Did somebody say jouissance? On Slavoj Žižek, consumption, and nationalism

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Accepted 22 August 2008

Keywords:
Jouissance
Slavoj Žižek
Consumption
Nationalism
Emotional geographies

ABSTRACT

This article illustrates how the works of Slavoj Žižek can advance the field of emotional geographies, as well as our understandings of emotion, space, and society. Žižek provides a rich social theoretical vocabulary that can help explain cultural discontent, how emotional worlds bond and fall apart, why there is no guaranteed harmony in love with our partner, and how emotional worlds are organized in ways so that people can hold onto something that resembles ‘subjectivity’ and ‘reality’. I focus on geographers’ interpretations of Jacques Lacan’s notion of jouissance: a concept that is at the heart of Žižek’s writings. First, I consider how geographers’ canonical portrayals of Lacan as the arch phallocentric thinker rely on what Žižek calls the “false poetry of castration”. Second, I address how Žižek’s notion of enjoyment (his usual translation of jouissance) as the “paradoxical payment” informs his critical engagement with Marxism, as well as questions about the political and emotional. I then turn to discuss how the irruptions of enjoyment can take place amidst spaces of nationalism and consumption. The article concludes by affirming the prospect of making emotional geographies less enjoyable than ever before.

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Jouissance is the jar of the Danaides, and that once you have started, you never know where it will end. It begins with a tickle and ends in a blaze of petrol.1 (Jacques Lacan (2007: 72)

1. Feeling our way with Žižek

I hope to show in this article how the work of Slavoj Žižek can advance the field of emotional geographies, as well as our understandings of emotion, space, and society. We will likely feel our way because any attempt to read and represent Žižek is fraught with difficulty. To begin with, Žižek is an extremely prolific and increasingly disseminated writer. Between 1989 and 2008 he wrote more than 20 books, 150 articles, and has become the focus of what compose a ‘fresh approach to interdisciplinary influence is the direct result of these meditations on a roller-coaster through anecdote, Kant, popular film, science, religion, Marx, opera, smut, current affairs, modern art, Derrida, political correctness, canonical literature, cyberspace, etc., being constantly buffeted as you do so in the twists and turns of Hegelian dialectic and Lacanian theory’ (Kay, 2003: 1).

Despite being heralded as ‘one of the major philosophers of our time’ (Eagleton, 2001: 51), geographers’ engagements with Žižek’s oeuvre have been mostly nugatory and dismissive (e.g. see Harvey, 1996: 98–100, 310–311; Goss, 1999: 71; Smith, 2000: 1024; but see Page, 2005). Furthermore, in two of the most recent and extensive publications on emotional geographies – an edited book (Davidson et al., 2005) and a special journal issue of Social & Cultural Geography (Davidson and Milligan, 2004) – Žižek is cited only once (MacKian, 2004: 617). Much of the cold-shouldering of Žižek in geography is probably the result of his (to paraphrase Friedrich Nietzsche) unfashionable meditations: for example, the reassertion of the Cartesian subject to renew ‘political ontology’ (Žižek, 1999); the re-actualization of Leninist and Pauline materialism to displace traditional Leftist critiques of capitalism (Žižek, 2000a, 2001a); and, the rejection of historicism, Cultural Studies, feminism, and post-structuralism in favor of a return to German Idealism (especially the writings of G.W.F. Hegel and F.W.J. von Schelling) and the re-reading of Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis to theorize subjectivity, society, and history (Žižek, 1989, 2006b). And yet, Žižek’s profound interdisciplinary influence is the direct result of these meditations which compose a ‘fresh approach … and … an extraordinary new

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1 In Greek mythology, the Danaides were the 50 daughters of King Danaus who were forced to marry the sons of their uncle Aegyptus. On their wedding night, all the daughters except Hypermnestra murdered their husbands. The daughters’ punishment in the Underworld was to forever fetch and pour water into a leaky jar.  

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voice’ (Jameson, quoted in Žiˇzek, 1991, n.p.). In addition, Žiˇzek possesses a rude skill for delivering extremely complex ideas into concrete, everyday, and often hilarious examples that allegedly makes him ‘much more fun to read [and] more entertaining’ than Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari (Kay, 2003: 1).

