

**A THEORETICAL TREATISE ON NON-THEORETICAL  
INTERPRETATION OF ARTWORKS**

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**A THEORETICAL TREATISE ON NON-THEORETICAL  
INTERPRETATION OF ARTWORKS**

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## ABSTRACT

### A THEORETICAL TREATISE ON NON-THEORETICAL INTERPRETATION OF ARTWORKS

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CULTURAL STUDIES M.A. THESIS, AUGUST 2024

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Sibel Irzik

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The most common idea regarding popular interpretation of artworks is twofold: (1) the non-theoretical methods that people use to interpret artworks are utterly personal, and (2) these methods have no relation to each other. This thesis argues that the methods of interpretation that people use in their everyday interactions with artworks nonetheless follow a theoretical logic, and that this logic undergirds several methods, and links them together. These methods are named ‘interpretative functions’ by the thesis, and the logic of their construction follows a dialectic movement; meaning that the contradiction in the previous function allows it to transform itself into the next function. This thesis will outline three of these interpretative functions, and each will be linked to a psychoanalytic concept: pleasure, fetishism, and taste. Logical formalizations are used in order to organize these functions, and to locate the exact moment of dialectical contradiction. In this endeavor, three main theoretical sources are utilized: Hegelian philosophy, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Žižekian theory. With these three pillars, the way non-theoretical interpretation of artworks functions is explored in order to find the irrationally logical structure underneath.

## ÖZET

### SANAT ESERLERİNİN TEORİK OLMAYAN YORUMLARI ÜZERİNE TEORİK BİR İNCELEME

UFUK KARATAŞ

KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, AĞUSTOS 2024

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Sibel Irzık

Anahtar Kelimeler: sanat eseri, teori, fonksiyon, mantık, yorumlama

Sanat eserlerinin popüler yorumlanmasıyla ilgili en yaygın fikir iki yönlüdür: (1) insanların sanat eserlerini yorumlamak için kullandıkları teorik olmayan yöntemler tamamen kişiseldir ve (2) bu yöntemlerin birbirleriyle hiçbir ilişkisi yoktur. Bu tez, insanların sanat eserleriyle günlük etkileşimlerinde kullandıkları yorumlama yöntemlerinin teorik bir mantığı izlediğini ve bu mantığın birkaç yöntemi düzenlediğini ve bunları birbirine bağladığını savunuyor. Bu yöntemler tez tarafından 'yorum fonksiyonları' olarak adlandırılıyor ve bunların inşasının mantığı diyalektik bir hareketi izliyor; yani önceki fonksiyondaki çelişki, onun kendisini bir sonraki fonksiyona dönüştürmesine sebep oluyor. Bu tez, yorum fonksiyonlarından üçünü ana hatlarıyla açıklayacak ve her birini bir psikanalitik kavramla ilişkilendirecek: haz, fetişizm ve tat. Bu fonksiyonları düzenlemek ve diyalektik çelişkinin kilit noktasını belirlemek için mantıksal biçimselleştirmeler kullanılacak. Bunun için üç ana teorik kaynak kullanılacak: Hegelci felsefe, Lacancı psikanaliz ve Žižekçi teori. Bu üç temel yapıtaşını üzerinden, sanat eserlerinin teorik olmayan yorumunun işleyiş biçimi incelenerek, altında yatan irrasyonel mantıksal yapı bulunmaya çalışılmaktadır.

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*To Sila hocam,  
who was there at every step of this journey*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 First Time in an Art Gallery

The first time I was in a contemporary art gallery, I did not know where to stand. I wanted some spray-painted symbols on the floor to dictate my movements, “Stand here, move there, don’t dawdle over there!”. Something that would alleviate the anxiety, the feeling that I don’t know what I’m doing. I did not know where to look: an artwork was in front of me, yes, but where do I look first? Does its positioning with regards to the exit points of the gallery space mean anything? Is it clockwise, anticlockwise? Is it bottom to top, or top to bottom? I wanted some directions; like “Start on the top left like a book, and move your eyes diagonally!”. I did not know where to put my bag. Do I leave it in the entrance area, or keep it with me at all times? The security guards did not look helpful either. And why are there security guards anyway? Are they protecting the artworks, or keeping an eye on me? I did not know what to think. All of these artworks look somewhat weird, somewhat beautiful, somewhat artsy... Are the materials they are made out of important? Some of them have words on them; in a language I can’t read. Some of them are interactive, do we form a queue and wait our turn? Is this a commentary on the treatment of women in the southeastern region of Turkey, or is it a nice rug? Is this political satire, commenting on the encroaching/expanding oppressive force of capitalist relations of production? Oh wait, that’s a vending machine. I did not know when to move from one artwork to another. Do I keep looking as long as I want? How do I know “as long as I want” even is, when I don’t know what to think? I’ll just count to forty-five seconds in my head and move on, that seems like enough time. I did not know a lot of things when I visited a contemporary art gallery for the first time. But I did know one thing... I knew which artworks I liked, and which ones I didn’t. But how did I know that?

This is the primary question of this work; as this is *a theoretical treatise on non-*

*theoretical interpretations of artworks.* How did I know which artworks I liked, when I didn't have an inkling of knowledge about artworks? I had no theory, no method, no principle, no nothing; so, what happened so that I was able to form an opinion? Are there unknown forces in my head that interpret and evaluate the artworks without my knowledge? Or are there socially conditioned discourses that guide me towards pre-accepted notions of interpretation and evaluation? These are some of the questions we'll be dealing with. In this section, we'll look at the basic outline of the treatise and provide the background necessary to dive in. We can begin by dissecting the title of the work itself. For example, what do we mean by 'theory'? In this treatise, theory will be defined as the set of ideas or judgments that are organized through philosophical knowledge with an intrinsic logic that undergirds them. That sounds vague, but as we move along, this definition will become much clearer. So, what do we mean by 'non-theoretical' then? With this, what we mean is the methods of interpretation that people use in their everyday encounters with artworks. These methods could be anything from pleasure to fixation to taste. Of course, this does not mean that people who are interested in art or work in the field do not use these methods. The non-theoretical person could be anyone, even a philosopher of art or an artist themselves. The conscious identity of one's method of interpretation does not matter, only the logic that nonetheless organizes them will be our main source. This also means that this treatise is work of pure theory; there will be no empirical evidence that people use these methods, nor there will be interviews, polls or psychoanalyses. It does not matter whether actual concrete individuals use these methods, the only thing that will interest us is the logical formations of these methods themselves. Lack of empirical data will extend to history too; we are not interested in the time period that these methods have been used. The logic that undergirds them is eternal, so we'll treat these methods as ahistorical/atemporal principles of interpretation.

What is the theory that we are using? We'll be developing our own, without any recourse to prior philosophies of art. We will begin from the absolute beginning, and presuppose (or attempt to presuppose) nothing in our formulations. Our argumentation will be guided by nothing other than the intrinsic logic of what came before, in the previous section or chapter. However, the fact that we will not be using philosophy of art in our theory does not mean that we will not be using philosophy or theory period. We do need prior theoretical work to give us tools, or hints as to where we will go next. Even if they are not related to art specifically, we will make them related. In this endeavor, we will mainly use the thought of three thinkers: G. W. F. Hegel's philosophy, Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, and Slavoj Žižek's theory. These will provide the main pillars of our work; even when

their explicit work is not apparent on the page, their thought will still move the pen. These three figures and their corresponding thoughts (Hegelian philosophy, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Žižekian theory) will have three more corollary figures to accompany them: Immanuel Kant, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx. Some of these figures might seem irrelevant (what does a political economist have to do with art?); but they will be crucial in some key moments of our argumentation. There's also another theoretical framework we will be using: mathema-logics. This is neither mathematics nor a pure propositional logic; but a combination of the two. Or to put it more precisely, it is logic with concepts from mathematics imported in. This is why it is not logical mathematics or mathematical logic; but our made-up term, mathema-logics. Now, it is perfectly normal to ask what does mathema-logics have to do with an analysis of interpretation methods of artworks; the answer is that it will provide us with tools to formalize our thinking, and to conceptualize our arguments. I claim that the use of mathema-logics will also make things a lot easier. This might seem absurd at first, but I hope that you will be convinced at the end. The mathema-logical framework is not just a mere teaching tool, however; at key points in our investigation, there will be roadblocks that cannot be alleviated by other methods. This is a crucial part of the work, as writing down the explicit versions of these interpretative methods will make the transition between them seem like it was self-evident.

The theoretical sections of this treatise will analyze the three main interpretative methods we are going to outline. These will discuss these methods' origins, developments, theoretical/philosophical bases, their mathema-logical expressions and their failures. We will see that all of these interpretative methods will fail; not because of a meta-theoretical reason or standard, but through the logic of their own construction. We will not impose any external criteria for these methods, we will simply allow them to develop and fail on their own accord. The three interpretative methods we are going to analyze will also be linearly formed, one will transform themselves into the other, to the other, etc. These transition points might even be more important than the methods themselves, they will show that the logic that forms these methods does not require outside interference to move along. In this way, we will see that the three interpretative methods will become truer as they go along, each of them surpassing their previous form. These sections are linearly organized, the idea that comes out of one will lead us to the next, and so on and so on.

The true beginning point of this treatise is '*The Zeroth Point*' section; but before we get to it, we must work thorough some mathema-logical ideas first. These will be the precise definition of the dialectical contradiction that we have claimed will

be the engine of transformation for our interpretative methods; and a brand-new logical commutator that we are going to invent, which will help us later with our formulations. These preparatory sections will be less explosive than what will come later, but they are necessary nonetheless.

## 1.2 ‘As If’ Commutator

Students learning propositional logic for the first time usually have no problems with "and" ( $\wedge$ ), or "or" ( $\vee$ ). The logic behind these commutators seems self-evident, and they follow our intuitive sense of argumentation and logical proposition. But problems start to arise when the students encounter the “if, then” ( $\rightarrow$ ) commutator. What are all the possibilities for the statement “if p, then q”? The truth table for ( $\rightarrow$ ) is as follows:

Table 1.1 "If, Then" Truth Table

p	q	$p \rightarrow q$
1	1	1
1	0	0
0	1	1
0	0	1

The first two instances are fine, and intuitively make sense. If p and q are true, then it makes sense that “if p, then q” is also true as well. In a similar vein, if p is true but q is false, then it makes sense that “if p, then q” is false. The problematic part begins when the first part of the proposition is false: how can the statement be true, while the premise is false? How can the statement be true, when both the premise and the conclusion are false? There is something that elides our intuition here, something that bothers the subject about this logical connection. We should state here that this truth table is obviously correct, we are not dealing with an error within propositional/mathematical logic; but rather with the point of discomfort within ourselves. The classical reasoning for this truth table goes as follows: the only way for a “if, then” statement to be false, is for the premise to be true, while the conclusion is false. Logician Susanna S. Epp explains it like this:

“Suppose you go to an interview for a job at a store and the owner of the store makes you the following promise: *If you show up for work on*

*Monday morning, then you will get the job.* Under what circumstances are you justified in saying the owner spoke falsely? That is, under what circumstances is the above sentence false? The answer is: You do show up for work on Monday morning and you do not get the job. After all, the owner's promise only says you will get the job if a certain condition (showing up for work Monday morning) is met; it says nothing about what will happen if the condition is not met. So, if the condition is not met, you cannot in fairness say the promise is false regardless of whether or not you get the job." (2019)[54]

While this explanation is sufficient in reasoning out why " $0 \rightarrow 1$ " and " $0 \rightarrow 0$ " cannot be false, it nonetheless does not explain why they have to be true. The only reason, is that in propositional logic, if a statement is not false, then it must be true. Since  $0 = 1$  by default, then " $0 \rightarrow 1$ " and " $0 \rightarrow 0$ " both must be true. These are sometimes called *vacuously true* by logicians, since they are true by default, which is a curious word choice for our psychoanalytically inclined theory, it is almost as if there is a void within the statement that automatically resorts to truth. The discomfort persists however, why do these conclusions seem off to our mind? A possible answer is that the relationship between p and q in propositional logic is different than that of the "real" logic people use every day. We can take another look at Epp's work where she claims:

"In ordinary speech we never say things like "If computers are machines, then Babe Ruth was a baseball player" or "If  $2+2 = 5$ , then Mickey Mouse is president of the United States." We formulate a sentence like "If p then q" only if there is some connection of content between p and q. In logic, however, the two parts of a conditional statement need not have related meanings. The reason? If there were such a requirement, who would enforce it? What one person perceives as two unrelated clauses may seem related to someone else. There would have to be a central arbiter to check each conditional sentence before anyone could use it, to be sure its clauses were in proper relation. This is impractical, to say the least!" (2019)[62]

This is where the rubber hits the road for our analysis, the psychoanalytic implications in this passage is too great to ignore. The reason the bottom half of the "if p, then q" truth table seems so alien to us is that we expect a relation between two statements; but because there is no necessary *meaningful* link between propositions in logic, what is mathematically true appears as subjectively false. Epp's wording here is crucial, "a central arbiter" who checks the relationality between two elements in a logical chain. . . Anyone who is familiar with Lacanian psychoanalysis

will immediately know that this mediator that Epp claims is “impractical” nonetheless exists: the Lacanian Big Other, the arbiter of the symbolic order. So, a proper psychoanalytic logic then, has to include the relation between the premise and the conclusion in a commutative operation within this operation itself.

This allows us to read the famous Freudian dictum “Knowledge does not cure the symptom.” in a slightly different way. The standard reading of this phrase goes as follows: you may know what your symptoms are (through free association, psychoanalytic treatment, etc.) but that does not help you ameliorate your psychic situation. The fact that I know I am a neurotic, in no way allows me to overcome it. The psychoanalytic cure, is not the process of gaining knowledge about the unconscious operations that determine your actions, gestures, speech, etc.; but the coming to terms with their existence, to *traverse the fantasy* that you can traverse them. Psychoanalysis therefore, cannot be used as a new-age self-help method, the self has to be recognized as a necessary illusion, and not as the authority of one’s being. This standard reading of Freud’s dictum is undoubtedly correct, but we can go a step further, and show how it is nonetheless incomplete. Since this line relies on the failure of conscious knowledge to seep into the unconscious, we can ask a naïve question: how can we know something consciously, but not unconsciously? The opposite is commonsensical, and is the crux of the entirety of Freud’s early work, culminating in *The Interpretation of Dreams*; it makes sense that what we know unconsciously (some repressed Oedipal desire perhaps) is unknown to our consciousness. But at a first glance, it does not make sense that something we know consciously would be unknown to the unconscious. And this first impression is correct, this is of course impossible. A Lacanian twist is to be added here: it is not that the unconscious does not know something that consciousness does, it is that *the unconscious pretends to not know something that consciousness does know*. The unconscious acts as if we do not know the thing in question. I can sense that some examples are in order:

- The Žižekian locus classicus example to be given here is the case of the venture capitalist. Stock traders, Wall Street executives, accumulative capitalists, the movers and shakers of the bourgeoisie know very well that money is a fetish object, and that their accumulation of a bunch of commodities will not bring them fulfilment etc. In their conscious thoughts, they are a utilitarian nominalist; they know that money is nothing but the reified form of social relations of oppression and servitude, that accumulation In-Itself is ideological. The point is that in their actions (which are governed by the unconscious) *they act as if they don’t know it.*(2008a, 135)
- We can extend this logic to the level of socio-symbolic ontology as well. Ev-



everyone in their teenage years comes to the realization that money, in a strictly nominalist sense, does not exist. The idea is that unlike gold or iron which have some external guarantor of their value (their use in circuitry, weaponry, etc.), money in and of itself only has value because we as a society deemed it to have a certain value. If we, tomorrow, all decide that money is just a piece of paper, than it will become just a piece of paper. But to follow this logic to its natural endpoint and to state that money does not exist at all would be idiotic. A constructivist answer to this conundrum would be that money is a social construct, born out of the societal socio-economic apparatus. This does not alleviate the tension that this realization brings however, it merely kicks the question down the road. Following the psychoanalytic logic we have developed here, we can claim that a proper response to this hypothetical teenager would be thus: money doesn't exist, yes, but acts *as if* it does.

- Isn't this the way the Big Other functions in the socio-symbolic realm also? Previously we have stated that the "central arbiter" Epp mentions does exist, that being the Big Other. But obviously the famous Lacanian dictum "The Big Other doesn't exist." would imply that this is false. How can we square the circle? Using the "as if" operation: the Big Other does not exist, yes, but acts *as if* it does.
- Another example we can give here is the toilet paper shortage that happened during COVID-19. As it is (and was) well known, there was no need to stockpile toilet paper in preparation for the pandemic. There was not going to be a shortage, since paper factories remained operational and there was no logical reason to single out toilet paper from other basic daily amenities. The rumor started nonetheless, and people started buying toilet paper in bulk, to a point where supermarkets decided to limit the amount of toilet paper that one person could buy at a time. The logic that these people who stockpiled toilet paper was thus: "I know very well that there is no toilet paper shortage. But I know my country, and its people. A bunch of idiots will believe the rumors and stockpile toilet paper, so I'm buying toilet paper before they can create a real shortage." The irony is of course that this logic created an actual toilet paper shortage. What was this metalogic that these people were using, if not the "as if" logic? Couldn't we say that what these people were effectively saying was that: "I know very well that there is no toilet paper shortage, but I'm going to act *as if* I don't know that."?

We can now come back to our discussion of the "if, then" operation. We have stated that the source of our unease regarding the " $0 \rightarrow q$ " being always true, is the fact

that the subject expects a meaningful link between p and q, and when propositional logic does not abide by their whims, it creates a sense of anxiety. So, what would be the psychoanalytic version of this commutator? I hope the answer is clear: what we must do is to create a new logical commutator, the “as if” commutator. We already know what the truth table for this commutator would look like:

Table 1.2 "As If" Truth Table

p	q	$p \not\rightarrow q$
1	1	1
1	0	0
0	1	1
0	0	0

In this case, since p and q are dialectically related to each other by the Big Other, q retroactively determines the truth value of p. The logical consequence of this operation is that the truth value of the entire statement depends on q, the second value. This is not because p is void, and meaningless; but it's because of the fact that whatever p is, is going to be reflexively redetermined by q through the operation. In this sense, the truth value of p *comes from the future*, from its dialectical relation to q. From now on, in order to differentiate it from the “if p, then q” proper, we will use “ $p \not\rightarrow q$ ” to mean “as if p, then q”.

But why are we talking about this exactly? What is the relevance of the “as if” commutator in a treatise on the interpretation of artworks? All of this might seem confusing at first, but it is a necessary preparation that we must undertake in order to understand the innerworkings of our interpretative functions.

### 1.3 $1/x$ and *House M.D.*

There is another aspect of this treatise that needs delineation before we can properly begin; that being the role of contradiction and dialectics in our analysis. I have claimed in the introduction that the three interpretative functions that this work will outline will transform from one to the other. This is a crucial point that cannot be understated: the dénouement of this work will hopefully be not just the functions and the specific mechanisms within which they structure non-theoretical interpretations of artworks; but also, the specific nature of the links between these functions, the turning points that differentiates one from another. We must stress

and emphasize this point profusely: the crux of our argumentations will rest not on the functions themselves, but their transposition from one to the other. But if that is the case, then we must ask the naïve but important question: what motivates/causes one function to transform itself to another? This is precisely where contradiction comes in, the crux of the entire Hegelian dialectical method. The argument goes as follows: there will be a point of contradiction that cannot be retroactively/reflexively subsumed into the already existing function, this will in turn cause the function to go through a self-transformation, in order to accommodate the previous contradiction. This will also (again reflexively) cause the creation of a new contradiction, which will cause the new function to transform and so on and so on. But why?

In order to answer this question, the difference between mathematical/analytical and dialectical contradictions must be examined, a slight detour if you will. Let us take a simple mathematical function,  $f(x) = \frac{1}{x}$ . This is a perfectly fine function; the logical equivalent would be: “For every real number value of  $x$ , we define  $f(x)$  as the division of one over  $x$ .” Or to put it in more rigorous Mathema-logical terms:  $\{\forall x \in \mathbb{R} \mid f(x) = \frac{1}{x}\}$ . At a first glance, there doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with this function, but in fact there is. This function, as we have represented it, runs into a contradiction; this is in a sense, mathematical non-sense. Why? Precisely because if we input  $x = 0$  into our function, we get  $\frac{1}{0}$ , which is obviously impossible. No number can be divided by zero, it leads to a mathematical contradiction. So, what should we do? The standard mathematical method of dealing with these types of contradictions is to remove the problematic element from the domain of the function. Every function has a domain and a target: the domain determines the set of mathematical elements that can and must be subjected to the function, and the target is the set of mathematical elements that are comprised of the collective results of the function. For this function in question,  $\forall x \in \mathbb{R}$  designates the domain, while  $frac{1}{x}$  is the target. We can write it more explicitly like this: Let  $\Psi$  be the domain and  $\Phi$  the target set of our function,  $\Psi = \{\dots, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, \dots\}$  is thus the domain set and the corresponding set  $\Phi = \{\dots, -2, -1, CONTRADICTION, 1, 2, 3, \dots\}$  is the target. In order to fix the issue, we just have to remove zero from the domain, and we’re golden. Our new and improved function becomes  $\{\forall x \in \mathbb{R} - 0 \mid f(x) = \frac{1}{x}\}$ , or “For every real number value of  $x$  except zero, we define  $f(x)$  as the division of one over  $x$ .” Okay, now what? Well, there is still something lacking in terms of intuition in our operation; as, even though this is a perfectly fine way of removing the contradictory element from a mathematical statement, there’s still something unsatisfying about it. Isn’t this a way of avoiding the problem, a way of writing off the contradiction from the necessary conditions of possibility? In a strict philosophical sense, what have we done exactly? At a first glance, it seems like we saw

a contradictory element in a mathematical statement, and we have removed it to make the statement make sense. What is important for us to see is the pure form of this operation; the fact that it is conducted in a completely external way. The function in its contradictory form would stay as is, if we had not intervened from an external position and fixed it. So what? Well, this means that *mathematical contradictions are inert*; they have no way to resolve themselves without the aid from a non-mathematical entity that intervenes in the situation.

But isn't this the norm? A broken clock has no way to repair itself too, so why does this matter in our analysis of artworks? Let us take a look at another example to answer this question. House M.D. is a procedural medical drama series, that centers on the character Doctor Gregory House as he and his diagnostic team solve difficult medical mysteries and unorthodox problems at the fictional Princeton–Plainsboro Teaching Hospital (PPTH) in New Jersey. There is a specific scene in the season 3, episode 6 of the show where a patient suffering from pain in his left arm visits House at the hospital clinic:

Patient: It's usually worst in the morning. Especially if I've slept on my arm. If I sleep on my back or with my arms out, I'm usually okay.

House: So, your arm only hurts after you lie on top of it all night.

P: Yeah.

H: Hmm... Well, have you thought about, I don't know– Not doing that?

P: Yeah, but it's how I sleep. That's how I've always slept.

H: Well, there's always surgery.

P: To do what? Like, clean out some cartilage or something?

H: You're not sleeping on some cartilage. You're sleeping on your arm.

P: You want to remove my arm!?

H: Well, it is your left. A guy's gotta sleep.

P: ARE YOU INSANE!?

This is a variation on the classic joke where the patient says, "It hurts when I do this Doctor." and the Doctor says, "Then don't do that." The scene is obviously absurd, but what interests us is precisely why is it that House's solution to the patient's problem is ridiculous. At first preview, the patient seems idiotic, it is clear that the fact that he keeps sleeping on his left arm is the cause of his pain; and House cannot handle the patients stupidity and decides to make fun of him by escalating the medical procedure to its patently absurd limit. But a closer inspection is needed here: isn't what House is doing the exact mathematical gesture of removing contradictions? "If your arm hurts when you sleep on it all night, then don't do it"

is the exact same logic that undergirds our situation with  $f(x) = \frac{1}{x}$ ; “if there’s a problem when you put zero into the function, then don’t put zero in the function.” House simply recommends the patient to remove “sleeping on your left arm all night” from the domain of his actions, and puff; the problem is gone. But there is more: when the patient rejects this proposition, House then recommends the patient to simply remove his arm instead. Isn’t this the same logic? If the patient removes his arm from the domain of his bodily functions, then there is no more pain. Even though House seems to move from a commonsense wisdom (don’t sleep on your arm) to a ridiculous proposition (cut off your arm), but underneath it all, the logic stays the same. So, why is this scene funny then? Is it just because of the absurdity of House’s ultimate solution? No, the comedy of the scene comes precisely from the application of a mathematical notion of the removal of contradiction to a non-mathematical contradiction. Non-mathematical (or dialectical) contradictions cannot be removed by the same method of operation. If one attempts it, one arrives at a non-sensical solution, one that doesn’t solve the problem but eliminates it instead. We must also note here that House is clearly wrong in his diagnosis; if the patient has always slept on his left arm but only now presents it as a problem, there must be a deeper symptom that is being ignored here. What House misses, ironically, is the form of the patient’s visit; he fails to ask the question: “Why is the patient coming to the hospital now?”. The dialectical conclusion is that there genuinely is something wrong with the patient, and that they are facing pain in a different way than before. Therefore, there must be a real symptom at work here, one that House misses; precisely because of his investment in the mathematical method of removing contradiction.

The patient’s predicament in this scene mirrors the motivation behind the analysand’s arrival to psychoanalysis. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it makes no sense that patients would willingly sign up for it; psychoanalysis offers no ultimate cure, no quick fix, no instant gratification. The usual logic would dictate that they come because they are showing symptoms: their relationship with their partner, their family, their work, their way of life, etc. But this can be refuted by stating that the patient’s psychoanalytic symptoms cannot originate haphazardly, and that the genesis of their symptoms must be deeper. Instead, we must conclude that, *patients come to psychoanalysis when their method of dealing with their symptoms stops working*; when their symptoms become unenjoyable. So, the symptom, in this sense, is precisely dialectical: the coincidence of opposites self-negates the Notion itself, leading to a necessary avowal of their fundamental contradiction. This is the engine behind their arrival; the contradiction of their symptoms become so unbearable that it leads the patient to action. This is, contrary to what might seem

like at first, an internal contradiction. The externality only arrives afterwards, as the manifestation of this inherent failure. This is precisely what House misses in this scene, the contradiction that leads the patient to the clinic cannot simply be external (patient stupidly sleeping on his arm); there must be a properly internal contradiction (both in the Hegelian and the medical sense of the term) that becomes unbearable and prompts the patient to action.

We must now look at the precise distinction between  $\frac{1}{x}$  and *House M.D.*, the fundamental deadlock between our two examples. The contradiction that lies at the heart of  $\frac{1}{x}$  cannot be resolved without the recourse to an external force; if no one intervenes, the function remains non-sensical. But the *House M.D.* example shows a way that contradictions can lead a function to transform itself, in opposition to its annihilating nothingness. Dialectical contradictions can resolve themselves by deepening the contradictory logic furthermore, moving from surface level contradictions to more fundamental ones; in a completely internal way, without the necessity of outside interference. The reason is that mathematical/analytical contradictions are inert, while dialectical contradictions are by definition dynamic. Hegel's logic does not move because Hegel is making it move, it moves on its own; drawing force and energy from its own presuppositional antagonisms. Thus, here is our final conclusion: even though we are going to use Mathematical notations and attempt to formalize our argumentations as much as possible, our functions are properly dialectical, and therefore, will move on their own and transform themselves into each other. The reason for the movement from one function to another will be self-evident, just by the contradictions that are effaced at the end of our analysis. We will therefore reject any non-self-evident claim, any assertion that is not completely obvious in the argument. This will allow us to avoid any axiomatic thinking, and subsequently form the logical backdrop of our theoretical apparatus.

