

Alenka Zupančič
**Sexual
Difference and
Ontology**

e-flux journal #32 — february 2012 Alenka Zupančič
Sexual Difference and Ontology

01/10

To even suggest discussing sexual difference as an ontological question might induce – not without justification – strong reluctance from both the sides of philosophy (the traditional guardian of ontological questions) and gender studies. These two “sides,” if we can call them so, share at least one reason for this reluctance, related in some way to the fact that the discussion would attempt nothing new. Traditional ontologies and traditional cosmologies were strongly reliant on sexual difference, taking it as their very founding, or structuring, principle. Ying-yang, water-fire, earth-sun, matter-form, active-passive – this kind of (often explicitly sexualized) opposition was used as the organizing principle of these ontologies and/or cosmologies, as well as of the sciences – astronomy, for example – based on them. And this is how Lacan could say, “primitive science is a sort of sexual technique.”¹ At some point in history, one generally associated with the Galilean revolution in science and its aftermath, both science and philosophy broke with this tradition. And if there is a simple and most general way of saying what characterizes modern science and modern philosophy, it could be phrased precisely in terms of the “desexualisation” of reality, of abandoning sexual difference, in more or less explicit form, as the organizing principle of reality, providing the latter’s coherence and intelligibility.

The reasons why feminism and gender studies find these ontologizations of sexual difference highly problematic are obvious. Fortified on the ontological level, sexual difference is strongly anchored in essentialism – it becomes a combinatory game of the essences of masculinity and femininity. Such that, to put it in the contemporary gender-studies parlance, the social production of norms and their subsequent descriptions finds a ready-made ontological division, ready to essentialize “masculinity” and “femininity” immediately. Traditional ontology was thus always also a machine for producing “masculine” and “feminine” essences, or, more precisely, for grounding these essences in being.

When modern science broke with this ontology it also mostly broke with ontology tout court. (Modern) science is not ontology; it neither pretends to make ontological claims nor, from a critical perspective on science, recognizes that it is nevertheless making them. Science does what it does and leaves to others to worry about the (ontological) presuppositions and the (ethical, political, etc.) consequences of what it is doing; it also leaves to others to put what it is doing to use.

Perhaps more surprisingly, modern philosophy also mostly broke not only with

traditional ontology but also with ontology tout court. Immanuel Kant is the name most strongly associated with this break: If one can have no knowledge about things in themselves the classical ontological question of being *qua* being seems to lose its ground. This is not the place to discuss what exactly the Kantian gesture and its implications was for modern and postmodern philosophy, whether it simply closed the door behind ontology (and, as some argue, left us imprisoned by our own discursive constructions, with no access to the real) or laid ground for a new and quite different kind of ontology.

In any case, it is a fact that the ontological debate, after a considerable time of withdrawal from the foreground of the philosophical (theoretical) stage – and, perhaps even more importantly, of not appealing to general interest – is now making a massive “return” to this stage, and is already the reason for the idiom “new ontologies.”² To be sure, these are very different philosophical projects. But it is safe to say that for none of them sexual difference (in any form) plays any part in their ontological considerations. Being has nothing whatsoever to do with sexual difference.

Since we are debating psychoanalysis and sexual difference, implicating Freud and Lacan in

02/10

the discussion of the ontological dimension of sexual difference – in any way but critical, that is – might look like the peak of possible oddities.³ For this seems to go contrary not only to the numerous and outstanding efforts the defenders of psychoanalysis have, for decades, invested in showing the incompatibility of psychoanalysis with any kind of sexual essentialism; it is also contrary to what both Freud and Lacan thought and said about ontology. In view of the previously mentioned desexualisation of reality that occurred with the Galilean revolution in science, psychoanalysis (at least in its Freudian-Lacanian vein) is far from lamenting. Its diagnosis of Western civilization is not one of the “forgetting of the sexual,” and it does not see itself as something that will bring the sexual coloring of the universe back into focus again. On the contrary, it sees itself (and its “object”) as strictly coextensive with this move.⁴ Hence Lacan’s emphatic statements such as “the subject of the unconscious is the subject of modern science,” or, “psychoanalysis is only possible after the same break that inaugurates modern science.” I’m not pointing this out, however, in order to argue that psychoanalysis is in fact much less centered on the sexual than is commonly assumed, or to promote the



Georg Dionysius Ehret's illustration of Linnaeus's sexual system of plant classification, 1736. During the Enlightenment, Linnaeus system was polemic precisely because he proposes classification through sex.

