Reading between the Lines: Reflections of the Unconscious in a Philosophical Text

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Abstract

This paper focuses on an emblematic encounter between philosophy and psychoanalysis in the guise of a textual analysis that demonstrates the tension between two (philosophical) texts by Slavoj Žižek, through what is omitted from one of them, on the one hand, and some psychoanalytical texts, on the other. Employing Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, one can uncover a curious blind spot on Žižek's part regarding the prevailing social and political context of 'lockdowns' and 'vaccinations' – which arguably signal the attempt to execute a global *coup d'etat* by the 'New World Order' – by identifying lacunae in Žižek's second text, which are symptomatic of what Freud called 'negation', and which Lacan relates to the 'censored chapter' of the subject's life story. One can regard these omissions as symptomatic of *repressing* knowledge of disturbing events in the extant world, given Žižek's well-known ability to offer trenchant criticism of any action he deems deserving of it.

Keywords: philosophy, psychoanalysis, pandemic, repression, unconscious, Lacan, Žižek

> Thus, the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed;

Print ISSN 1023-1757; Electronic ISSN: 2519-5476; DOI https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2023/sp41a05

> indeed, it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed …. To negate something in a judgement is, at bottom, to say: 'This is something which I should prefer to repress' (Sigmund Freud, 'Negation' 1974: 4141).
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> Since any behaviour is susceptible of a rational explanation, it is often difficult to decide when such an explanation is spurious – not in what it says but in what it neglects to say (Jean Laplanche & Jean-Bertrand Pontalis 1988: 375).

Introduction

In this paper a paradigmatic encounter between philosophy and psychoanalysis is scrutinised, in the form of a textual analysis that sets out to demonstrate the tension between what is written in two philosophical texts and what is omitted from one of them, despite textual signs of an unconsciously selective awareness of such omission. The latter omission becomes apparent when the text in question is read in conjunction with selected psychoanalytical texts. The intended textual analysis presupposes the distinction between intra-textuality and the domain of the extra-textual, or social context – even if the latter may be approached as a 'text' of sorts insofar as it lends itself to interpretation. The argument will roughly run as follows: In his texts, *Philosophy is not a Dialogue* (Žižek 2009: 40-52), and *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World* (Žižek 2020) Slavoj Žižek engages with two very different topics – the first focusing on the question, what philosophy is, and the second on the early stages of the Covid-19 'pandemic' (in scare quotes because it was no real pandemic; Olivier 2022: 8) that gripped the world, roughly from 2020 until the end of 2022. While Žižek's argument is persuasive in its demonstration of the distinctive character of philosophy (in the first text), one can show that a Lacanian approach to the manner in which he approaches the 'pandemic' in the second text exposes tensions between the two texts, as well as between the second text and the extant world. That is, in the second text he may not seem to deviate from his own previously articulated formulation of what philosophy is – including the insight, that it issues from a position of being 'dislocated'; that is, the

philosopher experiences the world as something 'foreign' – but in fact he does, at a different level. For example, in *Pandemic!* two of the blind spots he displays (discussed below) concern the 'only real philosophical question' with regard to biogenetics, which implicates the question of the 'redefinition' of being human, and 'mutual trust between the people and the state apparatuses' – which he perceives to be lacking in China, but by implication obtains in the West. The second of these blind spots shows no regard for the possibility that mutual trust between 'the people' and state (as well as other) 'authorities' is not warranted in the West either, while the first overlooks the possibility of medical biogenetics revealing a repressed truth about human beings as 'radically evil' (as Kant would put it). How is this possible on the part of a 'master of suspicion' like Žižek? To answer this question, one may turn to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, which enables one to dredge up the irrational and unconscious forces at work in texts, as much as in verbal speech, resting on the assumption of the agency of repressed materials in the unconscious. In this case it enables one to uncover the curious blind spot on Žižek's part regarding the prevailing extra-textual, social and political context, namely the attempt to execute a global *coup d'etat* by the so-called New World Order, which, if successful, would seriously undermine citizens' 'democratic freedoms'. This is demonstrated by identifying the telling lacunae or omissions in Žižek's second text, which are symptomatic of what Freud calls *Verneinung* (negation) (Freud 1974a: 4141), and which Lacan relates to the 'censored chapter' of the subject's life story. It is argued that one can only regard these omissions as the effect of *repressing* knowledge of disturbing, unacceptable events in the extant world, given Žižek's demonstrable ability to offer a trenchant criticism of any agency he deems deserving of such criticism.

