



ON THE POSSIBILITY AND IMPOSSIBILITY OF A THEORETICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN NIETZSCHE AND LACAN

Rodrigo Fariás Rivas

Escuela de Psicología, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Artes, Universidad Mayor, Santiago –
Chile. Facultad de Psicología, Universidad Alberto Hurtado (UAH), Santiago – Chile.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4564-9903> |  rfarias1@uc.cl

RIVAS, Rodrigo Fariás. On the Possibility and Impossibility of a Theoretical Dialogue between Nietzsche and Lacan. *Trans/Form/Ação*: Unesp journal of philosophy, Marília, v. 47, n. 3, e02400216, 2024.

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Keywords: Nietzsche. Lacan. Desire. Jouissance. Nihilism.

RIVAS, Rodrigo Fariás. Sobre a possibilidade e a impossibilidade de um diálogo teórico entre Nietzsche e Lacan. *Trans/formação*: revista de filosofia da Unesp, Marília, v. 47, n. 3, e02400216, 2024.

Resumo: O artigo examina os estudos contemporâneos na tentativa de uma convergência teórica entre a psicanálise lacaniana e a filosofia nietzschiana. São avaliadas as principais posições, ideias e argumentos desta bolsa. Ao fazê-lo, o problema filosófico que surge imediatamente diz respeito à própria possibilidade de tal diálogo teórico. A tese a ser desenvolvida é **que semelhanças superficiais obscurecem divergências teóricas centrais e até mesmo ontológicas**. Assim, além do exame crítico da literatura mencionada, o objetivo do artigo é iluminar essas tensões na medida em que elas obstruem as simples articulações entre Nietzsche e Lacan. Seguindo as semelhanças entre ambas as perspectivas teóricas, o artigo passa das semelhanças meramente superficiais para as semelhanças mais fortes entre a vontade de poder, o desejo inconsciente e o gozo, depois entre o niilismo e o gozo e, finalmente, entre as próprias lógicas do ressentimento e da repressão. A cada passo, o artigo mostra que as semelhanças são bastante insuficientes, na medida em que são sustentadas em pressupostos jamais questionados. O paradigmático: a ideia de que Nietzsche já é um lacaniano *avant la lettre*.

Palavras-chave: Nietzsche. Lacan. Desejo. Gozo. Niilismo.

Received: 14/08/2023 | Approved: 04/12/2023 | Published: 25/06/2024

 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n3.e02400216>



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Abstract: The present article examines contemporary scholarship attempting a theoretical convergence between Lacanian psychoanalysis and Nietzschean philosophy. The main positions, ideas and arguments of this scholarship are assessed. In doing so, the philosophical problem that immediately arises concerns the very possibility of such a theoretical dialogue. The thesis to be developed, then, is that superficial similarities rather obscure core theoretical, and even ontological, disagreements – and so besides the critical examination of the mentioned literature, the goal of the paper is to illuminate these tensions insofar they *obstruct* easy Nietzsche-Lacan articulations. Thus following the resemblances between both theoretical perspectives, we move from the merely superficial to the stronger similarities among the will to power, unconscious desire and jouissance, then between nihilism and jouissance, and finally between the very logics of resentment and repression. At each step, the article shows similarities to rather be insufficient, to the extent they are sustained on unquestioned assumptions. The paradigmatic one: the idea that Nietzsche is already a Lacanian *avant la lettre*.

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INTRODUCTION: NIETZSCHE AND LACAN

The last few decades have seen a curious trend in philosophical studies of Lacan. In particular, several attempts at a dialogue between Lacan and Nietzsche have emerged – an interesting phenomenon if we notice that Nietzsche is not usually mentioned in Lacan's theoretical discussions, despite also being widely considered, even against Freud's own resistances with Nietzsche, the primary and immediate philosophical precursor of psychoanalysis.² The present paper offers a critical examination of this bibliographical trend.³

As it is known, Lacan maintained a long and complex relation with philosophers of his time. He also strove to provide psychoanalysis with a solid theoretical framework, in the case of philosophy grounding Freud's discovery of the unconscious in relation to Socratic love, Hegelian dialectics, or Heideggerian concerns with being and language. Moreover, in

¹ Escuela de Psicología, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Artes, Universidad Mayor, Santiago – Chile. Facultad de Psicología, Universidad Alberto Hurtado (UAH), Santiago – Chile. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4564-9903>. Email: rfarias1@uc.cl; rofariasr@uahurtado.cl.

² This article focuses on attempts at a Nietzsche-Lacan dialogue. For the issue of Nietzsche and Freud, see Drivet (2015), Greer (2002), Gemes (2009), Martin (1991, p. 49, 52, 103, 110), and especially Assoun (2000).

³ This article was written with the support of the Fondecyt Project 1210921, headed by Aïcha Liviana Messina.

the time anteceding his return to Freud, Lacan seemed to have appreciated Nietzsche's work – see, for example, his admiring vicenarian essay on the philosopher, or the positive references to the notion of a *gay savoir* in 1953's Rome discourse (cf. Roudinesco, 1997, p. 13, 32; Lacan, 2001, p. 133-164). But things soon change.

By 1964, Lacan's instant disgust towards a Nietzsche-sounding platitude is clear (cf. Lacan, 1977, p. 241-242). Similarly, a glance at *Écrits* shows Nietzsche to be a peculiarly absent, silent partner, his small presence in the 1966 compilation being marked with disapproval. In one telling footnote, for example, Lacan (2006, p. 268) corrects an allusion from 1953 to the pre-symbolic past being always present in its "[...] 'eternal return'". The reason for this formula now appearing as "[...] an improper recourse" lies in Lacan's main post-Hegelian philosophical references to account for repetition having long been Kierkegaard and Heidegger.⁴ We will see that unconscious repetition bearing "[...] no relation to Nietzsche's 'eternal return'" (Lacan, 2006, p. 307) is but one instance of Lacan's general aversion to Nietzschean thought. The striking issue that calls upon us, however, remains the serious efforts in contemporary scholarship to bring the two thinkers together.

