38</sup>. While Le Bon thinks that an individual that forms part of the group acquires a set of completely new characteristics, for Freud there is nothing new in this manifestation, what the conditions of a group enable is the emergence of previously repressed unconscious instinctual impulses. It could be argued that the group formation does not in any way alter the individual in it, in as much the group is made possible through the bond, social bond, which is grounded in the fantasy of the ‘whole’ or ‘One’. The group allows for a different (unconscious) fantasy to come to the fore, something that was always already there, not ‘within’ the individual as such, but in the social bond that interpellates the individual. The social bond is structured through predominant discourses, which organize society. There are only four of them—not ten or twenty-five—and this is not without reason.

<sup>37</sup> Freud, S. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Group Psychology and Other Works*; (1920-1922). London: Vintage. p. 73, 2001.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

According to Lacan, all discourses—Master, University, Hysteric—apart from the fourth, the Psychoanalytic Discourse, which is ‘cleansed of the necessity of groups’,<sup>39</sup> are based on a notion of ‘completeness’. To return to the difference itself, what is different in the way an individual organizes, as opposed to an individual in the group? The cause of the difference is precisely in the *jouissance*. One can make oneself a cause of the master signifier, which organizes the cause ‘one for all’, which unifies, harmonizes, and gives an illusion of cohesion. On the other hand, one can make a cause of himself from *surplus-jouissance*<sup>40</sup>. This is the difference between taking up a signifier, that or the other, which determines a group and consequently, an identity, or inscribing oneself for example in the analytic discourse, that presupposes a bond that has a limited duration and involves two people, each time for a determined amount of time and in a specific space. Psychoanalytic discourse does not prescribe anything, or at least it should be in the service of a different cause, based on the singular experience and a very specific way one organizes and is impacted by one’s *jouissance*. What this also implies is the return of each one to their aloneness. It continues to challenge the fantasy of the group and the illusion of belonging, yet at the same time, maintains the dialectical relation of the subject’s inherent aloneness and the illusion which shields from the traumatic insight just enough. For ‘there is no sexual relation’ is effectively a logical impossibility and what remains, what is ‘effectively written’ in the speaking being is solitude<sup>41</sup>. Regardless of what one speaks about, in the end, ‘what speaks is just about solitude’<sup>42</sup>.

Equally, there is a reason why ‘*jouissance* goes from tickling to grilling’ which is how Lacan depicted what is at stake<sup>43</sup> with the excess of *jouissance*. He spoke of this at a time when there were quite a few people who were getting inflamed, in the true sense of the word. Today, once more, one could say that it goes from tickling to genocide. *Jouissance* is caught between what

<sup>39</sup> Lacan, J. ‘L’étourdit’. *Scilicet* 4, 1973.

<sup>40</sup> Lacan, J. ‘Lecture to the EFP [6/12/67]’, *Scilicet* 2/3, p. 26, 1967.

<sup>41</sup> Alemán, J. ‘Solitude:Common’, *Filozofski vestnik*, xxxIII(2), p. 29, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Lacan, J. *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge: Book XX*. Translated by B. Fink. New York (N. Y.): W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Soler, C. The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan. *Quarto*, May 1984, 1984.

Lacan would call the masochistic affectations on one end, and on the other, the horrors of war<sup>44</sup>.

And what about the Real? As it turns out, the Real cannot be purified or destroyed, as it became clear — with the attempts at (purification) destruction, the ultimate result is destruction itself. What comes closest to any possibility of dealing with the Real is perhaps Badiou's proposal of subtraction, as it deals with the minimal gap or split in the image, which disturbs the scopic field and is the place of the gaze, which without fail confronts us with the failed encounter. It is in the end the transference that 'leads us to the heart of repetition'<sup>45</sup>. It is the very split in the subject that drives the repetition of all failed encounters, which actively forces the formation of relations, familial, group formations and identification with larger communities, in the attempt to overcome the non-relation<sup>46</sup>. This is the insight that comes from the psychoanalytic discovery and experience, namely, the constitutive position of the split, pointing to the dialectical effects of the Real, which is always unwelcome<sup>47</sup>. Thus, it is the mechanism of the drive with the repetition that is immanently bound to the Real and hence structurally resistant to any formalization. the Real cannot be measured, it is unquantifiable and, in short, cannot be 'dealt with' in any formal way. Again, the answer to the question of what is to be done with the Real is; absolutely nothing. Psychoanalysis as the clinic of the Real could be seen as a practice that continues to resist the desire to do something with the Real.

Today instead of the somewhat stable pillars of social edifice, albeit dysfunctional, we have a multitude of identifications based on fragmentations and cuts of the signifiers that have this quality of division and isolation. Although the signifier functions in a way of cutting into the body, fragmenting and shattering the notion of totality, of some kind of unity, it introduces at the

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Lacan, J. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. London: Karnac Books. p. 69, 2004.