My article will focus on Žiˇzek’s relevance to the field of emotional geographies by elaborating on his engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis. Let’s start with one of Žiˇzek’s main contentions: ‘what passes in American cultural criticism for “Lacanian theory” presents a very limited and distorted reception of Lacan’s work’ (Žiˇzek, 2005a: 262). In contrast to many geographers, Žiˇzek rejects the widespread view that Lacan is a self-fashion- ioned theoretical obscurantist whose work belongs to the field of post-structuralism. Instead, Žiˇzek (1989: 7) situates Lacanian psychoanalysis ‘in the lineage of rationalism’ as ‘perhaps the most radical contemporary version of the Enlightenment’. Moreover, according to Žiˇzek (2006a: 3),

[for Lacan, psychoanalysis at its most fundamental is not a theory and technique of treating psychic disturbances, but a theory and practice that confronts individuals with the most radical dimensions of human experience. It does not show an individual the way to accommodate him- or herself to the demands of social reality; instead it explains how something like ‘reality’ constitutes itself in the first place. It does not merely enable a human being to accept the repressed truth about him- or herself; it explains how the dimension of truth emerges in human reality. In Lacan’s view, pathological formations like neuroses, psychoses and perversions have the dignity of fundamental philosophical attitudes towards reality.

Žiˇzek’s affirms the philosophical and political tenors of Lacan’s thinking in order to rethink themes such as ideology, subjectivity, political economy, and cultural politics. A Žiˇzekian emotional geography, then, commences with a series of ‘naïve but none the less necessary’ questions: ‘OK, but what is the structure of the universe? How does the human psyche ‘really’ work?’ (Žiˇzek 2000b: 230–231, emphasis in original). How do emotions take place and travel? What ‘really’ happens when we love? Why and how do certain stultifying feelings get into and stay in our hearts and minds? How do we live with the mysteries of sex and death? By taking these ‘big’ questions seriously, Žiˇzek provides a rich vocabulary through which we can address cultural discontent, how emotional worlds bond and fall apart, how there is no guaranteed harmony in love with our partner (this is what Lacan means when he claims ‘there is no sexual relationship’), how someone can wind up feeling like an obsessionall ‘Rat Man’, a phobic ‘Wolf Man’, or a psychotic ‘Doctor’ (see Freud, 1963), and how emotional worlds are organized in certain ways so that people can hold onto something that resembles ‘subjectivity’ and ‘reality’.

Now, much of Žiˇzek’s work addresses these questions by drawing on Lacan’s concept of jouissance.2 Translated by Žiˇzek as ‘enjoyment’, jouissance is a paradoxical, multifaceted, and relational concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis that is informed by Freud’s notion of the libid and Marx’s notion of surplus-value (e.g. see Lacan, 1992: 167–240, 1998: 1–13, 64–77, 2007: 29–83). Without doubt, jouissance is one of the most important concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan (1998: 55) once remarked that ‘reality is approached with apparatuses of jouissance’. Yet geographers have paid scant attention to jouissance when adopting (e.g. see Wilton, 2003) or evaluating Lacan’s ideas (e.g. see Blum and Nast, 2000). Let me be clear: a Lacanian geography shorn of the concept of jouissance is as curbed as a Foucauldian geography deprived of the concept of power. This is not to say that geographers have entirely elided or escaped the lures of jouissance (Hooper, 2001: 708–709). Jouissance has often been registered in consumption, for example, the ‘postmodernist celebration of the jouissance experienced by the knowledgeable consumer’ (Goss, 1993: 40) and national- ism, for example, commentary on Edward Said’s research on the Napoleonic Description de l’Égypte wherein ‘the east is watched for “bizarre jouissance”’ (Said quoted in Gregory, 1995: 459). Žiˇzek emphasizes both the celebratory and bizarre sides of jouissance as part of the ‘metastases of enjoyment’ (Žiˇzek, 1994) in consumption, especially capitalistic commodity-fetishism, and nationalism, especially post-Yugoslav and Balkan geopolitics. And so, jouissance provides an extremely convenient bearing through which we can chart Žiˇzek and emotional geographies.

The argument I present is organized as follows. I first discuss the main differences between Žiˇzek and geographers’ understandings of jouissance via Lacan’s notion of castration. I then discuss how Žiˇzek’s notion of enjoyment informs his critical engagement with Marxism on questions about the political and the emotional. In the next section, I briefly illustrate how enjoyment takes place through the practices and objects of nationalism and consumption. My aim, in short, is to not only stir up a critical engagement with Žiˇzek, but also to spur on a thorough reexamination of the concept of jouissance.