The goal of this article, to thus state it in further detail, is to examine recent literature that has noticed Nietzsche's absence from Lacanian reflection and has tried to overcome it. This will be a critical examination, insofar centered on its main arguments and assumptions. Particularly, I will focus on texts such as Babette Babich's 1996 paper "On the Order of the Real: Nietzsche and Lacan", Alenka Zupančič's 2003 book *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two*, Silvia Ons's 2006 chapter "Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan", and Tim Themi's 2014 book *Lacan's Ethics and Nietzsche's Critique of Platonism*. I will not summarize these works, and I will discuss specific Lacanian and Nietzschean ideas as background to the way in which these works develop them. As I aim to show, what this literature illuminates is rather the impasse constituted by the effort at a theoretical dialogue between Nietzsche and Lacan.

That being said, the fundamental problems in such an articulation are not self-evident. A first point that deserves attention, then, is the consensus on the similarities between certain Nietzschean and Lacanian attitudes and themes. The main one is the undeniable fact that both thinkers demystified the ideals of Western tradition and modernity in analogous anti-metaphysical blows (cf. Albuquerque, 2017). Following Alain Badiou, consequently, Babich and Zupančič refer to both thinkers' common anti-philosophical dispositions, while Themi (2008, p. 329) mentions their "[...] mutual antipathy towards the moral metaphysics of Platonism". Furthermore, Zupančič discusses Nietzsche through Lacanian problems, such

⁴ The apparent similarity between *return* and *repetition* has not stopped secondary literature from disregarding Lacan's explicit warnings against relating the two notions. Johnston thus uses eternal return to elucidate the Lacanian drive (2005, p. 288-298), a parallel also prominent in Albuquerque (2017, p. ix, 56-86). This parallel is echoed in other efforts at understanding Lacanian jouissance in terms of the will to power, as in Schuster (2016, p. 116-119). I discuss this latter comparison in Lacanian scholarship later below.

as subjectivation, the gaze, the ego-subject distinction and, as we will see later on, especially the three registers. Similarly, and still in relation to the themes linking them, Themí (2008, p. 329) writes that the 1959-1960 seminar on ethics contains “[...] Lacan’s most direct connection with Nietzsche’s main project of exposing the metaphysics underlying the history of Western morality as a Platonism which leads to neurosis and nihilism”. Finally, Ons (2006, p. 80) writes that

[...] Nietzsche is close to Lacan in his conception of truth as having the structure of fiction and the status of appearance that derives from this structure, the rupture of language as grammar to produce new values, in the pragmatism resulting from the dismantling of metaphysics and in the conception of *jouissance* as a different concept from pleasure.

Up to this point, Nietzsche-Lacan parallels seem intuitive. Yet the claims of the literature that concerns us are stronger. Accordingly, Ons’ passage above helps set the stage for the wider comprehension encompassing these attempts at linking together Nietzsche and Lacan. This comprehension entails three main theoretical positions, which we will continuously run into during this paper. The first is the insistence in *points of connection between Nietzsche and Lacan*. These similarities appear, indeed, abundant, and so we will return to them while also evaluating their portrayal. The second position relates to these connections leading, in the very way they are posited and developed, not exactly to parallel readings, but in most cases to openly *Lacanian readings of Nietzsche*. This leads to the third feature of the emerging Nietzsche-Lacan literature, itself also highly questionable. This is the fact that seeing Nietzsche through a Lacanian lens presupposes Nietzsche himself as Freud’s predecessor, and, more radically still, as a predecessor of Lacan’s *interpretation* of Freud. It is in this general and strong sense that the Nietzsche-Lacan dialogue seems unproblematic for the corresponding contemporary literature.

This is, then, the general thrust we are interested in investigating. Take Dallmayr’s (1989, p. 468) early attempt at “[...] a Lacanian [...] reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*”. Or consider as well Babich and Zupančič’s Nietzsche-related works, two examples of what one commentator characterized as “the prism through which Nietzsche appears as Lacan” (Faulkner, 2005). As we will see, this prism merits attention. Indeed, Zupančič reads Nietzsche through the registers of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real – a gesture also performed by Babich and Themí –, suggesting this approach permits a return to his originality. Faulkner compares this to the way Lacan himself read Freud, an analogy both suggestive and misleading. I have already mentioned a reason for the misleading character of such an interpretative lens: it implies disregarding Lacan’s own critical comments on Nietzsche. We can therefore add a few more examples besides the 1966 abandonment of the link between unconscious repetition and eternal return, like Lacan’s rejection of a Nietzschean overcoming of guilt in 1950’s “A

Theoretical Introduction to the Functions of Psychoanalysis in Criminology” (cf. 2006, p. 106), or his 1959 remark that Freud’s discovery of *jouissance* demands a novel historical-theoretical approach to the question of pleasure’s relation to the good, an approach casually referred to as a *genealogy of morals* only for Lacan (1992, p. 35) to quickly add: “Not in Nietzsche’s sense”.