“culturalized version” of psychoanalysis. Rather, the sexual in psychoanalysis is something very different from the sense-making combinatory game – it is precisely something that disrupts the latter and makes it impossible. What one needs to see and grasp, to begin with, is where the real divide runs here. Psychoanalysis is *both* coextensive with this desexualisation, in the sense of breaking with ontology and science as sexual technique or sexual combinatory, *and* absolutely uncompromising when it comes to the sexual as the irreducible real (not substance). There is no contradiction here. As there is no contradiction in the Jungian “revisionist” stance, which articulates an utter culturalization of the sexual (its transcription into cultural archetypes) while also maintaining a reluctance to forego the principle of ontological combinatory (of two fundamental principles). The lesson and the imperative of psychoanalysis is not, “Let us devote all of our attention to the sexual (meaning) as our ultimate horizon”; it is instead a reduction of the sex and the sexual (which, in fact, has always been overloaded with meanings and interpretations) to the point of ontological inconsistency, which, as such, is irreducible.

Lacan’s emphatic claim that psychoanalysis is *not* a new ontology (a sexual ontology, for example) is thus not something that I’m going to contest. But the reason for nevertheless insisting on examining the psychoanalytic concept of sexual difference in the context of ontology is not simply to reaffirm their incompatibility or radical heterogeneity in the circumstances of this “return” of ontology. The stakes are much higher, and the relationship of psychoanalysis to philosophy (as ontology) remains much more interesting and intricate. Perhaps the best way to put it would be to say that their non-relation, implied in the statement that psychoanalysis is not ontology, is the most *intimate*. This expression will hopefully justify itself in what follows.

One of the conceptual deadlocks in simply emphasizing that gender is an entirely social, or cultural, construction is that it remains within the dichotomy nature/culture. Judith Butler saw this very well, which is why her project radicalizes this theory by linking it to the theory of performativity. As opposed to expressivity, indicating a preexistence and independence of that which is being expressed, performativity refers to actions that create, so to speak, the essences that they express. Nothing here preexists: Sociosymbolic practices of different discourses and their antagonisms create the very “essences,” or phenomena, that they regulate. The time and the dynamics of repetition that this creation requires open up the only margin of freedom (to possibly change or influence this

process). What differentiates this concept of performativity from the classical, linguistic one is precisely the element of time: It is not that the performative gesture creates a new reality immediately, that is, in the very act of being performed (like the performative utterance “I declare this session open”); rather, it refers to a process in which sociosymbolic constructions, by way of repetition and reiteration, are becoming nature – “only natural,” it is said. What is referred to as natural is the sedimentation of the discursive, and in this view the dialectics of nature and culture becomes the internal dialectics of culture. Culture both produces and regulates (what is referred to as) nature. We are no longer dealing with two terms: sociosymbolic activity, and something on which it is performed; but instead, we are dealing with something like an internal dialectics of the One (the discursive) that not only models things but also creates the things it models, which opens up a certain depth of field. Performativity is thus a kind of onto-logy of the discursive, responsible for both the *logos* and the *being* of things.

To a large extent, Lacanian psychoanalysis seems compatible with this account, and it is often presented as such. The primacy of the signifier and of the field of the Other, language as constitutive of reality and of the unconscious (including the dialectics of desire), the creationist aspect of the symbolic and its dialectics (with notions such as symbolic causality, symbolic efficiency, materiality of the signifier) ... All of these (undisputed) claims notwithstanding, Lacan’s position is irreducibly different from the above performative ontology. In what way exactly? And what is the status of the real that Lacan insists upon when speaking of sexuality?

It is not simply that Lacan has to take into account and make place for the other, “vital” part of the psychoanalytic notions (such as the libido, the drive, the sexualized body), which gets to be defined as “real,” as opposed to belonging to the symbolic. This kind of parlance, and the perspective it implies, is very misleading, for Lacan also starts with a One (not with two, which he would try to compose and articulate together in his theory). He starts with the One of the signifier. But his point is that, while this One creates its own space and beings that populate it (which roughly corresponds to the space of performativity described above), *something else gets added to it*. It could be said that this something is parasitic of performative productivity; it is not produced by the signifying gesture but together *with* and “on top of” it. It is inseparable from this gesture, but, unlike how we speak of discursive creations/beings, it is not created by it. It is neither a symbolic entity nor



Madelon Vriesendorp, *Après L'amour*, 1975.

