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Locating the Melody of the Drives*

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Psychoanalysis has profoundly influenced those social theories that inform qualitative methodology in human geography. Yet many geographers are skeptical about the value and viability of psychoanalytic methodology because of its alleged reductionist causal explanations and relativistic interpretations of data. Drawing on the work of Slavoj Žižek, which affirms Jacques Lacan’s undermining of the dualism of causality versus sense, this article illustrates the potential value of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a qualitative methodology in geography. Using a methodological case study from my research on Jamaican tourism, I illustrate how we can locate a Lacanian understanding of the drives in the interactions between tourists and hotel workers. In so doing, the article provides new insights into the enduring allures of tourism’s commodity-form by focusing on how the object petit a—a chimerical object that incites desire and an unattainable object that the drives encircle—takes place in customer service and entertainment activities. Key Words: desire, drives, psychoanalysis, qualitative methodology, Slavoj Žižek.

精神分析已经深刻地影响了那些把定性方法引入人文地理学的社会理论。然而，由于其所断言的还原因果解释和数据的相对论解释，许多地理学家对精神分析方法的价值和可行性持怀疑态度。借鉴斯拉沃热・齐泽克的工作，即确认雅克・拉康对因果关系与意识二元论的削弱，本文说明了拉康精神分析作为一个地理定性方法的潜在价值。使用我关于牙买加旅游的研究理论个案，本文说明了我们如何在游客和酒店工作人员之间的相互作用中找到一个拉康的理解驱动器。由此，本文能为旅游业商品形式的持久吸引力提供新的见解—通过专注于客体小 a—一个煽动欲望的幻想客体和该驱动器包围的遥不可及的对象—是如何出现于客户服务和娱乐活动场所的。关键词：欲望，驱动器，心理分析，定性方法，斯拉沃热・齐泽克。

El psicoanálisis ha influido profundamente las teorías sociales en las que se apoya la metodología cualitativa en geografía humana. Con todo, muchos geógrafos son escépticos acerca del valor y viabilidad de la metodología psicoanalítica debido a sus alegadas explicaciones causales de naturaleza reduccionista y a las interpretaciones relativistas de los datos. A partir del trabajo de Slavoj Žižek, quien respalda la descalificación que hace Jacques Lacan del dualismo de causalidad versus sentido, este artículo ilustra el valor potencial del psicoanálisis lacaniano como una metodología cualitativa en geografía. Utilizando un estudio de caso metodológico tomado de mi investigación del turismo jamaiquino, muestro cómo ubicar una comprensión lacaniana de las pulsiones y las interacciones entre turistas y empleados de los hoteles. Haciendo esto, el artículo proporciona nuevas miradas críticas sobre los inventados halagos que ofrece el turismo como mercadería al concentrar la atención en cómo el object petit a—un quémérico objeto que incita el deseo y un objeto inalcanzable englobado en las pulsiones—tiene lugar en el servicio al cliente y las actividades de entretenimiento. Palabras clave: dese, pulsiones, psicoanálisis, metodología cualitativa, Slavoj Žižek.

The truth is that these people [Alfred Adler and Carl Jung] have picked out a few cultural overtones from the symphony of life and have once more failed to hear the mighty and powerful melody of the [drives].

—Freud ([1914] 1957b, 62)

Must one smash their ears before they learn to listen with their eyes?

—Nietzsche ([1883–1885] 1966, 16)

Although geographers frequently evoke psychoanalytic concepts to theorize

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spaces of social exclusion, domination, and antagonism, few geographers extensively use psychoanalytic methodology. For instance, Burgess, Limb, and Harrison’s (1988) “small group” analyses; Pile’s (1991) examination of transference; Bondi’s (2003a) work on empathy and identification; Bingley’s (2003) Jungian sandplay; Thomas’s (2007) study of interview data analysis; as well as the psychoanalytically inflected, that is, the inverted-coma-marked methods of Nast’s (2000) “mapping”; and Pile’s (2005) “tracking,” ultimately do little to dispel the notion that geographers are far more at ease engaging psychoanalysis on theoretical rather than methodological terrains. Arguably, then, one of the most intriguing and even perilous methodological questions in human geography today is this: How can geographers further extend and refine their methodological engagements with psychoanalysis?

Given the profound influence of psychoanalytic methodology on the critical social theories such as feminism and poststructuralism, which have influenced human geography over the past several decades, it is important to note that methodological discussions in geography are already (albeit unwittingly) informed by psychoanalytic methodology. Consider, for example, the degree to which psychoanalytic themes inform the following: the rambling free associations in unstructured interviews (e.g., see Longhurst 2003); the powerful transference bonds that develop during interviews, ethnographies, and focus groups (e.g., see Dunn 2005); as well as the anxiety and pleasure that attend the study of visual cultures (e.g., see Rose 2007). Also consider geographers’ attempts to foster critical research techniques akin to the psychoanalytic method of “analytic listening” (see Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 271–72); that is, an attendance to critical reflexivity (e.g., Dowling 2005), the multiple meanings of words (e.g., Cloke et al. 2004), the partiality and situatedness of knowledge (e.g., Mansvelt and Berg 2005), and the dynamic blurring of the boundaries between the researcher and researched in interviews (e.g., Mullings 1999) or the Self and Other in ethnographies (e.g., Butz and Besio 2004). Psychoanalysis, then, occupies a curious position in human geography’s methodological debates: It is at once central yet marginal, influential yet rebuffed.