## 1.4 The Zeroth Point

Now, we can finally begin. At a first glance, a proper starting point might be asking the age-old question: "What is Art?". The usual reactions to this blunt question (it is too big of a question, many philosophers have tried to answer it and failed, it is akin to diving in at the deep end of the pool, etc.) never hit their mark: this is an absolutely valid and crucial question for any inquiry regarding artworks. Let us delineate on it before moving on: what this question gets at is not all that clear from this vague formulation. Is it about the precise definition of art, one that would

be found within the pages of a dictionary? Or is it asking the ontological being of what art is? The first question is easy to answer: art is “something that is created with imagination and skill and that is beautiful or that expresses important ideas or feelings” (2024). We can see from the outset that there are many problems with this definition however; (1) It fits other concepts as well: many works of design (advertisements, informative booklets, websites, videos, etc.), writing (textbooks, political campaign slogans, non-fiction books, famous quotations, proverbs, etc.), or speech (oratory works, melodic ramblings, musical pronunciation, war cries, a teacher’s explanations, etc.) all fit within this definition; as we can imagine these works as being created with imagination and skill, and as beautiful objects that express important ideas or feelings. A personal anecdote: when I was in fifth grade, in the first day of the new term, our literature teacher asked us what we read during the summer. Everybody gave answers, “I’ve read this novel, this short story, this non-fiction book, etc.”; except my friend who sat next to me in class. He said that he did not read a single thing throughout the summer, which left our teacher disappointed. I was more in disbelief than disappointed; since I was beginning to read all the world classics around that time, I thought it was unimaginable that someone did not enjoy reading literature. During the break, I asked him: “You really didn’t read a single book this summer?” He said that the Wimbledon tennis tournament was on, and that he had watched that instead; I promptly asked what that had to do with reading. He responded: “The way Roger Federer plays tennis is *more artistic than any work of poetry.*” A brilliant response for a fifth grader! I didn’t understand what he meant at the time, but now I realize that my friend was tapping into a philosophy of art: any work can be artistic, poetic, emotional, moving, intellectual, skillful, technical, didactic, epic, resonant, sound and brilliant; so what is the difference between what we call an artwork and the rest? We will come back to this question. (2) It refers to the concept of beauty, but as 20th century art movements have clearly demonstrated, there can be incredible artistic potential in ugliness or imperfection. Perhaps a corrective would be that art is *about beauty*, but not necessarily beautiful. (3) It refers to imagination and skill, effectively trying to combat both the claim that art is a matter of pure craftsmanship (contra imagination), and also the claim that art is simply about ethereal inspiration and abstracted muse (contra skill). This is an admirable effort, as these claims are ought to be refuted, but it nonetheless misses the contradiction between them: what is perhaps a better counterargument would be to point out the imaginative aspect of craft and the skillful aspect of inspiration. These concepts are dialectically intertwined, and the moment we treat them as separate, we lose the crux of the argument altogether. (4) It relies on the notion of expression, which is a criminally unexamined philosophical concept. What does it mean to express something exactly? The word choice seems to indicate a desire to

differentiate the concept from pure communication; as simply conveying, relaying, or transmitting certain ideas might seem trite and pedestrian. Expression refers to something intractable within something, an anxious idea that must be pushed out there: like expressing the juice from an orange, or coffee from beans. We can see therefore, a violence in the concept; the artist squeezes some pre-symbolic intent or inspiration to create the artwork. (5) What do all of these points have in common? What is the distinct purpose, or desire behind this definition? Well, we can see clearly that the hidden desire in this description, is the attempt to differentiate art from other fields of the socio-symbolic realm. They all try to showcase what only art can do; effectively attempting to create a stark contradistinction between art and all the others. It tries to do this, not by tapping into the core of what art is, or what art can do particularly; but through the combination of the aforementioned qualities. The argument goes like this: many other fields can do similar things (sports can be beautiful, science can be imaginative, politics can express important ideas, and woodworking requires skill), but art is the only field that does *all of these things, at the same time*. The truth-value of this claim is up for debate, a different work can handle this question; but for us, what is important to see here is the precise form of this argument. Isn't this line of thinking attempting to find the point of differentiation with regard to artworks in a *positivistic manner*? This argument presupposes that what makes art different or special is its ability to do something, something that has positive ontological status. But what if it wasn't? What if the thing that separates art from the rest is not something that only art can do, but something that only art cannot do? With this, we come to the second interpretation of the question "What is Art?"; which is the ontological being of art itself. I claim that *art is the failure of representation*. This failure is by definition ontological, since it is not that art fails with regards to some external standard that gives a grade for its effort; but that it fails on its own terms. This is where I would assert a further distinction between what is artistic and what is aesthetic. Even though most of the thinkers of the philosophy of art, use these concepts interchangeably; I claim that not only are they separate, they are diametrically opposed to each other. Aesthetic is the success of representation, while artistic is the failure of it. We are not going to spend too much time on this distinction and the ontological question about art, since it requires many volumes of dense theory to argue for these points, therefore we are going to skip to the most important aspect of this claim: the idea that art is the point of failure within representation means that art is necessarily there to be interpreted. Because the concept is linked to a prior dialectical relation within representationality, it is forever attached to this notion; meaning that it fails only when we perceive it to fail. Art requires the subject, one who has the ability to look and ponder about why it is failing. This means that interpretation is not only a



matter of epistemology, but ontology; it is an intractable point within the realm of art.

This allows us to reformulate the question “What is Art?”, and instead ask “What can we say about an artwork?”. The intractability of interpretation means that we must be able to say something about an artwork; or to put it more precisely, the interpretation of an artwork requires a theory of the ontology of art in general. One might state that we have already said many things about art and artworks; and yes, this is true. I claimed that art is the failure of representation, but obviously, I have not deduced this from any prior argument; it was mainly to show the necessity of interpretation and by extension, the necessity of a working theory of the ontological dimension of art. Instead, what we must do here, is to start from the very beginning; and not jump too far forward. What we say here must be applicable to all artworks; so, our new question is: “What can we say about all artworks?” Which seems easier than the previous question (“What is Art?”), but a further analysis reveals it to be just as difficult. In order to insist on the necessity of ontology, we are going to impose some specifications/restrictions on our potential answer. The things we can say about artworks must abide by two strict qualifications: absolute universality, and absolute eternity. Absolute universality means that what we say about the artwork here must be regarded as true for everyone, regardless of any difference in any category (class, gender, race, IQ, nationality, education, religion, familiarity with art, etc.); while absolute eternity means that what we say about the artwork must be true for all times, it must remain unchanged in the future, as well as be completely applicable to the past, an absolute atemporal omni-presence. Why? Since we are trying to find the proper zero point for all artworks, any difference that comes from not abiding by these two restrictions would refute the validity of what we can say about them. In other words, we would be stuck in a kind of artistic relativism; a mode of thought that is ever so popular when it comes to art. This kind of relativism endangers not only our own theoretical investigations, but also any kind of Idea that can be thought of in relation to the realm of artworks. The purpose of all of these restrictions (and I do recognize that they are highly restrictive), is to allow us to return to the bare beginning point for all art, and to let us think and conceptualize without the baggage of socio-symbolic/societal conventions. Obviously, one can claim that even with these highly regulatory restrictions, what we say will still be in the realm of cultural/philosophical relativism; but this can be obviated somewhat by the use of mathema-logical forms. Even still, some people might be skeptical towards this vulgar universalization/ahistoricization/atemporalization; in response, we can only hope that the answer we give is robust enough to quell any suspicion or doubt.

Before we answer the question, can we think about the form of our answer? What can our answer look like? We have already stated the purpose of these restrictions (absolute universality, and absolute eternity), but what about their effects? It is pretty self-evident from the fact that we have cut off any kind of specificity from our possible answer, that it cannot be concrete in a vulgar materialist sense. Our answer will probably be extremely abstract, in order to fit into a description of all artworks for all times. All of the different forms of art, and their accompanying contents, mean that what we can say about all artworks in general, has to be pretty vague. Answers like “Art is what is Ideal.”, “Art is the representation of Beauty.”, “Art is political.”, “Art allows us to think differently.”, “Art is our contact point with our authentic Being.”, or “Art allows us to experience pure temporality.” are way too concrete for our purposes. Not to say that these answers are wrong of course, but that they do not satisfy the heavy conditions we have set for our answer. They all jump too far ahead, too quickly; therefore, missing the dialectical contradiction at the very heart of the question. This is akin to the parable of Achilles and the tortoise: as Lacan has already pointed out, the radical point of the parable is not merely that Achilles cannot surpass the tortoise; but that he can never *catch up* to the tortoise. When he gets near, Achilles immediately overtakes the tortoise, never at one moment are they on the same distance from the finish line; even though commonsense dictates that there has to be one specific time where they are at the same place. How can you resolve this contradiction? By abstracting the already abstracted form of the parable: only through differential calculus, can we make sense of the infinitesimal rate of change of Achilles in relation to the tortoise. We are in the same situation, and therefore, must also abstract as much as possible.

I can hear some groaning right about now, so enough prolonging the answer as if the question were a riddle. Let us finally answer the question: “What can we say about all artworks that is both absolutely universal and absolutely eternal?”. I claim that there are two things we can say that can satisfy these conditions: existence and action. Existence simply means that artworks exist, that for every artwork in the past, present or future we can say with confidence and absolute certainty that they exist. The concept reaches out from itself (or to put it in Hegelese: the In-Itself of the notion gets transposed onto the For-Itself of the concept), which means that artworks cannot be purely imaginative. What do we mean by this? A possible counter to this would be the example of the unicorn, which is a mythical animal that does not exist empirically, but only conceptually. Even though one might claim that art is also purely cognitive, that what makes art artistic only resides within the inner world of humans (the Freudian ‘*innenwelt*’); the physical existence of the artwork nonetheless resists this idea. Even the most physically abstract artform,

cinema, is made from a physical material: light. Photons are empirical, physical entities; and therefore, even cinema has concrete existence in the ‘*außenwelt*’ of the individual subject. Therefore, we can say that artworks exist; and be sure that everyone and anyone does/will agree that this is true (bad-faith sophistry aside). Like we have mentioned before, this answer “Artworks exist.”, is extremely vague, to the point where it would not be absurd to question the usefulness of it. Rest assured; we will come to realize that a lot can be made with an object’s mere existence. The second answer, action, simply means that artworks ‘do something’. What does this mean? Again, it is an extremely vague answer, so some delineation is required here. What we mean is that artworks enact some change within the existing situation. The precise nature of this change is unknown to us, but we can easily presuppose its existence, and be sure that, again, everyone and anyone does/will agree that this is true. The form that this change can take is unknown as well, since it can be anything: ideational change (this artwork made me think differently about some specific topic), historical change (this artwork changed how artworks were created in this specific time period), theoretical change (this artwork changed the very conceptualization of art altogether), technical change (this artwork uses a never seen before technique, or it uses a prior technique in a new and original way), subjective change (this artwork changed who I am as a person, or my self-perception) or even physical change (this artwork hit me on the nose!); or literally anything else. Again, any type of change will do for our purposes since we do not require specificity to move forward.

So, there’s our answer. What can we say about all artworks that is both absolutely universal and absolutely eternal? Artworks exist and they do something. What is clear from a first glance is that this answer does not do a very good job at differentiating art objects from other objects. Couldn’t we say that every object, whether it be an artwork or not, satisfies the same answer; that everything in a sense exists and does something? Well, yes and no. It is true that our answer fails to differentiate between art and non-art objects, but we can counter with a similarly simplistic retort: why is it necessary to differentiate art objects from non-art objects? To make some differentiation at this point would presuppose two things; namely that, (1) there does exist an ontological difference between objects in terms of their artistic nature, and (2), that people, in general, make a distinction between art and non-art objects in their immediate interpretation. Remember, we are approaching this topic purely from an interpretative perspective, the announced aim of this entire treatise is to locate the precise logic within which people interpret artworks. Therefore, these are legitimate points of contradiction with this statement. While (1) certainly might be the case, it nonetheless needs to be deduced and promptly argued for; and cannot be taken as self-evident (especially not for our specific methodological approach,

where we are trying to move back to the absolute beginning point of interpretation, a return to the utmost simplest terms). And (2) also requires heavy argumentation and its corollary proof; do people really make this distinction at a primordially epistemological level? Our point here is this: our answer to the primary question we are dealing with does not differentiate between art and non-art objects at this level; but as we move forward, our argumentation will be sharpened, and moving through this dialectical structure will make sure that our ideas about artworks and their interpretations will move us closer and closer to the realm of artworks. In the introductory section, we have claimed that the three interpretative methods will become truer as they go along (the second being more correct than the first, the third being more correct than the second, etc.); but here we can also go further and state that they will also focus more on art as they move along. The first method will start out as pretty non-descript, while the third method's relationship to artworks will be self-evident. However, we must also state that this reaction (the lack of differentiation between art and non-art objects in our answer) is not merely a pithy retort; as is usually the case with Hegelian dialectics, the antithesis of our position is quite illuminating. More precisely, the failure to differentiate allows us to see the finer nuances of our approach: what are we doing here exactly? Simply this: we are attempting to presuppose nothing (and thereby avoiding axiomatic thinking), and trying to see what we can conclude from the most bare-minimum of assumptions. This is a Hegelian approach par excellence; the locus classicus of this being Hegel's form of argumentation in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel deduces the absolute primacy of mediation from what seems like the most immediate forms of experience (the experience of 'this, here and now'). For Hegel, what seems the most immediate, is always already mediated; and this forms the starting point of the entire book. In an analogous way, what we take to be categorically true about any art object (that it exists, and does something) will be our main starting point.

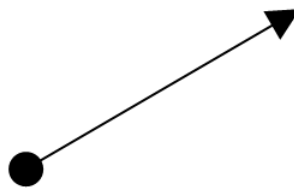
We can now formalize these answers, and try to find a way to combine them together. The apparent difficulty is the fact that these answers are vague and abstract: any representation of them in a formalized system would betray this vagueness. Artistically depicting these ideas seem nigh impossible, scientifically stating them would rob them of their universality, historically situating them would deconstruct them from within, even philosophically representing them runs the risk that they are subsumed under some predefined concept (Plato said this on existence and action, Aristotle said that on artworks, etc.). The only course of action left to us is the mathemal-logical perspective we have discussed before. Since this approach is also absolutely universal and absolutely eternal by default,<sup>1</sup> this means that it is the

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<sup>1</sup>We can claim that philosophy is also universal and eternal; but it is difficult to argue that it is this way

perfect tool for representing/formalizing them within a conceptual framework. OK, mathema-logical approach it is, but how exactly? Are we going to say that artworks are like numbers that we can operate with? Well, not exactly; since we have no reason to associate artworks with numbers, we must deduce the mathema-logical representation of artworks from our two answers: existence and action. Existence is easy to represent, as we can just say that a specific point within a field represents it. We have no idea of what this field is; it can be the Cartesian two-dimensional  $\mathbb{R}^2$  field, it can be the three-dimensional reality we live in, it can be the imaginary number line, etc. The specifics of what this field is does not matter, the only thing we care about is that it exists. The next one is action, this is a bit trickier; how can we represent the act of some object in this unknown universe of existence? Well, we can indicate action in terms of an arrow, the stem of which rests on the point of existence. Again, we have no idea of what this action looks like: we don't know its coordinates, its magnitude, its direction, its angle, etc. We don't even know what the criteria of what this action would be measured in. . . All of these unknowns aside, we now have a point with an arrow sticking out from it, in some direction. Now the power of our mathema-logical approach reaches its apogee: isn't this construction, a vector? It is a definite (but unknown) point in space, with a certain magnitude that is pointed at some direction. This is (one of) the mathematical definitions of a vector, a concept that now unlocks many doors for us.

Figure 1.1 Vector Representation



We will write this vector as  $\vec{x}$ , and this will be our representation of an artwork. We can now see the results of our strict regulations, and restrictions; as  $\vec{x}$  applies to all

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by default. As Hegel has already pointed out, universality and eternity are not the ground on which experience is structured, but rather the retroactive result of the failure within experience. Universality is not a given, but only exists in relation to the contradiction within particularity itself. In the same vein, eternity can only be reached through an abstraction of temporality.

artworks that has existed, does exist, and will exist, and this is something that is indisputably true for everyone. It might not seem like we have not covered much ground so far, all we have done is find another representation for artworks, even though the word ‘artwork’ also does all of these things. The difference is that the vectoral form of the artwork will allow us to construct our modes of interpretation in a formalized/systematized way, structured by the mathema-logical approach.

But now, let’s put a pin in this vector form and turn to the idea of interpretation itself. The rest of this section will be focused on the precise way that this vector (our representation of any artwork) can be interpreted. But before we can get to the interpretation of this vector, we must ask a general but crucial question: “What is interpretation?”. The precise logic of this question is vital for our purposes, the entire treatise depends on what we mean by interpretation. With the risk of being vague and abstract again, we can say that *interpretation is a judgment (or a series of judgments), coupled with evaluation; all based on the faculty of understanding*. Then, what is understanding? The general idea of the notion relies on the distinction between understanding and sentiment; or between ideas and feelings (or between the mind and the heart). This distinction is problematic for many reasons, for which we have no time to get into; but we will try to delineate on what our position is with regards to this distinction. The Lacano-Hegelian refutation of this distinction would simply be that it misunderstand the dialectical relation between these two faculties: the understanding is born out of the intractable contradiction within sentiment, while sentiment is born out of the intractable contradiction within understanding. What this means is that a clear-cut distinction cannot be made; we can find logic within sentiment, and at the same time find affect within reason. What can we make out of this? Well, precisely that when we claim that interpretation is a judgment based on understanding, what we mean by understanding is not simply the rational mind, or reason; but the realization that even the most subjectively relativistic position with regards to some artwork contains within it a logical framework that nonetheless organizes these sentiments. On the other hand, our ‘understanding’ also recognizes that the most logical statement is at the same time infected by pleasure, enjoyment, and desire. This is why we are able to formalize the most affective aspects of the interpretation of artworks into a cohesive set of formulas; as Lacan teaches us, the fact that the human mind is inherently irrational does not mean that it has no logical basis within which it functions. The idea that interpretation is based on reason and logic (and that the sentiments regarding the interpretation of artworks are also organized though a certain logic) might be controversial however; isn’t the most popular idea about the interpretation of artworks, *the law of subjective relativism*, which states that any interpretation of

art is purely subjective and depends on the sentiments of that person alone? We have already stated the theoretical reasons why this is not the case and that this law is fundamentally mistaken. But let us give an example nonetheless. One of the most common cases where the contradiction within subjective relativism manifests itself is the incessant circular logic that several interpreters of an artwork get into. This can be seen anywhere from internet forums to high-end art galleries; and the scenario usually plays out like this: person A will make some sort of an interpretation about the artwork; the precise content of this interpretation is irrelevant. Then person B will criticize person A's interpretation with a retort, again the validity of this is unimportant. Then person C will criticize person B, not for what they actually said against person A, but merely from the fact that they have criticized an interpretation. Person C's statement is "Person A is entitled to their opinion, and since art is subjective, you shouldn't criticize them in this regard." Then person D will pop up and say that "Well, person B was also voicing their opinion according to the law of subjective relativism, so they also have the right to criticize person A." Then person E jumps in. . . And so on and so on, ad infinitum. The content in this exchange does not matter, we have already shown why a certain standard in formalized interpretation is necessary; but what interests us is the form of this circularity. Namely that, if the law of subjective relativism works so well, then why is it getting stuck within a circular logic? The reason cannot be the fact that it is fundamentally incorrect since this is an external position with regards to this contradiction; therefore, an internal contradiction must be at work here, one that leads to this circularity. The interesting to note here is the precise theoretical logic that these people are working with: none of them disagree on the method of interpretation of artworks. They all agree that interpretation is purely subjective, so, why is there disagreement not just on the specifics of their interpretation, but also the form of their application? If everybody is on the same side, the side of subjective relativism, then why argue at all? Well, it is clear from scenarios like this that, even though everybody consciously thinks that art is subjective, *they nonetheless desire that it was not*. Everybody is on the same side, but also desires to be on the other side. An objective category or criteria does not exist, but the need for it, manifests itself as the contradiction of subjective relativism. This is the precise reason why there's so much discontent within popular interpretation of artworks. It follows from this that the problem with subjective relativism is not just that it is incorrect (that artworks are not purely subjective, and that there is nonetheless a logic within which interpretation is organized), but that it leads to an intractable contradiction and a fundamental antagonism, on its own terms. We will come back to the law of subjective relativism a little bit later.

Now we can move on to the second part of our claim: that interpretation always involves evaluation within it. This is certainly contrary to popular belief, so a further analysis is required here. The questions we are facing now are: What is the precise relationship between interpretation and evaluation? Is it possible to conceptualize a form of interpretation that does not have evaluation within it? It certainly seems possible, what if we interpret without ascribing some value, without making an evaluative statement? The way we defined interpretation suggests that the answer is no, that interpretation always includes evaluation as a fundamental aspect of its functioning; but the crucial matter is to prove this is true. Let's examine the two possibilities that arise from this decoupling: evaluation without interpretation, and interpretation without evaluation. Can we imagine evaluation without interpretation? This seems impossible in a self-evident way: the way in which we reach a specific evaluative statement must require a previous system of thought that structures the conditions of possibility (to use a Kantian term) of this evaluation. The form of evaluation, in its simplest terms, is to ascribe a set value to some art object; and since that inscription cannot happen spontaneously, without some prior element, we can say conclusively that evaluation always requires some form of interpretation, no matter how unsound that interpretation, or the system of thought it is based on is. . . . Let's give another personal anecdotal example here. Years ago, right outside of a second-hand bookstore, I've met a homeless man who was warming his hands in front of an open fire. I asked him for a lighter, and while he was handing me one, my eyes glazed over to the pavement next to him; where the full seven books of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series were stacked in a neat pile. Amused, I asked him which one was his favorite, adding that *The Prisoner of Azkaban* was mine. He said that *The Order of the Phoenix* was his favorite; a respectable choice, I thought. Then I asked him the natural follow up, why? He answered: "That one has the most pages, so it gives the most heat." *He had been burning them to keep himself warm.*<sup>2</sup> From an artistic standpoint, this person's outlook is patently false: we can confidently claim that reading is a natural prerequisite for the interpretation of literature. Nevertheless, from a purely philosophical standpoint, we can ask this question: isn't what this man is doing already a form of interpretation? Not a good one artistically, but a form of interpretation nonetheless. . . . His method of interpretation was based on thermodynamics, rather than art; but he still had one. It follows from this that the unsoundness of a form of interpretation invalidates neither the logic of its functioning, nor its subsequent evaluation; his method simply works, a logical construction of a systematic structure of interpretation.

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<sup>2</sup>Obviously, we cannot draw the conclusion that the needs of the poor and impoverished trump artistic concerns, as this would just be a simplistic form of Marxist sentimentalism. Thermodynamically speaking, there are much more efficient ways to heat oneself than burning books. As to why he chose to burn them anyway, I still have no idea.



We now can see that evaluation without interpretation is impossible. However, we still have the opposite case, which is the much dicier portion of our claim: interpretation without evaluation. There are two possibilities with this notion: (1) it is not that interpretation without evaluation is possible, but that evaluation is simply repressed. Isn't this an omnipresent phenomenon we see today? There are many interpreters, critics, artists, academics, reviewers, aficionados and theorists who hold back on making evaluative judgments; merely presenting an interpretation without making a claim whether the artwork is good or bad. One can even detect a note of fear in these approaches, a sense of holding back from being definitive; but for our purposes the crucial question is: why? The homeless man had no problems, why do learned people? The answer is clearly something we have encountered before, namely, the law of subjective relativism. This law gives an unquestioned blanket statement that all art is subjective, whatever that means. And giving a definitive evaluation with an interpretation attached effectively violates this law; and therefore, the evaluative aspect of interpretation is promptly repressed. (2) Interpretation without evaluation is ontologically possible; that the two concepts are linked through a contingency, rather than necessity. How do we combat this claim? Well, we can simply proceed with a classical proof by contradiction, a variation on the logical deductive operation of *reductio ad absurdum*. Let's assume that interpretation without evaluation is possible: we do our interpretation, and we leave it at that. What now? Well, the question here is "What happens when we want to evaluate at precisely this point?" Our assumption dictates that these are delinked entities, therefore we must bring in an independent evaluative method. This evaluative method has to work without recourse to the previous interpretation. But here's where the problem begins: didn't we just prove that evaluation without interpretation is impossible? We have shown conclusively that any evaluative claim has to come from a systematized method of thought, however illogical or unsound that form is. This means that this evaluation has to have an interpretative portion within it, irrespective of the previous interpretation. We now have two interpretations in our hand, one that is independent of evaluation, and one that is linked to it. This is an obvious point of contradiction, but we can go further. Our assumption is that their independency is possible, so let's cut this secondary interpretation from the evaluation. The second and more obvious contradiction reveals itself here: since we can continue this process of generating interpretative portions and decoupling them from the evaluation indefinitely; this means that we are stuck in an unending process. The series of operations form a divergent series, one that remains in an infinite loop (or in Hegelian terms, a 'bad infinity'). This means that our original assumption is false, and that interpretation and evaluation must be connected through a necessary link.

With this, we have now proven that both interpretation without evaluation and evaluation without interpretation are impossible. This means that (2) cannot be correct, which leads us to claim that the situation we have in our hands is the first (1) option: that evaluation is simply repressed in favor of interpretation. But we have also shown that there are instances where the opposite is the case, where interpretation is repressed in favor of evaluation (the example with the persons A, B, C, and D). What is happening here? We now can finally examine the precise nature of the law of subjective relativism: this mode of thought that claims that all art is subjective is not generative of these claims (interpretation without evaluation, evaluation without interpretation), but it is, in a sense, develops in response to them. The way that it makes sure that interpretation and evaluation are necessarily decoupled is through repressing one apropos the other, at the same time. This means that the law of subjective relativism is a superegoic mandate: no matter what you do, you are going to be punished for not doing the other thing. This is also precisely why we have come across a desire for objectivity; the law of subjective relativism is all-oppressive, there is no way of pleasing it; so, it follows that a desire to be on the other side, a desire for some objective criteria to come in and sort all of this out, would develop in response to it. As Freud teaches us, a superegoic Law is, by definition, tautological; because it gives the justification that you could've done the other thing when you are being punished, it always has plausible deniability. The desire for objectivity manifests itself as the feeling of anxiety or ennui in relation to this circular logic; a desire for something that would alleviate these affects, for something that would remove the burden of interpretation and evaluation at the same time. In a word, a desire for theory... This is why our approach of returning to the simplest terms of artistic interpretation is so important, if we are to analyze the way in which people interpret artworks in a non-theoretical way, we must first show that this non-theoretical endeavor is nonetheless based on theory, one that is effectively unconscious. To get to this level, we must drop our high hats and return with these hypothetical people down to the most rudimentary terms. With this, we can promptly return to our argument.

We have now shown the falsity of the possible counter-arguments to our definition of interpretation; which we claimed was 'a judgment (or a series of judgments), coupled with evaluation; all based on the faculty of understanding'. But can go even further? Can we simplify this definition to even more elementary terms? What is interpretation at its most absolute bare-bones form? Isn't the most basic answer we can give here, the idea that interpretation is taking one object (the artwork), and spitting out a judgment (one that is based on understanding, and has an evaluative element to it)? In this way, interpretation is akin to measurement, just like a ruler

takes an object (a distance), and gives back a value. In mathematical terms, isn't this the definition of a *function*? A function like  $f(x) = x + 1$  takes all values of 'x' and gives back the same term plus one. Couldn't we say that interpretation follows the same logic, only a tad bit more complicated? We will from now on, call the methods of interpretation, *interpretative functions*. These functions are going to be the foundational element of our investigations; the theoretical basis for the interpretation of artworks. Just like the aforementioned function takes numbers and associates them with another value, our interpretative functions will take artworks as their domain, and will associate them with a certain judgment. The problem now is that we have no idea where to begin with writing down this interpretative function explicitly. So, what can we do then? Well, we are just going to not write it; we are going to leave the most elementary interpretative function as is. This interpretative function (which is effectively the zeroth interpretative function), will from now on be called the *primordial interpretative function*, and will be written as  $\Delta(\vec{x})$ . We have already demonstrated that we can represent artworks as vectors, and now the domain (the values that a function can take in) is apparent; it is the realm of artworks, represented in the primordial interpretative function as  $\vec{x}$ , the vectoral form of artworks. The question now is obvious, what does this primordial interpretative function look like? Well, the simple answer is that we don't know. It can look like anything, and there is no way to find out. The primordial interpretative function is the most immediate encounter that a person can have with art, and therefore is completely unknown to us. So, why do we represent it, if we are not going to be able to learn what it is? The precise nature of the primordial interpretative function will be discussed in the next section; there we will understand what it is, even though we can't represent it explicitly. The reason as to why this is not a problem for us, and the reason why we chose the symbol delta ' $\Delta$ ' will be clear shortly. For now, the only thing we need to know is that the primordial interpretative function is the first moment of encounter between the interpreter and the artwork.