one constituted by the symbolic; rather, it is collateral for the symbolic. Moreover, it is not a being: It is discernable only as a (disruptive) effect within the symbolic field, yet it is not an effect of this field, an effect of the signifier; the emergence of the signifier is not reducible to, or exhausted by the symbolic. The signifier does not only produce a new, symbolic reality (including its own materiality, causality, and laws); it also “produces,” or opens up, the dimension that Lacan calls the Real. This is what irredeemably stains the symbolic, spoils its supposed purity, and accounts for the fact that the symbolic game of pure differentiability is always a game with loaded dice. This is the very space, or dimension, that sustains the previously mentioned “vital” phenomena (the libido or *jouissance*, the drive, sexualized body) in their out-of-jointness with the symbolic.⁵ More simply even, it also acts as the out-of-jointness of the symbolic. It is here that the sexuality that psychoanalysis speaks about is situated. For Lacan the unconscious sexuality is not related (as it is for Jung) to some archetypal *remains* that would stay with us after the desexualization (“disenchanting”) of the world; it is the *new* that accompanies this disenchantment, the *real* that comes to light with it. It is neither the remains of the sexual combinatory nor some aspect of sex that is entirely outside any combinatory. Rather, it is something that gets produced on top of any possible (or impossible) combinatory – it is what signifying operations produce besides what they produce (on the level of being and its regulation).

Sexuality (as the Real) is not some being that exists *beyond* the symbolic; it “exists” solely as the *curving of the symbolic space that takes place because of the additional something produced with the signifying gesture*. This, and nothing else, is how sexuality is the Real. It is not that – through its experience – psychoanalysis found and established sexuality as its ultimate real. For this would mean that psychoanalysis put sexuality, taken as an irreducible fact, in the conceptual place of the real, conceived independently. In other words, sexuality would *correspond* to what is the most real. Yet what is at stake is something very different: Starting from sexuality’s inherent contradictions – from its paradoxical ontological status, which precisely prevents us from taking it as any kind of simple fact – psychoanalysis came to articulate its very concept of the Real as something new. The Real is not predicated on sexuality; it is not that “sexuality is (the) real” in the sense of the latter defining the ontological status of the former. On the contrary, the psychoanalytic discoveries regarding the nature of sexuality (and of its accomplice, the unconscious) have led to the discovery and

conceptualization of a singularly curved topological space, which it named the Real.

The something produced by the signifier, in addition to what it produces as its field, curves or magnetizes this field in a certain way. It is responsible for the fact that the symbolic field, or the field of the Other, is never neutral (or structured by pure differentiability), but conflictual, asymmetrical, “not all,” ridden by a fundamental antagonism. In other words, the antagonism of the discursive field is not due to the fact that this field is always “composed” of multiple elements, or multiple multiples, competing among themselves and not properly unified; it refers to the very space in which these different multiples exist. In the same way that for Marx “class antagonism” is not simply conflict *between* different classes, but the very principle of the constitution of the class society, antagonism as such never simply exists between conflicting parties; it is the very structuring principle of this conflict, and of the elements involved in it.

The antagonism conceptualized by psychoanalysis is not related to any original double, or original multiple, but to the fact that a One introduced by the signifier is always a “One plus” – it is this unassignable *plus* that is neither another One nor nothing that causes the basic asymmetry and divide of the very field of the One. The most general, and at the same time precise, Lacanian name for this plus is *jouissance*, defined by its surplus character. One is cracked by what it produces on top of what it produces – and this is precisely what incites Lacan to name this fractured, or “barred,” field of the symbolic One the *Other*. The Other is not the Other of the One; it is the Lacanian name for the “One plus,” which is to say, for the One in which this *plus* is included and for which it thus has considerable consequences. This, by the way, is also why the Other referred to by Lacan is *both* the symbolic Other (the treasury of signifiers) and the Other of *jouissance*, of sexuality.