Whereas some geographers, notably Oliver (2003), warn that psychoanalytic methods are best confined to clinical settings (see also Bondi 2003b), taking inspiration from the method of bricolage (see Derrida 2007, 255–59), this article situates psychoanalytic methodology beyond the couch in two ways. First, by embracing “psychoanalytic theory as theory” (Thomas 2007, 543; emphasis in original) rather than a therapy, I affirm psychoanalysis as an inherently creative and transformative research praxis that thrives on empirical experimentation and observation (see Lloyd Mayer 1995; Ogden 2005; Fink 2007; Midgley 2007). Second, I take seriously the extent to which geography’s paradigmatic investments in historicism, social constructionism, and cultural studies have meant that much of the radicality and thus the very point of psychoanalytic methodologies have been forfeited (Kingsbury 2003).

This article focuses on Freud’s concept of the drive (trieb)—a multifarious and delicate concept that is often mistakenly conflated with biological instinct (e.g., see Aitken and Hermann 1997; Thrift 2004; Mann 2006). Very briefly, the drives refer to how human subjectivity and agency are not and cannot be entirely determined by biology or culture. For Freud, human pleasure and procreation are often at odds with one another and cannot be understood in terms of “natural” or “normal” behavior. In contrast to the innate attribute of instinct, Freud asserted that a psychical and somatic montage of drives coordinate human subjectivity, especially sexuality. Whereas objects such as food and water can satiate the instincts of hunger and thirst, the drives derive satisfaction by encircling or missing their object. Thus the drives are associated with activities that are excessive, repetitive, and potentially destructive because the drives have “no goal, but only an aim, this is because its object is no longer a means of attaining satisfaction, it is an end in itself; it is directly satisfying” (Copjec 2002, 38). Now, it is only by understanding why the Freudian drives cannot be reduced to biology and why “despite the fact they have no existence outside culture—are not cultural” (Copjec 1994, 209) that we will be able to listen to conceptual nuances of the drives and avoid repeating Jung’s and Adler’s methodological mistake (see epigraph).

By engaging the drives via the question of psychoanalytic methodology in geography, this article asks: Where might we locate the melody of the drives? Why search for the melody and
not say the rhythm or something else entirely? How can our newly won methodological insight into the drives further our theorizations about society and space? To answer these questions, I draw on my research on Jamaican tourism (e.g., Kingsbury 2005) and the work of Slavoj Žižek—a Slovenian dialectical-materialist philosopher and Lacanian psychoanalyst. Heralded as “one of the major philosophers of our time” (Eagleton 2001, 51), Žižek challenges historicist and social constructionist approaches to Lacanian psychoanalysis because he engages with Lacan’s neglected concepts of enjoyment (jouissance), the Real, and the objet petit a (see Kingsbury 2008). This article explores why and how Žižek’s methodological attendance to Lacan’s notion of the objet petit a—the object cause of desire and the object of the drives—can help geographers locate the melody of the drive. Why should locating the melody of the drives concern us at all? Because at stake is the realization of the still-unexplored methodological possibilities of Lacanian psychoanalysis that can help provide new insights into the enduring and ubiquitous allures of tourism’s commodity-form.

Notes on Slavoj Žižek’s Methodology

Beyond Causal Explanation versus the Interpretation of Sense

Geographers’ adjudications of psychoanalytic methodology usually proceed in two ways: On the one hand, psychoanalysis is deemed too deterministic because it adheres to a “reductionist...means to escape alternative theorizations” (Harvey 1996, 100). On the other hand, psychoanalysis is regarded as too relativistic because it elicits “as many interpretations in a body of data as there are practitioners” (Gould 1981, 170). Žižek (1994, 8; emphasis in original) responded to these lines of critique (found throughout the social sciences and humanities) as follows:

Is psychoanalysis the most radical version of psychic determinism, is Freud a “biologist of the mind,” does psychoanalysis denounce mind itself as the playing of unconscious determinism and, consequently, its freedom as an illusion? Or, on the contrary, is psychoanalysis the “in-depth hermeneutics” that opens up a new domain of the analysis of meaning by demonstrating how, even in the case of (what appear to be) purely psychological corporeal disturbances, we are still dealing with the dialectic of meaning, with the subject’s distorted communication with himself [sic] and his Other? The first thing to be noted here is that this duality is reflected in the very Freudian theoretical edifice, in the guise of the duality of the meta-psychological theory of the drives (oral, anal, phallic stage, etc.), which relies on the physicalist-biological metaphors of “mechanisms,” “energy,” and “stages,” and interpretations (of dreams, jokes, psychopathology of everyday life, symptoms...), which remain thoroughly within the domain of meaning.