We will return to these paradigmatic instances of Lacan’s uneasiness with Nietzschean philosophy. Still, a third dismissal offers an even more interesting case study for our still introductory purposes. At a certain moment in 1955’s “The Freudian Thing”, the psychoanalyst asks why would desire be more worthy of recognition than the equally real resistances that oppose it, a question he soon separates from any confusion with “[...] the shoddy Nietzschean notion of the lie of life” (Lacan, 2006, p. 338). This remark is also acknowledged by Babich (1996). Yet while doing so – and perhaps continuing what Ons (2006, p. 80) calls the “[...] surprising and symptomatic” nature of psychoanalysis’ silence “[...] with regard to Nietzsche” – , Babich treats it more as Lacan’s own (Freudian) negation of closeness to Nietzsche than as a sign of the *tension* between both parties. As Babich (1996, p. 55) hence puts the issue: “Lacan and Nietzsche *converge*”. The first step of the present paper then becomes clear: we need to examine this supposed convergence closer.

2 THE WILL TO POWER, UNCONSCIOUS DESIRE AND JOUISSANCE

We may begin by examining how those who assume this convergence treat the possibility that Lacan questioned when he rejected the idea that the truth of the unconscious could be made sense of in terms of a Nietzschean perspectival ontology. We will therefore move towards concrete conceptual connections between Nietzsche and Lacan – in this case, the comparison between the *will to power* and *unconscious desire* that is insisted on by Themí (2014) and Zupančič (2003, p. 157, 165). Note that the problems immediately arising from such a linking will soon lead us to a following point of connection for the will to power, beyond Lacan’s notion of desire.

To begin, Themí assigns to the Nietzschean notion of language a mediating function in constituting subjective reality out of the chaotic world of becoming. In this vein – and although for Nietzsche the perspectival nature of language may have referred primarily not to human experience, but to the conflictual movement of the living as itself a process not determined by *λόγος* as a transcendent instance – Zupančič (2003, p. 125) speaks of a “[...] dialectics of the will” explicitly compared to the Lacanian dialectics of desire. Drawing from Deleuze’s Nietzsche interpretation, but ignoring his effort to dislodge the work of the negative from the Nietzschean theme of life-affirmation (e.g., Ansell Pearson, 2004, p. 35), Zupančič (2003, p. 125) offers a strongly Lacanian take on Nietzsche, in which “[...] the fact that, on

a fundamental level, one wants nothingness is the very condition for one's capacity to want something/anything".

The first thing that can be said about this is that *On the Genealogy of Morality* is very clear in distinguishing the will to nothingness as a highly specific form of willing. As Nietzsche sees it, at the dawn of sedentary social life the will is faced with surplus amounts of suffering and is forced to make a choice: either begin willing nothing but, at least, keep willing, or not will at all and just embrace suicidal nihilism (cf. Nietzsche, 1997, p. 62-63, 68-70, 89-92, 120). Consequently, the election of the former choice, itself still willing power although in a *self-denying* manner, sets in motion the historical, moral and metaphysical logic of nihilism – “The will to nothingness [is] the universal [...] becoming-reactive of forces” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 69).

Now, if somewhat neglected, this is a fundamental Nietzschean idea, which even scholars critical of Deleuze's take on Nietzsche (cf. Müller-Lauter, 1999, p. 225-226) have nevertheless insisted on rescuing (cf. Müller-Lauter, 1999, p. 41-50). In Zupančič's strange reading, though, the distinction between the will to power and the will to nothingness is simply *ignored*. Writing about an “[...] inherent split between desire/will and its objects” that implies the latter as “[...] the envelope of the nothing” (Zupančič, 2003, p. 128), she thus portrays the will to power not as the conflicting becoming of perspectival forces, but as the constitutive non-coincidence *between* them, “[...] the condition and the motor of this potentially infinite multiplication of perspectives” (p. 115). As a result, the power that is, by definition, willed by the will to power as expanding and creative force is read as desire driven by *lack*, making equals of will and desire through the nothing that would supposedly ground them. On a broad note, this simply confuses Nietzschean and Freudian notions of desiring life (cf. Assoun, 2000, p. 68-69). More precisely still, it also seems to borrow from Deleuze's reading of the will to power as the genetic and differential element of force, but with a Lacanian twist: a fracture in representation that, while excluded from perspectival immanence, is, then, posited as Nietzschean.⁵

This reading has concrete consequences. For example, Zupančič's version of the will to power implies comprehending the immanence entailed by the overcoming of nihilism not as that of the living becoming that God's death could lead us to (cf. Reginster, 2006), but as the immanence of the impossible *void* at the kernel of psychic reality. The distance between these philosophical paradigms has been sufficiently distinguished in broader yet related literature (cf. Smith, 2004; Butler, 1999, p. 200). Still, for our purposes, the issue is the order of the real appearing as another Lacanian notion seemingly found in Nietzsche, in

⁵ The persistent influence of Alexandre Kojève in continental philosophy can be sensed in even these contemporary readings of Nietzsche. I have also criticized this Kojévianization of Nietzsche – that is, this interpretation of his thought from within dialectical, phenomenological, and post-phenomenological frameworks hence unable to grasp how Nietzsche rather unsettles them – in Derrida's and especially *Blanchot's* interpretation: see Fariás (2020).

this context closer to the will than to desire. Indeed, Babich, Zupančič and Themí insist that the will to power and the real are linked, but this presupposes Nietzsche's views on the human relation to natural becoming to be *analogous* to the relation between subjectivity and the real in Lacanian psychoanalysis (e.g., Zupančič, 2003, p. 11, 28, 31, 36, 44, 63, 91-116, 137).