The first and perhaps most striking consequence of this is that human sexuality is not sexual simply because of its including the sexual organs (or organs of reproduction). Rather, the surplus (caused by signification) of *jouissance* is what sexualizes the sexual activity itself, endows it with a surplus investment (one could also say that it sexualizes the activity of reproduction). This point might seem paradoxical, but if one thinks of what distinguishes human sexuality from, let’s say, animal or vegetal sexualities, is it not precisely because of the fact that human sexuality is sexualized in the strong meaning of the word (which could also be put in a slogan like, “sex is sexy”)? It is never “just sex.” Or, perhaps more precisely, the closer it gets to “just sex,” the



Sanja Iveković, *A New Years Eve Party, Silba, 1969-1970*, "Grazia", July 1975, gelatin silver print, magazine page and typewritten text by the artist.

further it is from any kind of “animality” (animals don’t practice recreational sex). This constitutive redoubling of sexuality is what makes it not only always already dislocated in respect to its reproductive purpose but also and foremost in respect to itself. The moment we try to provide a clear definition of what sexual activity is, we get into trouble. We get into trouble because human sexuality is ridden with this paradox: The further the sex departs from the “pure” copulating movement (i.e., the wider the range of elements it includes in its activity), the more “sexual” it can become. Sexuality gets sexualized precisely in this constitutive interval that separates it from itself.

So far we’ve discussed the question of the Real in respect to the psychoanalytic notion of sexuality (or the sexual) in its peculiar ontological status. But how does sexual difference enter this debate? What is the relationship between sexual difference and sexuality tout court? Is it accidental or essential? Which comes first? Is sexuality something that takes place because there is sexual difference? Freud’s answer is unambiguous and perhaps surprising. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) he insists on the original nonexistence of any germ of two sexes (or two sexualities) in preadolescent time.

The auto-erotic activity of the erotogenic zones is, however, the same in both sexes, and owing to this uniformity there is no possibility of a distinction between the two sexes such as arises after puberty ... Indeed, if we were able to give a more definite connotation to the concepts of “masculine” and “feminine,” it would even be possible to maintain that libido is invariably and necessary of a masculine nature, whether it occurs in men or in women and irrespectively of whether its object is a man or a woman.⁶

In other words, at the level of the libido there are no two sexes. And if we were able to say what exactly is “masculine” and “feminine,” we would describe it as “masculine” – but we are precisely not able to do this, as Freud further emphasizes in the footnote attached to the quoted passage.⁷

So, when confronted with the question of sexual difference, the first answer of psychoanalysis is: From the strictly analytical point of view, there is in fact only one sex, or sexuality. Moreover, sexuality is not something that springs from difference (between sexes); it is not propelled by any longing for our lost other half, but is originally self-propelling (and “autoerotic”). Freud writes, “The sexual drive is in the first instance independent of its object; nor

is its origin likely to be due to its object’s attractions.”⁸

Does this mean that sexual difference is only and purely a symbolic construction? Here waits the other surprise (not unrelated to the first, of course) of the psychoanalytic stance: Sexual difference doesn’t exist in the symbolic either, or, more precisely, there is no symbolic account of this difference *as sexual*. “In the psyche, there is nothing by which the subject may situate himself as male or female being.”⁹

07/10



Andy Warhol, *Unidentified Male (With Decorative Stamps)*, 1950s
ballpoint and stamped ink on paper 17 x 13 in.

That is to say, although the production of *meaning* of what it is to be a “man” or a “woman” is certainly symbolic – and massive – it doesn’t amount to producing *sexual* difference as signifying difference. In other words, sexual difference is a different kind of difference; it doesn’t follow the differential logic. As Mladen Dolar most concisely puts it:

There is a widespread criticism going around that aims at the binary oppositions as the locus of enforced sexuality, its *règlementation*, its imposed mould, its compulsory stricture. By the imposition of the binary code of two sexes we are subjected to the basic social constraint. But the problem is perhaps rather the

opposite: the sexual difference poses the problem of the two precisely because it cannot be reduced to the binary opposition or accounted for in terms of the binary numerical two. It is not a signifying difference, such that it defines the elements of structure. It is not to be described in terms of opposing features, or as a relation of given entities preexisting the difference ... One could say: bodies can be counted, sexes cannot. Sex presents a limit to the count of bodies; it cuts them from inside rather than grouping them together under common headings.¹⁰

And sex does not function as a stumbling block of meaning (and of the count) because it is considered morally naughty. It is considered morally naughty because it is a stumbling block of meaning. This is why the moral and legal decriminalization of sexuality should not take the path of its naturalization (“whatever we do sexually is only natural behavior”). We should instead start from the claim that nothing about (human) sexuality is natural, least of all sexual activity with the exclusive aim of reproduction. There is no “sexual nature” of man (and no “sexual being”). The problem with sexuality is not that it is a remainder of nature that resists any definite taming; rather, there is no nature here – it all starts with a surplus of signification.