Žižek on Philosophy and on the 'pandemic'

In stating what he regards as distinctively philosophical, Žižek responds to his interlocutor, Alain Badiou, in various ways. Here is one of them (Žižek 2009: 41):

> If one asks us philosophers something, in general something more is involved than providing public opinion with some orientation in a problematic situation. For example: today we are in a war against

> terror, and that confronts us with daunting problems: should we trade our freedom for security from terror? Should we carry liberal openness to extremes – even if this means cutting off our roots and losing our identity – or should we assert our identity more strongly? To point out that the alternatives we collectively face form a disjunctive synthesis, that is, that they are false alternatives, has to be the first gesture of the philosopher here: he must change the very concepts of the debate – which in my opinion represents precisely the negative of that which Badiou calls a 'radical choice'. In our case, concretely, it means that 'liberalism', 'war against terror' and so-called 'fundamentalist terrorism' are all disjunctive syntheses; they are not the radical choice. We must change the concepts of the debate.

I do not want to quarrel with Žižek on his claim that, *as philosophers*, we must 'change the concepts of the debate' – which is really what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue, more radically, by saying that philosophy is *the creation of (new) concepts* (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 35-36). I agree with them on this. What I want to insist on, however, is that even philosophers, as human beings, sometimes face the ineluctability of having to choose how to respond to a concrete situation that makes it imperative that we *act* at an ethical and political level. It is not so much changing the concepts of the debate that matters in our ethical response to this situation, as it is *in discerning carefully what constitutes the situation*, particularly if it is a novel, apparently life-or-death situation, and then not merely 'daring to think for ourselves', but *acting* upon it (Hardt & Negri 2009: 17). In the light of an experience that human beings usually cannot avoid in life, namely that one is sometimes deliberately deceived or disappointed by others (one of the principles on which the *Bildungsroman* is founded), this means that one's metaphorical antennae should be active all the time, searching for signs that all may not be as it seems. And especially if the threat to human liberty seems urgent, as it arguably does today, philosophers are not exempt from the need to *act* in accordance with their critical insights, keeping in mind that (public) writing and speaking are also *acts* of sorts. (In passing, it may not be as coincidental as it appears that Žižek refers to the contemporary 'war against terror' and the choice between 'freedom' and 'security', or the loss, as opposed to the strengthening, of our 'identity'; although it falls outside the

scope of this paper, a case could be made that one has witnessed a careful preparation for the current global 'pandemic' situation in these phenomena.)

Returning to Žižek's two texts referred to earlier, it is noticeable that the tone of writing in the second text is different from that of the first, more philosophical one. Compare this excerpt – where he writes about the Chinese government not trusting the people – to the first one (above) (Žižek 2020: 10):

> The chief argument against the idea that the state has to control rumors to prevent panic is that this control itself spreads distrust and thus creates even more conspiracy theories. Only a mutual trust between ordinary people and the state can prevent this from happening.

This excerpt pertains to one of Žižek's 'blind spots' alluded to earlier – the one that shows no regard for the possibility that mutual trust between 'the people' and state (as well as other) 'authorities' – which clearly does not obtain in China – is not warranted in the West either. He continues,

> A strong state is needed in times of epidemics since large-scale measures like quarantines have to be performed with military discipline. China was able to quarantine tens of millions of people. It seems unlikely that, faced with the same scale of epidemic, the United States will be able to enforce the same measures (Žižek 2020: 10).

Ironically, Žižek proceeds by posing a stand-off between freedom (of speech) and the sacrifice of civil freedoms in China, causing one to wonder if, elsewhere, he would have labelled this a 'disjunctive synthesis', and insisted on changing the concepts of the debate. In a way this is what he does, though (without saying it), when he states that, in 'some sense, both alternatives are true', and then goes on, seemingly, to justify the harsh 'pandemic' measures, with some more ironies surfacing. The first of these is his remark about critics protesting that Chinese authorities will unfailingly label 'the truth' as a mere rumour – which is doubly ironic, considering that 'rumour' here corresponds conspicuously with what has derogatorily been dubbed a 'conspiracy theory' in *western* countries since the advent of the

'pandemic', *and* that what such vaunted 'conspiracy theories' pertain to have turned out to be the case, after all. For example, when the 'vaccines' were first rolled out, people were assured that they would prevent infection and transmission of the virus, as well as death from Covid-19, and that detractors who expressed doubt in this regard were 'conspiracy theorists'. But as time passed, the 'authorities' changed their tune incrementally, ultimately admitting that none of these eventualities was preventable by the 'vaccines' (put in scare quotes because, clearly, they are not true vaccines, which *do* prevent these things; Olivier 2022: 8-12; 16-21).

