

## What is 'enjoyment as a political factor'?

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### Abstract

The notion of 'enjoyment as a political factor' is a key motif in Lacanian psychoanalytic social theory. This paper explores the notion of enjoyment/*jouissance* – a type of 'negative pleasure' or intense libidinal arousal - as an instrument of political analysis. Crucial here are a series of qualifications that refine an understanding of the concept. The paper clarifies that enjoyment is: sexual (or *libidinal*) in nature; *bodily* rather than *unconscious*; necessarily excessive (inasmuch as it is 'beyond the pleasure principle' and linked to the functioning of the death-drive); and *illicit*, incurred in acts that apparently transgress laws or socially prescribed limits.

A series of critical arguments are noted, such as the idea that *jouissance* cannot be extrapolated to the level of the social, and the contention that as 'extra-discursive', modes of enjoyment float free of the symbolic. Contrary to such contentions, I offer a series of examples – most typically of racism - to demonstrate how *jouissance*: occurs within the symbolic; implies a dialectic of possession; involves the functioning of the law and superego; entails particular rules and contracts of enjoyment; is structured by fantasy. *Jouissance* understood in these ways necessarily supports and extend social structure.

**Keywords:** enjoyment; *jouissance*; ideology; Lacan; law; racism; rules of enjoyment; superego; the symbolic.

### Untoward enjoyments

Kathryn Bigelow's award-winning (2008) war film *The Hurt Locker* begins with a quote: "The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug".<sup>1</sup> This perceptive remark, according to which heightened distressing (or 'negative') affects often become forms of passion that are not easily sacrificed nor moderated, points us in the direction of the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*. The comment provides an example of how ideologies attach themselves to – as Jodi Dean (2006) puts it - a *traumatic element*, a kernel of intensity. This is what Žižek (1994) has in mind with his notion of enjoyment as a *political* factor, the idea that ideology works upon us not simply as a system of representation or a mode of discourse, but *in the currency of enjoyment*, as a type of visceral gratification.

There is, Dean insists, an "irrational nugget involved in accepting authority...[in] responding to an ideological hail...[It] is manifest in actions and practices in which the subject does apart from what the subject claims to know" (2006, p. 190). Not only then is it the case that ideology is more than a question of social structure and discursive

values. It is also the case that this libidinal component - that which is most *enjoyed* in an ideology – occurs in spite of what the subject claims to know or believe, in ways, furthermore, that contradict what they would ordinarily assert as a rational or morally defensive position.

I have tried elsewhere (Hook, 2011) – drawing on authors working in Political Studies (such as Glynos, 2001; Stavrakakis, 2007; Žižek, 1992, 1994, 2005) – to make the argument that the concept of *jouissance*/enjoyment is of vital importance for political psychology particularly in respect of the study of racism. In what follows I explore and develop this crucial tenet of Lacanian social theory, namely, that forms of libidinal enjoyment play a crucial part in the domain of the political. We might argue, indeed, that we fail to grasp something essential about the interplay of power and subjectivity if we do not attend to the libidinal rewards and investments that bind subjects to particular ideologies.

My overarching aim in this paper is expository: to introduce and explore the usefulness of the idea of enjoyment in the domain of political psychology. A second and related objective - more critical in nature - is to identify a series of prospective limitations that arise in attempts to utilize this concept analytically. Indeed, a series of pragmatic methodological questions follow on from this assertion of the importance of the notion of *jouissance*. What exactly is meant, firstly, by the concept of enjoyment as a form of political and psychological analysis? Secondly: how might it best be utilized as a viable instrument of critique and analysis? Thirdly: what associated concepts need to be introduced in any analysis of enjoyment as a social form?

Two quick notes on the approach I adopt here. I punctuate my arguments with examples drawn from popular culture. The illustrative value of such examples is well needed in a field such as that of Lacanian psychoanalysis where abstract and formalistic theory typically predominates. Furthermore, I frequently make reference to racism in what follows. I do this not to suggest that it encapsulates all of what is meant by the notion of the 'enjoyment as a political factor' – there are of course multiple different ideological modes of *jouissance* – but because more often than not it provides a forceful dramatization of the concepts in question.

### **The vagaries of *jouissance***

In this first section of the paper I focus on qualifying what is meant by the term enjoyment (*jouissance*), a concept frequently employed but seldom adequately defined in Lacanian literature (for exceptions to this rule see Braunstein, 2003; Evans, 1998; Miller, 2000; Stavrakakis, 2007). Macey is correct when he remarks that *jouissance* is a “notoriously polysemic term in Lacan... The connotations of the term shift considerably over the years...[and] tend therefore to be the result of semantic-conceptual accretion” (p. 201). Evans (1998) similarly notes: “the term *jouissance* does not retain a stable meaning...its resonances and articulations shift dramatically over the course of Lacan’s teaching” (p. 2). It is true: the term takes on myriad values and functions in Lacan’s work, a situation not helped by the variety of differing applications to which the term has been put to use in the work of Lacan’s commentators.

There is also a further complicating issue to consider here: Lacan's own dismissive attitude to explanations based on attributions of affect. Lacan (1988) maintained – following the structuralist lead of his colleague Claude Levi Strauss - that one should reject any explanatory recourse to emotions, to the murky realm of “the field of affectivity” (p. 57). And this for good reason: reference to a posited affect can “explain” virtually any form of social behavior. This concern provides us with the first of a series of provisional critiques that can be directed at the concept: is the notion of *jouissance* just ‘Lacan speak’ for affect? If not, then what distinguishes enjoyment from affect, and what underlies the analytical specificity of the concept as distinct from explanations by way of affect?

Secondly: if *jouissance* is in part unconscious – as the secondary literature seems so often to suggest – then does this not consign the concept to a merely speculative use, pertaining as it does to something that cannot be verified or ascertained? Thirdly: how does the concept avoid falling prey to psychological reductionism? That is to say: explanations by way of *jouissance* seem to possess a markedly de-politicizing potential: the notion of *jouissance* surely runs the risk of transforming properly social and political events into psychological phenomena? Fourthly: the concept emerges in the clinical realm, where it points to the infinitely varied, idiosyncratic – even ‘solipsistic’ (Braunstein, 2003) - ways in which subjects attain libidinal arousal. This would seem to suggest that there is no viable way to extrapolate the concept to the generality of a group, a society or even – as is sometimes the case in the secondary literature – an entire nation. In other words then: is it even possible to speak of group modalities of *jouissance*? Fifthly: there appears to be no necessary relationship between *jouissance* as the intense libidinal gratifications experienced by the individual and the broader social or symbolic field. This problem is only exacerbated when we are routinely told that *jouissance* is ‘real’, that is, ‘extra-discursive’, outside the domain of the symbolic. What then, if anything, holds enjoyment in a relationship to the symbolic realm, to the dimension of social structure and power?