Žižek (1994) did not attempt to resolve the antagonism of causal explanation versus the interpretation of sense by either privileging one side of the binary at the expense of the other. Nor did Žižek submit the binary to a “pseudo-dialectical ‘synthesis’” to achieve an “Einsteinian” “unified theory of the Freudian field” (1994, 8). For Žižek, such a methodological rapprochement is unnecessary because the “Freudian revolution” already undermines the binary of causality versus sense. Žižek lamented that engagements with Freud’s deconstruction of this binary have proceeded from only two sources: Adorno (1990) and Lacan’s notion of the objet petit a. The objet petit a, Lacan’s preferred French and English translation for “object small other” (objet petit a(utre)), is both the object of the drives and an object that incites desire. In the former, the objet petit a is what the drives aim at but never quite attain; that is to say, an object produced by social activities that derive satisfaction from contrived repetition and failure rather than successful acquisition and completion. In the latter, the objet petit a is an object (e.g., the gaze and voice) that causes desire as an “unfathomable ‘something’ that makes an ordinary object sublime” (Žižek 2006, 66). That is to say, the strangely elusive yet palpable je ne sais quoi or unnamable X factor that accounts, for example, for why our neighbor’s glance is so disarming, the announcer’s voice is so hypnotic, the cupboard’s smell is so endearing, the passenger’s touch so delicate, or the cheese’s taste so exquisite.

But how exactly does the objet petit a unsettle the binary of linear determinism versus interpretation? To answer this question it is crucial to understand how the objet petit a takes place.

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To begin with, the objet petit a subverts oppositional logic (e.g., causality vs. sense) because its spatial logic is anamorphic and topological. In terms of anamorphosis, the objet petit a “is something that, viewed from in front, is nothing at all, just a void: it acquires the contours of something only when viewed at a slant” (Žižek 2006, 68). That is to say, the objet petit a only takes shape from the distorted point of view of the subject’s desires and fears. Lacan’s (1977) definitive example of the objet petit a as an anamorphic gaze is Hans Holbein’s early modern painting, *The Ambassadors* (1533), which depicts a skewed skull smeared beneath two lavishly dressed figures amidst their sumptuous objects of exploration and theology. Studying the objet petit a, then, demands that we methodologically “look awry” (Žižek 1991), as well as speak and listen awry because the objet petit a will disappear if it is approached directly rather than obliquely.³ In terms of topology, Lacan (drawing on Marx’s theorization of capital as the paradoxical coincidence of limit and excess) theorized the objet petit a as an amalgamation of lack and surplus of enjoyment (see Žižek 1989; Lacan 2007; see also Krips 1999).

Crucially, the objet petit a is intimately associated with what Lacan calls the Real: a paradoxical “register” (note the acoustic connotation) of socio-psychical life that supports yet fractures from within the register of the symbolic order; that is, the world of language, customs, and rules. A residual stain of the Real, the objet petit a is not an ordinary phenomenal object because it engenders a series of properties that lack determinate existence and elude meaningful interpretation. Žižek (1989, 163) wrote that the Real can be “illustrated by a multitude of well-known jokes based on the same matrix: ‘Is this the place where the Duke of Wellington spoke his famous words?’—‘Yes, this is the place, but he never spoke those words’—these never spoken words are a Lacanian Real.” Before addressing how the Real and the objet petit a take place, let me address how and why the objet petit a, a “strange object that is nothing but the inscription of the subject itself in the field of objects” (Žižek 2006, 69), is generated in the first place. Žižek (1994, 178) alerted us to how the objet petit a emerges to solve the deadlock of how a subject is to find support in the big Other (the symbolic order). The first answer, of course, is: in a signifier—that is, by identifying himself with a signifier in the big Other [e.g., a national identity, social class, sports team etc.], a signifier that then represents him for the other signifiers. However, in so far as the big Other is in itself inconsistent, not-all, structured around a lack, a constitutive failure, further possibility opens up for the subject to find a niche in the Other by identifying with this very void in its midst, with the point at which the Other fails. And objet petit a positivizes, gives body to, this void in the big Other: we encounter the object where the world fails.

The objet petit a never involves direct, neutral, or linear causality because it is a by-product of people’s activities that depends on an object or a person their desirability (see Žižek 1991).⁴ Žižek uses the objet petit a to rethink ideological critique by focusing on its incarnations as a “sublime object of ideology”; that is, “a spectral object which has no positive ontological consistency, but merely fills in the gap of a certain constitutive impossibility” (Žižek 1997, 76). One of Žižek’s (1989, 48–9) frequent examples of a sublime object of ideology is the anti-Semitic figure of the Jew, which is constructed to “stitch up the inconsistency” of the Nazi ideological system. Here, the objet petit a takes place as the “unattainable X . . . what is ‘in Jew more than Jew’ and what Nazism tried so desperately to seize, measure, change into a positive property” (Žižek 1989, 97) to scientifically and objectively identify Jews.

How, then, does Žižek go about studying other sublime objects in other ideological contexts? And how can the objet petit a help geographers locate the melody of the drives? I tackle these questions by turning to the methodological case study of a Jamaican hotel: a commodified social space composed of the melody of the drives and its recurring note of the objet petit a.