2. Cutting out the ‘false poetry of castration’

The twin difficulty of traversing both the daunting range and the intricacies of Žiˇzek’s writings, as well as the dual task of addressing the differences and similarities between Žiˇzek’s and geography’s framing of Lacan alerts us to Lacan’s theme of the split. In Žiˇzek’s work, splits are plentiful in terms of quantity, for example, there are splits between demand and desire (Žiˇzek, 1989: 111), knowledge and belief (Žiˇzek, 1991: 27), an utterance and its enunciation (Žiˇzek, 1989: 111), and the Other and jouissance (Žiˇzek, 2005b: 172); and, in terms of quality, for example, splits can be ‘inherent’ (Žiˇzek, 2006b: 38), ‘fetishistic’ (Žiˇzek, 2001a: 126), ‘asymmetrical’ (Žiˇzek, 1991: 125), ‘dialec- tical’ (Žiˇzek, 1989: 47), and ‘parallactic’ (Žiˇzek, 2006b: 26).

The split between the Other and jouissance is usually understood as follows: the former refers to the otherness of language and the Law, that is, a Symbolic world of words and customs that we inherit and do not choose; while the latter refers to the libidinal, corporeal experience of the ‘unsupported support’ (Copjec, 2002: 6) of the subject. In Žiˇzek’s (2005b: 172) words, the split between the Other and jouissance concerns the gap ‘between the “dead” symbolic order which mortifies the body and the nonsymbolic Life-Substance’. Furthermore, this split comprises Lacan’s thinking of Freud’s notion of the castration complex (see Copjec, 2002: 52–55). In order to attain a degree of psychical coherence, the subject must give up some of his or her jouissance: ‘castration means that jouissance has to be refused in order to be attained on the inverse scale of the Law of desire’ (Lacan, 2005: 700).

What Žiˇzek (2005a: 262) calls the ‘false poetry of “castration”’ informs much of geography’s canonical readings of Lacan as the dubious ‘philologocentrist “philosopher of language”’ (e.g. see Blum and Nast, 2000; Frosh, 1995; Gregory, 1997; Pile, 1996; Rose, 1995; 2000). At least four stanzas compose geography’s spurious verse on castration. First, an emphasis on Lacan as the theorist of the Symbolic castration of the subject: how the subject’s entrance into the Symbolic order, that is, the social world of language and rules, demands an irreversible and doleful renunciation of an unfettered access to the blissful realms of pre-Symbolic jouissance (e.g. see Doel and Clarke, 2002: 83; Wilton, 2003: 378). Second, the assertion that male or masculine aggression towards a woman is ‘phallic’ while the woman or feminine subject’s vulnerability is ‘castrating’

2 Given the frequency of the term jouissance and following Bruce Fink, the first English translator of the entirety of Lacan’s (2005) magnum opus, Écrits, I do not italicize jouissance. I also follow Žiˇzek and translate jouissance as enjoyment when addressing Žiˇzek’s work.
theses: enjoyment is a crucial yet neglected political ‘factor’ (Zihek, 2002a) or ‘category’ (Zihek) reduces all emotional phenomena to enjoyment (e.g. Zihek). Everything is evaluated (Zihek, 1997: 75; Crang, 2000: 149; see also Nast, 2000: 216) which is concretized in phallic built environments (e.g. see Pile, 1996: 221–222). The final stanza consists of the claim that the authority and exercise of the phallic economy can be strategically undermined by decentering the unified subject into multiple and shifting subject positions (e.g. see Brown, 1999: 193). For Zihek (2005a: 262), however, all these ‘rather commonsense and metaphorical’ interpretations of Lacan’s notion of castration overlook the paradox of the phallus itself as the signer of castration: if we are to assert our (symbolic) ‘phallic’ authority, the price to be paid is that we have to renounce the position of the agent and consent to the function as the medium through which the big Other – the symbolic institution – acts and speaks. When the subject is endowed with symbolic authority, they act as an appendix of their symbolic title: it is the big Other who acts through them. Suffice it to recall a judge who is a miserable and corrupted person, but the moment they put on their robe and other insignia, their words are the words of Law itself.