### **Enjoying in the margins**

It helps, by way of introducing the concept, to make reference to several everyday expressions. We may speak of someone *flying* into a rage, or of a person *wallowing* in despair. The verb in each case, “to fly”, “to wallow”, indexes the factor of *jouissance*, pointing to the unexpected relation of enjoyment in question. The enjoyment involved here is to be distinguished from the everyday (banal, pleasurable) sense of *enjoying*; it refers, instead, to more illicit gains, to ‘getting off’ in ways one would not readily admit to. Hence the frequent characterization of the ‘obscene’, or ‘perverse’ quality of enjoyment that seems invariably to run counter to the prevailing norms of what is permissible or acceptable. After all, this is not something typically acknowledged in how we represent negative affects to ourselves, i.e. the possibility that once I have flown into a rage I find myself greatly excited, exhilarated by this; that in the midst of wallowing in despair I find myself deeply gratified by own misery.

If the dimension of pained stimulation is not yet clear enough in these examples, consider the following extract from Tony Blair's (2010) autobiography *A Journey*, where

he describes Prime Minister's Questions, a weekly sessions where opposing MPs would have the opportunity to grill the PM:

PMQs was the most nerve-racking, discombobulating, nail-biting, bowel-moving, terror-inspiring, courage-draining experience in my prime ministerial life, without question...I hated it... [T]he whole thing is a giant joust, a sort of modern, non-physical dual...it's a blood sport and the prime minister is the quarry (p. 109).

When Blair described the experience to Americans who had watched him negotiate the perilous weekly sessions, they would often retort, to his exasperation: "Oh, but you always seemed to enjoy it so much" (2010, p. 109). It seems then, upon reflection, that while Blair himself may not have grasped the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*, his American observers, apparently, had.

We can add two further examples to our introductory exposition. Firstly, the case of the morally outraged subject that, in taking exception to some or other deplorable state of affairs, experiences a giddy righteous, a voluptuous contempt, in condemning what they see before them. That is to say: being in accordance with the law, with prevailing social attitudes, does not prevent excesses of libidinal gratification, quite the contrary. A last example: my partner admits to sexual infidelity, and in the escalating fight that results she lashes out to my admonishments, proclaiming "I enjoyed it!" This alerts us to something crucial in the economy of libidinal enjoyment. In this example, not only have I been deprived of what I take to be my rightful enjoyment (enjoyment experienced here as a kind of property), but someone else has enjoyed *in my place*. There, in short, invariably an inter-subjective dialectic at play in relations of enjoyment. Other people seem invariably to enjoy *at my expense*.

### **Unpleasurable feeling**

*Jouissance* then is an enjoyment intermingled with suffering; it is a type of painful arousal poised on the verge of the traumatic; an enjoyment that stretches the subject beyond the bounds of the pleasurable. This point deserves to be underlined: pleasure itself – as bound to desire and adhering to the principle of constancy – can be seen as a *defence against jouissance*, which goes beyond the principle of constancy. *Jouissance* is diametrically opposed both to pleasure and to desire (Braunstein, 2003). Not only does *jouissance* exceed the boundaries of ordinary pleasure, it likewise exceeds phenomenological registration, as Kay (2003) observes. There is something untranslatable in the bodily register of *jouissance*. It evades the domestication of symbolic capture – it is, for Lacan (1999), the only 'substance' known to psychoanalysis – it presents instead as a residue, a noxious odor, a smear, or, as it is often described, a *stain*, something which pervades the scene of enjoyment.<sup>2</sup> Hence – as we will go on to see – the emphasis in Lacanian social theory on the "thickness", the sensuality, or liminal nature of certain shared cultural and national activities that are said to maintain a powerful bonding capacity.

The sexual dimension to enjoyment – the French term *jouissance* (orgasm) makes this aspect explicit – is perhaps by now apparent, even if the ‘erotic’ charge here needs to be grasped in terms of wider range of bodily stimulations and intensities than might normally be assumed. In his *Three Essays on Sexuality* Freud (1905b) emphasizes the *surplus* quality of properly sexual (i.e. libidinal) gratifications that arise from, but far exceed the basis of physiological sensation:

[S]exual excitation arises as a by-product, as it were, of a large number of processes that occur in the organism, as soon as they reach a certain degree of intensity, and most especially of any relatively powerful emotion, even though it is of a distressing nature (1905b, p. 233).

In sexual enjoyments then we have an unavoidable overlap of physical pleasure and pain – “a feelings of tension necessarily involves unpleasure...sexual excitement is counted as unpleasurable feeling...[but] also undoubtedly as pleasure” (1905b, p. 209). Freud goes on to call attention to the intricate connection between sexual gratification and that which is distressing to the subject:

[I]ntense affective processes...trench upon sexuality... The sexually exciting effects of many emotions which are in themselves unpleasurable... feelings of apprehension, fright or horror, persist in a great number of people throughout their adult life (1905b, p. 203).

Sexual excitation here has more to do with a wide range of intensities of simulation than with the narrow domain of genital sexuality. We stand thus warned: what we get off on may surprise us. Indeed, what distresses us, what causes us displeasure and even suffering, can turn us on.

The use of such a sexual vocabulary assists in drawing out the libidinal aspect of various enjoyments that may otherwise appear distanced from the sexual realm. An example from Shane Meadows’s (2006) film *This is England* helps make the point. A group of young skinheads attends a rally for the neo-fascist British National Party. At the crescendo of a hate-filled speech delivered by a fiery orator, they become impassioned, inflamed; they start angrily gesticulating, shouting their support, building to a climax of political fervor. There is something sexual in their reaction, in how they ‘get off’ on their hateful anger, an orgasmic quality to the intensity of their reaction that the notion of *jouissance* perfectly captures. Aggression, as Freud (1930) stressed in *Civilization and its Discontents*, involves an intense erotic excitement; the aggressive drive is erotic in its energy. Or, to extend these reflections to consider the question of racism as *jouissance*: we should never under-estimate the gratifications of *hate*, which, as Jacqueline Rose (2007) reminds us, is one of our most satisfying passions, far outweighing the libidinal rewards of making way for others.