### A Methodological Case Study

**The Analysis of Form: Sandals Negril Beach Resort & Spa**

According to Žižek (1989, 11), Lacan’s claim that Marx “invented the symptom” is no mere “sally of wit” because it alerts us to the fundamental homology between the interpretative procedure of Marx and Freud—more precisely between their analysis of commodity and
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For Žižek, Marx and Freud avoid the methodological trap of attempting to reveal the content of truth hidden behind form—wherein form pertains not to an a priori (Kantian) “neutral-universal mould of the plurality of different empirical contents” (Žižek 1999a, 365) but rather to (Hegelian) singularity, uncertainty, and dislocation (see also Žižek 2000).

In the case of Marx, although conventional bourgeois political economy critiques unmasked secrets (e.g., labor consumed in production as the true source of value) hidden behind the commodity-form, they did not explain the secrets of the commodity-form itself. Thus Marx (quoted in Žižek 1989, 15) asserted “The commodity remains for classical political economy a mysterious, enigmatic thing” and asked “Whence, then, arises the enigmatical character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of commodities? Clearly from this form itself.” In the case of Freud, psychoanalytic interpretations of dreams do not search for their hidden symbolic meanings that are masked by the totality of a dream’s various parts (see also Pile 1998). That is to say, Freud rejected lines of inquiry that delve for deep meanings by asking, for example, what does dancing around a maypole imply? What does the prison tower on the hill symbolize? What does the yellow bird represent? For Freud, these lines of questioning mistakenly locate unconscious desire in “latent thoughts” hidden behind the dream’s literal images and text; that is, the dream’s “manifest content.” Freud argued instead that unconscious desire is located in the “dream-work”; that is, in the signifier’s “mechanisms of displacement and condensation, the figuration of the content of words or syllables” (Žižek 1989, 12) that articulate the dream’s very form: “the process by means of which the hidden meaning disguised itself in such a form” (Žižek 1989, 15). Unconscious desire “intercalates itself in the interspace between the latent thought and the manifest text” (Žižek 1989, 13; emphasis added); that is to say, unconscious desire is “not ‘more concealed, deeper’ in relation to the latent thought, it is decidedly more ‘on the surface’” (Žižek 1989, 13). The dream of a maypole, then, is not an expression of repressed phallic desire but rather the expression of unconscious desire disguised in the figuration of syllables and wordplay. Unconscious desire is registered polyphonically: “m-a-y-p-o-l-e” should be interpreted as “May poll,” “may pull,” “maple,” “my Paul,” and so on, in ways that resonate with the singular geographies and histories of the dreamer’s life (see also Žižek 1991, 51–2).

Let me illustrate the methodological value of Žižek’s analysis of form, in this case the commodity-form of tourism, by turning to the main pool bar (Figure 1) in the Jamaican all-inclusive hotel Sandals Negril Beach Resort & Spa (hereafter Sandals Negril). At first glance, the scene provides an exemplary snapshot of the unequal sociopolitical economy of tourism in the Caribbean: Poor black workers working for the pleasure of a rich white clientele (see Sheller 2003; Pattullo 2005). This reading, however, is limited because it falls into the trap of reducing “form to the essence, to the hidden kernel” (Žižek 1989, 15). That is to say, the reading interprets the commodity-form of tourism by reducing its manifest content (that is, white consumers on one side of the bar and a black worker on the other side of the bar) to its latent content (that is, the centuries-long subjugation of Caribbean people through colonialist, racist, and capitalist forces that emanate from beyond the Caribbean region). The assumption that the manifest spaces of workers’ smiles hide latent spaces of socioeconomic hardship informs numerous studies of tourism in the global South. For example, Gmelch’s (2003) study, Behind the Smile, offers (according to the book’s subtitle) “an inside look at the world of Caribbean tourism” from the perspective of tourist workers in Barbados (see also Ness 2003).

The impulse to reduce smiles to servility is indicative of an overrapid spatialization—superficial appearance versus stubborn determinant structures; unfettered pleasure on the one side versus servile labor on the other side—as well as an “over-rapid historicization [that] makes us blind to the real kernel which returns to the same through diverse historicizations” (Žižek 1989, 50). Therefore, a Žižekian approach poses the following question: Why should and how can the Real qua unequal and antagonistic socioeconomic relations endure and return throughout all of the Caribbean’s diverse geographies and histories? Answering this question demands that we take seriously
the notion that “the ‘secret’ to be unveiled” in Caribbean tourism “is not the content hidden by the form . . . but, on the contrary, the ‘secret’ of this form itself” (Žižek 1989, 11; emphasis in original). My research argues that much of the secret of tourism’s commodity-form consists of the allures in the “interspace” of tourists’ and service workers’ interactions (Kingsbury 2005). I suggest that these allures consist of workers and tourists occupying the place of the objet petit a: a place that incites desire and a place that the drives encircle. Where and how, then, can we locate the objet petit a in this context? What part does the objet petit a play in the melody of the drives? How does desire and the melody of the drives relate to the commodity-form of tourism?