Here, we again run into problems. For the stated operation demands us to ignore the complex unity of naturalism, genealogy and revaluation in Nietzsche's thought, to the extent that, for Lacan (quoted in Themí, 2014, p. 30), "[...] drives come already tangled up in signifiers and thus should not be 'confused' with our relation to our 'natural milieu'". Similarly, Themí (2014, p. 12) uses Lacan's reading of the Freudian notion of the Thing as a tool to understand Nietzsche's critique of Platonism. In the seventh seminar (Lacan, 1992, p. 118), *das Ding* was characterized as "[...] that which in the real, the primordial real [...], suffers from the signifier" – to which Themí (2014, p. 12) correctly adds that it hence "[...] suffers from *repression*, and then *returns*". Yet to adapt the Thing to Nietzsche forces the latter into alien concerns. To be precise, to say that the Thing suffers from the primary repression that introduces the subject to the symbolic order pushes onto Nietzsche a specifically psychoanalytical problem: the fundamentally impossible relation between subjectivity and cultural law. When Themí, then, quotes Lacan (in 2014, p. 20-21) saying that "[...] there is nothing in common between the satisfaction a *jouissance* affords in its original state and that which it gives in the indirect or even sublimated forms that civilisation obliges it to assume", one could rather say that for Nietzsche, on the contrary, there *is* something in common. This is precisely the will to power, even when it resents becoming, wills being and, hence, constitutes the logic of nihilism. The consequence here is that there seems to be no *psychoanalytical* return of the repressed in Nietzsche, just as willing may not be fated to equate suffering in his thought. As a further consequence, therefore, nihilist suffering and the enjoyment that the ascetic subject finds in it may *not* belong to a Nietzschean "structure of subjectivity" – if such an idea could even be said to exist in his work – , but instead to specific historical configurations of the will.

Still, we should not be so swift in dismissing this novel apparent connection we have seen emerge. For once seen that the dialectics of desire may not provide a plausible nexus with Nietzsche – or that, to borrow a formula from Félix Guattari, a Nietzschean "unconscious" may *not* be structured like a language – , it is what desire rather *encircles*, its real core of impossible *jouissance*, that which may legitimately be related to Nietzsche's reflections on the will and its ascetic self-denial. Beyond unconscious desire, then, we have mentioned the will to power perhaps being more closely related to the order of the *real*. And indeed, Babich (1996, p. 46) has proposed "[...] a conceptual comparison of Nietzsche's Chaos/Nature and Lacan's Real", given that "[...] it is the register of the Real that, more than any other in Lacan's conceptual panoply, can be better conceived via Nietzsche". Moreover, we have seen that Zupančič follows Lacan in conceiving the real as the inherent split in the

symbolic operation, barring it from fully coinciding with itself. Likewise, Babich (1996, p. 44) also mentions this missed encounter, the “[...] disappointment that is the fundamental characteristic of the Real”.

It is worth mentioning that, in relation to this topic, Babich brushes the realization of a *non-coincidence* between Nietzsche and Lacan. The former, Babich (1996, p. 58) writes, “[...] does not [...] presume a pathological re-presentation of the Real as the problem of the frustration/support of [unconscious desire]”. We mentioned this pathological re-presentation of the real, which is crucial when dealing with the inadequacies of Lacanian readings of Nietzsche. For example, when we discussed Zupančič’s take on the overcoming of nihilism as relying on a Lacanian notion of immanence that includes its inherent gap, this implies, in classic Lacanian fashion, “[...] pessimism as to the possibility of subverting anything whatsoever” (Zupančič, 2003, p. 114). Similarly, Babich (in 1996, p. 56) quotes the eleventh seminar to illustrate the real as “[...] the fact that things do not turn out all right straight away, as the hand that is held out to the external object wishes”. She, then, compares this indifference of the real to our symbolic structures to Nietzsche’s indifferent nature as it appears early in *Beyond Good and Evil*. But for Nietzsche, nature is indifferent to the life-denying values of nihilism and, as such, it invites an active affirmation, since our multiple will cannot but take part of the priority of active and creative surplus force. And this – to affirm becoming *against* the attempt of grammar at its metaphysical stabilization into the categories of being – is to subvert the pathological consequences of resentment in an immanent way that may be far from the creative nothingness of Zupančič’s “will to power”.

As for Lacan’s real-related “indifference”, we know, at least since his 1955 reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter”, that it is the fact that the real resists signifying articulation: “For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always and in every case in its place; it carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe” (Lacan, 2006, p. 17). In fact, this irreducibility of the real is precisely what *defines* unconscious knowledge as the discursive impossibility of acceding to its own truth. In this context, however, the pessimism that Lacanian theory derives from the impossible real is far from the Nietzschean idea of becoming as the affirmation of life, even through its entwinement with death, sickness and decay (cf. Klossowski, 1997; Reginster, 2006). Thus, here we have run into a core disagreement between Nietzschean and Freudian perspectives (cf. Assoun, 2000, p. 83-95). Beyond the morality of good and evil, Nietzsche finds *life*, whereas beyond the pleasure principle, Lacan finds the Freudian *death drive*.⁶

From a broader philosophical perspective, this entails that whether the real appears as the nullifying jouissance of the Other when symbolic mediation has failed, as the possibility of disavowing the law for perverse enjoyment, or as the object-cause for neurotic fantasy to

⁶ For a study on Lacan’s take on the death drive eventually arriving at this core ontological disagreement between Lacanian and Nietzsche-inspired perspectives, see Fariás (2023).

be framed between desire and anxiety, in all these cases a major contribution of Lacanian theory to contemporary thought is that it is the collapse of a certain *transcendent* signifier that has set the stage for modern subjectivity and its discontents. Yet as a metaphysically empty place – as the unsustainability of a transcendent “true world” in relation to which the mirages of desire circle the nonsensical real – , the core of modern subjectivity from Lacanian viewpoint can only present itself not as a life to be affirmed by revaluated values, but as an impossible imperative for jouissance. This is, again, quite foreign to Nietzschean thought. Still, in our interest in studying the Nietzsche-Lacan literature, it is important to examine one other possibility: that this may link the primacy of the real in unconscious subjectivity not to the will to power anymore, but to nihilism as the historical logic of the will to power’s own idealized self-denial.