Put another way, power always already addresses us as castrated or split subjects and its social reproduction relies upon our splitting. Why? Because the messages that power discourses bombards us with are ‘by definition inconsistent: there is always a gap between public discourse and its fantastic support’ (Zihek, 2005a: 263). Zihek (2005a: 269) argues that public-legal apparatuses of power are bolstered rather than undermined by the Law’s ‘obscene shadowy realm’ of brutal rituals, unwritten rules, and transgressive practices. Zihek also suggests that the penalty for breaking these unwritten rules is often much harsher than breaking the official rules. To illustrate these points, one of Zihek’s notable examples is the famous mutiny aboard the Royal Navy ship Bounty. For Zihek (2005a: 270), the Bounty’s crew turned against Lieutenant William Bligh not because he was too ‘stiff’ towards the sailors’ emotional bonds but because he was completely blind to the structural function of the ritualized power relations among the sailors (the right of the older, more experienced sailors to humiliate the younger and inexperienced, to exploit them sexually, to submit them to ordeals, etc.). … In his blindness to the stabilizing role of these rituals, Bligh prohibited them, or at least took their edge off by changing them into a harmless folkloric exercise. Caught in the Enlightenment trap, he was able to perceive only the brutal, inhuman aspect of these rituals, not the satisfaction they brought about, not the extent to which his own public, legal power relied on this obscene underworld of unwritten rules.

For Zihek, the satisfaction elicited by the rituals – a satisfaction overlooked by Bligh in 1789 and by geographers today – is jouissance. If, according to Freud (1920: 349), ‘fear is the common currency for which all emotional impulses can be exchanged’, in Zihek’s work, jouissance – which Zihek usually translates as ‘enjoyment’ – is the common currency through which emotions are evaluated (Zihek, 2006b: 223–231). This is not to say that Zihek reduces all emotional phenomena to enjoyment (e.g, Zihek, 2006b: 222–231), but rather to acknowledge one of Zihek’s most enduring theses: enjoyment is a crucial yet neglected political ‘factor’ (Zihek, 2002a) or ‘category’ (Zihek, 2006b: 308–317) that sustains and threatens the coherence of emotionally charged spaces of, for example, class and ideological antagonisms (e.g. see Zihek, 1989), racial and multicultural tensions (e.g. see Zihek, 1998), nationalist movements (e.g. see Zihek, 1993), and commodity fetishism (e.g. see Zihek, 1997).

What is enjoyment? Comparable to a libidinal buzz or charge, enjoyment is the aim of the drives, that is, ‘what a biological instinct becomes once it is subject to the signer’ (Kay, 2003: 162) and involves an ineluctable yet fleeting, alluring yet threatening painful pleasure. Enjoyment is a materialization of what Lacan calls the ‘Real’ – a key concept in Zihek’s oeuvre. Briefly, the Real is a tremulous part of our emotional lives that constantly threatens to upset or even traumatically dissolve our sense of everyday ‘reality’. In Lacanian terms, the Real can violently erupt from within and without the Imaginary (e.g. see Lacan, 1991a: 63–159), that is, the illusory and specular realm of fragmentary wholeness and aggressive dual relations and the Symbolic (e.g. see Lacan, 1991b: 173–273). Spatially, the Real ‘always comes back to the same place’ (Lacan 1981: 49) through the obdurate recurrences of ‘irrational’ violence, pain, and antagonisms in diverse geographic and historic contexts despite attempts to socially neutralize or integrate them (e.g. see Zihek, 1989: 50); irritants on boundaries that separate ‘insides’ from ‘outsides’ (e.g. see Zihek, 1991: 14–15); causes the shortest distance to an object that incites our desire – what Lacan calls the objet petit a – to be a curved gyre rather than a straight line (e.g. see Zihek, 2006a: 76–77); and, accounts for why our most heartfelt beliefs and ‘most intimate emotions such as compassion, crying, sorrow, laughter, can be transferred, delegated to others without losing their sincerity’ (Zihek, 1989: 34).

In addition to the Real, Zihek aligns enjoyment with the superego: the psychical voice of conscience and the Law. Following Lacan, Zihek asserts that enjoyment does not take place in a random or spontaneous manner because it is elicited by the superego’s imperative ‘Enjoy!’ Lacan draws on Freud’s (1960: 54) claim that the superego both suppresses and feeds off ‘its intimate relations with the unconscious id’. Thus the superego is an excessive, cruel, and obscene agency of the law exempted from its authority: it does what it prohibits us from doing. We can explain its fundamental paradox thus: the more innocent we are, i.e., the more we obey the superego’s order and renounce enjoyment, the more guilty we feel, for the more we obey the superego, the greater is the enjoyment accumulated in it and, thus, the greater the pressure it exerts on us (Zihek, 1991: 159–160).