Dialectical Isolation: Locating Desire in Customer Service

Žižek (1989) asserted that Walter Benjamin’s approach to history challenges hermeneutics and conventional understandings of historical materialism. In the former, instead of locating the “interpreted text into [sic] the totality of its epoch”), Benjamin aims at “the isolation of a piece of the past from the continuity of history ( . . . blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework”—Thesis XVII)” (Žižek 1989, 137; emphasis in original). For Žižek, Benjamin’s (1969) interpretative procedure recalls the Freudian distinction between interpretation en détail and en masse (cf. Pile 2000; Nast 2001). That is to say, Freud interpreted dreams not in their totality but rather in terms of their separate parts. Benjamin argued that historical materialism is characterized not by its attempts to “grasp events in the totality of their interconnection and in their dialectical movement [but rather by] . . . its capacity to arrest, to immobilize historical movement and to isolate the detail from its historical totality” (Žižek 1989, 139; emphasis in original). Benjamin’s dialectical technique of isolating a historical detail lies at the heart of Žižek’s
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Locating the Melody of the Drives (1989, 125; emphasis in original) critique of ideology that favors the latter of the following two “complementary procedures”:

One is discursive, the “symptomal reading” of the ideological text bringing about the “deconstruction” of the spontaneous experience of its meaning—that is demonstrating how a given ideological field is a result of a montage of heterogeneous “floating signifiers,” of their totalization through the intervention of certain nodal points... the other aims at extracting the kernel of enjoyment, at articulating the way in which—beyond the field of meaning but at the same time internal to it—an ideology implies, manipulates, produces a pre-ideological enjoyment structured in fantasy.

In so doing, Žižek drew on Lacan’s 1970s teachings that replace the symptom as the encoded message to the Other with the notion of the sinthome, a neologism that refers to (much like the objet petit a) “a kind of atom of enjoyment, the minimal synthesis of language and enjoyment” (Žižek 2006, 78; see also Žižek 1989, 55–84). Žižekian ideological critique aims at isolating the disarming mesmerizing power of the ideological sinthome and objet petit a in their “utter stupidity” (Žižek 1999b, 17) as “meaningless fragment[s] of the Real.” Such a maneuver aims at (following Lacan’s example) changing the

“precious gift into a piece of shit”... [making] it possible to experience the mesmerizing voice as a disgusting piece of sticky excrement... This form of estrangement... produces distantiation not by locating the phenomenon in its historical totality, but by making us experience the utter nullity of its immediate reality; the stupidity of a material presence which escapes historical mediation. Dialectical mediation—the context that bestows meaning on the object—is not added, but rather subtracted.

By drawing on Žižek’s method of dialectical isolation, we can reevaluate an enduring “problem for labour in tourism... the fact that many tourism products involve the production and consumption of social experiences... that cannot be reduced to tangible elements” (Britton 1991, 459). For Britton (1991, 460), these intangibles, which are “codified in management instruction and staff training manuals,” are associated with the “personal qualities” and “quality of service” of waiters, room service staff, tour guides, and stewards. From a Lacanian perspective, however, such qualities and experiences are eminently tangible and observable because they are materializations of the objet petit a: “the elusive, unattainable X that confers upon all our deeds an aura of magic” (Žižek 1991, 76). At Sandals, much of the quality or aura associated with service workers resides in the manner or “how” of service: the graceful technique of uncorking a bottle of wine, the surprising skill of throwing over the shoulder and catching a bottle of rum, or a chef’s style of serving an omelet at Sandals Negril’s Bayside restaurant counter (Figure 2):

Omar: Okay, let’s start making omelet now. Okay, what for you Madame?

Guest: Omelet please.

Omar: Some cheese on it?

Guest: Yes, please.

Omar: Let’s start nodding your head. We are in the party crew! Moving your neck, make your body move, just add some eggs and then cheese on. She said more cheese, she shouts out “Please!”

[Laughter.]

Omar: Let’s start sliding. To the right this time. Put your cheese on and then start folding. This starts omelet cha-cha-cha making! [tapping the griddle with a metal spatula] Ah ha! There we go again! Take it back this time. If it tastes nice, you’ll try it twice!

[Laughter.]

Impromptu and iterated vocal garnishes (an apt formula for the objet petit a as voice, see later) exemplify many interactions between Sandals service workers and guests whereby needs (e.g., hunger and thirst) are articulated in spoken demands (e.g., requesting cheese). Workers not only work to satisfy the guests’ needs, they also minister to the guests’ demands for service; that is, the demand for something more than the satiation of appetite. From a Lacanian perspective, the demand for service (that is, the demand for a worker’s presence qua smiling attention and friendly entertainment) approximates to a demand for love. The disjuncture between the demand for satiating a need and the demand for love is part of what Lacan (2002, 276) called the “dialectic of demand”—a place where desire emerges: “desire is neither the appetite for...
satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting.” Desire, then, is “the surplus produced by the articulation of need in demand” (Evans 1996, 37); that is, an excess or surplus produced through acts of giving and receiving. This formula is succinctly expressed in the following recurring directive in the Sandals Team Members’ Handbook: “Give the guest more than he/she expects.”