3 NIHILISM AND JOUISSANCE

Zupančič links nihilism and jouissance by writing that the invention of the second coincides with the self-denying ascetic ideal (cf. 2003, p. 47, 50). Likewise, Ons treats enjoyment as a synonym for the will to nothingness as it appears in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. As she explains,

[...] the anchorite worships part of his self as God, and in order to do so he has to render the remaining part of himself diabolical. The spectre of the pathological appears in morality, as Lacan observed with regard to Kantian law. Notably, Nietzsche concludes that if these men repudiate what is natural in them, it is because they have derived some kind of enjoyment from it. Together with Lacan, Nietzsche refers to enjoyment to designate a pleasure beyond the pleasure principle. (Ons, 2006, p. 85)

We can begin by mentioning pleasure is *not* a principle for Nietzsche – power is, with the experience of pleasure then being a *sign* of power-exertion (cf. Moore, 2002, p. 64, 66-67, 74-75; Franck, 2011, p. 145-151, 155, 158, 186-187, 297). But even ignoring this, the interesting parallel, highlighted by Ons, overlooks crucial distinctions between Nietzschean and Lacanian projects, particularly around the issue of *repression*. Before discussing this, however, it is worth mentioning Zupančič’s treatment of another aspect of the relation between asceticism and jouissance: that, for Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal achieves its height not under the ruling of reactive Christian values, but *following it*. One possibility, then, would be the idea that the pleasure in life-denial emerged with nihilist valuation, but only to solidify *after* God’s death – a Nietzschean theme echoed in the Freudian idea that the father’s original murder does not lift prohibitions, but instead *strengthens* them, or in the late-Lacanian, more popularly Žižekian idea that post-modern, permissive and hedonistic neoliberal capitalism grips subjectivity tighter than prohibitive, ascetic and ethically-protestant industrial capitalism. Thus, this is certainly an interesting hypothesis for conciliating Nietzsche with

Lacan. Nevertheless, it can also be said to contradict the basic structure of unconscious subjectivity: the distinction between *desire*, as it runs through the signifier, and *enjoyment*, as it insists in that which is not subject to symbolic articulation. In Lacanian theory, this implies the structure of subjectivity as divided, *split* by the letter, and in a manner that does not admit easy analogies with the values or history of Nietzschean resentment.

In effect, despite the end of the *Genealogy* stating that the ascetic ideal retains moralized guilt even after the death of God, the problem lies in how to reconcile this history-breaking event with what Lacan considers the formal and synchronic character of unconscious subjectivity. For Lacan, if the latter has a history, it rather relates to the subject of Cartesian certainty, as he developed it during the late sixties – being in this context telling that the seminar from 1959-60 rejects the idea of a “genealogy of morality” in its singular Nietzschean form (cf. Lacan, 1992, p. 35), while also being the last seminar (if not the only, considering his much greater interest in Heidegger during the fifties) in which Lacan ascribes to “[...] the philosopheme of the death of God” (Balmès, 2002, p. 226). Indeed, as Balmès (cf. p. 202-203, p. 226-227) also writes, this is a theoretical reference Lacan will soon abandon.

Broadly, then, it seems Ons and Zupančič make their comparisons by ignoring the *contingency* of the ascetic ideal – the fact that nihilist and ascetic enjoyment in denying life does not ground subjectivity broadly speaking, but instead only a specific form of experience whose revaluation sees its philosophical possibility opened by Nietzsche’s intuition that a higher, nobler, non-pathological and *innocent* notion of guilt is possible. As a result, when Zupančič correctly says that ascetic enjoyment has been hardened after God’s death, this may contribute to a psychoanalytic annexation of Nietzsche, but at the risk of radically distorting his understanding of said event, as the opening of the possibility of translating humanity back into the innocence of becoming. And in fact, this is the exact Nietzschean possibility Lacan seemed to mock in 1950, something already anticipated in our introduction. Concretely, Lacan (2006, p. 106) writes that – in orthodox psychoanalytic fashion – “[...] man began with law and crime”. Yet, as he seems to be aware, one must be careful in associating this Freudian insight to the Nietzschean one that man’s spiritualization has also involved guilt. To return to our previous point, in *The Genealogy*, there is a *contingent* relation between forms of guilt and punishment, whereas what Lacan celebrates in Freud, what he properly discovered *as* unconscious subjectivity, is the structural *unity* of guilt and self-punishment. Shall we then compare Nietzsche’s overhuman hope towards a future after God’s death with the words Lacan (2006, p. 106) hears “[...] modern man” say: “God is dead, nothing is permitted anymore”?