In addition, Žižek alludes to an 'ambiguous' Russian programme on 'conspiracy theories' surrounding the coronavirus 'pandemic' which ostensibly sets out to discredit them, but nevertheless leaves the impression that they may harbour some truth. Perhaps the ultimate irony pertaining to the Slovenian philosopher's stance on this matter is legible in his observation, that 'The central message, that shadowy Western elites, and especially the US, are somehow ultimately to blame for coronavirus epidemics is thus propagated as a doubtful rumor: it's too crazy to be true, but nonetheless, who knows ... ?' (Žižek 2020: 11). Admittedly, if Žižek had written this book two years (or even 18 months) later, and giving him the benefit of the doubt, he might have been less naïve, given that by this time significant evidence had emerged that 'conspiracy theories' actually did contain reliable information, and not merely a 'kernel of truth', which he suggests the Russian programme insinuated – correctly, it turns out, considering the reputable figures and groups intermittently providing evidence of this kind (GRAND JURY, Day 1; Kennedy 2021; Kennedy 2022). Moreover, as Giorgio Agamben (2021 73-74) has argued, those who derogate so-called 'conspiracy theories' in the context of the 'pandemic' have forgotten that history is replete with accounts of conspiracies to topple governments. Furthermore, historians have expanded upon these attempts by various groups at overthrowing existing power-relations, and Agamben discusses three examples of such conspiracies that were executed with varying degrees of success. 'In each of these three cases', he contends, 'individuals gathered in groups or parties and acted resolutely to achieve their goals, considering various possible circumstances and adapting their strategies accordingly (Agamben 2021: 74).

The point of Agamben's discussion of historical conspiracies is to rid readers of the belief that 'conspiracies' are preposterous claims about

non-existent phenomena, calculated by their whisperers to deceive people into believing that lockdowns, social distancing and mask-wearing are redundant and destructive, and that the 'vaccines' are dangerous, if not lethal. In fact, by now one knows on trustworthy authority that these assertions *are* in fact the case, and that labelling them 'conspiracy theories' was deliberately done by those responsible for engineering the 'pandemic' and everything attached to it (GRAND JURY, Day 1; *The Exposé* 2022; 2022a).

Returning to Žižek's notion of philosophy as changing the concepts of a debate, even if one agreed that new concepts – often introduced by asking the right questions – are called for when faced by the 'false alternatives' of a disjunctive synthesis, it is not the case that the terms of these alternatives, when faced from a volitional perspective, are meaningless. On the contrary: choosing between freedom and security (Žižek's example) can be approached philosophically by asking how one should understand the grounds of that choice – not only conceptually, but historically too. How did we get to where we have to decide between them? And is it really necessary to make that decision? I would argue that this is the case only when these two concepts (which pertain to concrete social reality) are set up as being mutually exclusive, which need *not* be so. For example, where my partner and I live we certainly face some security issues, but with the services of a dedicated security firm, and cooperation among community members, we have not sacrificed our liberties, such as being able to walk safely everywhere in the village, or climb the surrounding mountains, or swim in the streams and pools, sometimes kilometres from the village in mountain gorges. What this example demonstrates is that one cannot – as some analytical philosophers tend to do – divorce conceptual analysis from social and historical reality. Placed in the context of the latter, they are not *false* alternatives; in fact, they are not alternatives at all, but should be thought together.

In the case of the 'pandemic' – more specifically the enforced measures proclaimed as the only way of combatting its exacerbation – social reality shows us the alternative to what I described above as the co-existence of freedom and security. With the 'pandemic' these two concepts were held up as being mutually exclusive; one simply had to obey the autocratic diktats of the self-proclaimed authorities, thus relinquishing democratic freedoms for the sake of putative 'health security' (Wolf 2022: 37-43). Heeding Badiou and Žižek's insights concerning philosophy, changing the debate could entail

a question, for openers: Who benefits from the public accepting such mutual exclusiveness? At first blush it seems to be the public, threatened by a supposedly deadly virus – until research reveals that the death toll from the virus has actually been relatively low, at which point the suspicion should raise its head, that perhaps 'someone else' was hoping to benefit from it (Kennedy 2021: 242 - 251; Kennedy 2022: 4 - 28; Wolf 2022: 46 - 57). Commenting on the first two years after the 'pandemic' was declared, Naomi Wolf writes (Wolf 2022: 43):

> In just two years, five hundred years of ever-developing capitalism — which since the Glass-Steagall Act gave opportunity to millions of middle class and working class investors and entrepreneurs and landlords — was replaced with a bleak, coercive, Marxist-style crony oligarchy. And when the dust settled, billions of dollars in value were seen to have been essentially stolen from one group, the middle and working class people of the West, and handed to another, the globalist oligarchs.