We can actually make a lot out of this, from the very simple idea that interpretation is akin to a mathematical function. For example, we can ask: what is the precise relationship between the primordial interpretative function and the concept of measurement? What is it that this function would measure? It can't be anything in the artwork, since that would require an insane amount of variation in order to apply to all artworks within the restrictions we have placed before (absolute universality and absolute eternity). It can't compute or calculate anything either; remember, we have represented artworks as vectors, and not numbers. The only thing that it can measure is the answer to our primary question; being existence and action, or in other words, the vectoral representation we have found for all artworks. Existence

would be akin to figuring out the precise location of the artwork within the realm of all artworks, or in the artistic field. But what does ‘artistic field’ even mean? What are its limitations, dimensions, qualifications, determinations, specifications, and foundations? We don’t know any of these things; and it follows that the primordial interpretative function does not either. What about action? Well, the same problem persists: action in terms of what? We don’t know what action looks like, so the idea that the primordial interpretative function can measure that is also unlikely. So, is that it? Did we hit a dead end? Not exactly. What if we pretend the primordial interpretative could measure these things, but just in a way that we don’t know? From now on, we’ll assume that the primordial interpretative function is structured in a way that can somehow measure existence and action when it comes to artworks. This will allow us to move on, with the caveat that we have to return to this point, and justify our pretention. If the primordial interpretative function can measure all artworks, then what is the precise nature of this measurement? Is it like the ruler example we have given before? Well, no, since there is an important aspect when it comes to artworks that differentiates them from distance, weight, or any kind of physical quality: that the artwork must also be able to *change the system of measurement itself*. We already have an intuitive idea about how this works; any artwork has the potential to transform the way you look at artworks altogether. But we can prove this is the case as well. Let’s use the same method we have used before, proof by contradiction. Assume that artworks do not necessarily change the way you interpret all other artworks; it follows from this that a perfect method of interpretation exists, it applies to all artworks, for all times. This method must also be able to evaluate these artworks as well, since we have proven that interpretation is always coupled with evaluation. It is able to determine which artworks are good, which ones are bad, which ones are sixty percent good, etc. This would require this perfect method to understand what existence and action mean at all contexts, at all times; which is analogous to fitting artworks in a definite, descriptive field. This would also be the ultimate normative method too, since it knows how to interpret and evaluate every single artwork in existence, it must also know how to craft every single artwork too (if I know how the metric system works, then I can craft any theoretical distance I want). This means that we can compile a list of every single artwork that has existed, or will exist, or has the ability to exist. With this list, we can now create a new, special artwork that has these qualities: its first element (we don’t know what that means, but we assumed that this perfect method would know it) is different than the first element of the first artwork on the list, its second element is different than the second element of the second artwork on the list, its third element is different than the third element of the third artwork on the list, so on and so on. It might be an infinite series, but this perfect method would be able to handle

that as well. So what? Well, this new artwork would be different than the first artwork on the list because their first elements are different, it would be different than the second artwork on the list because their second elements are different, etc. This means that we have created an artwork that is not included in the list of this perfect method, which also means that this new artwork is not within the domain of the realm of artworks, the field that houses all art. It follows that this perfect method is not so perfect after all, since it was working with an incomplete field, it's like if I wanted to construct the distance of five hundred meters but my ruler didn't have the three-centimeter point on it... This violates our initial assumption that this method is absolutely perfect (universal and eternal), this means that every single artwork has the potential to change the system of measurement/interpretation.

But where does that get us? Why is the idea that every artwork changes the method of interpretation useful for our purposes? Doesn't this make writing the mathematical function of interpretation much harder? In a paradoxical way, it actually makes it easier. Since, if all artworks have the potential to change the very core of the primordial interpretative function, that means that our interpretation has to rely on something other than the result of the primordial interpretative function. And a potential solution can be found in the realm of physics. We can draw a strict homology between artworks and the logic of states in physics; which will provide us with crucial insight for the precise way that our interpretative functions must operate. There are mainly two types of states within physics: classical states and quantum states. Classical states are systems of logic that have objects of interest for the physicist who is analyzing them. An example of a classical state  $S_1$  may be that an object A, is subjected to some unknown force  $F_1$ , and we want to know the magnitude of this force. The state includes few other bits of information as well: the mass of the object is 10 kg ( $m_A = 10kg$ ), there is no friction between the object and the floor, the direction of the force is parallel to the floor, the object is uniform and rectangular, and the object moves 50 meters in 5 seconds. We can now construct an interpretative function that can take in all of this information, and get us the mystery force that we are looking for. This function, which we'll call  $\mu$  would look like this:

$$\mu(S) = \left\{ F = ma, a = \frac{\Delta v}{t}, \Delta v = \frac{\Delta x}{t} \right\}$$

This function  $\mu$  will find the speed, then the acceleration and finally the force of our state. And if we plug in the numbers we get:

$$\mu(S_1) = \left\{ \begin{aligned} \Delta v &= \frac{\Delta x}{t} = \frac{50m}{5s} = 10\frac{m}{s}, a = \frac{\Delta v}{t} = \frac{10m/s}{5s} = 2\frac{m}{s^2}, \\ F_1 &= ma = 10kg \cdot 2\frac{m}{s^2} = 20\frac{kg \cdot m}{s^2} = 20N, \end{aligned} \right\}$$

So, the interpretative function we have constructed has done its job and figured out that the mystery force was 20 Newtons. Now, imagine we get another state  $S_2$ , where the details are different (object B,  $F_2$ ,  $m_B = 8kg$ , moves 36 meters in 3 seconds). The first question is: can we use  $\mu$  again? The logic of classical states dictate that we can: nothing has changed in our function, and it suits this second state as well; so, why not? Once we run the function again, we get the result  $F_2 = 32N$ . The second question: can we trust this result? Well, again, the logic of classical states dictates that we can. There is nothing within the function nor the state that would indicate that our second result we got from  $\mu$  has to be doubted. Why are we talking about this? It becomes clear when we move on to quantum states. In quantum mechanics, the same logic that undergirds classical states does not work: a quantum particle, in between states, changes the interpretative function; so that the second result that we get cannot be trusted. And since this makes repeat experimentation impossible in this logic, then that means that the first result cannot be trusted either. Therefore, this makes our job a lot easier: *artworks operate under the logic of quantum states*, states that invariably change the very interpretative function that they are subjected to. Of course, we are not claiming that artworks are quantum objects, but that they are homologous to them. The idea that artworks change the primordial interpretative function, which we have proven to be the case, makes them logically linked to the form of quantum states. It follows from this that we can take a page out of quantum mechanics, and follow their procedures for handling quantum states. In quantum mechanics, particles are not measured through a logic of classical state measurement; instead of looking at the result of their interpretative function, a quantum entanglement device (QED) for example, will instead, *look at the change in the function itself*. This is akin to bouncing a ball on a surface, and determining the force, not from the velocity or acceleration of the ball, but rather the dent that it makes on the surface. Obviously, this type of measurement is not needed with objects as big as a ball, since the change in the function is so small that it is negligible. Our claim is that the relationship between an artwork and the primordial interpretative function make it so that this change is not negligible.

We now have an idea about the way that our interpretative functions must operate: instead of looking at the *result* of the primordial interpretative function, we'll instead look at the *change* in the primordial interpretative function itself. But this act of looking or detecting the change in the primordial interpretative function would already take us out of its domain. We have in our hands a different function, a function that includes the primordial interpretative function within it. This function will be our first interpretative function, which will detect the difference in the primordial interpretative function that is caused by the artwork, and move on from there. Two points here: (1) it becomes clear why we have chosen 'Δ' as the symbol for the primordial interpretative function,  $\Delta(\vec{x})$ ; since 'Δ' is mainly used in physics as the symbol of change. But instead of appearing before another variable (like speed, acceleration, mass, etc.) our 'Δ' stands alone; since it is defined not through the change in something else, but through the change In-Itself.  $\Delta(\vec{x})$  is the pure difference in the interpretation of art, the nature of which will become clear in the next section. (2) We now understand why not knowing anything about the primordial interpretative function was not a problem: we do not care about the result of this function, but the change that occurs within it, in its encounter with the artwork. The fact that we cannot know the explicit version of this function (probably because it changes with every single variable; person to person, time to time, place to place, etc.), does not stop us at all; we can simply move forward while looking at the change that occurs in its instantiation. Just like starting with an extremely vague and abstract premise "artworks exist, and they do something" did not stop us in the slightest. It was like an avalanche, these tiny crumbs that seem so obvious and useless, snowballed into the idea that interpretation is a judgment(s) that is based on the faculty of understanding, that the law of subjective relativism is a superegoic mandate that represses either the interpretation or the evaluation aspect of artistic interaction and fails on its own terms through a necessary devolution to a circular logic, that we can observe a desire for objectivity and theory in the zeitgeist, that interpretation is always coupled with evaluation, that a perfect method of interpretation cannot exist, that artworks always change the interpretative model that they encounter, that artworks can be represented by vectors, that artworks exist in a realm that is homologous to states in quantum mechanics, that the first method of interpretation is not the result of the primordial interpretative function but rather the change of this function itself. And this final point is precisely the starting line for our first function,  $f_1(\vec{x})$ .

## 2. THE FIRST FUNCTION

$$f_1(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \Theta(t) = 0, \begin{array}{l} \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) > 0, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \\ \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) < 0, \not\rightarrow 0 + \lambda(t) \end{array} \right\}$$

Now we have a general idea about how the first function must operate: instead of taking the result of the primordial interpretative function as the evaluating principle, the first function is the change in the primordial function itself. The first function then, is a nested function; as it includes the primordial interpretative function within it, while ignoring the result. This is all well and good, but it still does not give a clear picture of what this would look like precisely; and it certainly does not mean much when it comes to artworks. How can we spot the instantiation of the first function with this vague and abstract definition? That's not all, there are many questions left to be answered from the previous section. For example, what is the primordial interpretative function exactly? We have claimed that it is a mysterious method of interpretation that we had to presuppose for our argumentation, but why? What is the relationship between art and this first function besides the formalist Mathematical resemblance? How can the first function evaluate the change in the primordial interpretative function? Our primary claim in this section is that there is a strict homology between the form of our first function and the Freudian pleasure principle. This homology is the object of our analysis in this section, which will hopefully answer all of these aforementioned questions. Let us summarize our argument in its simplest terms; we have shown a homological relationship between interpretation of artworks and quantum states in the previous section, and claimed that artworks in a way function like mathematical vectors. Following this homology we have developed the first function, and now we are drawing a second homology between the first function and pleasure principle. To put it simply: Artworks (homology) first function, and first function (homology) pleasure principle; therefore artworks (homology) pleasure principle, with the first function as the mediating third element.



This relationship will allow us to state that the first form of interpretation of artworks must be governed by the pleasure principle. This will not be a smooth operation of course; we still have two more functions to go, but we'll leave that question to the end of the chapter.

The immediate relationship between the pleasure principle and artworks seems clear: artworks induce a sense of pleasure or displeasure, and the evaluating principle must measure the result of this pleasure and assign a value accordingly. Our work is done then. . . Well, no, since this immediate reaction is faulty at best; and we can see why by looking at the standard definition of the pleasure principle. In the most basic reading of this concept, the pleasure principle is defined as the psychic apparatus that aims to maximize the sensation of pleasure in the individual psyche. Just like the utilitarian philosophical tradition before him, Freud claims that the human subject associates what is pleasurable with what is good, and preferable. So, the most basic guiding principle of the psyche becomes a very simple dictum: More pleasure, less displeasure! There is another factor however, that of the reality principle. Freud opposes the functioning of the pleasure principle to the reality principle; while the pleasure principle aims to maximize pleasure, reality pleasure aims to bring it back to a balanced state. For example, if I find that the hypothetical scenario in which I punch my neighbor in the face pleasurable, the pleasure principle dictates that I must do it, while the reality principle emphasizes the reality of the situation, where if I punch my neighbor I will probably be arrested and put in prison where my potential of attaining pleasure will be severely diminished. Reality principle prolongs pleasure, so that the pleasure principle does not self-destruct in its blind state. In this very standard (and reductive) reading, pleasure principle becomes a blind hedonistic impulse, while the reality principle is a rational and logical compromiser. What would this structure look like in the realm of artworks? Well, as we have stated before, artworks that provide pleasure for me would be evaluated in a good way, while artworks that provide displeasure for me would be evaluated in a bad way. The oversimplification aside, the problem with this conception is evident; primarily that there is no place for the reality principle in this configuration. In non-art objects, the need for the reality principle is obvious (especially from the example with my neighbor, where if not for the reality principle I could be in prison); but when it comes to art objects, why would we ever need the reality principle? From a purely logical perspective we simply would not need the reality principle, as the act of interpretation is never a problem of annihilation in reality. This conception then, simply does not work. There are two possibilities here, either our homology between art and pleasure principle is wrong, or this standard definition of pleasure principle is lacking something in terms of philosophical nuance. Considering we have already

claimed that the first function is governed by the pleasure principle, we must reject the first possibility, and therefore conclude that this standard conceptualization of the pleasure principle needs some refiguring.

Our first step here would simply be to reevaluate the ontological position of the reality principle. While Freud conceives pleasure and reality principles as opposite forces in dualistic manner; from a Lacanian perspective, it is clear that their relationship is a tad bit more complicated than a simple compromise. If the reality principle prolongs pleasure for the safety of the psyche and subsequently the pleasure principle, then is it not accurate to say that the reality principle is the ultimate instantiation of the pleasure principle? What can be more pleasurable than to ensure future pleasure? In this reformulation, the reality principle is not an opposing force to the pleasure principle, but its ultimate guarantee (2013)[123]. Let us give an example: imagine I find eating nice foods extremely pleasurable, and do it every chance I get. The pleasure principle dictates that I must eat more, since I find it pleasurable, why not keep doing it? The reality principle intervenes and says that instead of eating too much in one sitting and filling up; I can divide the food I was going to eat into smaller portions, and eat in a smaller time interval. So instead of eating two thousand calories at breakfast and subsequently being too full to eat lunch, I divide the two thousand calories up into manageable chunks that I still have some room left for lunch. If the calories are the measurement of my pleasure, the reality principle's intervention allowed me to consume more; and if the act of eating is the measurement of my pleasure, again the reality principle's intervention allowed me to have more instances of eating. While the pleasure principle's job is to maximize pleasure, we see in both instances that the reality principle does this job better. Therefore, we must reevaluate the position of the reality principle, instead of being a force that acts against the pleasure principle; *the reality principle is nothing but the prolongation of the pleasure principle*. It is not a separate entity that exists outside the pleasure principle and intervenes externally, but rather an intrinsic aspect of the pleasure principle itself. In a strict sense then, the reality principle does not exist; the prolongation and compromise are already an intimate factor of the pleasure principle. Therefore, the characterization of the pleasure principle as the infinite seeking out for ecstatic pleasure at all costs is incorrect, the pleasure principle is rational and calculating. In the libidinal economy of the psyche, the pleasure principle is like the stock market; so, the maximization of libidinal profit occurs in a logical, rational way. Therefore, the hedonistic picture we have drawn before is patently false, we cannot conceive the interpretation of artworks in this manner.

What is the "correct version", then? If the standard conceptualization of the plea-

sure principle leads us to the hedonistic view (which we have just shown to be incorrect), then what is the actual logic that undergirds the pleasure principle? Better yet, what is the pleasure principle? We have stated that it aims at maximizing pleasure; but how? And why? Why is this the primary psychic apparatus? And how does it function precisely? A lengthy discussion of the pleasure principle is necessary here, to see how we can draw the homology we have claimed that exists, more clearly. And the best way to begin is to see how Freud himself conceptualizes it in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*. Freud begins by thinking about the way in which psychic energy flows within the psychic apparatus; its ebb and flow if you will, and the subsequent structure within which it is directed, dampened, closed off. He already had some ideas about several psychic processes such as stimulus, substitution, conversion and discharge; but the general principle according to which these processes were organized was still a mystery (1955)[1:295]. His conception of the human psyche as the organizing apparatus that aims to master the multiple facets of excitation, reaches its apogee in this work. His final goal is to show that we can “represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles” (1955)[1:295]. For Freud, excitation in the nervous system can be characterized/conceptualized as a quantity that can be thought of as the general amount of neural energy in the entire psychic network. He thinks of neurons as the ground of these psychic processes, where energy is collected and distributed. We can draw a homology between the individual Freudian neuron and the psychic apparatus as a whole. Just like the psychic apparatus can build up and subsequently release excitation, the individual neuron as the building block of this system must be able to do the same: “A single neuron is thus a model of the whole nervous system with its dichotomy of [afferent and efferent] structures, the axis-cylinder being the organ of discharge.” (1955)[1:298]. If all the individual neurons have this structure then, what guides its flow in some specific manner in opposition to another one? If all of them are the same, shouldn’t there be an equivalence in psychic processes, that reduces them to a single one? Freud explains that the multitude of psychic processes can be conceptualized as the different orderings of individual neurons; building blocks of the psyche can be structured in a different way to produce the ground for a different psychic process (substitution instead of discharge, stimulus instead of conversion, etc.). Psychoanalytic theorist Richard Boothby explains it like this:

“In the interconnecting network of neurons, the economy of excitation and discharge is organized by a series of differentiated thresholds or ‘contact barriers’ between neurons. The system of contact barriers thus constitutes an architecture of *Bahnungen*, or pathways (‘facilitations’ in Strachey’s translation), which are more and less permeable to the trans-

mission of energy. Thus conceived, the function of the psychic apparatus is to regulate the flow of energy along variously conducive pathways.” (1991)[51]

The psychic apparatus, in Freudian theory, is the organization of psychic energy in the neural network, in accordance with the pathways of the nervous system. The circuitry parallel is unavoidable here, Freud is thinking about the structure of the psyche in a similar way to James Clerk Maxwell and Michael Faraday’s conception of electromagnetism, in which electricity (electromagnetic energy carried by electrons, rather than psychic energy carried by neurons), flows according to the path of least resistance; only meeting resistance if it is the most conducive path. Psychic processes then, are akin to the devices in circuitry: psychic trauma instead of resistors, object substitution instead of transformers, displacement instead of transistors, conversion instead of capacitors, etc. And just like with electromagnetism with its two principles of electrical discharge (completion of the circuit, and grounding the electrical charge); the psychic apparatus also has two regulatory principles. The first one is akin to the grounding principle in electromagnetics; where the neurons strive for a complete discharge of energy, a principle Freud calls *Neuronenträgheit* or neuronal inertia. According to this principle the system’s ultimate goal is to “neutralize the reception of Qn (quantity of energy) by giving it off” (1955)[1:296]. Freud outlines three ways this can be achieved: one neuron can pass the Qn to another, and that to another, and so on and so on. In this way, the natural resistor-like quality of the neuron<sup>3</sup> will gradually eat away at the quantity of Qn, until there’s nothing left. The second strategy, Freud claims, is to redirect this energy to the musculoskeletal system where it can be used in the instantiation of motor functions (shivering, twitching, tics, trembling, etc.). The third strategy, which can be used only when the other two have already failed, is to simply flee from the source of energy; to put physical distance between the subject and the source. We can clearly see that Freud’s second and third strategies for the first principle of inertia form the commonsense wisdom of “fight or flight”. However, we can ask the natural follow up question: what happens when the subject cannot simply flee from the source of excitation? The excess excitation is clearly a problem, otherwise the whole psychic apparatus wouldn’t develop around its discharge. The most obvious example would be when the source of this excitation is not external, but instead comes from within. How can we escape from too much pleasure, if the source of it is inside us? Freud’s answer here is thus:

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<sup>3</sup>This is similar to the way in which the wire in a circuit is always already a resistor, without the need for an external device which we normally call a resistor. In fact, these devices are nothing but a bunch of knotted wires that dampen the electrical current.

“The principle of inertia is, however, broken through from the first owing to another circumstance. . . The nervous system receives stimuli from the somatic element itself – endogenous stimuli – which have equally to be discharged. These have their origin in the cells of the body and give rise to the major needs: hunger, respiration, sexuality. From these the organism cannot withdraw as it does from external stimuli. . . They only cease subject to particular conditions, which must be realized in the external world. . . In consequence, the nervous system is obliged to abandon its original trend to inertia (that is, to bringing the level [of Qn] to zero). It must put up with [maintaining] a store of Qn sufficient to meet the demand for a specific action. Nevertheless, the manner in which it does this shows that the same trend persists, and to guard against any increase of it – that is, to keep it constant. All the functions of the nervous system can be comprised under the aspect of the primary function, or the secondary one imposed by the exigencies of life.” (1955)[1:296-297]

So, Freud here outlines a basic mode of defense by the psyche, where some neurons store Qn in order to “meet the demand for a specific action”. Pathways between neurons (or the specific ordering of neurons) not only aims to discharge all of the excess energy that passes through them, but also retains some energy for special occasions. Freud calls these special neurons “permanently cathected”, meaning always excited; always full of psychic energy. This establishes the second principle of the psychic apparatus according to Freud (which he calls the secondary function in the above quotation): the principle of constancy. The difference between the two principles is clear: the principle of inertia demands complete discharge, a return to zero; while the principle of constancy demands the return to a specific amount of energy. Freud mentions in the above quotation that these two principles work in tandem with each other, but is he correct? Logically speaking, isn’t there a bit of contradiction or a certain kind of antagonism between the two? If one wants zero, and the other one wants not-zero, aren’t they at odds with each other? Freud resolves this contradiction by stating that the two principles are not symmetrical; they do not have the same weight in the psychic apparatus: there must be a third term that mediates the functioning of the two principles. This mediator would look at the potential result of the source of energy in the case it is transferred to the psychic apparatus, and decide whether it will be evacuated, or be passed along facilitative pathways that will constrict its movement, resist it until the energy is spent on the contact barriers (along with the permanently cathected neurons). This guiding mediator of course, is the pleasure principle; the logic within which the principles of inertia and constancy function. The dialectic between storage and inhibition serves as the most basic definition of the pleasure principle; therefore, it is misleading to state that the pleasure principle is simply the maximization of pleasure within the psyche. The

important point to be emphasized over and over again here, is the fact that the pleasure principle is not simply a logic that stays at the level of the id. The reality principle as the assertion of the rational ego, means that the pleasure principle is the organizing structure of pleasure not in the standard definition of the id as mindless hedonistic pleasure-seeking; but a rational guide, that determines the primacy of the two functions (inertia and constancy) in the individual psyche. If pleasure is defined as the release of excess excitation, then the pleasure principle is not something that aims to release more and more pleasure; *rather it is the very logic that determines what is excessive*. Pleasure principle designates an object (a source of potential psychic energy), by determining its possible effect in the apparatus; and deems it as excessive, which subsequently diverts this energy to the principle of inertia where it is discharged completely, creating a sense of pleasure. The sense of pleasure then is not the effect of a blind automatism, but of a logical determinism. If the psychic energy of this hypothetical object would overload the psychic apparatus, the pleasure principle diverts this energy to the principle of constancy where the neural contact barriers and the pathways between them eliminate this energy by returning to a pre-determined Qn; creating homeostasis. It is not that pleasure principle does not seek pleasure, but rather that it recognizes an unmanageable psychic energy and decides to involve the principle of constancy, so that the individual psyche can feel pleasure in the future. In both cases then, the pleasure principle is aptly named, it seeks pleasure at all times; however, it is not simply blind in this aim. The pleasure principle is not a stubborn ram, but a cunning stockbroker.

We can have a better understanding of the precise way the pleasure principle functions with an example from the realm of physics. If we look carefully at Freud's conceptualization of the psychic apparatus, we can draw a homological relationship between the two aforementioned principles (of inertia and constancy), and Isaac Newton's first law of motion. Isn't the principle of inertia and constancy form the two sides of the first law? If we take a look at Newton's first law of motion we see that it claims that "an object at rest remains at rest, or if in motion, remains in motion at a constant velocity unless acted on by a net external force." The first part of the law "an object at rest remains at rest" is clearly homologous to Freud's principle of inertia, while "if in motion, remains in motion at a constant velocity" is clearly homologous to the principle of constancy. The natural follow-up question is: what is homologous with "unless acted on by a net external force"? Well, our answer here is clear, that it would be the object of pleasure, that changes the existing situation and punctures the psychic homeostasis. What is the pleasure principle in this analogy then? We can have a better idea if we look at the second Newtonian law of motion: "the force on an object is equal to its mass times its acceleration". If

we translate this to the language of psychoanalysis, we get the idea that the force of an object within the psyche can be thought of as the change it creates within it (since acceleration is the change in the object with regards to its spatial dimensionality), with respect to some constant (mass). Again though, where is the pleasure principle? Well, in a paradoxical way, the pleasure principle is not within the text of the Newtonian laws of motion, but it is this law itself. Or in a more precise way, the pleasure principle is what determines the very applicability of this process.

We now understand the way in which the pleasure principle functions, but before we can move on to our first function, we must complicate the situation a little bit. In this section we have been discussing Freud's conception of the psychic apparatus, with respect to the concepts of neurons, pathways, inertia, psychic energy (libido), economy of pleasure, constancy, contact barriers, the quantity of energy ( $Q_n$ ), et cetera... But here, we must ask the crucial question: is any of this true? We have been talking about Freud's discussion of neurons at length, a term coming from neurology, a subdiscipline of human biology, which is a scientific enterprise; but can we say that this understanding of neurons is scientifically correct? Freud constantly insists on biologizing his concepts, or at least he tries to always ground his theory in some kind of natural science; but isn't his constant attempt at using biological terms to legitimize his speculative doctrine infamously dubious? Haven't the field of psychology numerous times disproven Freud's ideas when it comes to the human animal? What even is psychic energy? Freud seems to go back and forth with the idea that psychic energy is a metaphor, sometimes he writes about it in a way that makes it clear that he understands that it is merely a useful facsimile, that we obviously cannot describe psychic phenomena in terms of energies that can be described with calories or Joules; at other times however, he makes it seem like he really believes that psychic energy exists. Many scholars (even those who are not hostile towards psychoanalysis) seem to think that Freud's pseudo-scientific formulations are inaccurate at best: L. Breger claims that "the conceptual underpinning of motivational theory [the concepts of psychic energy, of libido, of conservation, or economy of life and death instincts] has long been its weakest aspect." (1968)[44] and K. S. Lashley claims that "The psychoanalytic system is based on energy concepts, and I do not believe that the data justify them. There is no known source of energy of such character in the nervous system." (1957)[231] and Roy Grinker writes that "the series of words [instinct, drive, action, force and energy] are misconceptions. There is no relation of 'psychic energy' to any known form of energy, and it is not remotely related to the physical concept of force." (1968)[24]. I wonder what Grinker would think about my example from Newtonian physics! Nevertheless, this is clearly where Freud pays the price for biologizing psychoanalytic concepts; these

protestations are obviously correct in the sense that there is no scientific evidence for the existence of ‘psychic energy’. We can obviously side-step all of these criticisms by simply claiming that Freud was wrong in doing this, and that psychoanalysis is not science, but a form of speculative theory, and the use of concepts from science are purely metaphorical. But a better response would be that it is not the case of a mere metaphor, but that they are homologous. A homological link is not a causal link, but rather a dialectical link: the relationship between Freud’s psychic energy and Newton’s physical energy does not indicate a physical cause-and-effect between the two, but rather points to a cause-and-effect relation within thought itself. This link does not actually exist, yes, but what do we mean when we say ‘actually’? The word itself points to an unquestioned understanding of metaphysics, one that grounds actuality in empirical realism. Therefore, we can say that the link between two actually does exist, in the realm of speculative theory, to which psychoanalysis belongs. Even though that would upset Freud, we must simply bite the bullet and make this reformulation. However, this still does not answer the question; what is psychic energy? For now, let us put a pin in this question, and turn to another round of complications.