The superego’s forcefulness ultimately prevents us from enjoying ourselves ‘more efficiently than any prohibition. … Perhaps the briefest way to render the superego paradox is the injunction “Like it or not, enjoy yourself!”’ (Zihek, 1997: 112). Zihek argues that our submission to a ‘monstrous duty to enjoy’ (Zihek, 1997: 114, emphasis in original) is coextensive with a capitalistic regime that bombards us with promises of enjoyment yet ultimately deprives us from enjoying ourselves. In so doing, Zihek draws on Lacan’s suggestion that under the reign of superegoic enjoyment ‘every individual is really a proletarian’ (Lacan quoted in Declerq, 2006: 75). Zihek is at pains to remind us that if Freud showed us how social relations emerged through the prohibition of enjoyment (e.g. see Freud, 1961), it is Lacan who shows how social relations are bonded through capitalistic bombardments of injunctions to enjoy (e.g. see Lacan, 2007; see also Byrne and Healey, 2006; Copjec, 1999; McGowan, 2004; Stavrakakis, 2007). Unfortunately geographers have overlooked Lacan’s engagement with Marx to theorize enjoyment – a point which is at the heart of Zihek’s engagement with Marxist theory.

3. From Mr. Money Bags to the paradoxical payment

The failure of Marxist thought to crystallize into revolutionary praxes in Western Europe gave rise in the 1930s to Critical Theory.
Often referred to as ‘the Frankfurt School’, Critical Theory inaugurated the fusion of Marxist and psychoanalytic theory and has had an enormous influence on subsequent social theories (Kellner, 1989). An abiding theme in Žižek’s work is the critique of social theories that blend (in various measures) Marxist and psychoanalytic concepts (e.g. see Althusser, 2001; Benjamin, 1969; Bhabha, 1995; Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972; Jameson, 1982; Lefebvre, 1991; Marcuse, 1966; Reich, 1970). Žižek’s engagement with the rocky ‘marriage of Marx and Freud’ (Whitebook, 2004) yet ‘profound solidarity of Marxism and psychoanalysis’ (Žižek, 2006b: 1) encircles questions about why, how, and to what extent psychoanalysis and Marxism can or should ‘enlist the services’ (Benjamin, 1969: 253) of each other’s theoretical insights (see especially Žižek, 1994: 7–28, 181–183). Žižek rethinks traditional Marxist concepts such as ideology, consciousness, alienation, exploitation, and commodity-fetishism via Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially the concept of enjoyment. In so doing, Žižek highlights the fundamental differences and similarities between Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches to all things political and emotional. Consider, for example, the following passages:

The worker’s misery is inversely proportional to the power and scope of his production. (Marx, 1983: 131)

We have a right to describe the existence of the masochistic trend in the life of the human drives as from the economic point of view mysterious. For if mental processes are governed by the pleasure principle, so that the avoidance of ‘pain’ and obtaining pleasure is their first aim, masochism is incomprehensible. (Freud, 1959: 255)

From a Žižekian perspective, Marx’s and Freud’s statements are not contradictory if we take into account (unlike Marx) the paradoxes of the libidoal economy such as people’s capacity to find pleasure in pain, or capacity to enjoy, as well as take into account (unlike Freud) the paradoxes of the political economy such as capitalist logics of ‘creative destruction’. Žižek has much to offer emotional geography because he not only illustrates the value of a Marxist approach to emotion, he also shows how psychoanalysis can greatly enhance Marxist approaches to political economy and ideology critique (see especially Žižek, 1989). Of course, combining Marxism and psychoanalysis is not new in geography (e.g. see Bondi, 1993; Sibley, 1995; Nast, 2000). Geographers, however, have yet to consider the extent to which the reproduction of capitalist discourses, commodification, and suffering are coextensive with the superego’s ideals, moralization, and obscene injunction to fulfill an impossible enjoyment.

For Žižek, attending to the paradoxes of enjoyment can enable us to confront an enduring and urgent conundrum (some might say crisis) that haunts Leftist thinking today: why is it that so many people, especially the working class, in so many different contexts around the world do not follow their socio-economic self and collective interests? Geoff Mann (2006), for example, has compellingly argued that the Left cedes theoretical acuity and courts political arrogance if it simply explains the disturbing election results such as the US Presidential elections of 2000 and 2004, as the outcome of the ‘People’ not honoring their class interests and succumbing to ‘false consciousness’. For Mann, much of Leftist thinking is guilty of theoretical fixes that overinvest in the concept and presence of ‘interest’ as a way to understand classed subjects’ practices in and out of the voting booths. A shortcoming of Marxist approaches to social pain is the uncritical assumption that people are ultimately pleasure principled, that is, interested subjects: interested in increasing the scope of their production, interested in maximizing profit, interested in recuperating the true value from their labor, interested in material gains, and even interested in creating or waiting for the right revolutionary conditions to overthrow the capitalist system. Psychoanalysis takes it as axiomatic that people are not and cannot be naturally predisposed to follow or even know their interests. Why? Because psychoanalysis shows us how people are also subject to ‘a principle beyond pleasure’ (Copjec, 1994: 87, emphasis in original; see also Healy, 2008: 278), that is, something beyond the positivities or gains of peaceful progress and interest. A Žižekian approach to the emotional political economy alerts us to two related points. First, as Ceren Özeçuk and Yahya Madra (Özeçuk and Madra, 2005: 86) so eloquently put it: there can be no pure ‘economic interests’ that are not caught up within, shaped by, and colored with the smear of jouissance. In fact, as class analysts, we find it necessary to take into account psychic ‘investments’ and fantasy scenarios that organize and impart coherence to the identifications of these classed subjects.