Something has to be added to this, however, in accordance with Žižek's appeal to Kant's insistence, that philosophers occupy the 'position of the singular universal' (Žižek 2009: 52) – in the sense that, as a singular human being, one participates in *universality* directly by engaging in an intellectual (propositionally and conceptually articulated) debate. This contrasts with the belief that one's true humanity is actualised only when one identifies fully with one's *particular* culture – be it Chinese, American or Croatian. What is the relevance of Kant's idea here? Wolf's observation, that 'globalist oligarchs' have stolen large amounts of money from the working- and middle-classes – a reference to the way that large corporations benefitted hugely from lockdowns by not closing down, while ordinary businesses were forced to shut – tacitly makes an ethical judgment which has universalist implications (of the form: 'Thou shalt not steal'; or, in Kantian terms, that one should always act in such a manner that the maxim [motive] of one's actions can be elevated to a universal law for all rational beings; Kant 2016: 584.).

Has Žižek consistently positioned himself affirmatively vis-á-vis the 'singular universal'? Arguably not. Recall the second blind spot detected on his part, that he overlooks the possibility of medical biogenetics revealing a

repressed truth about human beings as 'radically evil'? According to Žižek, the 'only real philosophical question' with regard to biogenetics asks: 'is there something in the results of biogenetics that would force us to redefine what we understand by human nature, by the human way of being?' (Žižek 2009: 46). Obviously, this formulation satisfies the criterion of universality with reference to human nature. But does it satisfy the (arguably additional) requirement, that 'the results of biogenetics' not be historically insulated, that is, that history is marching on, and at a date beyond that on which Žižek wrote that sentence, such biogenetic results might in fact force him to revise his conception of 'human nature', or at least acknowledge the truth of Kant's insight, that human beings are (universally) subject to 'radical evil'? (Kant 2016a: 951 - 963). No. There is no sign in his book on the 'pandemic' that this is the case, either. But if Žižek had suspended his vaunted trust in governments other than that of China, he might have had a nasty surprise, uncovered by several courageous (and less naively trusting) thinkers (such as Giorgio Agamben, Robert Kennedy, Naomi Wolf, Peter and Ginger Breggin, Byung-chul Han, Joseph Mercola and Jordan Peterson), that the trust of people in their governments and health authorities was scandalously abused by these actors, with the purpose – carefully hidden by the compromised mainstream media, but uncovered by intrepid researchers – of destroying their livelihoods and ultimately their very lives in an *unimaginably evil* manner (Wolf 2022: 253 - 254). Here I have in mind not only the previously mentioned authors, but other individuals, such as many medical doctors, lawyers and journalists, some of whom are no longer alive, such as Dr Andreas Noack, who was assassinated four days after he exposed the lethal contents of the Pfizer mNRA 'vaccine', particularly graphene hydroxide, described by him as 'nano-sized razor blades' (*BitChute* 2021). And to add insult to injury, this would be done by means of, among other things, injecting people with experimental gene-altering substances euphemistically (and misleadingly) labelled 'vaccines', supposedly to combat a 'virus' of natural, zoonotic origin, but in fact – in both cases: 'virus' and 'vaccine' – of artificial, biotechnical origin (Wilson 2022). It seems as if, in a cruel twist of history, the following – eerily prescient – observation by the theorist of the 'risk society', Ulrich Beck, is in the process of being actualised today (Beck 2000: 215).

Thomas Hobbes, the conservative theorist of the state and society,

> recognized as a citizen right the right to resist where the state threatens the life or survival of its citizens [...] tied to the attribution of dangers to the producers and guarantors of the social order (business, politics, law, science), that is to the suspicion that those who endanger the public well-being and those charged with its protection may well be identical.