*Jouissance* can be thought of as *subliminal* in the sense that we are not fully conscious of - or willing to admit to – the thrills (the ‘surplus enjoyments’) we get in pursuing those activities that trigger libidinal intensity. This leads to a qualification that

helps address one of the concerns voiced above: *jouissance* is *not* – as is sometimes assumed - *unconscious*, certainly not so in the Lacanian sense of ‘the unconscious structured like a language’. Although not at the foreground of consciousness, and typically unacknowledged by the ego, such libidinal intensities are very much present in *the aroused bodily state* of the subject. A related technical point: enjoyment is not thus *repressed* but is instead most typically *disavowed*.<sup>3</sup> In conducting an analysis of social modes of *jouissance* then, one should focus exclusively on uncovering the *unconscious* underpinnings of a given ideological formation. One should focus rather on the contrary directions that subjects of ideology finds themselves pulled in, prioritizing rather the discontinuities between professed symbolic values and modes of enjoyment.

### **The eroticization of limits**

Always composite, never an unalloyed pleasure, *jouissance* always veers off into excess, be it by virtue of the thrills of transgression, or simply by means of its indulgence in what is ‘too much’, potentially traumatic, intrinsically linked to pain. Simply put, such ‘negative pleasures’ are the result of gratification pursued ‘beyond the pleasure principle’, beyond the bounds of what is healthy, reasonable or ordinarily permissible.

This transgressive quality of *jouissance* - an aspect already explored in some detail before Lacan by Georges Bataille (1993) – becomes the predominant facet of the concept in Lacan’s (1992) Seminar VII, where effects of enjoyment seem wholly contingent on overstepping existing moral and legal laws. While this is only one of many Lacanian perspectives on the notion of enjoyment (Miller, 2000), the dimension of transgression will prove crucial as we explore the role of *jouissance* in supporting given social formations. Here we can introduce the rudiments of argument that will be further developed as we continue: enjoyment, far from being reductively individual or ‘intra-psychic’ in its locus of functioning, is always linked to the symbolic. How so? Well, by virtue of its relation to socially prescribed limits. Its illicit nature is contingent precisely *on the limits it transgresses*. Differently put: enjoyment is always ‘social’ in a default sense – always, indeed, ‘discursive’ – inasmuch as it oversteps the bounds that define what is acceptable in a given discourse or social sphere. This, as Freud (1905) already knew, is the reason that rude or offensive quips are over-represented in the realm of jokes: their enjoyment-factor relies on their violation of implicit laws of decency or propriety.

We can now begin to refine our developing thesis: not simply then is *jouissance* necessarily social in the sense of being related to given implicit symbolic laws and norms, it is, more specifically, defined by its relation to the law. Sharpe (2006) makes just such an argument: *jouissance* “presupposes the existence...of the ‘big Other’...of a community’s system and Law, since it is what insists when a subject approaches too directly what this Law has named as prohibitively ‘off limits’” (p. 110).

Against hopes for a type of ‘good *jouissance*’ then – as for example Stavrakakis’s (2007) wish for a bonding enjoyment that might unite a vital form of Leftist European identity - we should stress that this is the whole point of *jouissance* as a kind of erotics of the *negative*: overstepping a boundary, the fact that something illicit is involved, *a contravention*, increases both the subject’s enjoyment of such behaviors and the

bonding potential of such behaviors enormously. *Jouissance* then - certainly as I am operationalizing it here - exceeds both the boundaries of pleasure and the norms of moral or social orthodoxy.

We can go a step further here: the making of laws produces the very conditions of possibility for enjoyment. That is to say: there is a direct relationship between what moral law insists *we not do*, and the perverse kick we get in doing it anyway. The illicit gratifications of racism, for example, are hugely increased in an era where racism is prohibited. The obscene thrill of racism is thereby amplified; there is a special libidinal gain in transgression. A scene in Christos Tsiolkas's (2008) novel, *The Slap* nicely dramatizes the relationship between racism and the liberal anti-racist attitude that so often accompanies it:

*She was usually courteous to taxi drivers. They were invariably immigrant men, and she told herself that in treating them with respect and dignity she was separating herself from the immense sea of indifferent racist[s]... But she felt neither courtesy nor respect at this moment. Fuck him, she thought sourly, ignorant fundamentalist Muslim pig. She received an illicit thrill from the jolt of hatred (p. 62).*

An attitude that condemns racism is thus in fact is perfectly compatible with the enjoyment of racism. The two are dynamically inter-related, mutually-reinforcing. The stands to (psychoanalytic) reason: the more a subject deplores and rejects racist thinking, the more perverse the enjoyment at succumbing to such thoughts. One is reminded here of the logic of the superego: the more one adopts a stringent moral position, the more severely one's superego punishes oneself for failing to adhere to it. This underscores once again how *jouissance* positions subjects in inconsistent ways. For psychoanalysis, this is, after all, what it means to be a subject: to be constantly caught between the contrary vectors of meaning and *jouissance*.

The sobering conclusion is that progress in the prohibition of overt forms racism in no way eradicates the *jouissance* of thinking or feeling this way - quite the opposite. We have then something of an analytical priority: when it comes to grasping the hold of an ideology upon subjects, look not simply to *the meanings they produce* but to *how they enjoy*. We should expect, furthermore, that their predominant modes of enjoyment often contradict many of their avowed moral or political beliefs. In fact, developing this point still further: we should prioritize points of contradiction between ideology in its presentable symbolic formations and its libidinal components. These contradictions are the sign that something is working, not that an ideology has ground to a halt.

This line of argumentation provides us also with a methodological guideline for where we might locate *jouissance* within a social or discursive field: on the underside of a set of symbolic ideals ('Ego-ideals' in psychoanalytic terms). Enjoyment, we might say, feeds on the symbolic laws and ideals that define a society. An important corrective comes to the fore here. As opposed to characterizations that suggest that *jouissance* is wholly beyond the ambit of the symbolic, we should stress that enjoyment is not 'extra-discursive' in any absolute sense. While granted it is an instance of the Lacanian 'real' in

that it can never be fully domesticated by or encapsulated in language –never adequately ‘put into words’ - it remains always in an intimate relation with – indeed, is *parasitic upon* - the broader remit of the symbolic laws and norms.

### **The ‘contract of enjoyments’**

The example of racist enjoyment above introduces also the topic of libidinal rewards. Given that I am required to abide by the rules of liberal tolerance for much of my life, that I have, accordingly, made sacrifices of enjoyment, I occasionally partake in a particular guilty pleasure – allow myself stolen fragments of *jouissance* – by way of compensation. This gives us a distinctively psychoanalytic perspective on the longstanding problematic of voluntary servitude. Why is it that we are often so loyal to existing structures of power (including, often, those that are decidedly not in our best interests)? Because we enjoy the libidinal rewards that we feel are due us as a result of a broader sacrifice of *jouissance*. More simply put: *jouissance* is the reward (in effect, as Žižek (1994) notes, a type of ‘libidinal bribery’, the ‘wages of servitude’) offered to those who remain loyal to a given structure of power.