... By foregrounding the economy of jouissance, by taking into account the particular ways in which classed subjects may also be implicated in the reproduction of the relations of exploitation, psychoanalysis reminds us that the dissemination of the knowledge of class exploitation in itself (e.g., the righteous attitude of ‘Speaking truth to power’) can seldom be enough to occasion class transformation.

Second, how do the painful yet thrilling emotional lures of enjoyment that irrupt in the social antagonisms of, for example, racial, nationalist, and ethnic enmities (e.g. see Žižek, 1998, 1993, 2005b) trump the lures of pleasures that can only be acquired in times of peace and material prosperity? For psychoanalysis adds a difficult truth: When people and groups are locked in conflict, they are – beyond their immediate interest in securing sovereignty over another land or people – already experiencing intangible gains’ (Lane, 1998: 5, emphasis in original). Enjoyment is one of these intangible gains: an embodied and extra-discursive ‘thrill of the Real’ (Kay, 2003: 4) that can disrupt people’s pursuit of their individual and collective interests. As Todd McGowan (2004) argues, in 1914, the European working class, told by the Communist International that fighting an imperial war would damage their interests, nonetheless supported the war. One of the most shocked Leftists was Lenin because he ‘failed to consider enjoyment – specifically the degree to which the working class shared in nationalistic jouissance. What drove them was not their self-interest – the war didn’t speak to interest – but their relationship to enjoyment’ (McGowan, 2004: 5; see also Žižek, 1989: 49–53).

Although Marx brushes off the question about the origin or status of those ‘human needs’ that commodities satisfy by stating that ‘the nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the imagination, makes no difference’ (see Marx, 1977: 125), Marx’s writings (see especially Marx, 1977: 240–416, 492–639) on ‘the working day’ and ‘machinery and large-scale industry’ do not shy away from people’s capacities to enjoy inflicting harm on themselves and others. In a vivid passage in Capital (Marx, 1977: 280), we encounter the transformation in the ‘physiognomy’ and relations of two of capitalism’s ‘dramatis personae’:

The one [the capitalist, formerly the money owner – ‘Mr. Moneybags’] smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other [the laborer, formerly the possessor of labor-power], is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning.

Žižek’s wager is that the concept of enjoyment can be of considerable help to answer the following questions: why does the worker, still continue, to come to market and get the tanning from the capitalist formerly known as Mr Money Bags? Why doesn’t Mr Money Bags, who after all is greatly outnumbered by the workers, expect to get the tanning?3 To be sure, there are already numerous

3 For a fascinating account of the meaning of money for Mr Moneybags and Freud’s Rat Man, see Wolfenstein, 1993.
investigations into ‘affective economies’ (Ahmed, 2004a) and ‘emotional labor’ (for instance see: Ahmed, 2004b; Pringle, 1989; Leidner, 1993; Hoschild, 2003a,b) that are replete with capitalist hindings of the gendered, colonial, and racial kind. But how are we to explain the extent, ubiquity, and, most importantly, the obduracy of social violence and injustices – capitalist or otherwise – without reducing them to their diverse historical and geographical determinations (see also Nast, 2000, 2007)? Žižek’s (1989: 50) approach takes seriously the danger of how ‘over rapid-historicization makes us blind to the real kernel [such as social antagonism] which returns as the same through diverse historicizations/symbolizations’, as well as the extent to which (un)conscious harm and exploitation are a seductive and repellant dimension of socio-emotional life (cf. Kingsbury, 2004). Žižek (1989: 53) reminds us that although Marx brilliantly analyzed the scandalous violence and paradoxical topology of capital as both capitalism’s limit and excess, theft and provision, lack and surplus, ‘Marx failed to cope with the paradoxes of surplus-enjoyment’. Earlier I suggested that Lacan’s notion of enjoyment, specifically ‘surplus-enjoyment’ (plus-de-jouir) is modeled on Marx’s notion of surplus-value. To pose a question: what exactly are the paradoxes and surpluses of surplus-enjoyment?