A second form of complication, which is much more important for us, comes from Lacanian theory itself. Boothby summarizes this problem in a nice way:

“[I]sn’t [the idea of psychic energy] especially unsuitable for a discussion of Lacan? Isn’t the critique of psychoenergetics one instance in which Lacan is moving with the general trend? What else are we to conclude from Lacan’s thesis that ‘the unconscious is structure in the most radical way like a language’? Isn’t it Lacan who insists that the pure gold of analysis is to be found, not in any effulgence of affect, but in the verbal articulations of the patient’s discourse, in the algebra of the signifier?”  
(1991)[49]

This is clearly a much bigger problem in terms of our discussion with Freud and his conception of the pleasure principle. The concepts of psychic energy on which the pleasure principle rests clearly goes against our insistence on Mathema-logical formulation. How can the idea of an ethereal energy be described by logic and mathematics, which Lacan himself was fond of? First thing to note here Lacan himself thought that these concepts should be retained, even though his precise formulation reveals a sense of uncertainty:



“In fact, the notion of libido in Freud’s teachings seems to be an incredibly broad theoretical entity, which far exceeds the specialized sexual desire of the adult. It identifies itself rather with desire, the ancient eros taken in an extended sense, as the ensemble of appetites in the human being which goes beyond the strict limits of conservation. . . . For all the relative imprecision of the concept of libido, it seems to retain its value.” (1980)[256]

But how does Lacan use the concept of energetics in his thought? First thing he does is to associate the functioning of the pleasure principle with that of the ego: “Libido and ego are on the same side” (1988)[326]. Subsequently, Lacan envisages the functioning ego with the register of Imaginary: “The libidinal drive is centered on the function of Imaginary.” (1988)[122]. He then draws a homology between the gestalt aspect of the perceptual ego (which is within the Lacanian realm of the Imaginary), and the principal of constancy that Freud had developed. Like the contact barriers, or pathways, that block off the transmission of energy in the psychic apparatus, Lacan claims that the Imaginary ego does the same: “The ego, doubly emphasizing the regulatory function of this buffer, must allow the maximum inhibition of the passage of energy through this system.” (1988)[110]. In this way Lacan is able to fit the entirety of Freudian psychoenergetics into his thought.

OK, it does fit in with Lacan, so what? The question persists: can we retain the concept of psychic energy without any recourse to science? We have already dealt with this question before, but as we have already mentioned, we merely side-stepped it in a sleight of hand fashion. Now we must deal with it directly. In Lacan’s thought (in contradistinction with the ego, which has the status of the Imaginary), psychic energy itself has the status of the ever-illusory Real. Lacan takes this to be categorically true, in his three registers, the Real is the very failure of symbolization, the absence of sense itself; and psychic energy, prior to its articulation in the psychic apparatus; and its interpretation by the pleasure principle in the Imaginary, must therefore be found within the Real. Boothby draws our attention to an example that Lacan himself gives:

“In an analogy that explicitly links the problem of psychic energy with the Real, Lacan compares the Real to the energy of a hydroelectric dam. The important point is that it is impossible to specify the energy of a river without referring to the structure of the dam that will interrupt and redirect its flow. It is always possible, even necessary to presuppose the potential force of the unharnessed river, but that force is incalculable without reference to the mechanism in which it becomes operative.

Like the force behind the dam, organismic energy is meaningful only in conjunction with the psychological machinery through which it moves.”  
(1991)[62]

Boothby makes it clear that for Lacan, psychic energy In-Itself (in the Hegelian sense) does not exist. It only comes into its being (to use another Hegelian term) only when it is interrupted. For Boothby, psychic energy is indeterminate; we cannot (in the realm of psychoanalysis) make claims about its ontological status, but we must nonetheless presuppose it for our discussions. To further the analogy, to say that the energy of the river exists means nothing, even though it is true; what is meaningless is not the actual energy of the river, but its utterance in the socio-symbolic realm. In a sense then, Boothby’s formulation, even though it is definitely accurate, is somehow incomplete. The energy of the river is not simply indeterminate, it is certainly determinate; but only after the fact. The determination occurs only in its interruption, which retroactively signifies its existence. Perhaps here, we are at the breaking point of this analogy, since the energy of the river certainly exists prior to the hydroelectric dam. What we can do here however, is propose a better analogy, from quantum physics.

In the 1930s, when quantum mechanics was first coming into its being, with regards to the popularizations of the basic experiments in the field (Schrödinger’s Cat thought experiment, the particle-wave duality, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle), the theory of “hidden variables” developed (2018)[17]. This theory stated that even though we may not know everything about a particle prior to measurement, variables which determine the behavior of the particle still exist; and the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics is nothing but our limitation in our technological/scientific apparatus. Several variations of this theory developed: agnostic hidden variablists claimed that we will never know these hidden variables, and optimistic hidden variablists claimed that we don’t know these variables yet, and that with the development in physics we may one day learn about them. Philosophically speaking, the hidden variables theory is silly, there is even a ‘hidden variable fallacy’ in propositional (or first-order) logic; which states that in any causal relationship one can always state that there may be hidden reasons why X led to Y, etc. The attempt to convince physicists that they were making a philosophical mistake was also equally silly, most held onto their beliefs that the particle was not really indeterminate prior to measurement. These optimistic realists were not a bunch of idiots obviously (one of them was Albert Einstein himself!), but they were taking a philosophical stance even though they would have claimed that it was their hope in the determinacy of nature that compelled them to think this way. The agnostics on the other hand,

believed that worrying about the question itself turned physics into philosophy; for them, the only answer was to refuse the question altogether. All of this changed however; when in 1964, a physicist named John Bell, through precise experimentation and theorization, proved that both of these flavors of “hidden variable” theory was incorrect; that there is no hidden variable that will make the inherent indeterminacy of the particle vanish: in a sense, prior to measurement, the particle was nowhere. The act of measuring created the position of the particle, and therefore we cannot claim that the particle exists in an empirically realist sense, we can only presuppose its existence in an ontological way. Bell’s Theorem, as it came to be known, was proven again and again in the subsequent years; removing any doubt regarding its accuracy.

Lacan’s idea regarding the existence of the psychic energy in Freud’s thought is best exemplified by Bell’s Theorem. Psychic energy does not exist prior to its organization by the pleasure principle. In this way, we can completely refute the aforementioned biological criticisms: they presuppose that Freud in a sense is a hidden variable theorist, but as Lacan has clearly demonstrated, Freud already positioned his theory to accommodate Bell’s Theorem. Here Lacan claims that:

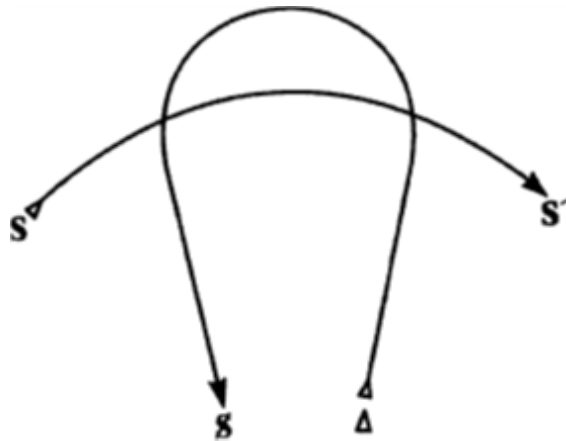
“In the end, at this existential level, we can only talk about the libido satisfactorily in a mythical way; it is the genitrix, *hominum divumque voluptas*. That is what Freud is getting at. In former days what returns here used to be expressed in terms of the gods, and one must proceed with care before turning it into an algebraic sign. They’re extremely useful, algebraic signs, but on condition that you restore their dimensions to them. That is what I am trying to do when I talk to you about machines.”  
(1988)[227]

Psychic energy then is the myth of psychoanalysis, we know that in a precise sense it does not exist; but through psychoanalysis we presuppose them to exist. Couldn’t we use here, the “as if” commutator we have developed in the ‘*As If*’ *Commutator* section? Psychic energy does not exist, yes, but acts *as if* it does.

One final item of business we have before turning our attention to our first function: the question regarding the primordial interpretative function. We have mentioned in the beginning of this section that we would be answering this question. Why haven’t we dealt with this question when we proposed this concept in the previous section (*The Zeroth Point*)? The answer is that we needed to understand the role of the mythical psychic energy and its homology with the quantum indeterminacy before we could fully understand the nuances of it. There are two points of interconnection

between the primordial interpretative function and this section: (1) the status of psychic energy (and it being within the Lacanian Real, its relationship with our as if commutator); and (2), the homology we have been trying draw between our first function and the pleasure principle. Now that we understand these two points, we can finally understand the status of the primordial interpretative function. I hope it is self-evident that the primordial interpretative function has the status of the Lacanian Real. It is made up of unsymbolized stuff, perhaps the clearest example of the Kantian Sublime in the realm of artworks. It does not *stricto sensu* exist, but acts as if it does. Only with the effect of the art object on it that we understand that it was there in the first place. Or to be more precise, the change brought on by the art object retroactively creates the primordial interpretative function. We presuppose it to exist out of theoretical necessity, which does not mean that this presupposition is pejorative; but instead, it gets at the Truth of our argumentation by puncturing it from within. We can draw another parallel here, between the primordial interpretative function and Lacan's idea of the mythical intent ( $\Delta$ ) in his discussion of the elementary cell of the graph of desire.

Figure 2.1 Elementary Cell of the Graph of Desire



Slavoj Žižek explains this elementary cell like this:

“What we have here is simply the graphic presentation of the relation between signifier and signified. [...] Some mythical, pre-symbolic intention (marked  $\Delta$ ) 'quilts' the signifier's chain, the series of the signifier marked by the vector  $S$ '. The product of this quilting (what 'comes out on the other side' after the mythical - real - intention goes through the signifier and steps out of it) is the subject marked by the matheme  $\mathcal{S}$ . [...] This pre-symbolic, mythical entity - with Althusser, too, the 'individual' which is interpellated into subject is not conceptually defined, it is simply a hypothetical  $X$  which must be presupposed.” (2008b)[112]

We see that this hypothetical X, in Žižek’s (and Lacan’s) words, has the status of the Real; in the case of the elementary cell of the signifying chain it is pre-symbolic intent, in the case of the pleasure principle it is the concept of psychic energy, and finally in our case of the non-theoretical interpretation of artworks it is the primordial interpretative function. We can further this analogy as well: the difference between S and S’ is the change in our function; while the first function is akin to the Lacanian subject ( $\mathcal{S}$ ), recording (or standing in for) this change, this pure difference itself. Here’s another example: in a way, the way we have discussed the primordial interpretative function also attests to this form of presupposition. Didn’t we also presuppose the existence of this function in the previous section without any evidence to support its existence? Only when we come to this section (when we ‘come out on the other side’ as Žižek writes in the quotation) can we understand what it is we were doing. We were discussing the primordial interpretative function in the same way the primordial interpretative function works!

Now that we understand the primordial interpretative function we are finally equipped to discuss the first function. What is the first function, and how does it work? Here we go: the first function (which from now on we’ll write as  $f_1(\vec{x})$ ), is the detection (and subsequent evaluation) of the change within the primordial interpretative function; the precise nature of this change is determined by the pleasure principle, on the art object’s pleasurable-ness. An art object that induces a sense of pleasure within the terms of the pleasure principle changes the primordial interpretative function in a positive way (in the mathematical sense), or to put it in another way, the difference between  $\Delta(\vec{x})$  and  $\Delta'(\vec{x})$  is +; while an art object that induces a sense of displeasure within the terms of the pleasure principle changes the  $\Delta(\vec{x})$  in a negative way, so that  $\Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) < 0$ . This change then gets evaluated in an ‘as if’ commutation: all of the variations in the positive value of the change in the primordial interpretative function gets squashed to 1, ‘as if’ they were only one value all along, while all the negative values gets squished to 0. Therefore, while the pure interpretative aspect of the first function of interpretation is multivariable, the evaluative aspect of it is reduced to a binary opposition.<sup>4</sup> If we write all of this in the mathema-logical form we have proposed before, it comes out to be something like this:

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<sup>4</sup>Well, why? Why does the evaluative dimension of the first function reduce the multiplicity into a duality? We’ll see that this also happens with the other two interpretative functions, so it is definitely not something to be glossed over. Unfortunately, the explanation of this binary reduction requires the discussion of the other two functions, so we will have to wait until the end to answer this question. The penultimate section of the conclusion chapter, ‘*The Two Times*’, will discuss this question in a satisfactorily in-depth manner.

$$f_1(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Theta(t) = 0, \quad \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) > 0, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \\ \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) < 0, \not\rightarrow 0 + \lambda(t) \end{array} \right\}$$

The function can be divided into two in two ways: horizontally and vertically. If we divide horizontally into two we see that the function comprises of two levels, each corresponding to the positive and negative results in the change of the primordial interpretative function. If we divide vertically, we see that the two halves form the interpretative portion and the evaluative portion. These portions are united by the as if commutator. We can therefore say that the function effectively has four quadrants; the top left quadrant indicates that the change in the primordial interpretative function is positive, and the as if commutator leads us to the top right quadrant where the evaluation takes place. We can see that the evaluation is designated as ‘positive’ (not in the mathematical sense) or ‘good’ by the form  $1 + \lambda(t)$ .<sup>5</sup> If we start on the bottom left where the change in the primordial interpretative function is negative, the as if commutator leads us to the bottom right quadrant, where the second possible evaluation takes place. This time the evaluation is designated by the form  $0 + \lambda(t)$ ; which means that the art object is ‘negative’ in the pejorative sense, or simply ‘bad’. Obviously the exact designations of these values ( $1 + \lambda(t)$  and  $0 + \lambda(t)$ ) as good or bad may seem too reductive of simplistic. We can change these terms however we like (radical instead of good, ideological instead of bad), but these shifts does not mean much when it comes to our mathema-logical approach. They all amount to the same thing at the end, the motivation behind the change would be nothing but a different way to spin the same evaluation, and it would be beyond the scope of our work.

There we have it, the first function. Before we conclude however, let us spend some time articulating how this function operates in the everyday interpretation of artwork by the people who use this function. Like we have mentioned in the introduction, our purpose is not to diagnose and better the non-theoretical methods of interpretation that people use in their encounters with artworks. We merely want to locate the precise logic within which these non-theoretical interpretations take place. Nevertheless, it might be helpful (in a purely theoretical, and not in a normative way) to look at the way these functions manifest themselves in everyday reality. And the first function is obviously a great way to begin looking at this aspect of artistic interpretation, since it is probably the most ubiquitous function out of

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<sup>5</sup>What are  $\Theta(t)$  and  $\lambda(t)$ ? These designate the two different temporal aspects of our function. Unfortunately, just like the binary reduction in the above footnote, the explanation of these terms require the discussion of the other two functions, and therefore will be reserved for the end of the treatise. They too (along with the binary reduction) will be discussed in ‘*The Two Times*’ section

the three.<sup>6</sup> We can say that the lay-person, in common parlance at least, is defined in a way that already precipitates the first function. Wouldn't most people say that the most basic way of looking at artwork is just by having fun with them? Doesn't a popular line of thought in the zeitgeist today, claim that we ought not to take artworks too seriously, that we should just enjoy them? Another line of thought in this proximity would be that we should not intellectualize art and that we should approach them in a simple manner. In these approaches, we can already see the traces of the first function. According to them, art is approximate to something like entertainment (the noun, not the g erondif), only there to provide some kind of pleasure. We can also see that these lines of thought reveals a kind of economy of art; not in the real-life art market sense, but instead a form of libidinal economy where artworks are defined by what they bring in terms of their pleasurable-ness. In this way, we can claim that just like everyday objects that are produced are turned into commodities under capitalism, artworks are turned into objects of pleasure under the pleasure principle which governs the first function. The pleasure principle would then dictate that the artworks that create a sense of displeasure are 'bad investments' (to further the Marxian analogy), an instance where the libidinal investment of the individual does not pay off its efforts. It follows from this that the forerunners of this anti-intellectualism movement with regards to art, are trapped under the logic of the free market system. "Have fun with art, and try not to think about it too much!" is a natural corollary to the capitalist dictum "Live in the moment!". Perhaps a more interesting group however, are the people who do not wield the dictates of the first function consciously (they do not consciously say or even think the aforementioned claims), but instead unconsciously act as if this is the proper way of approaching artworks fundamentally. Their non-theoretical outlook on artworks itself is not theorized, it functions in the same way free associations do in psychoanalysis: it is always already presupposed to be the way things are. In this way they are akin to the heroes of Luchino Visconti's films, where the juxtaposition that is created within the filmic image is that the only thing that separates the protagonists from the antagonists is their blindness towards their actions. We can even find a similar situation with Yorgos Lanthimos' 2018 film *The Favourite*, where the hero Abigail Hill and the villain Sarah Churchill are only separated by the perspective of the camera along with the narrative. We see that Abigail starts out as the underdog hero, while Sarah is clearly the antagonistic villain; as the movie progresses however, they switch places with regards to their narrative role. The end of the film reveals

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<sup>6</sup>A possible future work of art theory reveals itself here: can we track the movement of these functions in history? Can we say that the first function was most used in the early 20th century, for example? Even though (like we have said in the introduction), we are not going to be doing a kind of psychoanalytic historiography, or a Foucauldian archeology of knowledge with these functions in this treatise, these questions are still fun to think about. Someone can write a book about this!

Abigail as the villain, while we sympathize with Sarah. But the crucial aspect of the film is how this is accomplished narratively: it is not that Abigail commits more and more villainous actions, while Sarah commits heroic ones; rather the film just continues the logic within which these characters started. A parallax (in the Žižekian sense of the term) is created within the narrative as well as the image, which allows the spectator to see what all was there along. The followers of the first function work in quite a similar way: if confronted, they most likely would claim that there is more to art than just mere pleasure, that art does touch on intellectual issues. The point is that they actually know that they are following the mandates of the pleasure principle, but they act as if they don't know it. But wait, haven't we jumped the gun a little bit? Where did this idea that the first function (which follows the logic of the pleasure principle) is wrong, come from? We should be careful with our presuppositions here; we still have not shown why this first function fails, we have merely demonstrated its inner workings. From a metatheoretical position we do know that it must fail, since in '1/x and *House M.D.*' section we have claimed that all of these functions will have a point of inherent failure which will propel them to transform into the next function; and well, there are still two more functions. . . But nevertheless, we must show the precise way this function fails before we pass judgment on hypothetical people who use it to interpret artworks.

## 2.1 Failure of the First Function

After all of this we can finally ask the crucial question: what is the point of failure of the first function? We have already stated before that this point must satisfy certain conditions. (1) It must be an inherent form of failure: we have seen countless times when the first function fails from an external place, like the fact that the first function does not see art objects in an artistic sense. We do not know what this artistic aspect of the artwork is, in fact, we have only gotten where we are because we have purposefully ignored this aspect. Nevertheless, we do know that whatever this artistic core of the artwork is, the first function fails to recognize it. No matter what one's individual outlook on the theory/philosophy of art is, they would still accept that it cannot be one that rests on pure pleasure alone. However, we can only make this assessment (that the first function fails to recognize the artistic aspect of the artwork) from a meta-theoretical perspective; only from an exempted view that this claim makes sense. We must instead find the point of failure in the function's own terms. (2) This point of failure must be generative: this ultimate



failure cannot be the endpoint of the process of interpretative functions; otherwise, all of our discussions regarding the interpretation of artworks would be void. It follows from this that there must be a beyond to this function, a second function that ‘corrects’ this form of failure. (3) It must satisfy both the mathematical perspective we’ve utilized up until this point, and the philosophical/psychoanalytic framework within which we have argued for the homology between the purely mathematical functions and their non-mathematical (dialectical) counterpart. (4) It also must satisfy these two aspects (mathematical logic and philosophy/psychoanalysis) *at the same time*. There cannot be one point of failure for one aspect, and another point of failure for the other aspect. It must be the same point, sharing a certain homology between both cases.

Starting from the function itself, and moving towards the psychoanalytic aspect later seems to be easier, so therefore, that will be our approach. To see the failure more clearly, let us take a look at the first function again:

$$f_1(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Theta(t) = 0, \quad \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) > 0, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \\ \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) < 0, \not\rightarrow 0 + \lambda(t) \end{array} \right\}$$

Our starting question should be thus: what is wrong with this function mathematically? What about it may not make sense? Or to put it more precisely, what does the function not account for *on its own terms*? The attentive reader (even one who might be mathematically illiterate) should recognize this failure in an instant. Why? Well, because we have seen it before. . . Remember  $f(x) = 1/x$  from the ‘1/x and *House M.D.*’ section? We have stated there that  $f(x) = 1/x$  does not make mathematical sense, since it leaves out the possibility that x could equal zero; where the function would lead to a contradiction. The domain of the function was ill-defined, which led to this outcome. A similar case can be found in the first interpretative function. Namely that, *what happens if the difference between the two primordial functions is zero*? What if the primordial function simply does not change, and we get a third option, other than the two possible evaluations (0 and 1)? We have stated in the ‘1/x and *House M.D.*’ section that, we simply cannot use the usual mathematical way of getting rid of contradictions; where we would redefine the domain so that the change in the primordial interpretative function does not equal zero. The problem with that operation is twofold: (a) it betrays our explicit aim at emphasizing dialectical contradictions, since an analytic contradiction would not be generative (it would stop us dead in our tracks), and it would be impossible to apply to the realm of artworks (since this register is properly dialectical). And (b), per-

haps a bigger problem, is that *we simply do not know how to redefine the function*. In the case of  $f(x) = 1/x$  it is easy to see the problematic point in the domain, it is clearly when  $x$  equals zero. But in the case of the first function, how would we even do the same operation? What would be the thing that we would leave out? Here we see the necessity of the dialectical form of contradiction, the only way to resolve it, is to change the function itself; or to put it more precisely, *allow the function to change itself*.

We need to dig a little bit deeper here however. What does it even mean that the primordial interpretative function does not change? Didn't we presuppose in 'The Zeroth Point' section that when it comes in contact with an art object, it must change in some way? There are two options here: ( $\alpha$ ) the function simply does not work; where the art object does not even enter the domain of the function, it is forever outside for whatever reason. This is why there is no change, it is not that the difference within the primordial interpretative function is zero, it is rather that nothing ever happens to it. And much more importantly ( $\beta$ ), where the art object does change the function, not to another form, but rather it changes it precisely to itself. But again, how can that happen mathema-logically? In order to resolve this contradiction, and to answer this question conclusively, we need to look at another mathematical concept; one that is related to the beginning point of our entire inquiry. Since we have started with the simple claim that we can represent art objects with the mathematical concept of the vector, it seems apt that we should follow it to its natural conclusion. The study of vectors in higher mathematics is called 'Linear Algebra', a field that looks at mathematical concepts like vectors, vector spaces, matrices, linear combinations, dot products, determinants, etc. In high school level linear algebra, students generally think about vectors in a similar way to numbers in arithmetics; as independent and inert mathematical objects that they do mathematical things with. The numbers -9.2 or 352 are stationary objects that have no inherent movement that then you subject to some operation (you add them, subtract them, put them in a function, etc.). When students move on to linear algebra proper however, they realize that vectors are not inert, that not only can you operate with them, but that *they always already are constituted as an operation in themselves*. Every vector is a form of linear transformation, but instead of transforming a pre-determined value (like a function), they transform the very field that they exist in. This is a more accurate way of describing vectors, and since we have stated that art objects can be represented as vectors, we must follow this logic to its endpoint. Artworks are not inert objects that we subject to an interpretative function; but instead, they are always already a function, in and of themselves. Now, the precise nature of the aforementioned option ( $\beta$ ) is much

clearer: this special art object transforms the primordial function into itself; and this is precisely why the function spits out zero as the result. In linear algebra, a vector transformation that leaves its direction intact is called an ‘eigenvector’; while the determinant value of this vector is called an ‘eigenvalue’ (2009)[284]. Therefore, we can invent a new term to call these special art objects that transform the primordial interpretative function into itself: an ‘eigenartwork’.

We have two different ways that make the first interpretive function return zero as a result: ( $\alpha$ ), where the object was not within the domain of the function altogether; and ( $\beta$ ), where the art object in question is an eigenartwork, that transforms the primordial interpretative function into itself. This is all well and good mathematically, but it still does not mean much theoretically. Perhaps it is time to bring the philosophical/psychoanalytic perspective back, and see how it sees this situation. The first thing to ask is: what are the psychoanalytic versions of these two ways, ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ )? We have stated that the positive change in the primordial interpretative function gets mediated by the pleasure principle to create a sense of pleasure; while a negative change creates a sense of displeasure. So, the question here is: “What would ‘a lack of change’ create in the subject’s psychic experience?” ( $\alpha$ ) is clear to understand: a non-artwork would elude the domain of artworks, leading to a sense of boredom in the psyche. These objects are structurally outside the domain of art; and therefore, make it so that the function does not operate. The first interpretative function gets stuck, and cannot rev its engines when it encounters a non-art object; interpretation never takes place, leading to boredom as the fundamental evaluation. What does ( $\beta$ ) look like then? Instead of boredom, eigenartworks create a sense of anxiety: the function properly works, but gets stuck on its own inherent limitation.<sup>7</sup> It appears that the function does function, but it leads to zero nonetheless; which means that the inherent indeterminacy of the primordial interpretative function gets transposed onto the evaluation, where it disrupts the binary reduction of the multiple variables of the result. This means that when it comes to eigenartworks, the evaluative step itself is now indeterminate; creating a lack within this structure. It is clear why this inherent lack would result in the creation of anxiety in the individual psyche: the Real of the primordial interpretive function has left its cage in the unconscious realm of the interpretative portion of the function, and has crept its way into the conscious evaluative portion, thus resulting in a direct encounter with the void; perhaps the most primal form of anxiety. . .

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<sup>7</sup>One question to ask here is: what do these eigenartworks look like? Unfortunately, we simply cannot know; since they only exist in relation to a failure point of the function. Because the primordial interpretative function only exists in the terms of its own interruption and has no positive existence outside of its inherent difference to itself, we cannot predict what art objects would be eigenartworks. The primordial interpretative function is structurally indeterminate, a necessary presupposition; so therefore, we cannot determine what art objects would transform it back into itself.

We have now also found the ultimate reason for the transformation of our first interpretative function into the second one: is there a better motivator, a better fuel for the engine of transformative dialectical movement, than anxiety? But the true question now becomes: how can the subject deal with this anxiety, and subsequently its source, eigenartworks? Both Freud and Lacan emphasize that there are two main ways the human subject deals with objects that cause anxiety (for example, the realization that the mother has no phallus for Freud, and the recognition of the lack in the big Other for Lacan): first option is to avoid them at all costs, which effectively turns them into forbidden objects. This is the creation of phobia, the usually forgotten third type of neurosis (along with the more famous hysteria and obsession). This approach clearly does not work when it comes to art objects; since the artistic realm is somewhat disjointed from the socio-symbolic register, avoiding these objects is easy. In fact, it is too easy, there would be no chance of a re-encounter; and therefore, the entire art-world would be barred under a phobic outlook, effectively stopping the movement of the interpretative function dead in its tracks. The second approach is the polar opposite: instead of avoiding the anxiety inducing object, the subject fixates on it relentlessly. Its goal is to dissect this object to find the one element that is the true cause of its anxiety, and to effectively rob them of their anxiousness. This is a much more generative approach, and in a sense, it does work: the anxiety that is created does not transpose itself into the fear affect, but instead remains as is; as an endless source of force that propels the subject to some specific action. In this way, the subject displaces the anxiety to some specific element within the object; allowing them to disavow the object in its totality. The psychoanalytic term for this operation is fetishism; and the object that is displaced is called a fetish object. So now, we can claim that the way of resolving the contradiction that lies at the heart of the first interpretative function is to find the specific element within the eigenartwork, and instead of fleeing from it, is to fixate and subsequently fetishize this constant element. We can see that this forms the basis of the second interpretative function, where the problem of the eigenartwork is alleviated through a displacement of some constant element. Our first function has effectively been transformed on its own terms; leading us to an analysis of the second function. The next chapter will focus on the second interpretative function, and subsequently explain precisely how this fetishization happens; both mathema-logically and philosophically/psychoanalytically.