The issue of guilt offers a clear way of isolating the challenges of equating Nietzschean nihilism, the will to nothingness, with Lacanian *jouissance*, the mortifying pleasure beyond the pleasure principle. Let us return to the possibility of a Nietzsche-Lacan conjunction

sketched above. We may propose that the psychoanalytic unconscious is but the modern face of a much broader, millennia-long history, a natural history of nihilism, itself the long spiritualization of the guilt emerging out of resentment in the context of the first social organizations. Against Zupančič's ostensibly similar idea, however, this would mean that Nietzsche did not predict the Freudian superego nor the Lacanian imperative of enjoyment. Instead, what he envisioned was the movement according to which the contingency of such notions could be *forgotten* after the death of God – and then taken for the very structure of human subjectivity. For as Zupančič (2003, p. 35) writes, once God has died it is the “[...] power of the symbolic” that which has ended in the modern world, and *not* the subject's relation to unconscious guilt as the permanent drama of human desire and knowledge. What this means, simply put, is that Zupančič's Lacanian interpretation of God's death rather *ontologizes* what Nietzsche endeavored to naturalize through a genealogy of the forces determining the modern experience of guilt. Zupančič (in 2003, p. 35) quotes Lacan's 1960-61 seminar: “We are no longer guilty just in virtue of a symbolic debt. ... It is the debt itself in which we have our place that can be taken from us, and it is here that we can feel completely alienated”. In this way, and as the problem of the *real* core of (symbolic) guilt has showed, not even Nietzschean nihilism can be rigorously related to Lacanian concerns. Indeed, it is in accordance with the Nietzschean possibility of something *other* than anxiety and alienation surviving the overcoming of guilt that the difficulties of relating the will to nothingness to the real become clear. Still, this might not even be the key Lacanian problem that a Nietzschean framework cannot include.

Having shown the inconsistencies in likening the will to power to Lacanian desire or *jouissance* and, then, *jouissance* to the will to nothingness, we arrived at guilt as a clear theoretical disagreement. Accordingly, although Ons, Babich, or Zupančič ultimately fail at appropriating Nietzsche, their failure illuminates the way he *resists* Lacanization – and hence what *could* open a successful, if possibly critical, dialogue. At this juncture, the Lacanian perspective on guilt leads to the more basic, defining structural tension between the symbolic and the real, between the signifier's determination of the dialectics of desire and that which insists on *resisting it*. As we will now see, not only is a tension of this sort absent in Nietzschean thought, but even more, insofar it is the foundation of unconscious subjectivity, it is precisely what it allows to question and evaluate.

What does it mean to say that Nietzsche does not allow for the impossible relation between the symbolic and the real? I mentioned that Zupančič both misreads Deleuze's Nietzsche and turns it into a Lacanian by considering the will to power not as the affirmation of difference between forces, but as the nothing *within* force, the intrinsic discontinuity that forbids it from coinciding with itself. This allows her to introduce the breach between the symbolic and the real in Nietzsche. The problem here can, thus, be formulated. For Nietzsche, discontinuity was never a constitutive void within the frail linguistic nature of subjectivity.

Instead, it is the forces of the living themselves that become through conflictual, non-coincident perspectives, *not* the subject's relation to the irresolvable conflict and complicity between law and jouissance that necessarily makes her a *speaking* subject. In other words, Nietzsche's interest, even when he does psychology, is not in the inherent failure of subjective representation by language, but in the morphology of the will to power insofar always already implying will to illusion and surface (cf. Welshon, 2014). What this concretely means is that, even ignoring Zupančič's confusion between overabundance and lack, a Nietzschean notion of immanent discontinuity would be found at best in the chaotic movement of becoming – and not in the repressed and its return. But, then, a more profound question emerges: does the Lacanian idea of repression even make sense from the viewpoint of Nietzschean philosophy?

4 RESENTMENT AND REPRESSION

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, repression is the defining operation that marks the advent of the subject of the unconscious, at least under the paradigm of neurosis. Of course, I cannot give a full account of Lacan's idea of repression here, but it suffices to say that what is properly repressed are not, say, incestuous desires or bodily impulses. From a purely theoretical angle, what for Lacan is repressed is the fact that, as we have seen, nothing is lacking in the real, and this by means of a primary identification to signifiers of the Other. My claim is, thus, simple: this is a notion that a Nietzschean account of subjectivity, even of ascetic subjectivity, cannot admit. Now, Zupančič's book on Nietzsche assumes the opposite when, following Lacan, she construes nihilism as a libidinal crisis of sublimation, that is, of the power of creating values. The problem here is not a narrow definition of nihilism that – as the negative consequence of God's death – ignores its prior meaning as the active and originary creation of precisely reactive, priestly values. The problem here is even more fundamental: simply, that the idea of nihilism, as failed sublimation, already assumes repression as the constitutive operation it is in Lacanian theory. *Repression is what the interpretative gesture of Lacanization imposes on Nietzsche.*

Themi's 2008 and 2014 works on Lacanian ethics and Nietzschean anti-Platonism are the biggest culprit in conjecturing Nietzschean reactivity and resentment as Lacanian repression. To be sure, the similarity between Freudian and Nietzschean accounts of cultural renunciation and self-punishment is a worthwhile subject (cf. Butler, 1997, p. 63-82; Assoun, 2000, p. 137-156; Deleuze, 1983, p. 112-116). Yet, Themi (cf. 2014; also 2008, p. 329) starts from the assumption of an equation between neurosis and nihilism – once again, then effacing the difference between the *structure* of subjective division and the *historical logic* of resentment.