If we now return to the question of what this implies in relation to ontology in general, and, more specifically, to the performative ontology of contemporary gender studies, we must start from the following, crucial implication: Lacan is led to establish a difference between *being* and the *Real*. The real is not a being, or a substance, but its deadlock. It is inseparable from being, yet it is not being. One could say that for psychoanalysis, there is no being independent of language (or discourse) – which is why it often seems compatible with contemporary forms of nominalism. All being is symbolic; it is being in the Other. But with a crucial addition, which could be formulated as follows: there is only being in the symbolic – *except that there is real*. There “is” real, but this real is no being. Yet it is not simply the outside of being; it is not something besides being, it is – as I put it earlier – the very curving of the space of being. It only exists as the inherent contradiction of being. Which is precisely why, for Lacan, the real is the bone in the throat of every ontology: in order to speak of “being qua being,” one has to amputate something in being that is not being. That is to say, the real is that which the traditional ontology had to cut off in order to be able to speak of “being qua being.” We only arrive to being qua being by subtracting something from it – and this

something is precisely that which, while included in being, prevents it from being fully constituted *as being*. The real, as that additional something that magnetizes and curves the (symbolic) space of being, introduces in it another dynamics, which infects the dynamics of the symbolic, makes it “not all.”

Now, a very good way of getting closer to the relationship between sexuality as such (its real) and sexual difference is via an excerpt from a lecture by Joan Copjec, in which she made the following crucial observation:

The psychoanalytic category of sexual difference was from this date [the mid-1980s] deemed suspect and largely forsaken in favor of the *neutered* category of gender. Yes, *neutered*. I insist on this because it is specifically the sex of *sexual difference* that dropped out when this term was replaced by *gender*. Gender theory performed one major feat: it removed the sex from sex. For while gender theorists continued to speak of sexual *practices*, they ceased to question what sex or sexuality is; in brief, sex was no longer the subject of an ontological inquiry and reverted instead to being what it was in common parlance: some vague sort of distinction, but basically a secondary characteristic (when applied to the subject), a qualifier added to others, or (when applied to an act) something a bit naughty.¹¹

I would like to use this quote as the background against which the following thesis can fully resonate: It is because sexual difference is implicated in sexuality that it fails to register as symbolic difference. Indeed, psychoanalysis doesn't try to de-essentialize sexual difference. What de-essentializes it most efficiently (and in the real) is its implication in sexuality as defined above; that is, as the out-of-beingness of being. And this is what psychoanalysis brings out and insists upon – as opposed to the gender differences, which are differences like any other, and which miss the point by succeeding *too much*, and by falling in the trap of providing grounds for ontological consistency. It might seem paradoxical, but differences like form-matter, yin-yang, active-passive ... belong to the same onto-logy as “gender” differences. Even when the latter abandon the principle of complementarity and embrace that of gender multiplicity, it in no way effects the ontological status of entities called genders. They are said to be, or to exist, emphatically so. (This “emphatically” seems to increase with numbers: One is usually timid in asserting the existence of

08/10

e-flux journal #32 — february 2012 Alenka Župančič
Sexual Difference and Ontology

two genders, but when passing to the multitude this timidity disappears, and their existence is firmly asserted.) If sexual difference is considered in terms of gender, it is made – at least in principle – compatible with mechanisms of its ontologization. Which brings us back to the point made earlier, and to which we can now add a supplementary point: De-sexualization of ontology (its no longer being conceived as a combinatory of two, “masculine” and “feminine” principles) coincides with the sexual appearing as the real/disruptive point of being. And taking the sexual away (as something that has no consequences for the ontological level) opens again the path of the ontological symbolism of sexual difference.

This is why, if one “removes sex from sex,” one removes the very thing that has brought to light the problematic and singular character of sexual difference in the first place. One doesn’t remove the problem, but the means of seeing it and eventually tackling it.¹²

The fact that “sexual difference” is not a differential difference (which might explain why Lacan actually never uses the term “sexual difference”) can explain why Lacan’s famous formulas of sexuation are not differential in any common sense: They don’t imply a difference between two kinds of being(s) – there is no contradiction (antagonism) that exists *between* M and F positions. On the contrary, contradiction, or antagonism, is what the two positions have in common. It is what they share, the very thing that binds them. It is the very point that accounts for speaking about “men” and “women” under the same heading. Succinctly put, the indivisible that binds them, their irreducible sameness, is not that of being, but that of contradiction or out-of-beingness of being. This is also what it means that “there is no sexual relationship”: It doesn’t mean, as the popular title goes, that “men are from Mars and women from Venus,” and as such it can never form a harmonic couple. It is not something that aims at explaining the war between sexes, “the war of the Roses,” the alleged incompatibility of sexes. For these explanations are always full of claims about what *is* “feminine” and what *is* “masculine” – something that psychoanalysis denies all knowledge of, as we’ve already seen. The psychoanalytic claim is at the same time much more modest and radical: Sexes are not two in any meaningful way. Sexuality does not fall into two parts; it does not constitute a one. It is stuck between “no longer one” and “not yet two (or more)”; it revolves around the fact that “the other sex doesn’t exist” (which is to say that the difference is not ontologizable), yet there is more than one (which is also to say, “more than multiple ones”).