### 3. THE SECOND FUNCTION

$$f_2(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \Theta(t) = 0, \neg c \in \forall(A - \{c\}), \frac{d^n \Delta(\vec{x})}{d\vec{x}^n} \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) = c, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \right\}$$

$$\left. \frac{d^n \Delta(\vec{x})}{d\vec{x}^n} \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) = \neg c, \not\rightarrow 0 + \lambda(t) \right\}$$

The general framework within which the second function works is now clear: instead of looking at the change within the primordial interpretative function in terms of its positivity/negativity and evaluating based on this duality; the second interpretative function looks at the change in the primordial interpretative function, and detects it only when this difference is a singular constant. The existence of a particular value is the basis for the second function's evaluation, and not whether this value is positive or negative. This is a general and vague description of the second function, and it does not tell us much in terms of its relationship to artworks. Our objective is clear then, we must draw a suitable homology between this mathematical construction and philosophy/psychoanalysis, just like we did for the first function. Luckily, we already have an idea about what this homological link would look like; as in the previous section we connected the second function with the concept of fetishism. This chapter will go over this concept, and the interconnection between fetishism and interpretation. Several questions are in the way however: (1) What is fetishism really? We have only discussed the concept in relation to eigenartworks and nothing else. Remember, the eigenartworks are special type of art objects that cause the first function to transform into the second function, yes; but once we are in the domain of the second function, every single artwork still ought to be (potentially) interpretable by it, and not just eigenartworks. We have defined the second function in its ability to handle eigenartworks, but beyond this point, it should be able to handle non-eigenartworks as well. This means that we have only discussed the concept of fetishism in an extremely limited way. In this section we will expand this limited view. (2) When we say fetishism, whose version are we talking about? There are many to choose from; from Freud to Marx to Lacan. . . The answer should

be obvious: all of them. Our second function must satisfy the conceptualization of fetishism in every single theoretical utterance; therefore, our artistic fetish (if you will) must also be homologous to the sexual fetish from Freud, the impossible fetish from Lacan, and the commodity fetishism from Marx. (3) How can we represent the aforementioned description of the second functions innerworkings in the language of mathema-logics? How can a function check whether the difference is a constant or not? Remember, this constant is not the point of fetish; it would make no sense for the function to evaluate this constant. The constant is a particular element within the art object, which should be the object that is evaluated. How can we make sure we understand this nuance in a mathema-logical way? (4) And finally, what does this artistic fetishism look like in our everyday lives? We usually do not meet people who flaunt their sexual fetishes in their interpretation of artworks; so, would this mean that the second function is much rarer than the first one? We have mentioned numerous times in the previous chapter that we can see the first function being used all around us; does this mark a point of difference between the first and second functions? The short answer is no; in fact, we will see by the end of this chapter that the second function might even be more ubiquitous and omnipresent than the first. . . We will try to answer all four of these questions in this section, which will allow us to not only understand the second interpretative function theoretically, but also to write this function explicitly.

Just like with the pleasure principle, the best way to begin is to look at Freud's own discussion of fetishism. In his 1927 paper called '*Fetishism*', Freud develops the concept of the fetish: he had already written extensively about the topic in his famous paper '*Three Essays*' (1905), and in the '*Rat Man*' (1909) case notes; but after what seems to be a recent run of observations, Freud returns to this concept in this tiny, six-page paper. He begins with this statement:

“In the last few years, I have had an opportunity of studying analytically a number of men whose object-choice was dominated by a fetish. There is no need to expect that these people came to analysis on account of their fetish. For though no doubt a fetish is recognized by its adherents as an abnormality, it is seldom felt by them as the symptom of an ailment accompanied by suffering. Usually, they are quite satisfied with it, or even praise the way in which it eases their erotic life. As a rule, therefore, the fetish made its appearance in analysis as a subsidiary finding.”  
(1955)[21:152]

This is quite interesting; as common sense would indicate that the fetish would debilitate the individual in their everyday socio-symbolic life. We would expect

the fetish object to disrupt the normal course of these people's lives, constantly interfering with their jobs, relationships, hobbies, etc. Freud informs us that this is usually not the case: the fetishist is most likely content with their situation, which makes it so that the fetish is revealed as "a subsidiary finding". What can we make of this? Firstly that, the fetish in some sense works, it accomplishes whatever it was trying to do. The contrast to be drawn here is between fetishism and phobia; Freud tells us that the two are diametrically opposed in their approaches to the same phenomenon. Apropos its inherent lack, the subject either recoils or fixates on the object that stands in for the indicator of this lack. In a sense then, phobia is a much more 'honest' condition: it avows this lack in its entirety. If I have arachnophobia, I fully accept that I am a lacking (castrated) subject when I am confronted by a spider. The spider is the object of my anxiety, but the object-cause of my anxiety (the object that actually causes the sense of anxiousness) is the inherent lack within my subjectivity. On the other hand, fetishism displaces this nice dialectic from its original resting point, and is ultimately able to tame this primordial anxiety. It follows from this that fetishism is in a sense 'less honest' than phobia; the Real anxiety-inducing cause is disavowed, and we are left with another object instead. Phobia then, avows this failure; and does not do a great job at handling this anxiety. This is precisely why fetishism is compatible with everyday life; while phobia can make life a living hell (depending on the phobia).<sup>8</sup> The second point, is that if the fetish is revealed as a subsidiary finding, this means that the notion of the fetish necessarily attaches itself to some other symptom. It is parasitic in the psyche, tagging along with a different ailment or malaise. What can we make of this? Well, it follows from this that the reason for the fetishism's non-problematic functioning is precisely this parasitic attachment. It should point to some existential dread, but instead it makes the psyche take a detour through some other problem; ultimately diverting the anxiety inducing recognition. Nice example of this is in the 2022 TV series *Andor*, where the totalitarian and fascistic Galactic Empire is searching for one single individual for theft, the series' protagonist Cassian Andor. They are ultimately unable to find him, not because Andor does a stellar job at hiding, but rather because he is thrown in prison for another unrelated crime. The Empire cannot find him, because they already have him. Their fetishistic fixation on Andor (and the fact that they displace the activities of a large network of revolutionaries onto him), make it so that they miss the fact that he already came in as a package deal. If only the Galactic Empire had read Freud!

Freud continues:

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<sup>8</sup>Which is also why it is easy to hide one's fetish; while hiding a phobia is comparatively much more difficult.

“The most extraordinary case seemed to me to be one in which a young man had exalted a certain sort of ‘shine on the nose’ into a fetishistic precondition. The surprising explanation of this was that the patient had been brought up in an English nursery but had later come to Germany, where he forgot his mother-tongue almost completely. The fetish, which originated from his earliest childhood, had to be understood in English, not German. The ‘shine on the nose’ [in German ‘*Glanz auf der Nase*’], was in reality a ‘glance at the nose’. The nose was thus the fetish, which, incidentally, he endowed at will with the luminous shine which was not perceptible to others.” (1955)[21:152]

Three points are to be made here: (1) In stark contradistinction with the common sense understanding of the fetish, psychoanalysis teaches us that the fetish object can be totally innocent. The fetish has its roots in sexual displacement, yes, but that does not mean that the final destination of this displacement is evidently sexual. Freud’s patient’s fetish is not some sexualized body part, nor is it a phallic/vaginal object; it is not even the nose, it is precisely the light that shines on the nose. Many case studies have been conducted (some even by Freud himself) on the usual suspects of fetishism: feet, skin color, hygiene, sexual organs’ size, hair etc.; but even though these fetish objects are certainly operational, they are not necessary. What is fetishized can be completely innocuous or ordinary. This is perhaps the second reason why Freud claims that most of the time fetishes go completely unnoticed: if they are completely ‘normal’ objects in the eyes of the society, why would there be any disruption in the fetishist’s everyday life? (2) What Freud detects with the line “the luminous shine which was not perceptible to others” is also quite interesting. We would expect that a fetish object would be much more important in the eyes of the fetishist, compared to a non-fetishist; but this is not mere significance, Freud claims that the patient claims that only he can perceive this shine. What can we draw from this? Well, mainly that the fetish creates a private pocket even in the most public of spaces. Fetishism is a private endeavor, that much is obvious; but what is not obvious is that fact that if the required privacy is non-existent, the subject will then create it itself. (3) Freud picks up on the fact that the fetishistic displacement was hiding in the linguistic difference between German and English. This linguistic emphasis will become a crucial point for Lacan; for us however, we can see that even the most psychic of operations can be expressed in the ‘algebra of the signifier’, or in our case, the language of the mathema-logics.

In the following paragraphs Freud explains what the fetish is more clearly:

“To put it more plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman’s (the



mother's) penis that the little boy [the German/English patient] believed in and, for reasons familiar to us, does not want to give up. What happened, therefore, was that the boy refused to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis. No, that could not be true: for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger. [...] The oldest word in our psychoanalytic terminology, 'repression', already relates to this pathological process. If we wanted to differentiate more sharply between the vicissitude of the idea as distinct from that of the *affect*, and reserve the word '*Verdrängung*' ['repression'] for the affect, then the correct German word for the vicissitude of the idea would be '*Verleugnung*' ['disavowal'].  
 (1955)[21:153]

We can levy the usual criticisms that Freud gets against this explanation: the penis as an actual physical object opens the entire Freudian system to historicist refutation (i.e. What if the boy had not seen the mother's lack of a penis? What if the boy was raised without a mother? What if the boy had never believed that his mother had a penis? Etc.), and the boy's reaction, which Freud is sure that it happens precisely in the way that he describes, is open to relativistic resistance (What if the boy does not think that the absence of his mother's penis means that he too is in danger of being castrated?). The literality of Freud's descriptions hurt the repudiation of his theory, which was lacking in that aspect from the beginning. Later we'll see Lacan's reinterpretation of this structure, but for now, let us move on to the more important aspect in this quotation: Freud's invention of the concept of 'disavowal'. This is extremely important, as we will later see when we come to Marx and his commodity fetishism. It is paramount to see that the concept does not mean simple blindness, if it were, Freud wouldn't have come up with a different word. In common parlance, this structure would indicate that the subject is oblivious to what is going on: it never recognizes that the reason for its fetishistic displacement is the lacking nature of its own subjectivity. Disavowal is not simply a foolish refusal, as the act of this refusal itself already accepts its defeat. The concept itself reveals a gap between the subject who does not want to admit its lack, and the fact that *it admits it in the very act of refusing to admit it*. We can see here, another instance of our 'as if' commutator, the subject actually recognizes its lack, but it acts as if it does not know it; which paradoxically points to it regardless. There is a popular action film trope, in which the hero wants to locate the McGuffin of the story that the villains had hidden; and the way the hero finds it, is not through the content of the McGuffin, but instead its very form: the villains put a bunch of armed henchmen to guard the object, which is how the hero is able to find it. In the very act of hiding the object, they reveal its location. This is precisely the logic of disavowal: it is not a simple refusal, but a rejection that leaves a paradoxical gap within it. Every fetish then,

does simply work (as we have claimed before), but in its very construction, leaves a constitutive gap that points to a post-fetishistic beyond. Freud writes: “We can now see what the fetish achieves and what it is that maintains it. It remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it.” (1955).[21:154] The contradiction in this explanation is obvious: if you want to protect yourself from something by disavowing it, aren’t you already avowing it?

Now let us turn our gaze towards Lacan, who reinterprets Freud’s ideas about fetishism and its diagnostic parent, perversion. For Lacan, the fetishist when confronted with their lack, turns the absence/impossibility of the maternal phallus into an imperative. The fetishist disavowal is not a matter of choice for Lacan, they simply have to do this. Our comparison between the phobic and the fetishist is a purely theoretical one, not one subject is given the choice between the two: “What do you want to do with the signifier for your lack, do you want to run away from it, or fixate on it?” is a question that is too luxurious to be given to our subjective psyche. Lacan writes that the fetishist “identifies with the imaginary object of [his mother’s] desire, insofar as she herself symbolizes it in the phallus” (2006)[554/198]. We have a bit of a difference from Freud here: as for Freud, the absence of the mother’s penis was a physical absence, while for Lacan, this absence is purely symbolic. We also can see that the Lacanian twist here is that the fetishist not only fixates on some object; they think that they are an object. Of course, this object is impossible, and the fetishist’s identification with it is also a case of impossibility. Disavowal allows the fetishist to circumvent this impossibility, to act as if it were not. And yet, the subject desires this impossibility too... How? Well, it constantly attempts to test its fetish object, to see whether it sustains its impossible status; by prompting the symbolic order to destroy it. This is why the commonsense idea that the fetish is something abhorrent is not entirely incorrect; the fetishists seek the wrath of society to see whether their object of fetishization is still fetishizable. For Lacan, this is the precise logic within which disavowal functions. Lacanian psychoanalyst and psychoanalytic theorist Bruce Fink describes it like this:

“From a Lacanian perspective, the apparent contradiction inherent in disavowal can, it seems to me, be described as follows: ‘I know full well that my father hasn’t forced me to give up my mother [and my mother’s impossible phallus, my fetish object] and the jouissance I take in her presence (real and/or imagined in fantasy), hasn’t exacted the ‘the pound of flesh’, but I’m going to stage such an exaction or forcing with someone who stands in for him; I’ll make that person pronounce the law.’” (1999)[170]

Lacan opens up the Freudian dualist relation between the fetishist and their mother, to the third element; that of the father, or the symbolic order. A fetish stops being a private enterprise between the subject and some object, but the field within this object is placed in. The fetish object only has value, when the Other deems it to have value. This might not be positive value, Lacan claims that more often than not; for the fetishist, the fact that the Other despises its fetish object is evidence to the idea that it must keep fetishizing this object. However, this is also a point of contradiction, is it not? In the very action that undermines the symbolic order, the fetishist seeks its power and therefore props up or supports this order. Hiding behind the fascination with the object therefore, is the implicit desire for the Other itself. The fetishist fixates on some object for the anxiety that is induced by their inherent lack, yes, but the effect of the disavowal that is a prerequisite for this fixation, is the desire for the Lacanian big Other, and its resting place, the symbolic order. Lacan subtly inverts the commonplace idea that the fetishist goes against society's demands (the demand for a normal sexual relationship, fixation on normal sexual objects: the breast, the penis, the vagina, etc.) in an act of genuine defiance; for Lacan, this defiance only serves to provide legitimacy to these demands:

“One of the paradoxical claims Lacan makes about perversion is that while it may sometimes present itself as a no-holds-barred, jouissance-seeking activity, its less apparent aims it to bring the law into being: to make the Other as law (or law-giving Other) exist.” (1999)[180]

Let us give a concrete clinical example: Psychoanalyst René Tostain's 'Fetishization of a Phobic Object' paper; where he gives case note-style descriptions of his analysis of one of his patients, Jean (1980)[247-260]. The case, as Tostain describes, involved a young child named Jean (not his real name), who is very close with his mother. She is obsessively fixated on Jean; she does not seem to care that much about her husband, Jean seems to be her entire world (at least according to Jean). She enjoys taking care of him when he is sick; but later starts to take care of him even when he is not sick, which leads to Jean being very dependent on his mother. In his analysis, Jean tells Tostain that back then, his body (when he was treated *as if* he were sick) seemed like a crimson, pulsating object that his mother would please herself with. The phallic implication here is obvious, the mother treats Jean as a penis, as the object of her desire. The father, Tostain claims, is a non-factor at this point; he imposes no restrictions on the relationship between Jean and his mother, and does not seem to care about the 'pretending he's sick' show that the mother is putting on. Tostain states that Jean is the living extension of his mother,

he is simply an organ. All of this changes however, when he's six years old, Jean undergoes an emergency appendicitis surgery; afterwards, Jean wakes up to see his father holding a jar with his *dissected* organ in it. After this point Jean refuses to play along with his mother's reenactments, rejecting to be his mother's organ. This is a clear example of what Lacan describes as the paternal function: the 'Name of the Father' has finally intervened and has dissected Jean from his mother. Not completely, however, as Jean is only alienated from his mother and not completely separated from her. His mother continues to treat Jean the same way, even calls his penis 'ton petit bout' or 'ton bout'.<sup>9</sup> She never congratulates or praises Jean for his achievements: learning to read, write, play the piano, draw pictures, etc.; making it clear that, as Tostain claims, Jean is only valuable to her in his existence as a bodily extension. She loves him *as he is, and not through what he does*. One day Jean hears his father refer to his mother's vagina as a 'bouton' (Eng: button), which can be simply reversed to get 'ton bout' (bou – ton → ton – bout). From this point on, Jean has a button fetish; he abhors them when there is only one, but gets sexually aroused when there are multiple. More buttons mean more excitation for Jean; while two is fine for him, one is unacceptable.

This is a nice example for our purposes; for mainly four reasons: (1) Jean was not allowed to wonder about his subjective position in the eyes of his mother, he simply knows what he means for her at all times. This certainty is never comforting; as Lacan teaches us, to question and interrogate the desire of the mOther is the way the subject starts to desire itself, without this delineation, the subject would be left to be the extension of the mother. It follows from this that the fetishists position themselves with regards to the big Other, as the object that the big Other was lacking all along. The fetishist's claim is this: "I am the object that is impossible for you (the big Other), and through me you will be complete!". (2) The fetishist can only achieve this through some object that the paternal function 'names'; remember that Jean only developed the fetish because his father called his mother's vagina a 'button', without this act of naming, Jean's fetish object would not be buttons. The intricate way this fetish functions is also important: Jean detesting a single button, but getting turned on by multiple buttons seems to suggest that this difference is also linked to his father. A single button is Jean's mother in Jean's eyes, but multiple buttons mean that his father has intervened. Which leads us to (3): the fetishist, in their attempt to be the impossible object that would complete the big Other, actually desires the symbolic Law to come in and punish it; this is the only way that the fetishist can be sure that the fetish object is truly an impossible

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<sup>9</sup>French for 'your little bit' or 'your bit'. 'bout' in French can also mean goal or end, which turns this attempt at giving a cute nickname for Jean's penis to a proclamation of something much more sinister: this (your penis) is 'your end'.

object. If it were a simple possible object, the symbolic order would have no reason to punish the fetishist; therefore, the fetishist thinks that if they are punished, that means that the fetish object of (forced) choice is the correct one. We must therefore differentiate between the two objects that we are dealing with: the impossible object is the point of lack for the big Other (the absent maternal phallus), that the fetishist identifies with; in the fetishist's eyes they are this object. The second object is the object of the fetish itself, which can only be established when the 'Name of the Father' intervenes and writes over the impossible object; which marks the creation of the fetish. This is the primordial act of displacement: the impossible object gets displaced onto the fetish object. And (4), the fetishist can only fetishize, if this entire structure is disavowed. We must be precise here, we are not claiming that exposing the fetish, in a sense, destroys it; we know that this is simply not true: as Freud observed, the fetishist can have a harmonious relationship with their fetish, they can "even praise the way in which it eases their erotic life" as Freud writes. What does destroy the fetish is exposing the form of it; as the primordial act of displacement that creates the fetish can never be avowed.

This difference between the recognition of the fetish and the recognition of the formal logic within which the fetish came about, can be further understood through a discussion of our third theoretical stop in our journey through the innerworkings of the second interpretative function: Karl Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. Marx opens his discussion of commodity fetishism with a brilliant statement:

"A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a use-value, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it satisfies human needs, or that it first takes on these properties as the product of human labor. [...] But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness." (1990)[163]

Several points to be made here: first of all, what does Marx mean by "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties"? Is it not strange that a historical materialist like Marx is talking about metaphysics and theology? A rudimentary analysis would indicate that for Marx, this is because capitalist ideology is creating an idealist reversal here: instead of looking at the material conditions that create the object, we instead are enamored by the 'idealist stuff' above it. This would turn Marx into a false consciousness-based thinker; something along the lines of: "We have

been tricked, and through careful analysis we can get at the truth of the commodity form, and wake up from our collective illusion.” It is certainly possible to read this passage in this way, and Marx himself gives plenty of reasons to do so. But a more radical reading would be that Marx is referencing prior societies in which this fetishism was already taking place. For Marx, it is not that we are facing anything new here; what has happened is a simple form of displacement: unlike in the olden times, where a tree or a river would be endowed with a spirit (a guardian spirit, a malicious entity, etc.), today, the center of these spiritualizations is the commodity form. The products of the capitalist system of relations make us think that we have transcended the simplistic need to displace the reason why it rains from a rain god to rapid condensation and the heat differential in clouds, that we have been enlightened by the scientific method and these primitive fetishisms are no longer operational; however, what this system has done is to simply shift the accent of the object of displacement. The second point is the dialectical relation between use and exchange values; Marx explicitly links this relation with the concept of fetishism. At a first instance, we might think that the fetishistic displacement happens because of use-value; just like psychoanalytic relation between the fetishist and the impossible object with which the fetishist identifies, only to be used by the big Other. But Marx insists that this is not the case: “The mystical character of the commodity does not arise from its use-value. Just as little does it proceed from the nature of determinants of value.” (1990)[164]. So where does it come from? Marx claims that the enigmatic character of the commodity form “arises from this form itself” (1990)[164]. The form of the commodity (the translation of use-value to exchange-value) is the origin point of fetishism. The capitalist system of production imposes the value of exchange to be overwritten on the value of usefulness. This translation, or transposition, is the reason for the aforementioned “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties”. We can see a clear homology between Marx and Lacan’s ideas about the origin of fetishism: with Marx, the exchange-value is written over the use-value by the capitalist system of production, while for Lacan, some innocuous object is written over the impossible object of lack by the paternal function. The same formal logic is operative in both instances, where the Real cause is replaced by a simple one, which creates the fixation that characterizes the fetishistic displacement.

Well, what is it that is displaced for Marx then? The shift between use-value and exchange-value, which is the most basic form of the commodity, is the causal origin point for displacement, but what is it that is being displaced, and where to? Marx explains it like this:

“The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. [...] Through this substitution [or displacement], the products of labor become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social. [...] [Fetishism] is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. [...] I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.”  
(1990)[164-165]

Here we have Marx giving a concrete definition of what commodity fetishism is: it is the displacement of the social relations between people onto the relations between things; or to put it more precisely, the way in which the relations between people appear as the relations between things. First thing to note here is the precise language that Marx uses: “fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor”... Isn’t this the exact same way that Freud described fetishism in the beginning? Freud claimed that “the fetish made its appearance in analysis as a subsidiary finding”, which mirrors Marx’s idea that fetishism is not the central factor here, but it parasitically attaches itself to the commodity form. Which means that commodity fetishism is less about capitalism itself, but capitalist ideology: the system functions without recourse to it, but once these relations enter the socio-symbolic realm, they come attached with fetishism on the side. This is related to our second point: what do we mean when we say, “the relations between people appear as the relations between things”? What does “appear as” mean exactly? We have said before that the reduction of Marx to a vulgar materialist is not accurate; his discussion of fetishism here, is evidence to the fact that he was in tune to the concepts that seem, at a first glance, as idealist. Is this another case of ‘false consciousness’? Well, if it was, then wouldn’t breaking out of this commodity fetishism be easy? If all it takes is to realize that concrete relations of production are beneath every commodity, wouldn’t everyone already have done so? It is clear that there is something else going on here, and I wager that our ‘as if’ commutator can be used to answer these questions. The crucial point not to be missed here is that we all know that the commodities that we use involve the relations of capitalist production. I know very well that the coffee that I’m drinking right now as I write these sentences, was made with coffee beans from Ethiopia; where coffee farmers are brutally exploited for their labor. I know that the smartphone that I use every day has lithium batteries inside it, which contains cobalt that was extracted from cobalt mines in Kongo; mines which still employ literal child slaves as miners. The examples are endless; but the important

point is that no one is thinking under ‘false consciousness’, we all know what commodity fetishism is and the relations that it hides are. What do we do then? We act as if we do not know them, we disavow the fetishism itself. This is perhaps the most genuinely materialist stance we can take, commodity fetishism is not in our thinking, but in our actions. As Lacan emphasized over and over, meaning is Imaginary, acts are Real.

Before we move on to our mathema-logical function, we must complicate the conceptualization of fetishism that we have been developing in this section. This point seems to apply to all of these thinkers we have analyzed so far (Freud, Lacan, Marx). We have claimed in the previous chapter that the point of contradiction within a specific function cannot be one that can only be delineated from an external theoretical position; a safe space outside of this dynamic from which we can make any claims we want. Couldn’t we say that a similar thing is happening here? Doesn’t Marx’s understanding of commodity fetishism rely on the presupposition that non-fetishistic relations exist? Only from a hypothetical future society where the relations between people really appear as the relations between people (transparent social relations), we can make claims about the fetishistic nature of the present relations. We can extend this problematic to Freud and Lacan as well; isn’t Freud presupposing the existence of a ‘normal sexual relationship’ from which the fetishist fixation seems, as Freud calls it, “an abnormality”? And isn’t Lacan presupposing, from an external position, that a ‘normal human subject’ exists? As we have mentioned before, Marx only sets up the concept of commodity fetishism in relation to ‘primitive societies’, in which the fetishistic displacement was between natural phenomena and their spiritual rationalizations. It is not that Marx thinks that we have advanced over these previous societies, and that we can see the point of their failure in their fetishistic displacements. Instead, Marx points out that, through an analysis of these societies we can understand the fetishistic displacement in our own capitalist society. In fact, a closer reading reveals that the Marxian idea here is opposite to the aforementioned counter-argument: we have, in fact, regressed in this relation between previous societies and current society; what is fetishized is not the mere commodity form, but the form of fetishism itself. Slavoj Žižek explains it like this:

“[Marx’s] reasoning goes as follows: we, in our ‘developed’ Western society, tend to oppose our pure spiritual religion to the ‘primitive’s’ veneration of natural objects; is it not the case, however, that the very foundation of our society involves the veneration of a material object (money, gold), which, in the process of exchange, is endowed with supranatural properties? The reference to external (‘primitive’) society thus serves



to alienate us (in the Brechtian sense of *Verfremdung*) from our own society, so that we can discern the ‘primitivism’ in its very kernel. [...] This Marxian insight was already made by some South American natives themselves who, in a well-known anecdote, noticed that gold was the fetish of the Spaniards.” (2008a)[126]

We can see that Marx sees two instances of fetishism: the fetishization of simple, natural objects; and the fetishization of this fetishization. This is why his look at the ‘primitive’ societies is necessary; we are not dealing with the difference in the objects of fetishization: the first form of fetishization *is the object* of the second form of fetishization. We can have a better understanding of this if we turn to Lacan and Freud. For them, it is not that we have a functioning ‘normal’ sexuality that then gets derailed by the fetish object; but rather that the ‘normal’ form of sexuality is already fetishized, always already perverted. Freud claims, the fact that humans do not have a mating season, nor a mating instinct means that sexuality is always already disjointed from procreation. Cats, dogs, and many other animals have an innate sense as to when they should be copulating; the complete absence of this instinct in humans, for Freud, points to the idea that human sexuality is perverse from the get-go. Lacan adds to this by claiming (and using our ‘as if’ commutator) that ‘normal’ sexuality develops only retroactively; as the antithesis of the natural state of human sexuality as a fetish. Lacan rejects the idea that the reason for heterosexual men’s attraction to female breasts is linked to procreation, to the role that women’s breasts have in feeding the human infant; for Lacan, this attraction is always already a fetish, the only difference is that it is a societally accepted one. The fetish that we have been discussing in this chapter then is always already *a secondary fetish*. Or to put it more precisely, fetishism always includes a *double movement*.

With this understanding of the double movement of the fetish, we can finally construct our function. The problem we have in this construction, from a mathematical perspective, is this: How can we represent this double movement of the fetish? The function should be able to both detect the constant that represents the fetishized element within the artwork and be able to check the change in the primordial interpretative function so that the existence of the constant is pre-verifiable. This is a daunting task; this double movement require two different mechanisms in the function so that both of these objectives can be met. We can start with a version of our first function that can do one of these tasks, namely, just checking if the constant we are looking for is present. Doing this is relatively easy: instead of looking at the negativity/positivity in the change of the primordial interpretative function, we would just look for a constant value and evaluate respectively. If we

write this explicitly, we get something that looks like this:

$$f_2(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Theta(t) = 0, \neg c \in \forall(A - \{c\}), \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) = c, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \\ \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) = \neg c, \not\rightarrow 0 + \lambda(t) \end{array} \right\}$$

This is easy to comprehend:  $c$  is the constant we (or the function) are looking for, the not ' $c$ ' ( $\neg c$ ) being every other value that the difference between the original primordial function ( $\Delta(\vec{x})$ ) and its changed version ( $\Delta'(\vec{x})$ ) can have. If the constant is there, the function evaluates the art object as 'good', and if it's not there, it evaluates the art object as 'bad'. This is a fine beginning, but still does not account for the double movement that we have been talking about. How can we check the result of this difference, *before taking the difference*? Well, our discussion on the concept of fetishism should help us here; we have mentioned that with Freud and Lacan that we have two objects in our hand: the impossible-Real object (the absent maternal phallus), and the fetish object that is written over the impossible object. With Marx, we have the same structure: the use-value (whose existence is predicated on the existence of the capitalist system, but nonetheless is disjointed from it) and the exchange-value, which is written over the use-value. The first objects cannot change, they are fixed points of the Real (obviously, they only exist retroactively, as in, they have no positive existence prior to their recapitulation); while the second objects are variable values, they can be anything that the larger system deems them to be (the fetish object is anything that the paternal function decides it to be, the exchange-value is entirely dependent on the commodity's structural position in the market, etc.). The structure of the fetish is that these are overlaid on top of each other; meaning that if there is a change to them, they should move generally in the same direction. But not completely, as they are fundamentally different in themselves. So, if we can find a way to detect a change in the primordial interpretative function instantaneously, then we should be able to detect the tiny amount of difference in the fetish. The two objects' lack of complete coincidence, means that this would be the only way we can represent this function. But how can you check the change in something instantaneously? Doesn't change imply a passage of time, however minimal? Well, a mathematical solution presents itself here: we simply take the derivative of the primordial interpretative function; which will indicate the existence of the function, before we take their difference. If we write this explicitly we get this:

$$f_2(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \Theta(t) = 0, \neg c \in \forall(A - \{c\}), \frac{d^n \Delta(\vec{x})}{d\vec{x}^n} \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) = c, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \right\}$$

How many times do we take the derivative? As many times it takes to reach the point where the change in the primordial interpretative function is a constant. So, there we go: this is the explicit formula of our second function. This function checks the existence of the constant through derivation first, then checks whether this constant fits within the fetishist's universe. One important point is that the art object is not what is being fetishized, it is the constant 'c' which is the fixation point of our function. This distinction is crucial in our understand of what 'artistic fetishism' looks like.