In the light of the critically important work of Robert Kennedy, Naomi Wolf and others that I have referenced – where they expose governments, corporations and 'health authorities' doing precisely what Beck alludes to – it should be clear that the 'suspicion' in question has never been more apposite than in the present, epochal historical juncture.

But the level of Žižek's naïveté is even more egregious where he remarks: 'we are now effectively approaching a state of medical war' (Žižek 2020: 45) in the context of a discussion of different kinds of viruses, including ideological ones. The 'medical war' he has in mind is the war against the coronavirus, but he seems blissfully unaware that a different kind of 'medical war' is being waged right under his (and most other peoples') unsuspecting nose(s) – a war aimed at population reduction on a vast scale (Breggin & Breggin 2021: 32, 387, 398; GRAND JURY; Olivier 2022a: 1 - 23). His lack of awareness of such a possibility is reflected in his rather optimistic remark, that,

> […] maybe another and much more beneficent ideological virus will spread and hopefully infect us: the virus of thinking of an alternate society, a society beyond nation-state, a society that actualizes itself in the forms of global solidarity and cooperation. Speculation is widespread that coronavirus may lead to the fall of Communist rule in China […] But there is a paradox here: coronavirus will also compel us to re-invent Communism based on trust in the people and in science (Žižek 2020: 39).

Again, an irony obtrudes itself: an alternate society is indeed being thought today – and evidently has been planned for some time – by the so-called billionaire 'elites' of the world, brought together under the aegis of the World Economic Forum (WEF). The difference is, however, that the benign image conjured up by Žižek is belied by the kind of society they envisage, which

they call one of 'stakeholder capitalism', but on closer inspection is really neo-fascism – the fusion of corporations and governments, intended to govern autocratically and oligarchically, which one already witnesses today (Wolf 2022: 22 - 23, 46 - 57, 176). The question raised by these instances (only some among many others; too many to discuss here) is: how is it possible for someone who previously distinguished himself as an exemplary *critical* thinker, in his *many* published works, to have lost, or relinquished this critical acumen? (It is impossible to list all Žižek's many publications here. Suffice to say that an internet search would suffice to enlighten one on this score. For anyone not familiar with the critical excellence of the bulk of his philosophical work, I can recommend Žižek's *Living in the End Times* [2010], with its ironically apocalyptic title.)

How Should one Understand Žižek's Apparent Failure to Perceive the Deception Surrounding the 'pandemic'?

As stated at the outset, this paper focuses on an emblematic encounter between philosophy and psychoanalysis in the guise of a textual analysis that sets out to demonstrate the tension between what is written in a philosophical text and another, arguably not-so-philosophical text written by a well-known philosopher, on the one hand, and a perhaps more significant tension between these two texts and what is omitted from the second one (on the 'pandemic'), on the other hand. The intended textual analysis presupposes the distinction between intra-textuality and the domain of the extra-textual, or social context – even if the latter may be approached as a 'text' of sorts insofar as it lends itself to interpretation. To be able to concentrate on social-contextual criticism the psychoanalytical notion of the unconscious will be invoked, in so far as certain matters and events *that do not feature explicitly in Žižek's text* may be shown to bear undeniable relevance for what he has written. (To understand the psychoanalytic grounds for this claim, see Laplanche & Pontalis [1988]: *The Language of Psychoanalysis* p. 375.)

The psychoanalytical theorist, Jacques Lacan (1977: 46 - 55), emphasises the indispensable role of *discourse* in the analytical situation, where the therapist assists the subject of the analysis, in the course of her or his 'free association', to arrive at a comprehensible symbolic interpretation of their reconstructed life-story. This is necessary because the free-associative discourse of the analysand is anything but coherent, and

necessarily so. The point of free association, after all, is to neutralise the habitual inclination of the subject, to want to speak coherently, which is a function of reason. This enables the analyst to arrive at the 'truth' of the subject's unconscious as it manifests itself in free-associative speech.

The above, ostensibly enigmatic statement would be more intelligible when it is recalled that Lacan is notorious (at least among those who do not make the effort to understand psychoanalysis), for his initially perplexing reversal of Descartes's paradigmatically modern saying, *Cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am'). Lacan's version reads instead: 'I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think'; and in expanded form, even more confounding, 'I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think' (Lacan 1977a: 166). It is important to understand that '…[W]here I am not' is an allusion to the unconscious, of which the working is decisive in so far as it manifests itself negatively in instances of *lapsus linguae* as well as discursive gaps, omissions, hesitations, signs of insistent or aggressive denials, as well as such confirmations. By steering the analysand's discourse in a certain direction, the psychoanalyst utilises such symptomatic indices of the unconscious (which is constituted by the repression of intolerable or unacceptable material) to be able to arrive at a meaningful interpretation of their associative speech.