The split between the provision of need and love takes place in the split of the workers’ dual position as “provider of labour services and part of the consumed product” (Britton 1991, 458). Lacan’s notion of desire can enhance our understandings of what Britton (1991) called tourist service workers’ “unusual position” insofar as they occupy places of work and consumption. But what exactly does or can the worker give the guest if the guest is already expecting something extra from the service worker? And what exactly are these “extras” that attend service? Crucially, Sandals service workers do not work to become the object of desire for tourists; rather they work to occupy the place or embody the object cause of desire—the objet petit a. Like the commodity, the objet petit a is constituted through social exchange. When a guest demands an object such as an omelet at the breakfast counter or a cocktail at the pool bar, the object’s “use value” (the fact that it serves to satisfy some of our needs) eo ipso becomes a form of expression of its “exchange value”; the object in question functions as an index of intersubjective relations. If the other [e.g., a service worker] complies with our wish, he thereby bears witness to a certain attitude [e.g., love] towards us. The final purpose of our demand for an object is thus not the satisfaction of a need attached to it but confirmation of the other’s attitude towards us. (Ţiţek 1991, 5)

To incite desire, however, the worker’s attitude cannot be too positive. One cannot directly give the objet petit a because the...
incitement of desire can “be produced only as non-intended, as the side-effect of our activity” (Žižek 1989, 83). If workers directly or literally enact the directions of the Sandals Customer Service Checklist (e.g., “always smile,” “make eye contact,” “use the guest’s name,” and so on), then their actions risk suffocating the desire of tourists because they become “mechanical” or “fake.” Insofar as the pool bar is a space of desire where guests demand something more than the satiation of needs and workers try to give them “more than they expect,” then the quickest or shortest way to each other’s goals—the objet petit a—is not a direct approach but a repeatedly elliptical or curved path: the melody of the drives.

At stake here is the acknowledgment and understanding of the extent to which enjoyment, qua jouissance (painful pleasure), plays a constitutive role in violent social struggles. For Žižek, a crucial element at work in the emotional lures of nationalism, as well as other (fundamentalist) ideologies, is the enjoyment sought in and garnered from investments in and identifications with ideological fantasies; that is, the ways in which 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 a marauding Other (see Žižek 1994; Kingsbury 2008).

How, then, can the suspension of comprehension, something akin to turning off the sound of a television, help us observe the interactions—comprised of desire and the drives—at the pool bar? Thanks to some inductive grace, I stumbled on an answer by lowering my ears beneath the water. Deprived of their vocal support and the recursive poolside sounds of Bob Marley, the repeated movements of the people all of a sudden appeared in different light. That is to say, it was possible to observe the melody of the drives in the interactions between tourists and workers. Specifically, the melody consisted of three motifs of the drive: creativity, repetition, and curvature.

In Lacanian theory, the objet petit a—as the object of the drive—can take the form of bodily “love objects” (Salecl and Žižek 1996): the breast, phallus, voice, and gaze. Take another look at the pool bar (Figure 1): Like so many scenes at Sandals, the social space is animated and fixed by the enticements of the gaze (e.g., tourists looking at tourists, tourists looking at the worker, the worker looking at the tourists) and the disarming tonality of the voice (e.g., tourists laughing at the worker; tourists talking about the worker; the worker telling jokes, singing to, and laughing at the tourists). Lacan never tires of emphasizing how these body parts, or more accurately, appendage-like “organs without bodies” (Žižek 2004) are in the subject but more than the subject. That is to say, the gaze and voice are not ratcheted to the eyes, mouths, and ears that gather around the pool bar. Rather, the gaze and voice are partial objects looping around and passing through the insides and outsides of the body: They are in the worker, more than the worker and in

The Suspension of Comprehension: The Pool Bar, Bingo, and Musical Chairs

Much of Žižek’s work on the political is informed by his experiences of living in the former Yugoslavia. On the question of the geopolitical ethnic struggles in the Balkans, Žižek (1997, 62) rejected the notions that these conflicts are a natural or inevitable outcome and that the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians are “caught in the phantasmic whirlpool of historical myths.” For Žižek, such views, which are prevalent in Western social theoretical circles, are comparable to Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism, wherein the Balkans are framed as a timeless fantasy space onto which the West can project its desires. To make sense of these terrible and complex struggles, Žižek (1997, 62) advocated a method of “inverted phenomenological reduction.” This method puts into parentheses the multitude of meanings, the wealth of the spectres of the past which allow us to “understand” the situation. One should resist the temptation to “understand,” and accomplish a gesture analogous to turning off the sound of a TV: all of a sudden, the movements of the people on the screen, deprived of their vocal support, look like meaningless, ridiculous gesticulations. It is only a suspension of “comprehension” that renders possible the analysis of what is at stake—economically, politically, ideologically—in the post-Yugoslav crisis: of the political calculuses and strategic decisions which led to war. [emphasis in original]
the tourist, more than the tourist. Gaze and voice are topological—at once intimate and external—or, as Lacan (1992) put it, they are “extimate” or externally intimate (see Kingsbury 2007).