So, what does 'artistic fetishism' look like? We have claimed in the beginning of this chapter that the second function might be even more ubiquitous than the first. Isn't this highly unlikely? Well, historical changes aside, the second function fits within the contemporary logic of artistic interpretation more than the first one. Let us take a look at some cultural symptoms that may allow us to justify this claim. There are mainly two phenomena that are linked to the concept of artistic fetishism: historical accuracy and technical perfection. Before we conclude this section, it is paramount that we spend a bit of time describing these phenomena. Historical accuracy is easy to understand, the commonsense logic already would link this fascination with describing or depicting past events 'as they really were' with fetishism. We can show the illogical core of this fixation on historical accuracy really easily: this concept relies on a fixed understanding of history, that we are able to depict history more or less, in an accurate manner. This is of course false, as history is filled with contradictions, contingencies, randomness, and contrivances. A fictional approach that artworks take would mean the decimations of these contradictions. To use the Hegelian language: history is nothing but the realization of the impossibility of history. The true linearity required for the depiction of historical accuracy is not one that history itself possesses. As many would claim, art itself should embrace the fact that it is forever trapped in biases; considering the fact that history (the academic discipline) is also suffering from the same fate. This refutation we have presented here is fine, adequate; but for our purposes it misses the true core of the problem. Our point here should not be to show the impossibility of depicting history in an accurate manner, but rather to pinpoint the reason behind the attempt itself; the motivation that leads someone to praise an artwork because of its historical accuracy. This is where our concept of fetishism comes in, the point is that the true reason for fetishizing historical accuracy, is the very form that it would take in the

realm of artworks. Isn't this the very same form we have discussed before? The historically accurate artwork is not valuable for the fetishist because of its value as academically sound history-work, but rather its ability to overwrite or overlay the fetishistic object on the trauma of history. The contradictions in history is akin to the maternal phallus from psychoanalysis, an impossible object; that the historically accurate artwork as the paternal function writes over with the fetishistic element in the artwork. The precise logic of this operation is thus: the trauma of history gets tamed through its depiction in the artwork, the accuracy of the events is the very notion that becomes fetishized. Why is this a problem? Well, the fetishist in this sense, miss the very form of this fetishism; they are oblivious to the way in which this fetishization takes place: in the very act that wants to avow history, they disavow this action itself. The point of refutation would be to say that history is always already fetishized, and that a secondary fetishization is the precise point in which the fetishist misses this primordial displacement. History is never in its proper place, simply because this proper place does not exist. It is forever decentered, displaced in some innocuous elements of the socio-symbolic realm.

The second phenomenon is perhaps the most important instantiation of artistic fetishism: technical perfection. Again, a simple refutation presents itself: art can do so much more than depicting something perfectly, that imperfection is perhaps the very core of what it means for some object to be artistic. These ideas are fine, but we can do more. What is the precise point of fetishism here? Couldn't we say that the artistic fetishist is akin to Lacan's pervert, one that says, "I am the object of the Other"? The big Other (the other of the other, as Lacan defines it) in this case is obvious: it is the artist themselves. The artwork is the other, while the artist is the other of the other, or the big Other. The technical perfectionist in this case offers themselves as the very thing that the artist is missing, the very object that will complete their existence. This is why evaluation that takes technical perfection as its basis, always results in extreme views: the artwork is either the best thing ever and the artist therefore should be praised to heaven; or the artwork is the worst piece of shit imaginable, and the artist should be dragged down to hell. The second part of these judgments, ones that are related to the artists, is the point of fetishism. Doesn't this formulation make it explicit that we are dealing with what we have discussed before, namely Freud's idea that the fetish reveals itself by being attached to some other element ("As a rule, therefore, the fetish made its appearance in analysis as a subsidiary finding")? Technical perfection therefore, bears the hallmarks of all the three thinkers we have analyzed in this chapter: parasitic attachment from Freud, the identification with the object from Lacan, and metaphysical niceties from Marx (the technically perfect artwork's 'perfection' relies

not on its actual construction, but the very form that this construction takes). Let us give an example: *The Joy of Painting* is a television series hosted by the painter Bob Ross, which ran for an impressive 32 seasons. Every episode depicts Ross as he paints on a canvass, usually a landscape or some other natural scene, using the wet-on-wet technique. The show places a heavy emphasis on the process of painting, so much so that the finished painting would appear for only a minute or so. The announced goal of the program was to show that everyone could paint, and that the only important aspect of painting was the joy that one felt in the process. At a first glance, our example does not fit the concept: isn't the show more akin to something that we could've discussed with the first function? The show's title and mission objective emphasizes the pleasure aspect of the artwork, so why fetishism? Well, first thing to note is that the spectators of this program would never be painting themselves. The announced aim of the program is obviously not meant to be taken literally, even if there were people who were motivated to paint after watching it, the majority took enjoyment from the act of watching itself. So, where is the fetishistic element? It is precisely this displacement of the artwork to the process of painting the artwork that constitutes the technical perfection fetish: Ross's final painting did not matter, only the way he got there was of importance to the 'text' of the show. Returning to the show's title: the point of emphasis is not on the Painting, nor on the Joy; but rather on the very form, the very sentence of the title itself. This example also provides a nice supplement to our discussion with Marx: there, we have claimed that commodity fetishism hides the actual relations between people within the relations between things, i.e., the process of the production of commodities was displaced. Here we can see that the attempt to show the 'actual process' of an artwork can function fetishistically as well; showing the background of the painting can be an object of fascination, rather than to reveal 'how it was really made'. We can also see a homologous link between our two phenomena here: the fetishism of historical accuracy is just the other side of the fetishism of technical perfection. Seeing how history 'really played out' is the fetishistic supplement to seeing how artworks are 'really created'. So, to summarize, we can make two points here: (1) the technical perfection fetishist offers themselves up as the extension of the artist, the very thing that would complete the artist's subjective constitution. We can see this in the Ross example too; aren't the watchers of the show the extension of Ross himself, as the spectators that will finally complete the program? This is why the praise of illustrative talent, is the feeding ground of this type of fetishism: the technical aspect of the work is too loud to ignore (mainly due to the fact that technical perfection is all this type of artwork has, in terms of value). We can also see this in virtuosity with musical instruments too: the fetishist offers themselves up as the guarantor of the idea that the musician's investment in their instrument was

not all for naught. (2) Revealing the process within which the artwork was made can be the ultimate hiding place for the actual artistic element itself. The fascination with making-of documentaries, artist interviews, think pieces, contemporary art's supplementary videos, DVD extras, etc.; is the ultimate indication of this type of fetish. Which ties us back to the historical accuracy fetish; all of these fetishistic supplements aim to hide the form of fetishism itself.

### 3.1 Failure of the Second Function

We can now repeat the question we had asked when we were discussing the failure point of the first function: what is the failure point of the second function? Again, just like with the first function, we already know some things about this particular point of failure: (1) We know that it must exist, not only because we claimed that it exists all the way back at the introduction chapter; but also because of the dialectical nature of the movement between the functions that the functions must transpose themselves into the next one. (2) It follows from this that the point of failure of the second function must involve the change between the first function to the second one; namely that, the addition of derivation. The act of deriving the primordial interpretative function has to be related to this point of failure. (3) We cannot approach from a meta-theoretical position; we have outlined several ways in which the fetishistic aspect of the function misses some crucial element in the artwork (the technical perfection fetishism misses the very form of its own displacement, historical accuracy fetishism situates history in a nominalist/positivist (ideological) way, etc.); but all of these refutations are external to the function itself. (4) It must be related to our analysis of Freud, Lacan and Marx's conceptions of fetishism; in a way, our discussions from that section was in part there to illuminate the eventual downfall of the second function.

Let's start with the mathema-logical perspective that we have been using in our formulations. The mathematical point of the failure should be pretty easy to spot; especially compared to the first function, where we introduced a whole new concept to figure out the failure point, namely the eigenvector concept from linear algebra. The point of failure of the second function is easier to detect, mainly because of the difference point between the first and the second functions. To see it, let us take a look at the second function again:

$$f_2(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \Theta(t) = 0, \neg c \in \forall(A - \{c\}), \frac{d^n \Delta(\vec{x})}{d\vec{x}^n} \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) = c, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \right\}$$

$$\left. \frac{d^n \Delta(\vec{x})}{d\vec{x}^n} \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) = \neg c, \not\rightarrow 0 + \lambda(t) \right\}$$

The first thing to note is that it is obvious the point of failure cannot repeat; we can see the difference in the primordial interpretative function cannot be zero, or to put it more precisely, the possibility that the change in the primordial interpretative function is zero is not a problem for the second function, it would simply be subsumed into the ‘not c’ section of the evaluative portion (in the case that the constant is not zero). Instead, we know that the point of failure must involve the derivative portion we have added; so, the question now is: how can the derivative operation fail? Well, mathematically speaking, this is easy to answer: the primordial interpretative function may not be derivable. Remember, back in ‘*The Zeroth Point*’ section where we first introduced the primordial interpretative function, we claimed that we cannot know what the primordial interpretative function is; its explicit formula is indeterminate, and therefore cannot be represented. Also remember that in ‘*The First Function*’ section, we stated that the primordial interpretative function has the status of the Lacanian Real; which means that, by definition, it is unsymbolizable. We can even say that  $\Delta(\vec{x})$  does not exist, only  $\Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x})$  does; the change in the primordial interpretative function is the condition of its existence. Because we do not know the precise nature of it, we cannot determine its derivability in advance. We do know what it looks like when it is derivable, which is the second function itself. But what if it is not? The primordial interpretative function could be anything: a hyperfunction, a Fourier series, a 182-dimensional polynomial, an imaginary Riemann surface, etc. In any of these cases, we can construct a function that cannot be derived, which means that the primordial interpretative function always has the possibility to be underivable.

What would this mean philosophically/psychoanalytically? We came to the idea of derivation, because of the non-accordance, or non-coincidence between the impossible object and the fetish object. The fetish object stands in for the impossible object, but not completely; there’s always a minimal difference between the two. This minimal difference was the justification for derivation, which is a mathematical operation that can detect the infinitesimal rate of change within a function. Derivation, from a philosophical perspective, is a contradictory concept: a change indicates a difference in time, but calculus is able to reduce this time to zero nonetheless; or to put it more precisely, it indicates what would the rate of change be if the time difference was zero. Couldn’t we write this with our ‘as if’ commutator? Derivation (and by extension, calculus) acts as if change can occur instantaneously. All of this

points to a definite possibility; namely that, what if there was no minimal difference? Derivation only works if the function can be nudged an infinitely small amount; but what if it couldn't be? Psychoanalytically speaking, what if the fetish object covers the impossible object fully? First of all, we cannot characterize this possibility as the ultimate success of fetishism, remember that the fetishistic displacement only works through the act of disavowal; meaning that the minimal distance between the fetish object and the impossible object is the best-case scenario. If this minimal distance was shattered, then this would mean an unmanageable fetish, one that cannot be contained in a singular object.

We can find psychoanalytic precedence for this idea in the treatment of fetishism; when Lacan discusses several strategies when it comes to the treatment of fetishism (along with other perversions; sadism, masochism, etc.), he claims that fetishists often come to analysis when their fetish objects work too well. When they get exactly what they want, the fetishist feels dissatisfied; as if there was some other dimension they cannot have access to, if their position as the Other's object of enjoyment is never threatened. Treatment for fetishism involves repositioning the analysand in the exact position they want to be, and not an inch more or less. This does not mean to agree with fetishist's perverted fantasies or their expressed wishes; in that the fetishist would write the analyst off as an unworthy Other. It also does not mean to disagree or reject any fetishistic fantasy or free association they have; as this would position the analyst in the exact position that fetishist wants (the paternal law-giver, that says what they are doing/thinking is disgusting, etc.). The precise strategy Lacan means is to reposition the analysand's desire so that what they are fetishizing fits into its hole perfectly. In this way, the fetishist has no Other that can punish them, but also cannot renounce their fixation because of the existence of the Other. The natural next step becomes obvious after this; the fetishist starts to realize the very form of their fetishism, which as we have explained before, the sole reason why their fetishist displacement was established in the first place. This results in the fetishist collecting a bunch of different fetishes first, they are testing a suitable counterpart (or derivative) to their original fetish; and hopefully later recognizing the form within which they are acquiring these fetishes. The effectiveness of this treatment is questionable as Lacan admits, it certainly does not work with extreme cases of sadism or masochism; but with fetishism, we can be sure that it is at the very least minimally effective. The important point to emphasize here that what must be revealed to the fetishist is not the object of their fetish or their non-separation from their mOther, the fetishist already knows these very well; instead, the goal of their treatment is to make the precise link between these two factors self-evident, in this way, fetishist understands that their fetish makes too much sense. How can we



apply this to our function? If the minimal distance between the fetish object and the impossible object is shattered, which makes the primordial interpretative function underivable; then the only option the function has is to open the constant value into a set of differential values. Every single instantiation of the fetish element would then be added to the list of constants; in a sense, doing what Lacan recommends with the treatment of fetishism. The constant is no longer a constant, but a single value in a long string of values; a predefined set. Artistically speaking, this is easy to see: instead of valuing a single constant element within the artwork, we now have a bunch of elements that are suitable. And if the artwork does contain some element from this set, we integrate it into the function.

The problem now becomes: what determines this set? What are its defining characteristics? What are the limits (in both the mathematical and theoretical sense of the term) of this set? How can we check if an element is within the set or not? What would be the precise nature of this ‘integration’? And what would be the philosophical/psychoanalytic homology between this set idea and our previously discussed concepts? These questions will be the main focus of our discussion for the next section and chapter; on the third and final non-theoretical interpretative function.

#### 4. THE THIRD FUNCTION

$$f_3(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Theta(t) = 0, a \in \Sigma \wedge b \notin \Sigma, \int \cdots \int_n \int \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) dx = a, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \\ \int \cdots \int_n \int \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) dx = b, \not\rightarrow 0 + \lambda(t) \end{array} \right\}$$

From the last section, we have some vague idea about what the third interpretative function might look like. To summarize the failure point of the second function: when the fetish object and the impossible object coincide too much, then the function becomes underivable, which causes the fetish to explode. Lacan informs us that this explosion does not mean annihilation, it is more like the explosion of a bomb: a multitude of tiny pieces of the fetish fly out, creating a cloud of signifiers in its wake. The third function will have to deal with these fragments, made up of tiny pieces of the fetishistic constant. The claim of this chapter is that there is a definite homology between the third function and the concept of taste; and a strict homology between the concept of taste and the Lacanian idea of *le point de capiton* (quilting point). This is the goal of this particular section; to provide these two links, which will enable us to construct the third function explicitly. It follows from this that the third function must satisfy several criteria: (1) It must answer the naïve but crucial question: what is taste? The relation between taste and art is self-evident; in a sense, the common place understanding of art would already place taste as the de facto standard of artistic evaluation. We must analyze this concept fully, and not be content with common sense. (2) We must therefore look at the philosophical/conceptual history of taste; in this endeavor, we will analyze three the main sources on philosophical exploration of taste: David Hume, Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel. The utility of these three thinkers is two-fold; they will allow us to understand the concept of taste in more of an in-depth sense (which will rescue us from the common-sense understanding of it), and they will provide the necessary foundation for our own conceptualization of taste. (3) Just like the previous two functions, the third interpretative function must have its homology

be linked to psychoanalytic theory. In this case, we will actually start where we leave off with Kant and move on to Hegel, and see how Hegelian philosophy can help us understand the vicissitudes of taste; which will later allow us to link these philosophical analysis of taste with the Lacanian conception of the quilting point. This is perhaps the most crucial part of this section, which will quilt our previous discussions and will provide the necessary analytic work for the construction of the third function. (4) The third function must also be related to the mathematical failure point of the second function. With the transition between the first and the second function, we had used the concepts of eigenvectors and derivation; and now, we must find a suitable mathematical concept that can handle the third function. This new concept must also be related to the philosophical/psychoanalytic homology we are drawing in this section; in a way, we must find the mathematical expression of the concepts of taste and quilting point. And if our claim regarding the homology between these two concepts is true, then the mathematical concept that would express this homology must be a singular concept, able to handle both of them at the same time. (5) We must look at the contemporary version of taste to come up with our own theory of the concept; and see how it manifests itself in current day understanding of interpretation of artworks.

Let us start with Hume, and his conceptualization of taste. The best beginning point here is obvious; we should look at where Hume's delineations about taste reaches its apogee: his essay titled '*Of the Standard of Taste*'. This short essay, published in 1757, provides us with the clearest analysis of what can be called the Humean understanding of taste. Hume begins with a common sensical logic about the difference between judgments of taste and judgments of fact:

“All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard. Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true; and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind.” (2012)[268]

This is the classical understanding of the difference between subjective judgments (sentiments) and objective judgments (determination of understanding): one is

about the object and therefore can only be true or false, while the other is about the relationship between the subject and the object and therefore cannot be false. The contradiction in this statement is palpable: one is tempted to refute it, on the grounds that it ignores the subjectivity in objectivity (the fact that every claim about the object is mediated by the subject) and the objectivity in subjectivity (the fact that every subject is constituted with reference to some object); however, our interest here is not on the accuracy of Hume's conceptualizations, rather it is the form that it takes. The contradiction that is apparent here (in Hume's own terms), is that while Hume claims that matters of sentiment lack a truth-value and therefore are always valid; he then claims that they are not so valid after all:

“Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between Ogilby and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained [...] a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be found persons, who give the preference to the former authors; no one pays attention to such a taste; and we pronounce without scruple the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous.” (2012)[269]

Hume immediately follows his statement that “all sentiment is right” with the idea that some sentiments are “absurd and ridiculous”. How can this be? Well, at a first glance this seems to represent an intractable contradiction within Hume's thought; but a closer inspection reveals the nuance of his argument: Hume bases the correct taste of artworks in what he calls ‘the standard of taste’; which means that Hume does not claim that a taste that puts Ogilby over Milton is false, but that it is unsound. These judgments are not incorrect, since there can be no truth-value of sentiments; but they are absurd, since they contradict the logic of their own construction. Hume still maintains that this normative standard cannot be thought of in a similar way to science or philosophy: it is nonetheless subjective, meaning that it does not refer to something outside of themselves; which means that the standard of taste has to be exemplified not in thought but in people. This is why Hume claims the necessity of ‘good’ critics, people who have the ability to pass non-absurd judgments on art. He defines the characteristics of true critics as “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice.” (2012)[278]. These critics hold the locus of the standard of taste, which later provides rules for “confirming one sentiment, and condemning another” (2012)[268]. Hume thinks that these critics are “rare” (2012)[280] and that “few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art” (2012)[278]. The problem with this description is obviously the fact that it is operating under a circular logic:

the ‘true’ critics decide what the best art is, but the detection of the best art define who the ‘true’ critics are. To get out of this circularity, Hume adds notions such as education, familiarity, and practice to the mix, claiming that the ‘true’ critic would be knowledgeable about the artform and the general history of the artwork while making their judgments (2012)[284]. This does not alleviate the problem however, Hume’s ‘true’ critic remains a Platonic figure; impossible to realize in socio-symbolic reality.

The problems with Hume’s conceptualization of taste are therefore apparent: it relies on the standard of taste, which cannot be actually standardized in thought, but only in the taste of ‘true’ critics whose definition relies on the standard of taste. Hume moralizes this notion too, his interpretation of several artworks in this essay mostly rests on their moralistic composition. This is how he tries to get out of these aforementioned problems, through a return to his earlier work on the concept of moral normativity. We have been pretty negative towards Hume, prompting the question: if the Humean concept of taste is so problematic, then why are we discussing it? The answer is that there is nonetheless a silver lining to this essay; towards the end of it, a further contradiction reveals itself: Hume spends the majority of the essay trying to explain what the standard of taste should be, while trying to stay true to his philosophical subjectivism; but the final section of the essay, betrays the announced goal of the beginning. Hume claims that the standard of taste in the essay he’s currently writing “had never been methodized” (2012)[285]. But wait... Isn’t this the exact thing that Hume tried to do for the majority of the essay? Why is he giving up on this concept at the very end? Well, what Hume is getting at here is the point that is most important to us: Hume claims that the impossibility of writing down the rules of taste does not mean that they do not exist; the difficulty is apparent, yes, but we can nonetheless theorize taste within philosophy. He gives the example of the wine taster, who is able to pick up trace amounts of “fruity notes” beneath the “aftertaste of iron or leather”; (2012)[272] with this example, Hume makes the point that even if the wine taster (an analogue with someone who has good taste, the ‘true critic’ of wine) does not know the precise way that they are able to have a better sense of taste than that of a novice, they do have it nonetheless. What this reading reveals to us is that taste can be theorized, even if the rules that govern this taste are in a state of “disorder, in which they are represented.” (2012)[273]. “The same excellence of faculties which contributes to the improvement of reason” (2012)[278] can be formalized not in themselves, but in their relation within themselves. And aren’t we trying to do the same thing? We have the primordial interpretative function, which as Hume states, “had never been methodized”, but through its interaction with the art object, we were able to deduce

the logic of interpretation; just like Hume is able to deduce that the wine taster has already a theory of wine that is governed by some unknown rules.

We can now move on to Kant, who has a special place within 18th century aesthetic philosophy: the two main camps at the time can be characterized as empiricism vs. rationalism. The empiricists (Hume, Burke, Hutcheson) argued that a judgement that is based on taste was strictly sentimental, without any recourse to reason or cognitive ideations (remember how Hume claimed that “All sentiment is right”); while the rationalists (Baumgarten, Meier) argued for the idea that a judgment of taste required the ideational recognition of some objective quality within the artwork. Kant’s approach can be seen in a way that combines both of these arguments together: he will argue that judgments of taste cannot be proven, but also that they impose a normative universality. We just saw how Hume botched his attempt to reconcile these ideas together, and now we will see that Kant, in general, does a much better job. He recognizes the apparent contradiction between these two ideas:

“How is a judgment possible which, going merely upon the individual’s own feeling of pleasure in an object independent of the concept of it, judges this as a pleasure attached to the representation of the same object in every other individual, and does so a priori, i.e. without being allowed to wait and see if the other people will be on the same mind?”  
(2007)[118 - §36/288]

Two points: (1) What is the relationship between Kant’s idea of pleasure and our understanding of pleasure from the first function? The problem we have here is that Kant is pretty vague when it comes to his definition of ‘pleasure’: at times (like in the *Critique of Practical Reason*), it seems like he understands that there is pleasure within displeasure; the psychoanalytic term for this type of pleasure being *jouissance* (enjoyment). At other times however, he collapses these concepts together (like in the *Critique of Pure Reason*). We must bite the bullet and claim that we must treat Kant’s use of the concept in a case-by-case basis. The problem persists however, what about his use of the concept right now? Well, Kant claims that the pleasure that forms the basis of taste must be disinterested; a concept that confuses many readers. What he means is that there cannot be any intent behind the pleasure that reaches to some ground outside of itself; it must remain completely self-centered, because if not, we cannot possibly know the nature of the judgment. This gets analyzed further by Kant in the *Critique of Teleological Judgment* section; where he argues that the expressed teleology blocks the movement of deduction of the judgment of taste. This disinterested pleasure perceives the object without po-

sitioning it under any specific concept. The notional make-up of the pleasure that Kant describes is empty, floating along concepts haphazardly, not being tied down to any of them. Unlike fetishism, we have the opposite of fixation; a complete detachment from any conceptual notion. (2) What is the answer to the question then? How can pleasure can be universally valid? Well, Kant brings in the concept of ‘free play’ to resolve this dilemma. ‘Free play’ for Kant involves the categories of imagination and understanding. Imagination, is the transposition of intuition onto itself, a manifold as Kant calls it; under the supervision of the category of understanding. Kant thinks that this is the way we ascribe certain empirical qualities to objects: the forms are given by understanding and imagination is the act of applying the form to the concrete object. Let us give an example: If I say, “Imagine a yellow book!”, what happens? What is the precise form of operations between you reading those words, and the image of a yellow book popping up in your mind? In Kant’s conceptualization, this is how it goes: you already have an idea what yellow and book are (understanding), and you apply this understanding to the hypothetical object in your mind (imagination). The particular image in your mind (imagination) is governed by your faculty of understanding. This was the description of the relationship between imagination and understanding given by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998)[210 - A77/B102]; in the *Critique of Judgment* however, Kant claims that understanding and imagination can have a different relation between them (2007)[49 - §9/218]: Kant argues that in the case of taste, the imagination still serves understanding, but it applies it to objects not under the umbrella of a specific concept. We can use the aforementioned example again: If I say, “Now imagine a beautiful yellow book!”, what happens? The usual operation takes place, the empirical qualities I ordered are still governed by understanding and applied by imagination; but there’s an additional element. I don’t know what that element looks like, since I cannot read your mind, but I do know that it is there (it could be that the book is shiny, glossy, clean, has a fun design on the cover, is written by your favorite author, is held by an attractive person, etc.). This non-descript element is the result of what Kant calls ‘free play’; the relationship between understanding and imagination works in the usual way, by with an additional element, which is the ground of judgments of taste. But how is this judgment of taste a priori universal? How can this ‘free play’ idea account for the idea of universality Kant started with, in contradistinction to other 18th century thinkers of aesthetic philosophy? Kant is at his most formalist self here, arguing that what is universal in the concept of taste is not the content, but the form:

“In a judgment of taste, what is represented a priori, as a universal rule

for the judgment and as valid for everyone, is not the pleasure but the universal validity of this pleasure perceived, as it is, to be combined in the mind with the mere judging of the object. A judgment to the effect that it is with pleasure that I perceive and judge some object is an empirical judgement. But if it asserts that I think the object is beautiful, i.e. that I may attribute that delight to everyone as necessary, it is then an a priori judgment.” (2007)[119 - §37/289]

Kant claims that the pleasure itself is obviously not universal, but the form within which it is perceived is universal. Of course, the problem with this argument is that it presupposes a group of imaginary ‘people’ who do not exist. For the judgment of taste to be an a priori judgment, this virtual person(s) has to be the guarantor of this form. Kant does not delineate on this point too much, which leaves it open for criticism; but we, with our psychoanalytic perspective, can be helpful. Isn’t what Kant is presupposing here the Lacanian big Other, the ultimate virtual person, who guarantees a judgment in an a priori form? In fact, we can even say that Kant precipitates Lacan here, *avant la lettre*.