Moreover, Lacan's (Freudian) conception of the subject as 'interrupted' or 'split' (between conscious and unconscious) implies that human rationality constantly has to reckon with the disrupting, destabilising functioning of the unconscious. This is corroborated by his remark, that:

> The unconscious is that part of the concrete discourse, in so far as it is transindividual, that is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse (Lacan 1977: 49).

Hence, Lacan terms the unconscious that 'chapter' of the subject's personal narrative that has been 'censored', and as such is 'marked by a blank' (Lacan 1977: 50), as indicated by the unintended verbal and physical actions on her or his part. Nonetheless, the repressed 'chapter' of the subject's history can be revived by means of the interpretive collaboration between the psychoanalyst and the free-associating discourse of the analysand, regardless

of the characteristic *resistance* by the latter; which resistance is the function of reason at the level of consciousness, 'aimed at' blocking access to the repressed materials of the unconscious. However, the 'language' of the unconscious is legible in the subject's discursive omissions, childhood memories, 'idiosyncratic' linguistic expressions and word-selection, as well as their physical symptoms (Lacan 1977: 50).

This psychoanalytical detour, above, is necessary as heuristic or rationale for my social-contextual criticism of Žižek's second text, which can be read against its backdrop, or in the terms it provides. As I have shown via Lacan's theoretical account, the unconscious, repressed 'truth' of the psychoanalytical subject can only be reconstructed with the assistance of the knowledgeable analyst. Furthermore, anyone familiar with psychoanalytical discourse analysis as applied in the clinical situation, would know that it is possible to read written texts in an analogous manner, given the comparable occurrence of lacunae, gaps and omissions in texts – what is known in philosophical hermeneutics as 'the unsaid' – and that these omissions may similarly be interpreted as a function of *repression* or exclusion, in so far as it signifies something unacceptable or unbearable to the writer – for example something that is fear- or anxiety-inducing. If one were to add that repression is a function of *prohibition* (Freud 1974c: 741), then it follows that the conspicuous omission or 'blind spot' on Žižek's part could be a symptom of his *unconscious* repression of the world-shattering events alluded to earlier – specifically to the unacknowledged, censored side of such events, which pertains to the global usurpation of power. His discussion of the events surrounding the 'pandemic' makes no reference to the manner in which they have been used to promote the agenda of the global 'elites', which has been unfolding in global space for some time now. Significantly, however, the open discussion of *all* aspects connected to these events has been censored, *prohibited*, by the mainstream, conventional discourse (Olivier 2022), as has already been pointed out above in connection with accusations concerning so-called 'conspiracy theories' in the mainstream media. Furthermore, it is my contention that someone who is willing to actively search for and peruse alternative media, where the mainstream omissions are explicitly thematised, would *not necessarily* come to different conclusions about the real state of affairs – the force of repression is such that, once one has accepted the mainstream narrative, alternative accounts would be rejected, as Žižek has done (Laplanche & Pontalis 1988: 375, 390 - 391).

Moreover, concerning the question pertaining to repression of disturbing information about the 'pandemic' and the 'virus', which arguably compelled Žižek to banish it from his mind, one thing has to be clearly understood: repression is not a function of intelligence, or the lack of it – nobody escapes repression, as shown in the fact of dreaming, where the dream images embody repressed thoughts, hopes, anxieties or fears (Freud 1974: 3305) (although, what is repressed may differ widely from person to person). Even the most intelligent people are subject to repression, Žižek being a case in point. Another exemplary illustration of this is Freud's famous essay on Leonardo da Vinci – probably one of the most intelligent and creative individuals who ever lived – in which he gives an account of Leonardo's personality by, among other strategies, uncovering the role of repression in shaping the Renaissance artist and inventor's complex psyche. Keeping in mind that 'repression' refers to the *defensive* psychic relegation, to the unconscious, of thoughts or ideas that may cause 'unpleasure' or anxiety to the subject (Laplanche & Pontalis 1988: 390), to illustrate how repression (in general) works, Freud writes of the notoriously sexually conservative ('Victorian') society in which he lived,

> Through a long series of generations the genitals have been for us the '*pudenda*', objects of shame, and even (as a result of further successful sexual repression) of disgust. If one makes a broad survey of the sexual life of our time and in particular of the classes who sustain human civilization, one is tempted to declare that it is only with reluctance that the majority of those alive today obey the command to propagate their kind; they feel that their dignity as human beings suffers and is degraded in the process (Freud 1974b: 2271).