Animated by the gaze and voice, the pool bar is a space composed of the scopic drive and the invocatory drive. As I noted earlier, Freud developed the concept of the drive to theorize the extent to which human subjectivity was never entirely determined by biological and cultural forces. In contrast to the innate attribute of instinct, Freud argued that a psychosomatic “montage” of the drives composed human sexuality. Lacan (1977) adhered to Freud’s definition of the drives as “partial”—part of a montage or “circuit” composed of a pressure, object, aim, and end. Instead of theorizing the drives in terms of mechanical, biological, or energetic metaphors, however, as Freud had done, Lacan addressed the corporeality of the drive in terms of three grammatical voices: active (e.g., to see or hear), passive (e.g., to be seen or heard), and reflexive (e.g., to see or hear oneself). Lacan (1977, 195) emphasized the “subject-making” (subjectivable) capacity of the drives. For the drives are radically creative: They involve making oneself seen or heard. Exemplary of the creative capacities of the drives are the sudden and rapturous performances of bar staff; for example, Cleon’s spontaneous wailing impersonations of Elvis Presley (Figure 3). Instead of simply following the rules of customer service in the Sandals management instruction and staff training manuals, many workers like Cleon creatively enact them through the place-and value-making capacities of the voice by singing songs, teasing tourists, telling obscene jokes, and sharing ridiculous stories. But why does Cleon’s Elvis impersonation exemplify the drive’s creativity? Because when the drives take place, “the intimate core of our being, no longer sheltered by sense, ceases to be supposed and suddenly becomes exposed. It thrusts itself forward, pushing through the surface of speech to take up a position alongside it” (Copjac 1994,
In the raptures of an Elvis impersonation, Cleon is no longer sheltered by his use-value as just another Sandals worker. Rather, the intimate core of his being erupts amidst crooning and exaggerated gestures. When the drives take place, an object is transformed: “It is not a means to something other than itself, but is itself other than itself. The bi-partition takes place within the object, not between the object and the satisfaction that lies beyond it . . . [but] as a changing of the object itself. The object of the drive is never identical to itself” (Copjec 2002, 37–38, emphasis in original). In other words, once under the swerve and sway of the drives, soda dispensers turn into microphones, runny omelets become arousing lyrics, bar personnel transform into star personalities, and sunsets radiate the sublime blessings of Jah.

Locating the Melody of the Drives

From a Lacanian perspective, all drives (oral, anal, scopic, and invocatory) are expressions of the death drive. This is not to say that people are biologically compelled to drink or work themselves to death in the pool. On the contrary, the death drive is partly the result of living in the symbolic order wherein the “dead” automatonic-like operations of language (e.g., impersonal injunctions, harsh prohibitions, unrealistic demands, impossible ideals, etc.) forcibly seize and sexualize our living bodies. Crucially, the death drive takes place through repetition compulsion, through the iteration of activities that aim for something beyond mere pleasure—the objet petit a, the incarnation of enjoyment.

By highlighting the death drive in tourism, we bring to the fore the extent to which tourism consists of not only movement and travel but also the vicious circles of routine and inertia. In spatially confined environments such as the all-inclusive compound of Sandals Negril, many activities consist of repeatedly returning to and staying in favorite places such as tables, food counters, bars, sun loungers, dance floors, and pools. Exemplary of the coincidence between entertainment and routine are bingo and musical chairs. In the latter, the bodily movements of Sandals Negril’s guests are forcibly commanded and judged by microphone wielding “playmakers” (employees of the Entertainment Department). Bingo (a notoriously addictive pastime) and musical chairs are exemplary of the death drive because they are ultimately pointless symbolic or rule-bound activities that attempt to generate enjoyment that is permeated with anxiety and frustration (cf. Thien 2009).

Why should bingo and musical chairs and not another activity exemplify the movement of the drives? The important point to make here is that any activity has the potential to turn into the gyre of the drives, insofar as the activity brings to the fore the extent to which people can achieve satisfaction by not achieving their aims: by not finding an empty chair, by waiting and waiting and waiting for that final magic number to be called out. In addition, the satisfaction derived from the inhibition or obstacle that prevents the drive from achieving its aim is not extrinsic but intrinsic to the activity of the drive itself (see Copjec 2002). This is why Freud aligns the drives with the notion of a melody: The drives garner satisfaction not from the tempo, timbre, or intensity of an activity but rather from the sequences and repetitions of an activity. For Žižek (2005, 193), the spatial implications of this aspect of the drive are as follows:

Einstein “desubstantialized” gravity by way of reducing it to geometry: gravity is not a substantial force which “bends” space but the name for the curvature of space itself. In a homologous way, Lacan “desubstantialized” drives: a drive is not a primordial positive force but a purely geometrical, topological phenomenon, the name of the curvature of the space of desire, i.e., for the paradox that, within this space, the way to attain the object (a) is not to go straight for it (the safest way to miss it) but to encircle it, to “go round in circles.”

How, then, does the curvature of the drives relate to Žižek’s thesis that Lacanian methodology can undermine the binary of causal explanation and the interpretation of sense? On the question of causality, the objet petit a—the object of the drives (e.g., an elusive number to complete a full house in bingo)—does not cause Sandals Negril’s social spaces to bend or curve; rather, the objet petit a is an effect of the drives: “the purely topological ‘distortion’ of the natural instinct which finds satisfaction in a direct consumption of its object” (Žižek 2005, 193; see also Žižek 2006, 72–73). On the question of interpretation, the drives are not an
act of communication or a plea for reciprocity. The drives do not reveal the “domain of private being [which] emerges unveiled, its contents finally visible for anyone to see” (e.g., Cleon’s ‘true’ self as an exhibitionist or ‘repressed’ singer). Rather, what the drives make “audible—or visible—is the void as such, contentless and nonsensical” (Copjec 1994, 190). This nonsensical emptiness positivized by the circuit of the drives is the objet petit a—a mesmeric sliver of the Real that lodges within and beyond us.