We concede to various forms of subjugation (indeed, to sacrifices of *jouissance*) on condition that we are allowed our own modest allowance of enjoyment by way of compensation. We might provide the example here of a type of anti-racism that pervades much British tabloid journalism: by aligning ourselves with such a perspective, we are obliged to root out our own prejudices and to give up on the pleasures of ethnic hating, only to be rewarded by *being allowed to hate* racists.

This ‘contract of enjoyments’ makes us aware not only that servitude brings with it libidinal rewards, but that a wide range of apparent sacrifices and compromises can be made bearable if certain libidinal enjoyments are still allowed. In John Carlin’s (2008) book *Invictus* – the basis of Clint Eastwood’s (2009) film – he tells the story of South Africa’s 1995 World Cup winning rugby team (the Springboks). He notes there that Nelson Mandela’s political party, the ANC, who played such a central role in the downfall of apartheid, had for many years “been waging a campaign to deprive white males South Africans...of international rugby, their lives’ great passion” (2008, p. 20). For many the most memorable scene of the 1995 rugby World Cup final was Mandela’s magnanimous act of donning a Springbok rugby jersey. This, we might say, was a canny political gesture; it was Mandela’s ‘libidinal contract’ with white South Africa. He understood the priorities of enjoyment for the majority of rugby-watching white South Africans at the time, who were still coming to terms with the ANC’s political rule: “Ok, you change the government, the leaders, the ruling ideology of the country, so long as you don’t take away our national enjoyment”.

Intense debates and struggles about the racial demographics of the team continue in South Africa, and this helps us make a further point. Given that the payment in such ‘libidinal contracts’ is compensation for a greater *jouissance* forfeited – however imaginary that *jouissance* may have been – it is something of a volatile and jealously guarded currency. To take it away is to upset the balance of a given relationship of power; it is to renege on what amounts to a libidinal contract, and to be met vitriolic resentment.



Tony Blair's autobiography provides another helpful illustration. Reflecting on the seemingly disproportionate outrage following his successful attempt to outlaw fox-hunting in the UK, Blair (2010) conceded that he had totally failed to grasp the cultural significance – in other words, *the degree of enjoyment* – that had been invested in this 'sport', considered by many to be an essential part of their cultural heritage. Blair ultimately regretted the attempt to enforce the ban, and the words he uses to describe fox hunting aptly describe a mode of cultural *jouissance*: "The passions aroused by [fox-hunting] were primeval"(p. 306), "[it was] a tradition, embedded by history and profound community and social liens, that was integral to a way of life" (p. 307).

With these arguments in mind, one appreciates the cynical attitude of Žižek toward those 'carnavalesque' social practices that seem at first to challenge prevailing social values and norms, only, ultimately, to reinforce them. Granting a temporary period of exception to the law in effect maintains the existing social order all the more effectively. Such is the libidinal economy of power: festivals of excess provide a modicum of relief from a given regime of renunciation, but they do so in a way that ultimately preserves rather than undercuts existing structures of power. Or, differently put: one should not be surprised to find that some of the most orderly or suppressive social orders are also those that permit some of the most dramatic festivals of enjoyment. A further clue to the operation of such a libidinal economy is to be found with the fact that such festivals often entail an obligation to enjoy. As such: you are forced to enjoy, to transgress, yet in a way that is confined within 'regulated' parameters, such that, in effect, you can no longer complain that you have been permitted no enjoyment.

### ***Jouissance of the drive***

Having stressed that *jouissance* is neither unconscious nor a merely 'intra-psychic' phenomenon we can now add a further qualification. One should avoid equating *jouissance* and affect. It is more accurate to understand *jouissance* as a mode of intensity, a type of arousal – a thrilling twist – that occurs when affect moves beyond the bounds of what is comfortable, reasonable or satisfying. Bearing this in mind prevents us from making the error of thinking *jouissance* as itself a variety of affect that permits for easy categorization (as in types such as anger, frustration, joy, etc.). Enjoyment should not be delimited in thus way; it is neither a sub-category of affect nor the preserve of a limited range of affects.

We can further refine our understanding of the concept by stressing, as Lacan (1992), that "jouissance appears not purely and simply as the satisfaction of a need, but as the satisfaction of a drive" (p. 209). Furthermore: *any* drive impulse - be it 'blind' physiological sensation or a more overly 'goal-directed' activity - can serve as the basis of *jouissance*. It helps here to signal the omnipresence of enjoyment in everyday life, to indicate that any drive activity – 'drive' understood here as the psychical elaboration of pressing bodily impulses - is linked to the pursuit of *jouissance*. As Miller (2000) puts it: "an automatic *jouissance* is attained by means of the drive's normal course" (p. 24).

We should evoke here the notion of the death-drive; doing so allows us to offer a succinct formulation: *jouissance* is a form of enjoyment willing to exceed the

parameters of life. As Lacan puts it in Seminar XVII: “the path towards death is nothing other than what is called *jouissance*” (p. 18). Or, to paraphrase Jacqueline Rose’s (1986) helpful gloss: all drives are characterized by their aggression, their tenacity.

It is this very insistence which places the drive outside any register of need, and beyond an economy of pleasure. The drive touches on an area of excess... Lacan calls this *jouissance* (p. 57).

Miller (1992) is once again instructive: to understand the concept of *jouissance* in Lacan as unique is to understand “that it concerns at the same time libido and death drive, libido and aggression, not as two antagonistic forces external to one another, but as a knot” (pp. 25-26). The masochistic overtones of Rose’s (1986) above comment calls to mind Freud’s (1924) observation – an invocation of the death drive if there ever was one – that “even the subject’s destruction of himself cannot take place without libidinal satisfaction” (p. 426). This opens a further dimension of the concept, which, as we will go on to see, must be related both to the notions of the law and the superego. Hence Eagleton’s (2003) description of *jouissance* as “the lethal pleasure of Freud[’s] primary masochism, in which we reap delight from the way that the law or superego unleashes its demented sadism upon us” (p. 198). Or, as Evans (1988) puts it, in a more dramatic rendering of the potency of the superego’s influence on the subject: all the *jouissance* that is sacrificed by the subject “collects in the superego whence it can return in the form of evil” (p. 12).