Themi (cf. 2014, p. 23-40) discusses sublimation as well, using Nietzschean categories of strong and weak not for bodies or forces, but for *types* of sublimation. In his seventh seminar, Lacan (cf. 1992, p. 112, 117-118, 134) characterizes *sublimation* as the raising of the object of desire to the dignity of what he terms *das Ding*, hence *distinguishing* between objects as regulated by the pleasure principle and the impossible *Thing* that, although shaping desire, escapes it. Strangely, though, instead of simply resulting from ordinary resentment, in what would fit a more straightforward repression-resentment analogy, the Thing, as the unchewable and pathological core of desire, is also suggested by Themi to *escape* the resentment that Nietzsche found at the moral origins of metaphysics. As can be intuited, the problem is that this risks leading Themi's Nietzsche-Lacan parallel into confusion, for here we are left with two conflicting possibilities. The first is that repression and resentment do indeed overlap – but, then, the Lacanian structure of subjectivity would have to be located as a late moment in the broader history of resentment, a hypothesis that Themi does not entertain. The second possibility is that repression and resentment rather *diverge* – in which case strong sublimation, raising the objects of desire to the dignity of the Thing, may indeed serve for something like the overcoming of nihilism through active value-creation, but at the risk of making the Nietzsche-Lacan parallel superficial, a mere comparison of theoretical models as random as any other. However we might wish to resolve this problem, it arises out of the unjustified supposition that psychoanalytic repression can simply be integrated into a Nietzschean framework, thus sweeping under the rug any tension between both projects, not to mention psychoanalysis' – and of course, Lacan's – well-known resistances to Nietzschean thought.

Moreover, this supposition also entails unwanted consequences for Themi's (cf. 2014, p. 3, 5, 21, 22, 130, 132) program of a "[...] combined Nietzsche-Lacan analysis". First, it leads him to ignore the possibility of a direct application to Lacanian psychoanalysis of those moments in which repression and its concomitant – desire as lack – appear as privileged objects of Nietzschean condemnation. For example, following Lacan in criticizing the excessively repressive character of the ideal of the Good (cf. Themi, 2014, p. 26), Themi (2014, p. 23) locates this critique in continuity with Nietzsche's, since the latter "[...] places *Plato's Good* near the lowest levels of value [,] because of the Good's propensity to form a *repressive* ideal that inhibits stronger types of sublimation". We have already seen the problems of ascribing a Lacanian version of sublimation to Nietzsche – in a word, that it imposes onto the philosopher a structural notion of repression foreign to his thought. Consequently, what Themi overlooks is that a Nietzschean critique may be aimed not only at the *Good* as a repressive ideal, but also at *the very operation of repression* once its subordination to active and conflictual forces – key for any "Nietzschean notion of repression" to be plausible – is left unclear. Thus, Lacan may well criticize the extreme discontent caused by the cruelty of the Platonic moral ideal. Still, and at the risk of repeating ourselves, the point remains that

discontent is structural to Lacanian subjectivity, insofar caused by repression. Repression, thus defining subjectivity in a manner logically *prior* to its relation to a philosophical doctrine like Platonism, makes the Nietzsche-Lacan parallel appear, once again, superficial.

An analogous problem arises when Themí fails to apply a coherent Nietzschean stance in the context of Lacan's rejection of the characterization of desire in Plato's *Symposium*. As Themí (2014, p. 72) writes following Nietzsche, "[...] it is only the weak perspective – as a state of lack falsely universalized – which forgets that desire or love can also come from states of overflowing strength and fullness". But here, where we might expect a Nietzschean perspective on how this dialogue helped Lacan's eighth seminar illustrate the structure of transference through the beautiful and *fantasized* object Socrates was believed to be hiding, Themí simply praises Lacan's reading of the *Symposium* without mentioning that his theory revived the classical definition of desire. Insofar driven by lack, to put this in as simple terms as possible, *Lacanian desire would always already belong to such "weak perspective"*. Hence the questions Themí dare not ask: is psychoanalysis not *built* on the forgetting that desire can be a creative expansion of force? And if so, would it not just be the most recent perspective to falsely universalize a state of lack, only now as the subject's very structure?

In this general context, Themí's biggest missed opportunity in noticing the essential tension between Nietzsche and Lacan comes near the end of his book, when he shyly tries to apply the former's rejection of the notion of *castration* to psychoanalysis. The possibility that Themí passes over: that such a critique may well annul any theoretical continuity between Nietzsche and Lacan or, at least, mark the space for a radical and original Nietzschean critique of psychoanalysis. Instead, Themí (cf. 2014, p. 104) follows Lacan's seventeenth seminar to suggest that language and culture may *not* castrate, yet the action of referring to such a specific (and late) seminar is not trivial, for as we have seen, it is for the Lacanian subject itself that the signifier castrates. However critical this observation may be in Lacan – and Themí rightly insists on his eventual rejection of the Oedipus complex as *Freud's myth* – , to transfer the significance of this Lacanian idea to Nietzsche only brings problems to the project of "[r]eading Lacan and Nietzsche together" (Themí, 2014, p. 129, 134). Is he aware of this possibility? Consider Themí's (2014, p. 133) questioning of the

[...] residue of the Judeo-Christian type valuation that may subsist in the continued use of concepts such as "castration", where *difference, distance, and its affirmation* is more appropriate to the Nietzschean ethic of restoring a sense of innocence to the drive in its multiplicities of becoming.

Themí does not explicitly propose this terminological substitution for psychoanalysis, but one could guess why. For it is psychoanalysis itself which has a problematic relation with the Judeo-Christian type valuation subsisting in its conceptuality. As a result, given that it defines its field of discourse around the castration that language exerts on the

real and its subject-effects, it is not exact to say that psychoanalysis simply *uses* concepts such as “castration”. Therefore, to replace the notion for others entailing the innocence and multiplicities of becoming – a transliteration process already taking place in the use by Lacanians of an *already Lacanized Nietzsche* – means avoiding the very question that Nietzsche’s *resistance* to be turned into a Lacanian *avant la lettre* allows us to pose: why has psychoanalysis, even Lacanian psychoanalysis, taken part of a certain language and, thus, of its implicit and resentful valuation of becoming?