Conclusion? No, Thanks!

In the beginning of the article, I suggested that psychoanalytic methodology is at once central and marginal to the methodological debates in human geography. This paradoxical position became evident to me when I completed a “suggestions for cross-references” section in an entry on psychoanalytic methods for the International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Kingsbury 2009). The section, consisting of twenty-two key words ranging from affect to uncertainty, was extremely suggestive. I therefore asked the publishers how many cross-references were acceptable and was told not to worry because the entry was “only” psychoanalytic methods. This article has aimed to help make psychoanalytic methodology as equally pertinent and compelling to geographers as the concepts on which it depends. By providing a preliminary illustration of Žižek’s methodological attendance to Lacan’s notion of the objet petit a, I hope to have shown how psychoanalysis undermines rather than buttresses the methodological dualism of determinism versus interpretation. Žižek’s methods of the analysis of form, dialectical isolation, and the suspension of comprehension can help geographers locate one of the most important psychoanalytic concepts: the drives. Drawing on the case study of Sandals Negril, I illustrated how Žižek’s ideas can be grounded and studied, as well as how they can orient geographers’ methodological inquiries into the ways in which desire and drive inform socio-spatial relations.

By taking the melody of the drives seriously we can also consider the following questions: To what extent are our psychic and embodied research activities informed by voyeuristic and exhibitionistic enjoyment? Can we understand the gaze and voice as not only love objects but also research objects? Similarly, to what extent are the collection, evaluation, and reevaluation of data (e.g., painstaking searches for revealing quotes lurking in lengthy transcripts) exemplary of the chasing, wooing, and gathering of love objects? Methodological conundrums such as these are central to the vast psychoanalytic literature on methods—a literature that I have barely touched on in this brief article. Rather than trying to solve these conundrums, we should aim at keeping them in play because this will incite our methodological desires and ensure psychoanalytic research in geography is never humdrum. Psychoanalytic geography can become not only a theoretically but also a methodologically possible profession.

Note

1 The importance of psychoanalytic methodology qua the method of observation is exemplified by Freud’s ([1914] 1957a, 77) assertion that (metapsychological) concepts in psychoanalysis “are not the basis of the science upon which everything rests: that, on the contrary, is observation alone.”

2 Laplanche’s (1999) notion of the “enigmatic signifier” is arguably another source that builds on the psychoanalytic rejection of determinism versus interpretation.

3 Lacan (1977, 168) also advocated listening awry to Freud’s definition of the drives: “Let us look at what he [Freud] says—As far as the object in the drive is concerned, let it be clear that it is, strictly speaking, of no importance. It is a matter of total indifference. One must never read Freud without one’s ears cocked. When one reads such things, one really ought to prick up one’s ears.”

4 The objet petit a is therefore an underdetermined object. As Dean (2002, 24) put it: Whereas the concept of overdetermination derived from psychoanalytic hermeneutics (specifically, The Interpretation of Dreams) had promised a theory of subject formation that seemed compatible with Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism, in fact the multiply determining relations created by chains of signifiers connected in a symbolic network could never completely determine the subjective effects they were invoked to explain. There is always something left over, something unexplained by symbolic determination. Hence Freud’s observations about the enigmatic “navel of the dream”; hence, too, Lacan’s attempts to theorize this subjective...
underdetermination via a range of terms and concepts (principally that of l’objet petit a [emphasis in original]).

Explaining how psychoanalytic over- and underdetermination implicates the binary of causality–sense requires the space of another article.

5 For Freud ([1900] 1953, 277–78), the dream is comparable to hieroglyphics and a rebus (picture puzzle).

6 In French, the neologism *sintbome* is associated with “Saint Thomas,” “healthy tone,” “synthetic-artificial man.”

7 The *sintbome* and *objet petit a* take place as a *Tuché*; that is, a chance and unassimilable encounter with the Real (see Lacan 1977). Thus they are comparable to Freud’s notion of the navel of the dream: the “unplumable . . . point of contact with the unknown” (Freud [1900] 1953, 186n). An excellent cinematic illustration of the idiocy of enjoyment is Arnold’s (1998) fifteen-minute stuttering Oedipal drama *Alone: Life Wastes Andy Hardy*.

8 The technique of purposely and momentarily becoming deaf while crouching in a swimming pool ironically recalls Freud’s method of “analytic listening”: taking a position of free-floating or evenly hovering attention that is responsive to new meanings in the analysand’s speech. The technique also recalls Friedrich Nietzsche’s recommendation that we learn to listen with our eyes.

9 Given the drives’ radical creative capacity, that is, an ability to make a real difference in or even puncture the fabric of the social world, Lacan (1992) situated the drives in the field of ethics.

10 Let us not forget that most contemporary spaces of mobility or travel such as airports and roads are chock-a-block with inertia.

**Literature Cited**


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