*Jouissance*, then, to review the key points made above is: 1) diametrically opposed to pleasure and desire; 2) *bodily* and *subliminal* rather than properly *unconscious* in nature; 3) less an affect than *an excess of affect*, a mode of intensity produced by *pursuing drive impulses*; 4) necessarily ‘negative’ (excessive, traumatic) in the sense that it is inflected with the death-drive; 5) takes the form of contravention (is transgressive) inasmuch as it pushes the subject painfully (*enjoyably*) beyond the law or socially prescribed limits.

### **‘Negative dialectics’**

Our own enjoyment – let alone that of others – is, for the most part, repulsive to us, and needs to be kept at arm’s length. (The revolting quality of *jouissance* is memorably invoked by Žižek (1994) when he describes the puss-oozing character of Baron Harkonnen in David Lynch’s *Dune* as a materialization of *jouissance*: “The face of the baron...is full of disgusting protuberances, ‘sprouts of enjoyment’ (p. 116)). The subject’s stance regards their own enjoyment is thus necessarily conflicted. *Jouissance* exacerbates the split in the subject who at once reviles their enjoyment and yet, periodically, succumbs to it. Freud supplies us with a canonical example of such a conflicted expression of *jouissance*. He describes the expression of Ernst Lanzer (the ‘Ratman’), as he related an account of torture:

his face took on a very strange, composite expression. I could only interpret it as one of *horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware* (1909, pp. 166-67).

On the one hand the ordinary (neurotic) subject wants more *jouissance*, feels they deserve more enjoyment than they are receiving, and yet they are also appalled and repulsed by it, more readily identifying it in the always deplorable enjoyments of others.

Contrary then to the tendency to view enjoyment within the frame of individual subjectivity, we need rather approach it in terms of prospective relations *to others*. *Jouissance*, insists Macey (1988), “is not...a category of pure subjectivity” (p. 203). Rather, it implies “a dialectic of possession and enjoyment of and by the other” (p. 203). The revulsion we feel toward our own *jouissance* is, as already noted, all too readily displaced onto others. These others, moreover, are always already to blame for having too much *jouissance*, for having procured improper or unacceptable enjoyments that appear to compromise given social or cultural norms or laws. Given the neurotic subject’s presumption that they have surrendered a crucial quantity of enjoyment – an effect of socialization, of the Symbolic over-writing the bodily experience of drives - they maintain a pre-existing condition of resentment toward such enjoying others. In other words, this resentment (for Freud a type of ‘original envy’) *comes before*, and thus in a sense *determines*, what the subject perceives to be the illegitimate or disproportionate enjoyments of others.

The perceived existence of *jouissance* thus implies a social relationship, one that exists before the other upon whom this *jouissance* will be projected. So, what even the most elementary experience of *jouissance* necessitates is a type of hating object-relation, a conflicted mode of *inter*-subjectivity, which is always already there, prior to the racial/cultural/social other who will be assigned a position in this negative interpersonal dialectic. The construction of otherness is not, in other words, simply an effect of social construction. It involves also a libidinal component, a *prior* attribution of stolen enjoyment, a readymade form of resentment, which is, as it were awaiting a blameworthy subject upon this crime can be pinned.

### **Enjoyment in the form of lack**

*Jouissance* approached as a type of possession exhibits an odd characteristic: it is never more real than when we have been dispossessed of it. Enjoyment, that is to say, comes most forcefully into being, is most intensely experienced, when: a) it is seen to be in the possession of others, or b) when it is perceived as endangered, about to be snatched away by intruders. Put differently, *jouissance* seems most typically to exist in an ‘already stolen’ or precarious state; it only takes form in the shadow of a potential castration. This helps us understand Vighi’s (2010) initially puzzling descriptions of *jouissance*. *Jouissance*, he says, is a type of libidinal excess, most typically experienced as a lack. This experience of surplus, he insists, corresponds to a void: “every enjoyment is structured around a lack...a paradoxical lack of enjoyment” (p. 25). Furthermore:

We perceive enjoyment not as lack but as fullness, a ubiquitous substance that fills our lives and gives it meaning. Here we are faced by what we might call the “enjoyment parallax”, with parallax naming the different aspects of the same object viewed from...different lines of sight. Although enjoyment in its deepest connotation is always a lack, we...perceiv[e] it as fullness... This split between lack and fullness is indeed constitutive of enjoyment (Vighi, 2010, p. 25).

This facet of enjoyment – that it oscillates between surplus and absence, a ‘too much’ and a ‘not enough’- once again highlights the inter-subjective aspect of the concept. A further conceptual component becomes crucial here. If it is the case, as Vighi (2010) argues, that attributions of enjoyment invariably spring from the experience of lack, then it is hardly surprising that this lack should be allocated a cause, and, accordingly and more importantly yet, *a suspect* who is responsible for this lack. *Jouissance*, that is to say, entails an elementary narrative component. To extend a point made above: the elementary experience of *jouissance* implies already the role – the fantasy - of a culprit, someone who enjoys more than I, or who is poised to steal the little enjoyment that I do possess. One of the most articulate expressions of this psychoanalytic idea is offered by Yannis Stavrakakis. Stavrakakis (1999) insists that the various festivals and spectacles of *jouissance* by means of which we constitute our ‘national ways of enjoyment’ are always in some way lacking:

No matter how much we love our national ways of enjoyment, our national real, this real is never enough, it is already castrated, it is the real staged as staged in fantasy, in national myths and feasts. This is never enough; there is a surplus that is always missing. Within the national fantasy, this loss can be attributed to the existence of an alien culture or people: the enjoyment lacking from our national community is being denied to us because ‘they’ stole it. They are to blame for this theft of enjoyment.... What is not realised within such a schema is the fact...that we never had at our disposal the surplus enjoyment that we accuse the Other of stealing from us (Stavrakakis, 1999. p. 156).

As I hope is by now clear, the modes of *jouissance* that we have been discussing cannot be dismissed merely as individual or idiosyncratic quirks (which, of course, is not to say there will not be considerable latitude in terms of how these forms of enjoyment are experienced by individuals). How though is this ‘structured’ quality of enjoyment to be explained? This is a particularly important question given that the notion of *jouissance* as developed in the clinic is always attuned to the singularity of a subject’s enjoyment.

### ***Fantasmatically structured modes enjoyment***

In a helpful paraphrasing of a series of Lacan’s comments in 1973 on *jouissance* and emerging trends of racism in multi-cultural societies, Evans stresses that:

*jouissance* is not merely a private affair but is structured in accordance with a social logic...this logic changes over time... *jouissance* is as much a problem for society as it is for the individual...in Lacanian terms, different cultural groups have different ways of collectively organizing their *jouissance* (pp. 20-21).