The ambiguity of the French term is decisive here: it can mean ‘surplus of enjoyment’ as well as ‘no more enjoyment’ – the surplus of enjoyment over mere pleasure is generated by the very opposite of pleasure, that is, pain. Pain generates surplus-enjoyment via the magical reversal-into-itself by means of which the very material texture of our expression of pain (the crying voice) gives rise to enjoyment … [for example] love poetry and its ultimate topic: the lamentation of the poet who has lost his beloved. … Poetry, the specific poetic jouissance, emerges when the very symbolic articulation of this loss gives rise to a pleasure of its own. (Žižek, 1997: 47, emphasis in original)

Put another way, enjoyment outbids and disturbs the balanced or weighed-up promises of love, pleasure, happiness, and satisfactions of interest because enjoyment as part of the Real, elicited by the superego, and the object of the drives is an irreducible surplus that cannot be easily attained or abandoned. The main problem with enjoyment, then, is not that one can’t get enough of it, or that one lost it as a result of entering the Symbolic, ‘but, rather, that one can never get rid of it, that its stain drags along forever’ (Žižek, 1996: 17, emphasis in original). The surpluses of enjoyment and value are ‘constitutively an “excess”’ (Žižek, 1989: 52) because taking away the surplus in enjoyment means losing enjoyment itself just as achieving an internal balance in capitalism means losing capitalism itself. Moreover, the renunciation of enjoyment produces its own kind of enjoyment:

Let us take the case of Fascism – the Fascist ideology is based upon a purely formal imperative: Obey, because you must! In other words, renounce enjoyment, sacrifice yourself and do not ask the meaning of it – the value of the sacrifice lies in its very meaninglessness; true sacrifice is for its own end; you must find positive fulfillment in the sacrifice itself, not in its instrumental value: it is this renunciation, this giving up of enjoyment itself, which produces a certain surplus-enjoyment. The surplus produced through renunciation is the Lacanian objet petit a, the embodiment of surplus enjoyment. (Žižek, 1989: 82)

Thus Žižek (1997: 48) asserts that enjoyment can help ideology critique by clarifying ‘this paradoxical jouissance as the payment that the exploited, the servant, receives for serving the Master’, the return that ‘makes us accept the framework of the social relationship of domination’. Let us turn to consider some brief examples of how and where enjoyment takes place.

4. Some eruptions of enjoyment in nationalism and consumption

If people’s support of an ideology promoted by a ‘cabal of restless nationalists immersed in an anti-intellectual culture of affect and aggressive militarism’ (O’Tuathail, 2003: 860), appears somehow mysterious, irrational, or delusional, then from a Žižekian perspective, a crucial element at work in the emotional lures of conservative, as well as any other (fundamentalist) ideology is the enjoyment sought through the investments in and identifications with ‘ideological fantasies’ (Žižek, 1989). An ideological fantasy is one way a community organizes its enjoyment and beliefs, for example, by discursively installing the ideals of a nation – a national ‘Thing’ – that is unique, whole, but threatened by an external and persecutory ‘Other’ (see also Wood, 2007). This Other, exemplified by the anti-Semitic figure of the Jew (Žižek, 1989: 48), threatens to steal a nation’s enjoyment (e.g. by ruining a nation’s way of life) and/or overwhelm a nation’s way of life because it possesses an excessive enjoyment (e.g. an ethnic group’s ‘zealous’ attitude towards work or ‘peculiar’ ways of celebrating) (see Žižek, 1993: 200–237; cf. Gregory, 1995: 459). The ideological fantasy contends that the removal of this enemy can restore social harmony and wholeness. In addition, the ideological fantasy conceals ‘by imputing to the Other the theft of enjoyment … the traumatic fact that we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us: the lack (“castration”) is originary, enjoyment constitutes itself as “stolen”’ (Žižek, 1993: 203, emphasis in original).

In order to theorize the confluence of the emotional and ideological calls of the state, nation, and other edifices of power, Žižek critically engages with the Lacano-Marxist work of Louis Althusser. Drawing on Lacan, Althusser’s (2001: 85–126) theoretical ‘notes’ on ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ (hereafter ISAs) aim to illustrate the social activities and structural mechanisms through which subjects are concretely constituted by (mis)recognizing themselves as the addressees of ideological ‘hails’ or ‘interpellations’. Žižek (1989: 43) alerts us to a ‘weak point’ in Althusser’s theory of the ISAs: Althusser or his school never succeeded in thinking out the link between Ideological State Apparatuses and ideological interpellation: how does the Ideological State Apparatus … ‘interpolate’ itself; how does it produce the effect of ideological belief in a Cause and the interconnecting effect of subjectivation, of recognition of one’s ideological position?