09/10

Psychoanalysis is not the science of sexuality. It doesn’t tell us what sex really is; it tells us that there is no “really” of the sex. But this nonexistence is not the same as, say, the nonexistence of the unicorn. It is a nonexistence in the real that, paradoxically, leaves traces in the real. It is a void that registers in the real. It is a nothing, or negativity, with consequences. Which brings us to the logic implied in the following joke:

A guy goes into a restaurant and says to the waiter, “Coffee without cream, please.” The waiter replies, “I am sorry sir, but we are out of cream. Could it be without milk?”

Sexuality is that cream whose nonbeing does not reduce it to a mere nothing. It is a nothing that walks around and makes trouble.

The fundamental lesson of psychoanalysis is precisely that of the joke above: if psychoanalysis cannot “serve” us anything without sexuality, it is because *there is no* Sexuality that it could serve us. And it is precisely this “there is no,” this non-being which nevertheless has real consequences, that is lost in translation when we pass from sex to gender.

×

This paper was originally presented at the conference “One Divides Into Two: Negativity, Dialectics, and Clinamen,” held at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry Berlin in March 2011.

Alenka Zupančič (born 1 April 1966) is a Slovenian philosopher whose work focuses on psychoanalysis and continental philosophy. She is currently a full-time researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and a visiting professor at the European Graduate School. Zupančič belongs to the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis, which is known for its predominantly Lacanian foundations. Her philosophy was strongly influenced by Slovenian Lacanian scholars, especially Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek. Zupančič has written on several topics including ethics, literature, comedy, and love. She is most renowned as a Nietzsche scholar, but Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Henri Bergson and Alain Badiou are also referenced in her work.

10/10

e-flux journal #32 — february 2012 Alenka Zupančič
Sexual Difference and Ontology

1 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1987 [1979]), 151.

2 To name a few of the most prominent thinkers in this field: Gilles Deleuze, for his ontology of the virtual; Alain Badiou, for his mathematical ontology; Giorgio Agamben, for his ontology of potentiality.

3 Lacan and Freud being, in my opinion, synonymous with "psychoanalysis."

4 "[Psychoanalysis] proceeds from the same status as Science *itself*. It is engaged in the central lack in which the subject experiences itself as desire ... It has nothing to forget [a reference, no doubt, to the Heideggerian "forgetting of Being"], for it implies no recognition of any substance on which it claims to operate, even that of sexuality." Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 266.

5 Slavoj Žižek is very right in replacing the term "vital" with the term "undead": What is at stake here is not any kind of simple opposition between life and death, or vital forces and the "dead" automatism of the symbolic, but is instead a paradoxical entity traversal to this divide.

6 Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," in *On Sexuality*, Vol. 7, The Pelican Freud Library (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 141.

7 "It is essential to understand clearly that the concepts 'masculine' and 'feminine,' whose meaning seems so unambiguous to ordinary people, are among the most confused that occur in science."

8 Ibid., 83. Which is why, "from the point of view of psychoanalysis, the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature." Ibid., 57.

9 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 204.

10 Mladen Dolar, "One Splits into Two," in *Die Figur der Zwei/The Figure of Two, Das Magazin des Instituts für Theorie*, No. 14/15 (December 2010) 88.

11 The lecture, called "The Sexual Compact," has only been published in Spanish so far, in a collection of Joan Copect's essays titled *El Compacto Sexual* (Paradiso editores and 17, Instituto de Estudios Criticos, 2011). The English version will appear this spring in a special

issue of *Angelaki* on vitalism and sexual difference.

12 And, to be said in passing, something very similar happened in the conceptual space of leftist political theory when it abandoned all reference to the political economy and focused entirely on the "cultural" (i.e., identity politics), or "evental" (Badiou), dimension of emancipation. Žižek developed this argument very convincingly in chapter 3 of *Living in the End Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2010).