The most direct way of responding to the question of whether properly social modes of *jouissance* exist is to refer to an axiom of Lacanian psychoanalysis: *jouissance* is necessarily structured by fantasy. We might make reference here to the field of sexuality, and ask: sexual enjoyment is not formless, surely, but is organized precisely by fantasy (fantasmatic scenarios designating who or what is desirable, that define the parameters of enticing as opposed to traumatic forms of sexual interaction)? Social modes of *jouissance* are no exception to this rule: they, likewise, are not formless; they occur within precise symbolic coordinates, and they take on distinct forms, forms defined by a particular force of arrangement: that of fantasy.

Racist or xenophobic enjoyment of the sort discussed above does not occur in a vacuum. Racist *jouissance*, in other words, is never simply a spontaneous individual psychological reaction. It is, by contrast, conditioned by precise historical and symbolic conditions. To provide one example – derived from a more extended analysis (Hook, 2011) - the threat that the racial other is thought to pose is invariably defined relative to the ego-ideals of a given society, to those symbolic values for which members of the society are willing to live and die for. Differently put, racist *jouissance* plays its part in the symbolic labor of consolidating a community, of ensuring a kind of identity.

The critical analysis of racism – or of any ideological formation for that matter – requires thus an engagement not only with the *contents* but the *dynamics* of political fantasy. Such an analysis should attempt not only to pinpoint libidinal patterns - the question of affective force, the arrangement of intensities - but to do so within the fantasmatic framework that provides the underlying ideological coordinates of meaning. An exemplary instance of this can be found in Fanon's analysis of colonial racism. His *Black Skin White Mask* undertakes not only a careful scrutiny of the colonial regime of racist representations (an analysis of the pervasive 'Negro myth') but also a libidinal economy, that is, an account of libidinal dynamics of enjoyment (the 'negrophobic' quality of racism). Žižek (1989) could be said to have a similar analytical imperative in mind when he argues that one of the most efficacious forms of ideology critique consists in "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" (p. 124).

This means then that we need always consider the question of *jouissance* alongside the dimension of social structure. It is thus vital to stress that we need to speak of *patterns* of racist *jouissance*, of a certain social rationality, of *social formations* or *arrangements* of libidinal enjoyment. Indeed, there is no such thing as *jouissance* as such; there are only distributions, articulations of enjoyment as structured by fantasy. So, to return to an earlier qualification, while *jouissance* is not itself unconscious, the framework that attaches it to meaning is not itself fully conscious. So, insofar as groups share fantasies about themselves (including, most typically, attributions regards what is

most special or precious about themselves, what is the greatest 'castrating' threat), then they have shared modes of *jouissance*.

Or, to take a different tack: there would be no cohesive viable group sensibility without such shared fantasies and modes of *jouissance* – there would only be a disaggregated set of individuals. Which is to say: fantasies, like the modes of *jouissance* they frame and organize – are constitutive of a collectivity. Salecl (1998) puts it this way: “the community holds itself together by means of a vital attachment to an intense negative pleasure” (p. 123). More categorically yet: “A nation *exists* only as long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices” (Žižek, 1993, p. 202).

### **Participation in the same substance**

What the above discussion points to is that fact that *jouissance* plays a crucial role in the formation of a rudimentary social bond. The paradigmatic case in psychoanalytic theory would be Freud's mythical totemic meal in which excesses of shared guilt and indulgence come together to constitute an elementary social contract. Freud's implication is clear enough: we are never so much a community as when we suffer together, when we indulge, jointly, in forms of negativity or excess, or, more to the point, when we partake of *jouissance* together. In the interests of finding a more contemporary example, we can turn to Bruce Parry's (2005) British TV documentary *Tribe*.

The underlying premise of *Tribe* is that Parry, a kind of amateur anthropologist eager to learn about the lives of the world's most remote tribes, can, by living with them for a fortnight, in effect become a member of their community. Parry's charismatic nature and his willingness to participate in the most onerous of everyday chores goes some way to achieving this unlikely goal. More importantly perhaps is Parry's willingness to undergo a series of punishing tasks – skinning animals, hunting with rudimentary weapons, going without food, etc. - and be subjected to a series of harsh initiation rites. In one episode he is poisoned with frog venom; in another he is made to drink blood from a severed artery in a bull's neck; in yet another he imbibes a large quantity of hallucinogens and ends up bilious and vomiting. The charm of the show is that Parry's attempt, as announced in the voice-over at the beginning of each episode – “to become one of the tribe” - is unfailingly successful.

One might of course argue that these are not properly transgressive practices given that they play their part in the formation of social bond. One could argue that they are in this sense normative, indeed, wholly culturally-sanctioned. True as this may be, it is worth noting that these ritual practices remain, in an important sense, *extraordinary*, 'extra-legal': they are bonding forms that entail pain and/or suffering; they are performed only under specific (typically ritualistic) conditions; and they require that various societal rules and norms be temporarily suspended.

Such practices are, by definition, exceptions to everyday moral, legal and societal norms that come – perhaps paradoxically – to substantiate, even *constitute*, these very norms. Initiation rites, for example, play their part in substantiating a social group not in spite of, but *precisely because* they exceed the mark of ordinary moral and social norms.

We are building here to a larger point: the law needs reference to something outside its codified regulations in order both to function and to ground the basis of its own authority.

### **Beneath the law yet still supporting it**

There is an episode of the popular (2004) US legal drama *Boston Legal* in which a quirky defensive attorney (James Spader) is landed with a thoroughly unlikeable client: a rich woman, who admits to marrying for money, to having repeatedly cheated on her elderly husband and to feeling no particular sadness at his death. The defense seems doomed to fail. She is accused of complicity in the death of her husband, and the jury feels absolutely no sympathy for her. There is, by contrast, a near palpable animosity in the courtroom, directed towards her. A desperate last-ditch attempt on the part of her attorney saves the day. He discretely calls attention to the '*schadenfreude*' of the jury, pointing out their evident distaste towards the accused, indicating, furthermore, the enjoyment they will procure by overseeing a guilty verdict over her. This factor, as he rightly points out, has already biased the supposed impartiality of their judgment.

The 'passion for justice' in operation in this scene is one that has become tainted, inflected with unacknowledged libidinal interests. The usefulness of this example has much to do with demonstrating the excessive zeal of 'doing the right thing': it shows up the disquieting gains underlying our participation in apparently anonymous, institutional - ostensibly even *moral* - duties, which in so many instances conceal a distasteful element of gratification. This 'supra-legal' terrain, the substance of this 'obscene supplement' that makes the law function as such is nothing other than *jouissance*.