Now let us move on to Hegel, who we’ll approach from two different perspectives: first we will look at Hegel actually has to say about the concept of taste, then we will take a detour Lacan as an interlude, then go back to Hegel and use his dialectical method itself to see where we end up with regards to taste. Hegel spends less time discussing taste than either Hume or Kant; dedicating only a few paragraphs to the topic in his Lectures on Aesthetics, however, in just these paragraphs alone we can detect a bit of a break between Kant and Hegel. He begins by briefly defining the concept:

“Now, as a work of art is not merely to do in general something of the nature of arousing emotions – for this is a purpose which it would have in common, without specific difference, with eloquence, historical composition, religious edification, and so forth – but is to do so only in as far as it is beautiful, reflection hit upon the idea, seeing that beauty was the object, of searching out a peculiar feeling of beauty to correspond to it, and of discovering a particular sense of beauty. [...] it followed that education came to be demanded for this sense, and the educated sense of beauty came to be called taste, which, although an educated appreciation and apprehension of the beautiful, was yet supposed to retain the nature of immediate feeling.” (2004)[38, LII - b]

Hegel defines taste as the educated understanding of the sense of beauty; thereby severing its ties to the immediate experience of beauty. In this view, taste is not



something that everyone has, but is reserved for those who are well-versed in the interpretation of artworks. Not only that, but Hegel also differentiates between the ‘peculiar feeling of beauty’ and the ‘sense of beauty’. It might seem that this divide is reminiscent of the Hume/Kant divide: for Hume too, what was important was ‘good’ taste, people who could set the ‘standards of taste’, while for Kant, taste is an a priori category that governs the conditions of possibility of artistic judgment altogether. But a closer inspection reveals that Hegel is rejecting both of these views: contra Hume, Hegel claims that even if Hume’s ideal ‘true critics’ could be educated in a way that would ascertain the vague ‘standard of taste’, it would not mean much in the end; as this critic would only be responding to the ‘sense of beauty’ and not the ‘peculiar feeling of beauty’. And contra Kant, Hegel states that what we call taste only comes about through this differentiation, and therefore cannot be constructed as an a priori judgment. Hegel continues:

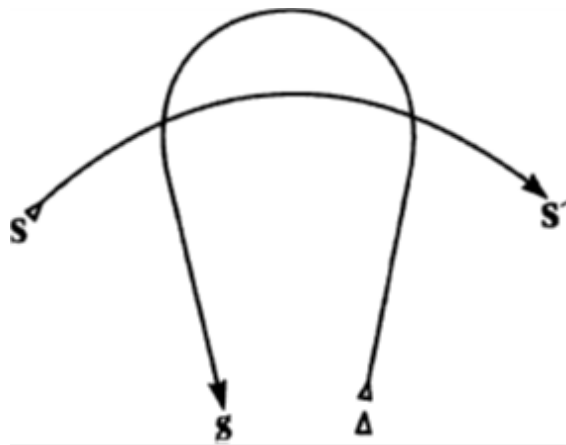
“Yet the depths of the matter remained a sealed book to mere taste, for these depths demand not only sensibility and abstract reflection, but the undivided reason and the mind in its solid vigor; while taste was only directed to the external surface about which the feelings play, and on which one-sided maxims may pass for valid. But for this very reason, what is called good taste takes fright at all more profound effects of art, and is silent where reality comes in question, and where externalities and trivialities vanish.” (2004)[39, LII – b]

We can see from this passage that a transition has taken place between Kant and Hegel; in pre-Hegel times, taste indicated perhaps the ultimate designator of artistic interpretation; but from Hegel’s remarks we can see that this understanding of taste is closer to the contemporary one. Today, most would claim that having good taste is not enough, that something else is needed: Hegel names this something else as ‘undivided reason and the mind in its solid vigor’ which is not all that clear. We can maybe surmise that Hegel is demanding more rigorous work done on the interpretation of artworks, rather than merely determining which is the best and moving on. ‘Undivided reason’ seems to suggest that educated tasters (if you will), are divided in their faculties: at one hand, they must be open to the feeling of beauty induced by the artwork, but they must also be able to formalize these feelings and synthesize them with ideas, therefore being able to be open to what Hegel calls the ‘Absolute Idea of Art’.

Now let us turn our gaze towards Lacan. It might seem strange that we are stopping our discussion of taste in artworks dead in its tracks; we still have not come to a

single conclusion about the third function, let alone taste. Patience is required here, as the concepts we are going to outline now are going to form the beginning point of our actual argument in this chapter. The concept we are going to analyze is Lacan's idea of *le point de capiton* (quilting point). Lacan develops this concept in his third seminar, titled *The Psychoses*; in relation to what the psychotic is unable to do. Lacan describes the psychotic in terms of their inability to hold onto meaning, the famous case of Schreber, a psychotic Freud treated, describes Schreber claiming that words seemed to slip from his grasp, and that he started to physically reach with his hand and try to grab the words. After analyzing the case Lacan gives an analogy through the sewing lines of a chair, where quilters would grab the loose fabric, bunch them up and sew them with the help of a button. This would keep the lining of the chair from falling out, and keep the several layers of fabric nice and tucked. Lacan states that this is the exact thing that psychotics lack; a quilting point, where their words would be sewn in their proper place, and therefore wouldn't constantly slip out. We have actually seen this concept before when we were discussing the first function. Let us return to the same schema; the elementary cell of Lacan's famous graph of desire, explained by Slavoj Žižek:

Figure 4.1 Elementary Cell of the Graph of Desire



“What we have here is simply the graphic presentation of the relation between signifier and signified. [...] Some mythical, pre-symbolic intention (marked  $\Delta$ ) 'quilts' the signifier's chain, the series of the signifier marked by the vector  $S'$ . The product of this quilting (what 'comes out on the other side' after the mythical - real - intention goes through the signifier and steps out of it) is the subject marked by the matheme  $\mathcal{S}$ . [...] This minimal articulation already attests to the fact that we are dealing with the process of interpellation of individuals into subjects. The point de capiton is the point through which the subject is 'sewn' to the signifier, and at the same time the point which interpellates individ-

ual into subject by addressing it with the call of a certain master-signifier ('Communism', 'God', 'Freedom', 'America') – in a word, it is the point of subjectivation of the signifier's chain." (2008*b*)[112]

As Žižek explains, the Lacanian quilting point brings together 'floating signifiers' by sewing them into the chain of signification. One important point about the quilting point is that it works in a retroactive manner: its quilt changes the meaning of the signifying chain backwards in time. A nice example of this can be found in the linguistic construction of a sentence: you have no idea what this sentence means. . . until I finish it. Or a more explicit version of the same example: this train goes to. . . London. The word at the end retroactively decides the meaning of the beginning. You can even subvert expectations with this structure: you have no idea what this sentence means until. . . hamburger. We expect the end of the sentence to quilt the beginning, but a nonsense word can make the entire structure of the sentence void. The point is not that 'hamburger' is a nonsense word and that the sentence has no meaning now: the quilting still takes place, the structure still works, but it leads it to be read as nonsense; or to put it in a different way, the quilting point makes sense even from nonsense. The second concept here is the Lacanian Master-Signifier. Again, we have encountered this before, the paternal function from the second function section was operating in the subjective universe of fetishist as the master-signifier. This point is the signifier itself, while the quilting point is the effect of this retroversion. Lacan defines the master-signifier as 'the signifier without a signified'; it follows from this that the master-signifier is in a sense the last signifier in the chain. But the fact that it has no signified means that by itself it does not mean anything at all, it is devoid of any positive content; it only gains meaning through its structural position within the chain of signification. This also means that because the master-signifier does not mean anything by itself, it can be the ground for all meaning. It can mean anything if it is quilted to the right set of signifiers; it bears all the load of meaning, precisely because it is by definition load-less. Let's look at the example of 'American' as the master-signifier; under this master-signifier every political category means something different: democracy becomes the electoral college, freedom becomes libertarianism, free speech becomes empty speech, a middle-eastern becomes a terrorist, peacekeeping becomes puppet governments, etc. The other side of this dialectic is equally important, 'American' as a signifier means nothing by itself; without the aforementioned set of significations, the question "What does it mean to be an American?" is a nonsense question, only when it is quilted to some set of signifiers does it gain meaning ("Being an American means being free, democratic, peaceful, having free speech. . ."). This is the precise point that psychotics lack: their universe is always free-floating, meaning is never

tied down to anything, and therefore, they have trouble explaining anything using words. The important point here is that it is not that they have no notion of meaning whatsoever, but rather that their universe of meaning never comes together under a larger concept.

We can now return to Hegel, but this time instead of looking at his discussions of taste, we will look at the formal logic of the Hegelian dialectic itself. On the movement of this dialectic Žižek writes:

“We arrive at the starting point of the process, the ‘thesis’, through the operation of ‘immediation-abbreviation’: a series of markers,  $(M_1 \dots M_J)$  is abbreviated in the marker  $M_K$  whose content (i.e. what this marker designates) is this very series:

$$(M_1 \dots M_J) - M_K$$

What then follows is the inverse operation of ‘explication’ in which the series  $M_1 \dots M_J$  explicates  $M_K$ :

$$M_K - (M_1 \dots M_J)$$

What occurs now is yet another reversal - and the crucial point not to be missed here is that this additional reversal does not bring us back to our starting point, to (1) (or, in Hegelese, that ‘negation of negation’ does not entail a return to the initial position):

$$(M_1 \dots M_J) / M_K$$

What can this mean? In (3) the marker  $M_K$  is *stricto sensu* ‘reflexive’: it no longer stands for immediation that is abstractly opposed to explication, since it explicates the very series that explicated  $M_K$  itself in (2).<sup>10</sup> (2005)[48]

Several questions here: Why doesn’t the reversal of the reversal (or the negation of the negation) return us to (1), i.e. why is (3) necessarily different than (1)? Well, what is achieved through this dialectical process is the very definition of what  $M_K$  is: it not only abbreviates a certain set, but also it underlines its position as the abbreviator of this set; this is what Žižek means by ‘reflexive’, precisely that  $M_K$  is able to look back and expose its own structural position. Isn’t this akin to the dialectical movement of our functions? The second function not only ‘fixes’ what was wrong with the first function; but also, it stands in for what was wrong with the first function: the derivation of the second function (and the fetishistic constant) is

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<sup>10</sup>Žižek, in order to differentiate this step from (1), uses a different symbol here: ‘/’ instead of ‘-’; this is the point of the Hegelian ‘synthesis’, where explication and abbreviation occurs synchronously.

the concretization of the failure of the first function. This is what is fundamentally different between mathematics and dialectics (which we briefly touched upon in the ‘ $1/x$  and *House M.D.*’ section): mathematics is clean and tidy, for example, if I give you the number ‘ $-18$ ’, you cannot determine what operation led me to this number, as there is literally an infinite number of possibilities; on the other hand, dialectics always leaves a trace, this is why Hegel’s negation of the negation does not return you to your original position, the route you took to get there is now written into the final position itself (unlike in mathematics where ‘ $--18 = 18$ ’). The second question is, can we give a concrete example for this movement? We can, let’s take an example which Hegel himself uses and imagine a scenario where we are trying to define what an ‘elephant’ is. First, we write down all the empirical qualities of an elephant:

(1) (grey skin, four legs, a giant trunk, two long curvy teeth, eats plants, ...) - Elephant

Then we take the inverse of this relation, effectively implicating the original question we began with: “What is an elephant?”:

(2) Elephant - (grey skin, four legs, a giant trunk, two long curvy teeth, eats plants, ...)

Finally, we take the inverse again, this time positioning the ‘Elephant’ as the reflexive abbreviation of the set:

(3) (grey skin, four legs, a giant trunk, two long curvy teeth, eats plants, ...) / Elephant

What is the difference between (1) and (3)? The third step keeps the reversal of the second step while returning to the first step: the scar of the first negation is still present after the second negation. Let us translate this movement to a more explicit form:

(1) (grey skin, four legs, a giant trunk, two long curvy teeth, eats plants, ...) is called an ‘Elephant’.

(2) X is an ‘Elephant’ because it is/has (grey skin, four legs, a giant trunk, two long curvy teeth, eats plants, ...).

(3) X is/has (grey skin, four legs, a giant trunk, two long curvy teeth, eats plants, ...) because it is an ‘Elephant’.

What becomes clear with this translation is that through this dialectical movement we can come to a crucial insight into the act of naming, and its byproduct, referring.

Something is called an elephant not because it has a set of empirical qualities that is usually associated with the concept of an elephant, but it has these set of qualities because it is an elephant. The famously confusing Lacanian dictum; “A chair is called a chair because it is a chair.” attests to this paradox, this contradiction. Things are called certain things not because of their nominalist determinations, but through the very form of their name. The dead form of a name brings forth a new dimension to the thing itself: precisely the point where an elephant gains the unnamable quality of ‘elephantness’, the core of what it means to refer to something as an ‘elephant’. We can find another example of this operation in Marx; who, in his analysis of the commodity form, points out that the translation of exchange value to the universal equivalent brings forth a new concept, one that ‘stands in for all commodities’, and taps into the core of ‘commodity-ness’: money. It is important to point out that this new element (elephant-ness, commodity-ness, etc.) cannot be reduced to the previous set of elements; as this is not a positive feature like the rest. This is the result of the cut, or the negation through which  $M_K$  gets maimed. If you have been reading carefully you might realize that we are very close to something we have discussed before. . . All the way in the beginning, in the preparatory section ‘As If Commutator’, we claimed that the classical ‘if, then’ operation relies on the absence of any conceptual link between the two terms, while our ‘as if’ commutator maintained this relation, even after the operation. We have even depicted this non-relation that still functions as a relation as the ‘if, then’ arrow with a slash through it, symbolizing the cut of negation that is maintained in the term. We can substitute this commutator for the  $/$ , while replacing  $-$  with the classic ‘if, then’ arrow, and rewrite the dialectical structure like this:

$$(1) M_1 \dots M_J \rightarrow M_K$$

$$(2) M_K \rightarrow M_1 \dots M_J$$

$$(3) M_1 \dots M_J \not\rightarrow M_K$$

We can start to form our conceptual links now. Isn’t the abbreviator/explicator term  $M_K$  the Lacanian Master-Signifier? And isn’t this entire dialectical structure akin to the formation of the quilting point? One term, by standing for the entire set, quilts or sews the entire set together. But the crucial aspect is that Hegel is one step ahead of Lacan here, as his dialectical schema allows us to understand the precise difference between the quilting point and the master-signifier.  $M_K$  in step (1), is the quilting point, bringing the set together by creating an external anchoring point, after which all the elements of the set gain their meaning in reference to this point. But after the double Hegelian reversal,  $M_K$  in step (3), is the master-signifier, which also quilts, but it does so reflexively: the master-signifier is a special type of quilting

point which avows its own lack. What is this lack? Well, precisely the fact that the master-signifier is inherently meaningless, it is a signifier without a signified. The lack of a signified is not apparent in (1), but is unavoidable in (3); we now know that the master-signifier can only function from its own structural position and nothing more, while the quilting point can be repressed or disavowed, due to its structural position being hidden.

Now we are finally ready to begin with our actual argument of this section. We have claimed that there is a homology between the concept of taste and the Lacanian quilting point, which will later allow us to construct our third function. The second function failed when the object of the fetish and the impossible object of the Real coincided too much, we can even claim that the second function fails because it works too well; remember that the second function only came about through its ability to handle what we have called eigenartworks, the failure point of the first function. The second function was able to interpret eigenartworks, artworks of the Lacanian Real, and it was able to provide a substitute by displacing an ordinary constant element within the artwork to the structural position of the impossible Real object. But if this process works too well, the function gets stuck on itself, and it becomes underivable. The tension that this contradiction brings, grows exponentially; until, as Lacan describes, the fetish explodes to a bunch of tiny fragments. This cloud of signifiers must then be totalized, brought under a singular concept; the master-signifier. But what happens if this process does not work so smoothly? The main argument of this section is this: *'taste' is created, when the dialectical movement of the act of quilting these floating signifiers to a master-signifier gets stuck, and is unable to move forward.* The precise point where this process halts, is the second (2) step we have outlined above. The set of signifiers of the exploded fetish, gets quilted to a certain signifier; this relation then gets inverted. This I claim is what taste is: an organizing principle that does successfully bring together the free-floating signifiers, but gets stuck on this step, and is unable to inverse this relation once more. This means that the quilting point of taste never gets named, it is forever invisible; unable to become a master-signifier. This also means that signification never truly ends, even though the quilting point was established; since the master-signifier (the signifier without a signified, the final point of signification) is non-existent, the two limits of the set (its beginning and end points) are undefined. In set theory (the branch of mathematics that deals with the study of sets), this would be called an open set; a set that does exist, but is incomplete, since the limits of it are undefined. The third function then, has to parallel these concepts in its construction. Before we construct our third function however, let's return to the concept of taste and the discussion of this concept we have gone through in this section. With Hume,

we mentioned that his ‘standard of taste’ could never be defined by reason; since as Hume claimed, all sentiments are right, and therefore, are unable to be totalized within reason. This is why Hume invents the idea of the ‘true critic’; someone who could set the standard of taste not on reason, but on feeling and sentiment. This Platonic ideal of an interpreter is obviously an imaginary fantasy, the logic that undergirds the relationship between the ‘true critic’ and the ultimate ‘standard of taste’ is circular: the critic is defined in their ability to tap into this standard, while this standard is the combination of the taste of the ‘true critics’. But what matters to us is the form of Hume’s conceptualization: isn’t Hume asking for the exact thing we are talking about, namely a master-signifier, a ‘true-critic’ who can quilt and therefore totalize the reasonably untotalizable field of taste? Even though Hume is the thinker we have criticized the most in this section, he is also perhaps the only one who truly understands what taste is: an abstract field of sentimental judgments that are brought together by some invisible concept that remains undefined. This is why the form of Hume’s writings is more important than their content, underneath his attempt to find the ‘true critic’ of the standard of taste, Hume unknowingly gets at something fundamental about the concept itself; namely that the concept of taste, by definition, is contradictory, stuck between the quilting point and the master-signifier. Kant, on the other hand, does a much better job in the text itself; as he is able to deduce the concept of taste in a much more successful manner. His delineations on the concept seem opposite to ours; as he relates taste to the concept of pleasure, the crucial notion of our first function. But through careful analysis, we were able to show that what Kant really gets at is the conceptual difference between taste and the form of taste. Kant links the former with pleasure yes, but the latter, through its universal applicability, reveals that it nonetheless relies on something other than pleasure: the big Other, who acts as the guarantor of the a priori form of the judgments of taste. Kant, in a sense, is doing the exact same thing as us: trying to find the limits of taste that is beholden to a signifier that is undefined. We can see this more clearly in his concept of the ‘free play’ of imagination and understanding; as Kant claims that the usual relationship between these two faculties (imagination applies the forms of understanding to the perceptual object), is operational in a fundamentally different way when it comes to taste: the imagination still applies the forms of the understanding to the object, but not under a certain, defined concept. In a sense, ‘free play’ designates the failure of this relationship of the Kantian manifold; imagination through its relationship to the understanding gets stuck when it comes to objects of beauty, and this is the point where Kant thinks that taste is created. Isn’t Kant’s idea of the ‘free play’ of imagination and understanding homologous to our conceptualization of taste? He even sees the nuance between the quilting point and the master-signifier, as he claims that imagination still does its duty in relation



to understanding (quilting point), but the difference is precisely the fact that it applies these forms under an indeterminate concept (the absent master-signifier). Hegel's conceptualization of taste, is perhaps the clearest when it comes to the lack of the master-signifier: for him, artworks "demand not only sensibility and abstract reflection, but the undivided reason and the mind in its solid vigor", which means that taste by itself fails on its own terms. The quilting point is not enough, since it does not consider its own failure, which is the point of division and the lack of reason for Hegel.

This is our basic claim; taste is the jamming/wedging point within the dialectical movement that tries to bring together the free-floating cloud of signifiers that were left over from the explosion of the fetishistic constant. We now have a set in our hands, and the point of difficulty when it comes to its mathematical expression is obvious: how can we locate the existence of the difference in the primordial interpretative function, in some set; if this set itself is undefined? The third function looks at the art object and determines whether the change in the primordial interpretative function is contained within this set, but we do not know how this set is constructed, since its quilting point is in a sense, repressed (not able manifest itself as the master-signifier). We can follow a similar logic to the one we used when we were constructing the second function; there, we claimed that derivation would make sure the constant existed before the change in the primordial interpretative function occurred. Here our third function will have to make sure the change in the primordial interpretative function falls into the domain of it, before it takes the difference. In a sense, what it must do is to integrate this element (the change in the primordial interpretative function), and then take this difference. What we are doing is effectively the opposite of derivation; so, the answer instantly becomes obvious: let us use the exact opposite of derivation, which is integration. If we write our third function with the integration operation in an explicit manner, we get this:

$$f_3(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Theta(t) = 0, a \in \Sigma \wedge b \notin \Sigma, \int \cdots \int_n \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) dx = a, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \\ \int \cdots \int_n \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) dx = b, \not\rightarrow 0 + \lambda(t) \end{array} \right\}$$

Here we go, our third and final function. To clear some terminological issues:  $\Sigma$  is the set of values that constitutes what we have conceptualized as 'taste'; like the set  $M_1 \dots M_J$  we have seen before in Hegel's dialectical movement.  $a$  is some element that is a part of  $\Sigma$ , while  $b$  is some element that is not. The function brings together this abstract field of taste, without recourse to its precise definition; by integrating it within the domain of the primordial interpretative function ( $\int \cdots \int_n$

means to integrate the function  $n$  times, which essentially means to integrate as many times as it is necessary to find the difference between the two forms of the primordial interpretative function). After the integration, it is business as usual: the function looks at the change in the primordial interpretative function caused by the art object and sees whether the difference is within the set of  $\Sigma$ . If it is, then it evaluates the artwork as ‘good’, and if it is not, it evaluates it as ‘bad’.

Now that we have our third and final function, we can look at some places where it manifests itself within everyday interpretation of artworks. With the first function, we looked at the concept of anti-intellectualism when it comes to art; the mode of thought that claims that art is not to be thought about, but simply to be enjoyed. With the second function, we mentioned the fixation or fetishization with the concepts of historical accuracy and technical perfection. Now, we come to the phenomenon that is perhaps the most prevalent: the matter of taste. In ‘The Zeroth Point’ section, we briefly touched upon this issue, but now that we have discussed the concept of taste extensively in this section, it is time to return to it. At a first glance, it seems that the concept of taste is linked exclusively to the concept of pleasure or enjoyment. We even saw that much of the 18th century theorization of artworks operated under this ideational link as well. But as the construction of our functions indicate, our position must be different. Taste is not pleasure, as Kant has already demonstrated, rather it is the attempt at organizing artistic pleasure. This is an admirable endeavor, there seems to be nothing wrong with it at face value. But a closer inspection reveals that this organization does not run smoothly; we have already seen how it fails to come together fully, and how can it? We have argued that taste does not really fail, but that taste is the point of failure itself, or to put it more precisely, taste is the indication that this attempt at organizing pleasure-based judgments has already gone awry. But what is perhaps more interesting when it comes to the common sense understanding of taste is the superegoic demand that it cannot be discussed or questioned. The most popular understanding of taste places it as the ultimate untouchable category of artistic interpretation. There’s even a saying in Turkish about it: “Renkler ve zevkler tartışılmaz.” (Colors and pleasures shall not be discussed). People who are artists, interested in art, academics in the field, art critics, etc.; artophiles, if you will, have already countered this statement: for them, art is something to be discussed, thought about, delineated, interpreted, played with, etc. We can also refute this claim ourselves, using the conceptual tools we have developed in this section: taste is not the success of artistic interpretation, but the name of a stuck movement in the organization of pleasures. But we have already made this point enough times, so perhaps it is more interesting to combat this claim of the non-discussability of tastes, not from our own theoretical posi-

tion, but from the commonsense perspective itself. And we can start by looking at an example from the video game *Disco Elysium* (2019), where the protagonist has the ability to be interested in artworks. The game provides a mission to the player, where they have to complete some challenges, etc.; after which they gain this thought. The thought reads:

“Yeah, it’s another copotype – the worst one. The most savage and brutal. The Art Cop. Nothing is good enough for him. Everything is shit. You have to employ an armada of adjectives to depict and demean the mediocrity of the works and visual institutions around you. Really flex that critical muscle. Until the vocabulary for PUNISHING mediocrity becomes second nature. Here we go... Trite, contrived, mediocre, milquetoast, amateurish, infantile, cliché-and-gonorrhea-ridden paean to conformism, eye-fucked me, affront to humanity, war crime, should *literally* be tried for war crimes, resolutely shit, lacking in imagination, un-informed reimagining of, limp-wristed, premature, ill-informed attempt at, talentless fuckfest, recidivistic shitpeddler, pedantic, listless, savagely boring, just one repulsive laugh after another.”(2019)

What is this description parodying? Or to put it in another way, why is this funny? The first part of the parody is obviously the stereotype of the artophile who is discontent with every artwork: nothing is good enough, art is dead, nothing new is anything of worth, “*everything is shit*” ... This type of critic is often satirized enough, so let’s move on the second facet of the example. What is of interest to us is the precise form of this description, or the use of literary tools: it is a parody of the artophile who, in their attempt at interpretation, just lists a bunch of adjectives one after the other. This is a point that game is already aware of, “an armada of adjectives” or “the vocabulary for PUNISHING mediocrity” already point to this idea. And we can find real life agreement with this sentiment as well; the popular point of satire for art critics is one that depicts them as just listing off a series of words that attempts to interpret the artwork without contributing any ideational content. In a way, this popular criticism gets at what Freud called ‘the kettle logic’: Freud claims that if a patient lists off several reasons why they did something, then none of those reasons are the real one. If the patient gives only one reason, then that has the possibility of being true, but if there are multiple reasons, then it is patently not the reason why they did that thing. This is an instance where everyone thinks psychoanalytically without even realizing, since isn’t this a concept that everyone knows? If a loved one, a partner, a friend, etc., tries to justify themselves *too much*, then we unconsciously are already aware of the fact that they are lying; even though if they had stuck to the first item of their list of lies, we might have even believed

them. The popular criticism of taste shows that it understands this point perfectly; if an art critic is listing off several judgments, qualities, features about the artwork, our immediate reaction is to reject their attempt at interpretation, even if those features are empirically true/there. We can even come back to our own theoretical position here and claim that the popular criticism of taste even anticipates our theory of taste: isn't the list of adjectives of the parodied artophile, our  $\Sigma$ , the set of values that indeterminately establish the field of taste? We can see from this conceptual link that the commonsense logic when it comes to taste, has already developed a critique of it, without realizing it. This is the paradox of taste in the zeitgeist: in one single gesture, it is substantialized as the ultimate category of artistic interpretation, one that is untouchable and undiscussable, the ultimate instantiation of subjective relativism; but on the other hand, the actual interpretation that is based on taste is ridiculed as nothing but a meandering series of adjectives, akin to a word salad.

#### 4.1 Failure of the Third Function

We'll keep it brief in this section; precisely because of two reasons: firstly, this is our final function, and the potential fourth function is not within the purview of this treatise (though we will touch upon it in the final section of the final chapter, '*The Fourth Function and Beyond*'), and secondly, we have already seen what a potential failure point would look like in the theoretical first section of this chapter, where we outlined the third function. But to find the precise failure point of the third function, we must analyze it nonetheless. To summarize the innerworkings of the third function, we can say that it originates from the failure point of the second function: we saw that when the fetishistic constant coincides with the impossible object of the Real (the eigenartworks from the failure point of the first function) too much, the function gets stuck on its own internal mechanism, which leads to tension within it, and it eventually explodes into tiny pieces. These pieces form a cloud of signifiers, which then must be totalized under a single concept. This is where the third function comes in, the set of signifiers that was left over from the second function moves through a dialectical process: they get 'quilted' by some unknown point, and afterwards are reversed into this point as the abbreviation of the entire set. At this point, however, the dialectical movement gets stuck, and is unable to perform the final reversal that would establish the master-signifier as the explicator/abbreviator. This 'stuckness' is what we claimed the concept of 'taste' is, a set of signifiers/qualities/features/judgments about the artwork that are organized, yes, but under the quilting point that is fundamentally indeterminate.

The next step here should be obvious, the completion of this dialectical movement: in this way, the master-signifier would come into its being (to use the Hegelian term) and taste would unfold onto itself. Is this it, then? Is our work here done? Well, no; since there are multiple problems with this description: (1) It is not clear what would motivate the dialectical movement to be completed. We do know that it must have something to do with contradiction, not only because we saw this same form of process happen two times by now, but also for the fact that by definition, the contradictory point, is the ultimate (and only) fuel for functional transformation. This is the point we must discover in this section. (2) We have claimed that taste does not fail, but that taste itself was the point of failure of this dialectical movement. If we simply claim that this is the point of contradiction, then we will have criticized the function from a purely meta-theoretical position. As we have stated before, we must find the point failure on the functions own terms, and not impose external requirements or stipulations. (3) Since the concept of taste simply works, the incompleteness of the dialectical movement therefore, poses no problems for it whatsoever. So, the point of contradiction or failure of the third function must therefore be intractable, but not guaranteed. To put it more precisely, the point of failure in the third function must be necessarily there, but this necessity itself has to be contingently operated. Just because something logically fails, does not mean that it actually fails. This point is easy to see from the movement of our functions alone; if this contradictory point would lead everyone and anyone to the next function, then there would be no reason to interpret artworks within the logic of the previous function. For example, even though the second function advances on the first, and in some sense, is truer then the first; we can observe the first function still being used today. (4) What would be the mathema-logical expression of this point of failure? Integration seems to be pretty fool-proof as a mathematical form, especially compared to the previous mathematical forms of our two previous functions. There can be no problems regarding integrability (à la derivation), since every function is integrable in our formulation of the primordial interpretative function.