<sup>46</sup> "this is why it is necessary to ground this repetition first of all in the very split that occurs in the subject in relation to the encounter." Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p.69.

same time the idea of the One. It unifies and creates an illusion of belonging to some kind of total body, be it the national body, professional body, racial body or in any case, some kind of a stable, common body. In that sense, all the causes, the good causes that attach to master signifiers, to quote Soler, 'are the causes which collectivise, that make crowds, make groups. In other words, with the master signifier, you can found [sic] an orthodoxy, even a psychoanalytic one<sup>48</sup>'.

## Passion for delegation

It can be said that all causes are influenced by the Real, or at least to some extent, organized by the predominant ways and ideas the Real should be dealt with. The proposition here is that the passion for the Real is mapped differently today, instead of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's proclamation of never-ending 'work' taking place here and now, today the problem with the Real is approached with a different logic, namely, through the process of delegation.

In today's world of constant content generation, where life is increasingly experienced through the screen, in the comfort of algorithmic predictability where very little happens that might provoke the effects of the Real. At least until February 25, when Aaron Bushnell<sup>49</sup> set himself on fire in front of the Israeli embassy in Washington D.C. The video of his self-immolation set the internet on fire. With this extreme act of protest against the genocide in Palestine, he brought the Real back to here and now — back to Washington D.C. Aaron Bushnell was an active serviceman of the United States Air Force, he was 25 years old. Before setting himself on fire he started a livestream on Twitch, stating: "I will no longer be complicit in genocide." As he was walking toward his destination — the entrance of the Israeli embassy — he explained his intent and reasons why this act was not only logical but necessary; "I am

<sup>48</sup> Soler, C. The Body in the teaching of Jacques Lacan. *Quarto, May 1984, 1984.*

<sup>49</sup> The very next day a Wikipedia page was set for Aaron Bushnell, becoming another name on the long list of individuals that engaged in self-immolation as a sign of extreme protest against oppressive governments through history. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-immolation\\_of\\_Aaron\\_Bushnell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-immolation_of_Aaron_Bushnell).

about to engage in an extreme act of protest. But compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonizers, it's not extreme at all. This is what our ruling class has decided will be normal<sup>50</sup>.” He then poured gasoline over his head and set himself on fire. As the flames engulfed his body, he continued to shout “Free Palestine!”, as the smoke entered his lungs, altering his voice, slowly choking him, that voice was the moment of utter terror and despair, the moment of the Real.

Prior to this event, the internet was filled with images and videos of the brutal violence unfolding in Palestine, testimonies of children, and commentaries that flooded our social media feeds. The proliferations of images at a certain point started to resemble each other, a reproduction of one and the same image, cleansed — purified of the dimension of the Real that they were portraying. Until Bushnell’s video. Until this video of a U.S. soldier setting himself on fire on U.S. grounds, which functioned as a cut, that one singular event made all the difference. This is the very difference in Badiou’s theory of numbers, there are numbers, infinite numbers of deaths in Gaza, and one number, one death that made that very difference possible. As if the tragedy and horror of the very act were not enough, Bushnell fell to the ground suffocated relatively soon after the fire enveloped his body, within seconds the video shows the arrival of the police and ambulance, particularly one policeman pointing a gun at the burning body on the ground, clearly confused and reacting instinctively, pointing a gun at something terrifying. In the back a voice is heard shouting; “I don’t need guns, I need the fire extinguisher!” Is this voice not the very image of the truth today? A soldier who killed himself, refusing to perform his duties is perceived as the ultimate threat to the establishment and state security.

When this truth is articulated in the form of absolute difference, sublimation becomes impossible. At least temporarily. The effect of the Real has precisely this function, to disrupt and make a certain repetition impossible. Like a short circuit that disrupts the normal flow of life.

<sup>50</sup> Donegan, M. Aaron Bushnell set himself on fire outside an Israeli embassy. It is our loss he is no longer with us. *Guardian. Opinion. US News.* <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/feb/28/aaron-bushnell-self-immolation-gaza-israel, 2024>.



Figure 1: Lego: Gaza edition (Vir: [https://www.reddit.com/r/TheRightCantMeme/comments/189657e/lego\\_gaza\\_edition/](https://www.reddit.com/r/TheRightCantMeme/comments/189657e/lego_gaza_edition/))

In the era of memes, images that transform any real event or idea into something comical — a cynical distance, lacking the very core of truth that can be transmitted through comedy. While comedy with its mechanism enhances and confirms the truth behind its comical procedure, the cynical humor effectively functions as the obscuring, veiling of the very truth. What can be more sublime than laughing at memes appearing today, depicting the reality in Gaza, translated into the images of commodification for the West? For example, an image of a Lego box, the Western commodity *par excellence*, entitled Gaza City, its image depicting a pile of grey rubble, suggesting that this is the final product, and no assembly of pieces is necessary.