### **The 'rules of enjoyment'**

The psychoanalytic postulate, as we have seen, is that the enjoyment of others is often troubling to me. This is particularly the case when the *jouissance* in question is different to my own; when it occurs outside of acceptable bounds (the suspicion thus that others are enjoying illicitly, enjoying what is not rightfully theirs to enjoy); or when - as is so often the case - this enjoyment is seen at happening at my own expense. These attributions of illicit 'other' enjoyment are most virulent, most exaggerated, when they occur across lines of social/cultural division (although, as I have noted above, such attributions of enjoyment also play their part in constructing such lines of otherness in the first place). We confront here a vicious circle of social and fantasmatic constructions of otherness, a situation in which each such domain - the realm of social construction, the domain of fantasy - operates to reinforce the other.

In *Chasing the Scream*, journalist Johann Hari (2015a) offers a compelling argument that the so-called war on drugs was motivated not so much by the need to uphold law and order, still less by any concern with the lives and welfare of addicts, but rather by a far less morally-defensible agenda:

The argument we hear today for the drug war are that we must protect teenagers from drugs, and prevent addiction... We assume, looking back, that

these were the reasons that this war was launched... But they were not.... The main reason given for banning drugs – the reason obsessing the men who launched the war - was that blacks, Mexicans and Chinese were using these chemicals, forgetting their place, menacing white people (Hari, 2015b).

The racist agenda here seems to have been driven not only by anger that such minority groups were ‘forgetting their place’, but also by fury at the fact that they were indulging in an alien and potentially contaminating forms of enjoyment. Harry Anslinger, the first commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, so Hari tells us, detested jazz. Jazz was to him was

a mongrel music made up of European, Caribbean and African echoes, all mating on American shores. To Anslinger this was musical anarchy, and evidence of a recurrence of the primitive impulses that lurk in black people, waiting to emerge...The lives of jazzmen, he said, “reek of filth” (Hari, 2015b).

Jazz music, to Anslinger, was inseparable from the evils of alcohol and drug abuse, and his vendetta against narcotics soon became focused on the jazz world, and subsequently, one particular target – Billie Holiday. It seems difficult here to avoid concluding that Anslinger was particularly troubled by such other modes of enjoyment (of drugs, jazz music), and that the ‘war on drugs’ was partly motivated precisely by such a hatred of enjoyment. What Hari’s analysis so effectively underscores is that ‘forgetting one’s place’ in a given social order and indulging in illicit forms of enjoyment typically go hand in hand. Indeed, these two modes of contravention seem, upon closer scrutiny, necessarily linked. Modes of enjoyment, as they occur within social and symbolic space, bring with them a tacit set of rules, concerning who can enjoy, how they might do so, under what circumstances, and as importantly, who *may not*.<sup>4</sup>

It is for this reason that attributions of objectionable enjoyment also function as an indicator of social asymmetries. What are considered to be the most problematic enjoyments in a given social field (from the rapacious sexuality attributed to black males in racist colonial discourse to the disquieting religious passions of Islamic Fundamentalists in the eyes of liberal, secular post-modern society) tells us where the lines of social/racial/cultural division have been drawn in that society. Succinctly put: such deviations from a given ‘norms of enjoyment’ becomes an effective index of otherness.

In the psychoanalytic clinic it is always important to ask ‘Why now?’, to question what immediately preceded a particular psychic event. In my work with the Apartheid Archive, a group of researchers analyzing narratives of apartheid racism in South Africa, it quickly became apparent that a similar procedure could be applied in the analysis of narrative accounts of racism. In studying the antecedents to aggressive outbursts of racism, I asked myself: why did the flare-up occur at the moment it did; what were the salient symbolic coordinates; what immediately preceded such abrupt and disproportionate acts of racist animosity?



While there were, admittedly, some exceptions, I was struck by just how frequently such eruptions of anger were the result of a perceived infringement of sorts. Such racist behaviors (typically aggressive actions and threats) typically followed the breaking of a 'law' of enjoyment. The list of such infringements was as long as it was varied: black children swimming in a whites-only swimming-pools; black families polluting and overcrowding traditionally white tourist spots; black children driving down the standards of education at formerly white schools; the idea that (to quote verbatim from one account): "blacks should not watch blue movies [pornography]...because it gives them ideas of how to rape a white women" etc. The subterranean rule - which invariably included a proprietary component - was: don't intrude on my (white) libidinal privileges.

In each of the above examples there is a separation of appropriate domains of enjoyment. A 'rules of enjoyment' is in play; typically volatile responses accompany the perception that others are enjoying where they should not be, or in activities or places not open to them. Such a 'rules of enjoyment' proves also to be a way of organizing roles, prerogatives and moral privileges within the (racist) social order. The perceived violation of such socially designated parameters of *jouissance*, the sense that others are enjoying outside of their allowable bounds makes it apparent the extent to which there is an emphatic marking off of symbolic roles, social and cultural domains and appropriate sites of enjoyment. In other words: such modes of *jouissance* don't float free of the symbolic domain. Racism, like other social modes of *jouissance* to which it may be compared, entails particular libidinal rules of enjoyment, a set of rules *that supports and extends social structure*.

### ***Jouissance and superego***

In his *Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche (2006) makes reference to Thomas Aquinas's view that God-fearing believers will one day have the pleasure of watching the damned suffering in Hell. In Aquinas's own words, as cited by Nietzsche: "The blessed in the heavenly kingdom will see the torment of the damned so that they may even more thoroughly enjoy their blessedness" (2006, p. 29). Aquinas's proclamation takes us directly to the mutually reinforcing relationship between *jouissance* and the superego. Fidelity to moral law, following this argument, can be likened to a journey on a Mobius strip. The subject begins, on one surface, 'above ground', following the symbolic law, doing what is right, abiding by socially sanctioned principles. However, as the subject becomes progressively committed to the law, identified with it, the more they find themselves on its underside, participating in its subterranean dimension, *enjoying* it. No longer merely a law-abiding subject, the subject has become someone who is aroused by implementing the law and gratified by seeing law-breakers punished.

A precursor to this Lacanian emphasis on the relationship between *jouissance* and superego is to be found in the Frankfurt School's notion of 'repressive desublimation' in which an 'unholy alliance' is established between id impulses and the demands of a given (usually totalitarian) social order. The prospect of such an alliance - which bypasses altogether the ego - means that the same act, typically the (excessive) execution of a given social ideal or imperative, can serve both libidinal and societal ends.