CONCLUSION: NIETZSCHE AND LACAN?

Maybe the defining psychoanalytic object, the linguistically-structured character of unconscious desire, *is* internally related to the nihilistic logic of resentment – in which case the significance of a possible Nietzsche-Lacan conjunction would lead far from the seeming consensus of the literature insisting on it. In fact, if we broaden our perspective, it is not a coincidence that previous generations of authors, people like Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, or Butler, have sensed an irresolvable tension between Nietzschean and Lacanian paradigms. A passage that Zupančič passes as Nietzschean helps see the value of assigning to these differences – that Ons, Babich, Themis and herself repeatedly avoid – their possible significance insofar part of the core theoretical disagreement, and even critical distance, between Nietzsche and Lacan. As Zupančič (2003, p. 108) writes:

We often hear that knowledge is somehow circular, and that what we finally find in the object of knowledge is always something that we have already put there ourselves. But maybe one could also claim the opposite: the circular or metonymic structure of knowledge is attributable to the fact that, within the considered object, we never manage to find what we have put or “deposited” there, namely, our gaze.

What we often hear is an idea that appears in several of Nietzsche’s works, from the early *The Birth of Tragedy* and “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” to the mature *Beyond Good and Evil*. It is what the former calls *metaphysics of the artiste* and what the latter considers *being more artistic than one thinks* – the fact that, as Nietzsche (1999, p. 8; cf. also Nietzsche, 1999, p. 4-5, 8-9, 11, 147-148; Nietzsche, 2002, p. 81-82) wrote in the year 1886, “[...] art [...] is the true metaphysical activity of man”. The problem, however, is what Zupančič adds in line with her Lacanian interests. To the non-moral and eternal circularity of this will to truth and lying, in effect, Zupančič (2003, p. 105) attaches a foreign issue that turns it into the circularity of metonymy around an irrecoverable “[...] remainder of subjectivity dissolved into the ‘stuff of the world’ through the occurrence of a primordial severance”. In other places, curiously, Zupančič (cf. 2016, p. 176) seems perfectly aware of the incompatibility between an ontology of immanent becoming and one of immanent rupture. In the case of a possible Nietzsche-Lacan articulation, though, we have seen that the

primacy of active forces within the will to power implies a more precise *questioning* of the idea of a primordial severance marking the advent of subjectivity. As a result, Nietzsche's notion of the human animal as a lying artist – whether active or reactive, strong or weak, master or slave – could be conceived not as a predecessor to psychoanalytic subjectivity and its desiring space of fantasy (that both protects from and ensures its pleasure beyond the pleasure principle), but as the proof of its radically contingent ontological and historical status. From this angle, and to insist on this, the meaning of an actual Nietzsche-Lacan articulation might *not* be that the former anticipated psychoanalysis, but rather his envisioning of the wider historical movement explaining the *ahistorical* claims of psychoanalytic theory.

This is why we suggested, at the beginning, that the real issue is not *the fact* of Lacanian readings of Nietzsche or even their distorting misrepresentations. Instead, the issue lies in the presupposition of Nietzsche as a prophet of the Freudian thing – and thus, in the *obscuring* of those underlying theoretical challenges perhaps explaining Freud's resistances towards Nietzsche or, in the case that concerns us, Lacan's insistent rejection that psychoanalysis be understood in Nietzschean terms. For psychoanalysis to *acknowledge* the Nietzschean challenge, on the other hand, entails risky consequences. In fact, this may well be what lies behind the symptomatic character of Lacan's rejection of Nietzsche. For here, Lacan confirms psychoanalysis' historical attitude towards the philosopher, in what can ultimately be understood in two different ways. Either it constitutes a symptom of psychoanalysis' impossibility to overcome the disease of morality, hence why it instead reifies it – or it is rather a symptom of psychoanalysis indeed finding of real core of unconscious discontent, which should then be understood as the enjoyment in denying life through the illusions of permanence provided by the signifier. It is important to be clear about the consequences of this. In the former case, Nietzsche's thought simply dissolves the ontological, historical and epistemological claims of psychoanalysis. In the latter, instead, it arises as the repressed ontological ground of the more profound discoveries of psychoanalysis, Nietzschean thought then being not psychoanalysis' precursor, but the condition of possibility of its emergence and, hence, metaphysical *overcoming* (cf. Ansell Pearson, 2004, p. 36, 38).

As it might be known, ontological, theoretical, critical and historical possibilities such as these ones were already developed by 1972's *Anti-Oedipus* (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), one of the few serious attempts at thinking the Nietzsche-psychoanalysis relation through, and a book that, unsurprisingly, has been ignored by the Lacanian tradition since the work of its initiator and up to, at least, the current hegemony of the Millerian and Žižekian interpretations. Be that as it may, we can now see that the central point of the Nietzsche-Lacan encounter is that it is a *missed encounter* – and this in the double sense of the theoretical dialogue being misconceived by the existent literature, and of this misconception itself being based on an underlying and radical non-coincidence. We can, therefore, conclude with the paradoxical proposition that, if Nietzsche was indeed a Lacanian *avant la lettre*,

maybe he was so *avant la lettre Lacanienne, mais aussi avant sa matérialité*. And if this is so, maybe what prevented Nietzsche from severing the interpretative autonomy of language from the conflictual circularity of becoming answered to strong theoretical reasons, but then also – this is what Deleuze and Guattari saw clearly in their never-answered interpellation of psychoanalysis – to the demands of the future.

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