For Žižek and other Lacanians such as Mladen Dolar (2006), the State Apparatus’s force, that is, the emotional grip and pull of its ideological demands derives from the senseless, traumatic, and surplus enjoyment or, more accurately, enjoy-meant (following what Lacan calls ‘jouis-sense’) that permeates the voice and gaze. Briefly, the Lacanian argument is as follows: Althusser’s theory of interpellation takes into account the psycho-social dynamics of the Symbolic and the Imaginary, yet fails to take into account the psycho-social register of the Real, that is, those excessive things such as enjoyment that cannot be entirely reduced to or ‘caught up in the positivity of the social’ (Copjec, 1994: 4). This is why Žižek (1993: 202) affirms that the only substance acknowledged by psychoanalysis, is of course enjoyment (as Lacan states it explicitly in Encore). A nation exists only as long as its specific mode of enjoyment continues to be
materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices. To emphasize in a ‘deconstructionist’ mode that Nation is not a biological or transhistorical fact but a contingent discursive construction, an overdetermined result of textual practices, is thus misleading: such an emphasis overlooks the remainder of some real, nondiscursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation qua discursive-entity effect to achieve its ontological consistency (emphasis in original).

For example, the US nation becomes materialized through the myths and sets of social practices associated with the ‘consumer–object relations’ (Blum, 2002) and classed modes of enjoyment of conservative-leaning Red states and liberal-leaning Blue states. A Blue stater, for example, such as Howard Dean was once famously told by the conservative organization ‘Club for Growth’ to take his ‘tax-hiking, government-expanding, latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Liberal-leaning’, for example, such as Howard Dean was once famously told by the conservative organization ‘Club for Growth’ to take his ‘tax-hiking, government-expanding, latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Liberal-leaning’.”

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Enjoyment is a 'truly monstrous' (Callard, 2003: 308, emphasis in original) psychoanalytic category not because it is at odds with happiness and pleasure, but because, from a Lacanian perspective, 'Enjoy!' is the ineluctable and ultimately unrelenting psychic commandment that tempts us to cede 'ground relative to one’s desire' (see Lacan, 1998: 319), that is, to sacrifice our emotional conflicts and division in the name of an illusionary harmonious whole.

In closing, this article is very much an introductory rather than accomplished engagement with not only Žižek’s notion of enjoyment, but also the works by and on Žižek. I omitted to discuss many related things including: Žižek’s extensive writings on jouissance vis-à-vis the ‘Thing’, as well as masculine and feminine sexuation; Žižek’s unique readings of Hegel, Deleuze, feminism, and deconstruction; some valuable critiques of Žižek’s project (e.g. see Dean, 2002; Stavrakakis, 2007); methodological questions about how we study enjoyment in social contexts (e.g. see Proudfoot, 2007); Lacan’s response to ‘the story of ... [his] supposed neglect of affect’ (Lacan, 1990: 20); psychoanalytic approaches to emotion, more generally (e.g. see Green, 1999; Shapiro and Emde, 1992); and, alternative psychoanalytic (e.g. see Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1984), semi-psychoanalytic (e.g. see Barthes, 1975), and non-European conceptualizations of jouissance (e.g. see Khasnabish, 2003; see also Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Still, if ‘psychoanalysis is the only discourse in which you are allowed not to enjoy’—not forbidden to enjoy, just relieved of the pressure to do so’ (Žižek, 2006a: 104, emphasis in original), I hope this article has laid enough traps so that we can advance emotional geographies by making them less enjoyable than ever before!

Acknowledgements

I thank Liz Bondi, Joyce Davidson, and Mick Smith for their perceptive and extremely helpful editorial comments on an earlier draft of this article; Hilda Fernandez and other members of the Lacan Salon study group in Vancouver, BC, for inspiring discussions; Brookfield Road Facilities Management in Gloucester, UK; and, finally, Globe 5.5 in Bloomington, IN for providing me settings to ‘Wherewith enmound, these bleeding words’ and ‘Faire feeling finally, Globe 5.5 in Bloomington, IN for providing me settings to advance emotional geographies by making them less enjoyable than ever before!’

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