This raises the question of enjoyment in this sublimated way, of this passion for Gaza that needs to be veiled and purified at any cost because the consequences of this reality are indeed too great to bear. In other words, the duty to tolerate life in this case would become impossible. There is an irresistible desire to use the current events in Palestine to declare a certain position and absolute horror but in a carefully dosed manner, because ultimately, the desire of the western ruling class — besides the colonial expansion — to repeat Bushnell's words, is to normalize the permanent state of war, but at the same time, maintain the position of the 'beautiful soul'. This, in particular, holds true for the left across the world, if anyone needs the horrors of Gaza today, it is the global left.

There is no better example of this new perversion than the latest movie *The Zone of Interest* by Jonathan Glazer. This is a movie about the Holocaust that never shows the actual Holocaust<sup>51</sup>. The story unfolds through sceneries of the family life of Rudolf Höss, the Auschwitz commandant with his wife, Hedwig they are building a truly happy life, on the outskirts of the concentration camp, they enjoy the luxurious nature, beautiful garden, and of course a spacious, well-decorated house. They partake in many engagements with friends and family, hosting dinner, tea, and garden parties. The luscious scenery of this serene family life is accompanied by the constant sounds of shots, dogs, and screams from the camp. During the night, dense clouds of smoke engulf the entire area, bright light emanating from the furnaces of the camp, lighting the sky, layers upon layers of ashes covering the beautiful garden and surrounding area (which turns out can be used as a fertilizer, promoting better growth of plants). The whole drama starts when the commandant Höss receives the news that he will be transferred, and someone will take his place as the commandant of Auschwitz. As it turns out, Höss exceeded all the expectations, the camp under his guidance functioned as a well-oiled machine, thus he deserves a promotion to overseer of the entire operation, supervising all the concentration camps. The news about the transfer is not as upsetting to Höss himself as it is to his wife. Hedwig does not want to lose the idyllic lifestyle, she lists all the possible reasons why they need to stay there, concluding finally that the children are happy and healthy, finally away from the city, that in the end, is this not what the Führer instructed them to do, namely, to live in this way, close to nature, in nature. This is her zone of interest, this zone that justifies and perpetuates the lack of humanity, this total darkness and monstrosity which is the Holocaust. The ability to disavow and bureaucratize the brutality of this industry-scale killing to create a lifestyle that does not require — further actively suppresses — empathy and solidarity, a lifestyle that is limited to the protection and maintenance of the zone of interest.

<sup>51</sup> Štefančič. M. Genocid kot nekaj vsakdanjega. Film o holokavstu, ki holokavsta sploh ne pokaže. *Mladina 5. Kultura. Film.* <https://www.mladina.si/230446/genocid-kot-nekaj-vsakdanjega/>, 2024.

Does this movie not portray precisely this perversion symptomatic of the passion for delegation? Is this not the most perverse act imaginable today, namely, sitting at the cinema watching *The Zone of Interest*, while in Gaza — another zone of interest — genocide is unfolding? Two genocides at the same time, one experienced on the big screen, through the eyes of Nazis, and the other, essentially live-streamed on YouTube through the eyes of the world. At what point do these two very different sights, and different eyes converge into one single gaze?

Thus, we can conclude that the passion for the Real is still very much present but the crucial difference is that today the Real is 'managed' with delegation. This is possible only with this radicalized disavowal, with the very perversion of disavowal, a redoubled disavowal. the Real is still here, well, not exactly 'here' but it is certainly now. The passion for Gaza and the delegation of the Real do not diminish the violent destruction; it remains absolute destruction — similar to the purification of the Real — the destruction of the Real equals destruction as such. Calling Hamas a terrorist organization and proclaiming Israel's right to defend itself against the aggressor are part of this passion, so that after the genocide, we will still be able to write poetry. What kind of poetry will that be? Certainly, a poem defending democracy and the Idea. The final step is the complete destruction of the threat, of the other. This epic that is celebrating the final and total destruction of the biggest threat to the sovereignty of the Western neoliberal ideology, Palestine — the signifier of terror. This delegation of the Real allows for the situation where genocide is still very much happening, however, it is not called as such, named by the real name. The name of the Real is called Gaza. The signifier, which incidentally says much more, it is not just genocide (an event) or the name of the city (a place); it speaks of truths that escape both words and silence, yet these still must be communicated. It persists and speaks of the universal truth, of minimal difference and the gap, recognized by the resistance of humanity, it is such Events that start a revolution.

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### Images

**Image 1.** Source: <https://9gag.com/gag/a6qg7rA>. (Accessed: February 4, 2024).