From a Lacanian perspective then, symbolic law, if it is to be effective, relies on the obscene gratifications afforded to those who are loyal to it. It is for this reason that

Superego emerges where the Law – the public Law, the Law articulated in the public discourse – fails; at this point of failure, the public Law is compelled to search for support in an *illegal* enjoyment. Superego is the obscene ‘nightly’ law that necessarily redoubles and accompanies, as it shadows, the ‘public’ Law...[We have thus a] splitting of the field of the Law into...a symbolic order which regulates social life and maintains social peace – and its obscene, superegotistical inverse... [T]he opposition between symbolic Law and superego points towards the tension between ideological meaning and enjoyment: symbolic Law guarantees meaning whereas superego provides enjoyment (Žižek, 1994, pp. 54-57).

I asked, at the outset of this essay, what other concepts need to be introduced if the concept of *jouissance* is to be an effective tool of critical analysis. One such answer – in addition to the concepts of the death-drive, the divided subject, etc. – is now abundantly clear: the superego. *Jouissance* and superego are – to risk an understatement - closely entwined.<sup>5</sup> The superego, as the above examples help to stress, *enjoys*. Yet it enjoys in twofold sense, and both such avenues of enjoyment underpin the ideological efficacy of *jouissance*. The superego enjoys, firstly, by producing thrilling intensities (of hate, punishment, anger, etc.) that accompany the enactment of symbolic law. More than just this however, it entails also – and secondly - the prospect of masochistic gratification, the thrill of the sadism unleashed by the superego on the ego precisely for feeling such enjoyments.

The complicated subject position the subject finds themselves in by virtue of their *jouissance* is thus more complex than at first it appears. It is not simply a case of the conflicting impulses of symbolic law and the transgressive *frisson* of flaunting such rules; there is a second subsequent dimension to the functioning of properly superegoic *jouissance*.

We can summarize many of the key themes discussed above by making reference to Freud’s (1912) description of the totem meal. Freud speaks there (in *Totem and Taboo*) of “participation in the same substance” (p. 137) and goes on to say:

Each man is conscious that he is performing an act forbidden to the individual and justifiable only through the participation of the whole...every instinct is unfettered and there is a license for every kind of gratification. Here we have easy access to an understanding of the nature of festivals in general. A festival [of enjoyment, we might say] is a permitted, or rather, obligatory excess, a solemn breach of a prohibition....excess is of the essence of the festival; the festive feeling is produced by the liberty to do what is as a rule prohibited (1912, p. 140).

Furthermore:

In the act of devouring [the primal father the brothers] accomplished their identification with him... The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this...deed...and the beginning of...social organization, moral restrictions and of religion (p. 142).

These passages are useful because they spells out virtually all the dimensions of the Lacanian notion enjoyment: its transgressive nature that is nonetheless able to substantiate community bonds; the fact of its typical obscene or extreme dimension; that it may be experienced as obligatory (and thus linked to superego injunction) and, furthermore, that its guilt-inducing character means that it is nonetheless operative in establishing and maintaining a given regime of power, rather than merely turning it upside down.

As we have seen then, in the act of identifying with and implementing the law, a degree of 'subterranean' enjoyment is incurred. What the lengthy extract from Freud above helps us to understanding is that this enjoyment is followed by the prospect of guilt. Glynos (2001) is right then to insist:

what sustains ideological meaning is not simply symbolic identification...[but] identification with the *jouissance* procured through the collective transgression of publically accepted norms... [T]he social bond, the glue binding society together, at its most fundamental, is to be located at this level, at the level of *jouissance*-transgression (pp. 209-210).

Clearly then, guilt and associated superego punishments are the result of contravening the law. The subject is caught thus in a vicious (superegoic) circle. Enjoying the libidinal rewards of (excessively) enacting law leads to guilt, to superego-punishments which ensure that the subject tries ever harder to adhere to the law which in turn creates the conditions of possibility for ever more voluptuous transgressions. The to-and-fro dance step of enjoyment's ideological effects is akin to the following directive: "Enjoy this moment of excess. Suffer the guilt for having done so. Repeat".

The subject is thus bonded to the law (and, indeed, to the symbolic order supported by it) in two complementary although apparently contradictory ways. This is what much political literature on the topic of *jouissance* fails, in my opinion, to adequately spell out, something Freud insists upon in his most extended engagement with the topic of shared enjoyment (cited above). Symbolic law, in other words, becomes animated by the investment of those who both adhere to it and - via the superego - suffer from it. This 'double binding' of the subject helps explain why society's laws so frequently become infused with an agency and force - indeed, an apparently self-instantiating impetus - that goes well beyond their mere institutional basis. The law, in other words, needs the superegoic *jouissance* of its subjects if it is to function. We have here the flipside to allegations of psychical reductionism. To ignore this facet of the

law – namely the superego imperative that the subject both *enjoys* transgressions and suffers from doing so - is to fail to grasp how *the law works upon us*.

### Conclusion

One future objective highlighted by this paper is that of developing a methodological framework, a type of ‘analytics of enjoyment’ that would better enable us to grasp the characteristic features of, for example, racist (or nationalistic, xenophobic, homophobic, misogynist, etc.) modes of *jouissance*. Following such an approach we should ask, what are the coordinates today, of a given ‘rights to enjoy’. What, for example, are the illegitimate, threatening or alien modes enjoyments that cultural Others are thought to possess? What, furthermore, are the sacrosanct libidinal treasures, the precious modes of enjoyment that a given subject-group considers to be imperiled? What are the tacit ‘rules’ of enjoyment that operate in a given symbolic location, and, much by the same token, what implicit laws, rights and perceived violations (and justified modes of punishment) are articulated in associated fantasies of enjoyment? How, furthermore, might one envisage a ‘traversing of the fantasy’, that strategically undercuts or weakens such fantasies and thus defuses the modes of enjoyment associated with them?

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<sup>1</sup> This quote drawn from Chris Hedges's (2004) book *War is a Force that Gives us Meaning*.

<sup>2</sup> In Seminar V, for example, Lacan describes the subject in *jouissance* as in "a type of radiation or phosphorescence" (p. 285, seminar of 23 March 1958).

<sup>3</sup> I mean repressed here in the Freudian/Lacanian sense of being subject to amnesia, to condensation, symbolization, various operations of language (metaphor, metonymy), etc.

<sup>4</sup> The conceptual linkage between enjoyment and possession is evident in the French term *jouissance*, which refers not only to orgasm but also to the enjoyment of property, the rights of ownership.

<sup>5</sup> At times, in fact, it seems that the whole notion of *enjoyment* is subsumed within this broader psychoanalytic concept: *jouissance*, we might say, is itself a property of the superego.