Let us start with the mathema-logical perspective. We need to see the third function again:

$$f_3(\vec{x}) = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Theta(t) = 0, a \in \Sigma \wedge b \notin \Sigma, \int \cdots \int_n \int \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) dx = a, \not\rightarrow 1 + \lambda(t) \\ \int \cdots \int_n \int \Delta'(\vec{x}) - \Delta(\vec{x}) dx = b, \not\rightarrow 0 + \lambda(t) \end{array} \right\}$$

From a mathematical perspective, one thing jumps out as the weak point of the

function; the fact that the limits of the integral are not defined. If it were, it would look something like this  $\int_a^b f(x) dx$ , where  $a$  and  $b$  represent the limit cases of the integral. In calculus, first order derivation calculates the slope of the function at any single point, which corresponds to the instantaneous rate of change in Newtonian physics. While integration as the opposite operation to derivation, calculates the area under a curve. But if the domain of the function is infinite (the real number line  $\mathbb{R}$ , for example) than this calculation would simply spit out infinity. This is why integration is confined between two limits, where the operation calculates the area between the function and the number line, with the two limits forming the boundary terms of the function. What does this mean for our function? Well, we have already stated that the concept of taste comes together under an invisible signifier, so this lack of definition in the boundary terms of the integral would be homologous to this idea. We can go further, however, though the idea of repeat integration. We have constructed the third function in a way that the failure point in the second function would not be a problem; the third function can integrate at all times, so that the problem of underivability does not hurt the third function. But this also means that the function can be reduced down to a single point through this operation. This would make it so that the third function behaves exactly like the second function, with its insistence on a single value. The absence of boundary limits is clearly a problem here too.

So, what is the precise point of failure in the third function? Well, the absence of boundary limits does not just mean that the concept of taste can never come together, as we have seen that that is not a problem in and of itself. Rather, the failure point is in the single element that is found at the end of the integration process, values we have designated in our explicit formula as  $a$  and  $b$ . These values are the basis of the evaluative section of the function, and therefore are crucial to its proper functioning. But if the boundary terms of the integral are undefined, then this means that there are necessary instances where we simply do not know whether these values are in the set  $\Sigma$  or not. This is the true reason for the failure of the third function, resulting in from the indeterminacy of the set of taste we have established before. The creation of this set poses no problem as we have stated, but when we have to check whether a certain value is within this set or not, then the undefined aspect of this set becomes an intractable contradiction. To resolve it, the function must transform in order to pre-check the existence of this specific value within the set, which requires an additional element to the function. We have already stated what this element is: this is simply the Lacanian master-signifier. This special quilting point avows its lack at all times, since it is a signifier that lacks a signified, the determinant of meaning for the subject. This point of lack would

then function as the limits of the integral, effectively resolving the contradiction of the third function. What would be the instigator of this dialectical movement? Well, the specific elements of artworks that the function cannot determine whether it is within the set of 'taste' or not. These elements would be akin to the contextual change in and around the artwork. Let us give an example: in the Kurt Vonnegut novel *Bluebeard*, the main character Rabo Karabekian, an abstract expressionist painter, finds that he has trouble with a specific painting that is comprised of a single black stripe on an orange background. This painting, that was painted by an unknown artist and was sold for a lot of money, now hangs in the lobby of a large bank building. Rabo finds the painting to not be worth of all that money, but nonetheless abhors the fact that it was owned by a bank. He does not like the painting too; he describes it as distasteful. We can see that his views on this painting are contradictory: it does not fit his tastes at all, and he thinks it is not worth that much, but he still does not like that it sits in a bank lobby. He nonetheless finds the painting to be intriguing, he is not able to take his mind off it. One day, he decides he is going to paint an exact replica of this painting in his barn. After it is complete, he becomes enamored by it, and he starts to think that it is the greatest painting in the world; and promptly gets depressed after realizing that his greatest work is a carbon copy of someone else's painting. We can see from this example that at first, Rabo finds the painting to be unfitting of his taste, but as soon as he sees it in a different context (his barn vs. the lobby of a bank), he thinks that it fits his taste to a tee. But the crucial point for us is not that Rabo finds the painting distasteful, but that he cannot decide on what to think about the painting conclusively in that specific context. In the terms of our function, Rabo's taste was lacking in boundary terms, so when he came across a painting which contained a single element that was unknown with regard to his set of 'taste', his third function got stuck. His way of resolving this contradiction was to remove the painting from that context, but furthermore, it was to paint the painting himself. Isn't this the creation of a new master-signifier? Rabo effectively appoints himself as the master-signifier, and through this determination, he's finally able to deal with the painting.

We have now seen the failure point of the third function, and we have even seen one of the facets of the fourth function. As stated earlier, the fourth function requires further discussion to be fully constructed. Even though we will not do this completely, we will dip our toes in it in the next chapter.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 The Two Times

In this conclusion chapter, we will deal with concepts and points that are left over from the previous chapters. This specific section will deal with the role of time in our interpretative functions, while the next section will outline the potential fourth function and beyond. The two main questions in this section are: (1) What are  $\Theta(t)$  and  $\lambda(t)$ ? We barely mentioned them while we were constructing our functions, it almost seems like we have just presupposed them to exist. These are the indicators of time in our interpretative functions, they designate the temporal dimension of the interpretative process. The question still persists however, why are they there? And why is there two of them? What's the difference between the two? (2) Why did we claim that the multitude of results that the change in the primordial interpretative function can have has to be reduced to a binary evaluation? Isn't this counter-intuitive, and more importantly, counterfactual? One can think of many instances when their evaluation is not as clear cut as good or bad, could one not? We have waited until now to answer these questions since they are intimately linked to one another. We'll see in this section that the concept of time is the precise reason why there is an initial binary reduction of evaluation, and also why we do not see this type of binary response in the real world. Time reduces all evaluation into two, but it also explodes it into a multiple fragments as well.

Let's start with a commonsense question regarding the relationship between artistic evaluation and time: what is their precise interconnection? At a first glance, the answer seems self-evident; as time passes, one's interpretation and subsequent evaluation can change depending on a multitude of factors. But this answer is wholly unsatisfactory, as the relationship between time and the interpretative process remain vague and inconclusive. Why does the existence of time mean that our interpretation has to change? Can't it remain what it is? What is meant by the



'passage of time' seems to be the aggregator of all changes in the ideational position of the interpreter (social, political, physical, ideological, educational, etc.); as in, we ascribe the change in the subject to the natural flow of time. This is not as sloppy as one may think at first; isn't time just the aggregator of all change in the universe, whether it be psychic or physical? Let's imagine a closed system within which all objects retain their determinants (the atomic structure, the special positioning, electrical charge, etc.). Could we say that in this specific closed system, time has passed? This is a much-debated issue, but most physicists today would say no; that since time is the symbolic totalizer of all change, if there's no change, then there's no time. Obviously this is completely hypothetical, as there's no possible complete closed system in the universe, but it does show why time in modern physics is a complete thermodynamical issue. Since nothing can remain the same thermodynamically speaking, change is a primordial necessity of the universe; therefore, if one were to investigate at the origin of time, one ought to look at heat. We can form a homological link between thermodynamics and artistic interpretation here, even in this juncture. In colloquial terms, don't people say that an art object that they like is 'cool'? This music is cool, this painting is cool, this movie is cool, etc. Obviously, this is merely an analogical connection, the actual heat of the art object is irrelevant. But nonetheless, the word choice I claim is not accidental; 'coolness' of an art object is one of the most prevalent evaluative claims when it comes to interpretation. So what does it mean then? Why is 'cool' the preferable signifier? We cannot reduce the cool/hot dichotomy to a simple good/bad binary, since it does not function in this way; both 'cool' and 'hot' can be used to ascribe desirability to an object or person. There is a slight difference however; as 'hot' indicates some type of attraction/attention whether it be sexual or not (this person is hot, this venue is hot, the artistic style is hot). It connotes that this object's desirability is made manifest by the object itself; it is trendy, fashionable, in vogue, the center of all attention. While 'cool' indicates desirability in the complete opposite manner, it hides its desirable point or underplays it in some manner. So the actual point of desire for the 'cool' object is not in the manifest desirable feature, but in the attempt to hide this point itself. In Lacanian terms, this would be the difference between the 'object of desire' and the 'object-cause of desire': the object of desire is conscious, we can know exactly what it is (a person, a car, a house, ice cream), while the object-cause of desire is usually an unrelated object that causes the desire to be born in the first place. This object is unconscious, and it constitutes the real reason why we desire the object of desire. 'Hot' is akin to the object of desire, the reason why we are attracted to it is obvious from the very form of the object; while 'cool' is the object-cause of desire, the reason for our desire is in the very attempt to hide its apparent desirable features. But what does this have to do with time?

Well, thermodynamically speaking, what happens if we push the ‘coolness’ of an art object to its extreme? If it deliberately shies away from attention, isn’t the coolest art object one that no one can see? It is so cool that it is exempt from the socio-symbolic realm altogether. This also means that this hypothetical artwork is outside of time; since no one can interact with it, it is dislodged from history itself. This not only makes sense, it is also thermodynamically sound, in absolute zero (-273°C), all objects stop moving, eliminating time altogether.

What does this mean for us? Simply this: it is not merely the case that the artistic interpretation changes because of a change in the interpreter, but that it is the other way around. The art object itself ‘heats up’ or ‘cools down’ simply by being subject to time, and this constitutes the real reason why interpretation necessarily changes. This brings us to the first symbol of time in our functions:  $\lambda(t)$ . This element is the ‘half-life of interpretation’, the indicator of the necessary change in the artistic interpretation. Because of the necessary change in the art object itself, which we have just outlined, the interpretation necessarily loses its original consistency. The direction or the amount of change in the art object is irrelevant, even a minimal change means that the initial interpretation no longer can be operative completely. This means that, thermodynamically speaking, all interpretations are radioactive, and therefore, have a ‘half-life’. They degrade and deform on their own terms, without any recourse to external factors. These factors are there and are operative, but even if they weren’t, we would see the degradation of any and all artistic interpretations/evaluations of the first three interpretative functions. This is why we have indicated that the evaluative result of our functions are always coupled with  $\lambda(t)$ , this half-life of interpretation comes prepackaged with it. The deciding factor is obviously time itself, and the degree of which the interpretation degrades is corollary to the change in the art object itself. But how? How does this process work exactly? It makes sense that a change in the art object causes a change in the artistic interpretation/evaluation, but how does this process work from the subject’s point of view? And what does ‘degrade’ even mean? The precise logic of this process goes as follows: as we have mentioned before, while the evaluation itself is conscious, the interpretative logic within which this evaluation is produced remains unconscious from the individual interpreter. This was the precise limit point between the first three functions and the rest, and this is also precisely why these functions work ‘non-theoretically’. This neat differentiation between the unconscious interpretation and the conscious evaluation does not work itself out smoothly, however. As Freud emphasized, the conscious memory is a trace, left there by the unconscious. While most of the time these traces are meaningless to the conscious ego, with enough force, they do seep through the barrier that separates these realms together. Imagine a

crime scene where our conscious detective is trying to solve the crime committed by the unconscious murderer; if there are only a couple of clues, the scene is incomprehensible, an unsolvable riddle. But if there's too much, then the solution of the case becomes self-evident, an obvious explanation to the precise logic within which the unconscious operates. In psychoanalysis these 'clues' are called symptoms, the leftovers of the unconscious register. Another way we can think about it (an example which Freud himself uses), is to imagine consciousness and unconsciousness as the subsequent pages of a notebook. The unconsciousness is on top, and is being actively written on, while consciousness is one page below. If written with enough force (or for our purposes, given enough time), the ink on the first page will bleed through to the second page; not enough to read completely perhaps, but enough to interpret or guess. Freud claims that this is what memory is; a guesswork done on the traces left by the unconscious ink. And this is also how the 'half-life' concept works in our interpretative functions: as time passes, the interpretative process itself starts to bleed through to the evaluative portion. This causes the evaluation itself to degrade, and since the temporal/thermodynamical aspect of art is unavoidable, the degradation/radiation of the interpretation/evaluation itself is also necessary. This is precisely why we see a multitude of evaluative stances when it comes to artworks, not because of a multitude of subjective positionality or contextual differences; but because of the inherent half-life of interpretation.

What about  $\Theta(t)$ ? This is the second time factor in our functions, and in all three of them, we have indicated that this term equals zero. What does this mean? And why is there a definitive value for this time factor, while the previous one was mathematically undefined? This is perhaps the simplest term to explain, and it is ironic that we have left it for last.  $\Theta(t)$  is simply the time it takes the interpretative function to produce an evaluative result. In all three of our functions, this time is zero seconds; or to put it plainly, the non-theoretical interpretative functions operate instantaneously. Why? This is related to the discussion of the first time factor, and the answer is because of their relation to unconsciousness. We have mentioned numerous times that the non-theoretical interpretation of artworks occur unconsciously, in that the logic of the interpretative process itself remains wholly unconscious. This means that the entire system works without recourse to external factors, a notion we have discussed in the preparatory sections. The inherent form of the functions means that there is no outside principles or ideas that the interpretative process relies on, it is completely self-dependent in its formal structure. It follows from this that the process itself require no time to operate, the psychic framework works instantaneously. Our point is not that the literal time it takes to interpret artworks within the logic of our functions is zero, but that the temporal dimension

of these functions are stacked on top of each other. The linearity of the relationship between the functions is not operative within the functions themselves. Think about our discussion of the primordial interpretative function, where we claimed that this function only exists retroactively. It exists because of its result, its change In-Itself. A similar logic is at work here; the functions operate instantaneously not because the unconscious is incredible efficient and fast, but because the lack of external factors results in the functions' operations overlaying their inherent processes. But because of this unconscious dimension, it follows that the time required is zero only for the first three functions. The arrival of theory with the fourth function means that now there is a concrete outside factor, a set of ideas or principles independent from the individual psyche. We can conclude, therefore, that starting with the fourth function,  $\Theta(t)$  will no longer be zero. This provides us with a nice point of differentiation. One lingering question one might have when dealing with the first three functions is this: How can we be sure that we are/aren't using the non-theoretical interpretative functions? With  $\Theta(t)$ , our answer becomes clear; if one is unsure about their interpretation/evaluation in the immediate aftermath of the interaction with the artwork, then they can be sure that they are not operating within the domain of the first three functions.  $\Theta(t)$  provides us with a nice litmus test to see where we stand in our everyday interaction with artworks.

$\Theta(t)$  also provides us with the explanation as to why the multitudinous results of the change in the primordial interpretative functions gets reduced to two outcomes. In this section we concluded that this binary reduction does not stay in a binary form, and that the 'half-life' of interpretation means that whatever the binary option is, it degrades necessarily. But this does not answer why this binary reduction occurs in the first place. The first thing to do here is to differentiate this binary form from its content. The binary options of 'good' and 'bad' are not necessarily inherent categories; we are not dealing with a primordial 'goodness' or 'badness' of art here. Instead the good/bad signifiers are glommed onto the preexisting binary form of the interpretative process. We can easily imagine other signifiers occupying this space: useful/useless, imaginative/unimaginative, hot/cool, tasteful/tasteless, exciting/boring, etc. The question remains however, why does the form emerge in the first place? The reason lies in the translation of the interpretative process to the evaluative section: the interpretation is the detection of the change in the primordial interpretative function, and the evaluation is the designation of this change into some judgment in the logic of the interpretation itself. Because there's no outside principle that the evaluative process can judge the artwork's adherence to, the only criteria becomes the inherent logic of the function itself. The binary reduction is the indication that the function works, that the process has been operative. The only

thing that the evaluative section can cognize is whether the interpretative process has worked or not, this is precisely because of the lack of externality of our three interpretative functions, a concept that finds itself manifested in  $\Theta(t)$ .

## 5.2 The Fourth Function and Beyond

We are now ready to conclude. Let's begin by summarizing what we have done so far. In the introductory section, we have outlined our methodology: we are looking the logic within which people interpret artworks in a non-theoretical way. Our initial claim is that these non-theoretical methods that people are using nonetheless can be categorized in a theoretical manner. These methods are mostly unconscious, and therefore we are using the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan. Even though these methods seem non-theoretical and irrational from a cursory glance, a deeper analysis reveals that they nevertheless rely on a theoretical understanding of artworks. These methods we have called interpretative functions. These functions take in the artwork as their domain, and associate it with an evaluative judgment; all organized by some theoretical idea or principle. We have claimed that the interpretation of artworks cannot happen in the logic of the classical states; instead, they are homologous to the quantum states in quantum mechanics. This means that artworks change the interpretative system that they encounter; this makes the result of the zeroth interpretative function unreliable. We have also shown that his particular function, which we have called the primordial interpretative function, is not only unreliable in its interpretation, but that we cannot know what its interpretation would be regardless. This meant that we had to look at the change in this primordial interpretative function instead, following the logic of quantum states, and see the difference in it. This led us to the idea that functions would transform from one another, fueled by the contradiction within them; in this instance we have used the philosophy of Hegel to show that this intrinsic failure point of contradiction must be in the function's own terms, and cannot be external to it. Any metatheoretical failure point would be secondary contradiction of the function, while the primary one providing the engine of transformation in the function. This means that we have already left the domain of the primordial interpretative function, and reached the realm of the first interpretative function. We have claimed that this function would be organized through the Freudian pleasure principle, and that we could show the strict homology between this concept and our first interpretative function. This line of thought led us to see the precise nature of the primordial interpretative function; that it does not exist on its own, but has the status of the

unsymbolizable Lacanian Real. It's pure change or difference in the encounter with the art object; and therefore, cannot be written down explicitly. But the first function can be, and we have written down as the change in the primordial interpretative function. This mirrors the functioning of the pleasure principle, and therefore, the logic of the first function was that it would look at the difference in pleasure that the artwork caused and would evaluate according to this difference. But there are special artworks, which we have called eigenartworks, that would change the primordial interpretative function back into itself. In this case, the difference would be zero; and this was the inherent point of contradiction for the first function. The second function was defined as the ability to interpret and circumvent the eigenartworks; it accomplished this through a fetishistic fixation of a singular element within the artwork. The second interpretative function would take the derivative of the primordial interpretative function to see whether this element had a ground that it could stand on, and then it would again look at the difference in this function to see this constant element was present in the artwork. We have shown that the popular manifestations of this idea of fetishistic displacement are in the obsession with historical accuracy and technical perfection. Then we claimed that the inherent failure point of the second function was the cases in which the fetish object would coincide too much with the impossible Real object that it was trying to disavow. This made the fetish explode into tiny little pieces, creating a cloud of signifiers that then had to be organized through some element. We have claimed that this was the beginning point of our third interpretative function; which was constructed around the concept of taste. We looked at several analyses of the concept of taste; namely in Hume, Kant and Hegel. We also looked at the Lacanian idea of the quilting point and the master-signifier, and we have read these concepts through the Žižekian interpretation of the Hegelian dialectical process. This movement allowed us to claim that taste was the failure of moving through the second step of the dialectic; and that it would get stuck and would be unable to reach the status of the master-signifier. This meant that taste was an organized group of signifiers that had its organizing element repressed. This corresponded to the popular understanding of taste, according to which, the standard artistic interpretative process was nothing but listing off several adjectives (signifiers of taste) in a measly attempt at interpretation. And we also showed that the way the third interpretative function dealt with the absence of the master-signifier was to integrate the primordial interpretative function, so that the elements within the artwork would be checkable to see whether they were in the set of taste or not. The third interpretative function would later actually check the artwork and its corresponding elements and cross reference them with the set of taste, in order to evaluate the artwork.

An additional homology reveals itself here: couldn't we say that our three interpretative functions are similar to the three Lacanian diagnostic categories of psychosis, perversion and neurosis? (1) The first interpretative function is neurosis: it deals with the logic within which the subject's enjoyment is structured. The neurotic subject is akin to the user of the first interpretative function, in that, they too delegate their enjoyment through a detour of some function (the pleasure principle, the desire of the Other, etc.). We can even go further with this homology and claim that there must be subcategories within the first function that would correspond to the types of neurosis. A hysterical first function would organize its pleasure principle in the purview of the enjoyment of the Other; whatever the Other enjoys, the hysterical first function finds displeasurable. An obsessive first function would do the opposite; whatever the Other enjoys, it tries to find it even more pleasurable. Isn't this the case with the popular view in which artworks that are 'underrated' are to be enjoyed more, while artworks that are deemed 'overrated' are to be written off as unworthy substitutes? Who's even rating these artworks? Psychoanalysis has an answer: what is 'over/underratedness' if not the view of the big Other? The other of other's evaluation provides the ground on which the neurotic first function organizes its pleasure: the hysteric finds every artwork the Other enjoys, displeasurable; since their goal is to undermine the Other at every turn. This isn't an act of pure defiance, or an example of revolutionary emancipatory politics; instead, the hysteric desires an Other that is even more perfect, who can 'rate' artworks in an appropriate manner. The obsessive on the other hand, seeks to find the 'underrated' artwork, the art that the big Other has missed. In this way they try to show that they are somehow even more proficient than the big Other, even more omnipotent and omniscient. We can even extend this to the third type of neurosis, one that we have discussed before: the phobic. The phobic in a sense recognizes the true potential of artworks, even more than the hysteric or the obsessive. They realize that art really has the power to hurt the subject, the power to nick what seems like the most invincible of notions. They are the antithesis of the popular idea that states that through art, we gain 'cultural capital': "I read the classics, I seem cultured. I watch all the movies; I always have something to talk about. I go to high-end art galleries; I transcend the mere plebians who are content to pleasure themselves with their drivel." The phobic, in a way, recognizes that all of this is complete nonsense; they realize that art doesn't give you something, it takes something away. *Art is a wound to thought, that must constantly be reinflicted.* The phobic knows this, and they fear it; for justified reasons. (2) The second interpretative function, is obviously perverted; since our main concept in that chapter was fetishism, a subcategory of perversion. We can do the same operation and extend the limits of the second function to the other types of perversion; namely masochism, and sadism. A masochistic interpretative

function would be akin to the people who try to be engaged with art, only when they consider it ‘high’: contemporary art, painting, classical music, sculpture, and architecture are acceptable; but cinema, literature, songs, and video games are too fun to be artistic. They torture themselves in the false belief that art has to be boring in order to be effective. The sadistic interpretative function on the other hand, would be the opposite: whatever the artwork is doing, it has to be demented or twisted in order for it to be enjoyed. Pulp fiction, Hollywood blockbusters, pop music, and pop music are evaluated higher than their ‘high-end’ counterparts; since the spectacle is all that matters for the sadist. Why? It’s the same case with the fetishist: the sadist desires the Other to come in and punish them. While the masochist does the punishment to themselves, the sadist seeks it in the most ‘unartistic’ places. (3)

The third interpretative function is psychosis: since we defined the function in its inability to bring about a master-signifier that would quilt the field of taste, this makes the most sense. The psychotic is unable to see the invisible concept that ties their universe of meaning together. Their taste-based judgments seem to slip away constantly, always carrying the danger of turning into their opposites. This invisible quilting point would then manifest itself in either paranoia or schizophrenia. The paranoid interpretative function would be akin to popular distrust of art critics; they seem to have their invisible quilting point in lock, which is suspicious from a paranoid point of view. “Isn’t taste, the lack of a master-signifier, how can these critics know exactly what they are talking about in their interpretations?” This would be the paranoid interpretative function, distrustful of any kind of definitive artistic interpretation. The schizophrenic interpretative function would be similar: but this time, the distrust wouldn’t be with the interpretative judgments of other people, but with the interpretative judgments of oneself. “How do I know that what I think about an artwork is really my own genuine judgment?” This leads the schizophrenic interpretative function to constantly withhold any interpretative or evaluative judgment; effectively destroying itself in the process... These are hypothetical ideas obviously, to draw out all the implications between our three interpretative functions and the Lacanian diagnostic categories would take another treatise on its own. But the reason for drawing this homology is quite interesting: in Lacanian psychoanalysis, the diagnostic conditions are linearly organized, just like our interpretative functions. However, the order of these conditions are opposite to ours, they go: psychosis, then perversion, then neurosis; while our order was the first function (neurosis), then the second function (perversion), then the third function (psychosis). We have claimed all the way back in the introductory section that the functions get truer as they go along, and in ‘*The Zeroth Point*’ section, we claimed that they become more artistically involved as they go along as well. But here in a paradoxical way, we find that even though the first function is the most incorrect,



in a sense, it is also the most correct. Again, to draw out all the implications of this would take another work, but it is crucial and interesting to point out nonetheless.

Before we conclude, let's discuss what a potential fourth interpretative function would look like. We have already sketched out its outlines when we discussed the failure point of the third function. There, we concluded that the fourth function would pick up where the third has left off: the master-signifier would be fully established, so that the boundary limits of the integral operation of third function would be exposed. The fourth function then, uses the Lacanian master-signifier as its organizing principle; every artwork is now interpreted on its compatibility with this signifier, they are all reflected on to it, and evaluated accordingly. The manifestation of the fourth function in the realm of popular interpretation of artworks is perhaps the easiest one out of all of the previous three. Isn't the fourth function and its master-signifier akin to the idea that art must serve some specific purpose? This master-signifier could be 'God'; the idea that all art must describe the magnanimity of god almighty, that just like every other aspect of human (non-human) existence, art also must be created with the purpose of serving god himself. The master-signifier could be 'Nation'; the idea that all art must be in service of portraying the greatness of one's own country, or its national identity. It could be 'Communism'; the idea that all art ought to reflect the plight of the working class, and that it must show how the communist state has saved/will save the proletariat from their bourgeois overlords. It could be 'Social Justice'; the idea that all art must represent the lives, struggles, thoughts, and desires of oppressed groups, and that art must abide by what is now called 'good representation'. It could even be 'X Theory'; the idea that art must exemplify all the ideas of a specific philosophical/theoretical doctrine, and that art has to be read as the symptom of this specific theory. I certainly hope that this treatise does not come across as this last example!

Two questions: (1) if there is a fourth function that is perhaps one of the most ubiquitous methods within which people interpret artworks, then why did we stop with the third? The answer is that this treatise (as the title suggests) was about the seemingly non-theoretical ways that people interpret artworks. The fourth function, I claim, is the first instantiation of theory proper. We have claimed that even the non-theoretical ways that people interpret artworks nonetheless rely on a logical theory, these were our three interpretative functions. But they nevertheless functioned unconsciously, with notions such as the law of subjective relativism serving as their conscious manifestations, or organizing principles. But a properly conscious theoretical engagement with art starts with the fourth function; with the establishment of a specific master-signifier that organizes these disparate thoughts and judgments into a cohesive theoretical whole. This is the first theoretical engagement with artworks

that recognizes its own structure; a theoretical method that knows its theoretical form. This means that there is a stark line that separates the third from the fourth function, a line of demarcation that establishes the origin point of artistic theory proper. This is why we stop here, and only hint at what the fourth function would look like. The second question (2): is this it then? Is the fourth function the final one? Well, no. I claim that there are *nine functions* in total! These functions range from popular theories on art, to the most respected philosophers of aesthetics; all of which, I claim, rest on formalizable theoretical notions. Perhaps a future work could discover what all nine of these functions are. . .

I did not know anything when I visited a contemporary art gallery for the first time. But I had the three interpretative functions with me; guiding my thoughts and judgments, and providing interpretation and evaluation in my stead. It turns out that I did know something, I just didn't know I knew it. The purpose of this work was to figure out what was going on in my interpretative method, to find the theoretical foundations of my non-theoretical interpretation of artworks. Now that we know what they are, are they correct? Is this the optimal way of interpreting and evaluating artworks? All the failure sections seem to indicate that they are not, that all of them miss something when it comes to artworks. But who decides this? Why does the fact that the three interpretative functions necessarily fail, make it so that they are wrong? Is this the point of philosophy of art? To constantly judge the way people encounter the greatest thing in the world? We'll end with this: in '*The Zeroth Point*' section I claimed that *art is the failure of representation*, and in this section I claimed that *art is a wound to thought, that must constantly be reinflicted*. And here I claim that the purpose of a theoretical philosophy of art is not to provide a solution to this failure, nor is it to heal this wound. Instead, its goal ought to be to see the way in which we can reconcile ourselves with this inherent failure, this intractable contradiction; *so that we don't forget the impossible enjoyment of Real art*.

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