It takes no genius to realise that contemporary society no longer displays signs of such strong collective sexual repression; on the contrary, it is no accident that, since the 1970s, it has been called the 'permissive society'. In the case of Leonardo things were more complex, as Freud indicates in the following observation about him – keeping in mind that 'sublimation' denotes the channelling of libidinal (sexual) energy into creative cultural (artistic, scientific) endeavours (Freud 1974b: 2257):

> It is true that here too sexual repression comes about, but it does not succeed in relegating a component instinct of sexual desire to the unconscious. Instead, the libido evades the fate of repression by being sublimated from the very beginning into curiosity and by becoming attached to the powerful instinct for research as a reinforcement. Here, too, the research becomes to some extent compulsive and a substitute for sexual activity; but owing to the complete difference in the underlying psychical processes (sublimation instead of an irruption from the unconscious) the quality of neurosis is absent; […] the instinct can operate freely in the service of intellectual interest. Sexual repression, which has made the instinct so strong through the addition to it of sublimated libido, is still taken into account by the instinct, in that it avoids any concern with sexual themes.

This brief digression on repression in the case of someone as conspicuously intelligent and creative as Leonardo serves to emphasise that Žižek is by no means exempt from repression; all human beings are subject to it, but not all people repress the same things, partly because not everyone is distressed by the same phenomena and partly because – even if the same thing or event is experienced as disturbing by everyone – as the example of Leonardo illustrates, each person's psyche or subjectivity is configured differently, and therefore everyone responds differently. This is the case with the current disturbing attempt to take control of governments and health authorities worldwide by the globalist neo-fascists, too, remembering that its first manifestation was the dictatorial imposition of lockdowns, social distancing, mask-wearing and later, mass-'vaccinations', justified as necessary to combat a 'deadly virus' (Wolf 2022: 37 - 43; 60 - 66; 191 - 195; Kennedy 2022: 4 - 28). One need not look any further for confirmation of this statement than a cursory glance at the manner in which (professional) philosophers have responded to the 'pandemic'. Evidence suggests that the vast majority have responded in a similar manner as Žižek, with only a handful – foremost among them Giorgio Agamben and Bernard-Henri Lévy – resolutely confronting the adversary through their philosophical writing, highlighting the nefarious motives behind the authoritarian clampdowns (Olivier 2022b).

It could be argued, however, that Žižek's book on the 'pandemic' is based on observations from 2020, before sufficient evidence of the real motives driving the unfolding global drama was available. A comparison between Žižek's response and that of Agamben is therefore instructive, given that the latter also reacted speedily to the events of early 2020. Take the following statements by Žižek first (Žižek 2020: 39):

> The ongoing spread of the coronavirus epidemic has also triggered a vast epidemic of ideological viruses which were lying dormant in our societies: fake news, paranoiac conspiracy theories, explosions of racism. The well-grounded medical need for quarantines found an echo in the ideological pressure to establish clear borders and to quarantine enemies who pose a threat to our identity.

Furthermore – commenting on the 'need to maintain a proper distance' from others, despite which 'a deep look into the other's eyes can disclose more than an intimate touch' – he observes that,

> No coronavirus can take this from us. So there is a hope that corporeal distancing will even strengthen the intensity of our link with others. It is only now, when I have to avoid many of those who are close to me, that I fully experience their presence, their importance to me (Žižek 2020: 2).

In the first excerpt, Žižek's qualification of 'conspiracy theories' (discussed earlier with reference to Agamben) as 'paranoiac', is symptomatic of his uncritical acceptance that there is nothing untoward about the outbreak of the 'pandemic' and the accompanying 'quarantine' measures. Considering that 'paranoia' is associated with delusion, it is ironic, again, that he attributes it to 'conspiracy theories' and not to himself. Moreover, in the second excerpt, which addresses 'social distancing', he engages in a classic instance of what, in psychoanalysis, is called 'rationalisation' – which is defined as follows:

> Procedure whereby the subject attempts to present an explanation that is either logically consistent or ethically acceptable for attitudes, actions, ideas, feelings, etc., whose true motives are not perceived (Laplanche & Pontalis 1988: 375).

To substantiate my claim, that the justification of 'social distancing' is a case of rationalisation, a number of thinkers who immediately perceived its actual intent could be cited. This is how Naomi Wolf expressed her take on it,

> How do you dissolve human civilization? One way a machine program could target human beings is by attacking and undoing the magical power of touch. One of the strangest diktats from the start of the pandemic was the demand for 'distancing', that inorganic, awkward verb that was introduced in a new context, and redefined, early in the pandemic (Wolf 2022: 20).

Furthermore, compare Žižek's response to that of Agamben, as articulated in the following,

> Never before, not even under Fascism and during the two world wars, has the limitation of freedom been taken to such extremes: people have been confined to their houses and, deprived of all social relationships, reduced to a condition of biological survival (Agamben 2021: 36 - 37).

There is no attempt here to 'rationalise' the authoritarian measures implemented to contain an admittedly dangerous, but supposedly *lethal* virus – the death toll of which has turned out not to warrant these Draconian rules; instead, with a keen sense of historical differentiation, Agamben (and Wolf) home in on the *exceptional* features of the present 'crisis'. It is not difficult to recognise here the theme of the 'state of exception' that runs through Agamben's work (particularly Agamben 1992) – that is, the reduction of human beings to 'bare life' (*minus* basic human rights), dating back to the ancient world and which, according to Agamben, reached its nadir in the Nazi death camps. Once again Agamben introduces an historical perspective, reminding one of a similar, coerced conversion of governance structures in the Roman Empire of the third century that resulted in a despotism similar to the one that is emerging today at the cost of democratic institutions, and increasingly, of people's freedoms. There is a difference, however, as he remarks (Agamben 2021: 6):

> The defining feature … of this great transformation that they are attempting to impose is that the mechanism which renders it formally possible is not a new body of laws, but a state of exception – in other words, not an affirmation of, but a suspension of constitutional guarantees …. While in Nazi Germany it was necessary to deploy an explicitly totalitarian ideological apparatus in order to achieve this end, the transformation we are witnessing today operates through the introduction of a sanitation terror and a religion of health.

Had Agamben written the chapters for this book today (early 2023), he would have known that this 'transformation' has not ended there, but by now includes the disruption of supply chains and energy as well as food sources worldwide, as well as, most recently, threats of 'climate change lockdowns' – all aimed at sowing chaos (and possibly civil war) in global societies (GRAND JURY; Wolf 2022: 259-261). I doubt very much whether he would have changed his critical understanding of what is happening, however; on the contrary.

The comparison, above, of Žižek's response to that of Agamben, illustrates well what was meant by saying that a psychoanalytic approach to the writings of the Slovenian thinker on the 'pandemic' reveals clear instances of repression and 'rationalisation' on his part, in stark contrast to those of his Italian counterpart, who displayed perspicacity as well as courage in his characterisation and condemnation of the manner in which the 'pandemic' was handled. The fact that Agamben alludes mordantly to a 'sanitation terror and a religion of health', above, speaks volumes.

Conclusion

What has been attempted in this paper is to show that, and how, philosopher Slavoj Žižek's response to the Covid-19 'pandemic' was unable to escape the functioning of repression (and related to this, 'rationalisation') in so far as his observations about various aspects of this event display classic (textual) psychoanalytic evidence of instances where the actual motives of 'authorities' in the course of lockdowns were arguably not perceived. What Žižek – who is, after all, one of the world's leading critical thinkers –

neglected to write, is demonstrable evidence of repression on his part. This can be explained by considering (as pointed out above) that no person is exempt from the psychic mechanism of repressing disturbing, anxiety- or fear-promoting thoughts or events, and Žižek is no exception. His surprisingly uncritical reaction in the second of his texts scrutinised here (on the 'pandemic') is all the more puzzling when compared to his first text (on philosophy), and to the responses of other thinkers, such as Giorgio Agamben and Naomi Wolf. These thinkers, as well as others (see for example Chossudovsky 2022), have made no secret of their awareness that the 'pandemic' response worldwide (together with subsequent actions on the part of governments and global corporations) has been an attempt to usher in a repressive, authoritarian regime. While Agamben, Wolf and others like themselves clearly experienced the event of the 'pandemic' just as disturbing and anxiety-provoking as Žižek did – including, and especially, the tyrannical form assumed by government responses to it – as may be seen in the manner they expressed their understanding of it, in contrast to him, they did not repress their anxiety by *rationalising* it, but instead elaborated on it courageously.

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