Practicing Concrete Universality;

Psychoanalysis as a Political Method

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Abstract

Lacanian psychoanalysis, embodied in contemporary thought by Slavoj Žižek's dialectical materialist rehabilitation of universality, enables a form of political analysis based on the possibility of structural change. Many political theorists argue that because psychoanalysis stresses the negative ontological base of the social (the Real) it is fundamentally conservative and nihilistic. Conversely, the very political value of psychoanalysis lies in its accent on the Real. However, there are two separate psychoanalytic perspectives on the Real. The idealist approach, which contends that every social construction is essentially conditional, is politically and theoretically limited. In contrast, Žižek's materialist perspective emphasises the fundamental fixity which lies in the necessary exclusion from a universal horizon. Thus, the main political insight of Lacanian psychoanalysis is not to reveal the contingency of the social, but rather the disavowed foundation on which these constructions are based; the concrete universal. This thesis argues for a Žižek-inspired psychoanalytic approach to the political which 'practices concrete universality'. Conversely, while Žižek himself considers his own theoretical endeavours as an application of this task, his work can appear to be at times abstract and obscure, such that the reader is not sure exactly what it is that Žižek is arguing. As such, this thesis seeks to develop a methodological position that practices concrete universality, taking on the fundamental insights of Žižek's position whilst grounding them in a methodology which can be applied for political intervention. The methodology analyses both the manner in which universal imaginaries domesticate the effect of the symptom (that which represents the concrete universal) and the possibilities for practicing concrete universality and in doing so evoking radical structural change. These possibilities are considered against global capital, which Žižek describes as a modality of the Real. Capital has produced a paradoxical and pressing condition in humanity is living both well beyond and beneath its material needs and the finite capacity of the planet to provide for those needs. Rather than seeking an impossible utopian revolution (the removal of all lack), by evoking the concrete universal it is hoped that humanity can rid itself of that lack which is historical contingent; global capital.

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Introduction: Psychoanalysis and the Political

Lacanian psychoanalysis has a tense relationship with political philosophy. The Lacanian world of desire, fantasy, *jouissance*, and the Real[1] can appear quite divorced from contemporary politics. Indeed, Jacques Lacan himself was skeptical about the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics. This unease continues amongst contemporary readers of Lacan. Many regard Lacanian philosophy to be inherently conservative and nihilistic, based as it is on a fundamental lack which constitutes the impossibility of society and thus utopian politics. This impossibility has lead some theorists, such as Elizabeth Bellamy, to suggest that psychoanalysis and politics do not mix (Bellamy, 1993). The central criticism appears to be that psychoanalysis relies upon ontological assumptions more than political theory (Robinson, 2004, p.259). Herein lies the fundamental misconception about Lacanian psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is political because it *is* ontological – psychoanalysis examines the manner in which inherently contingent social constructions are fixed. More than that though, psychoanalysis also exposes that which is not contingent in social constructions: the disavowed exclusions upon which social constructions are founded. Therefore, for both of these reasons, any use of psychoanalysis for social analysis is inherently political.

Centrality of the Lacanian Negative Ontology

Lacanian ontology positions 'lack' as the central element of the human condition, the notion of lack being at the root of psychoanalysis's inescapably political implications. Lack is produced when the subject is 'castrated' upon entry into the symbolic order, that is, separated from themselves. Castration occurs because language creates a mediating barrier between the subject and the world of things. Any attempt at symbolisation creates a gap between the language used in that symbolisation and the object to which language

[1] Throughout this thesis the Lacanian term 'Real' shall be capitalised to distinguish it from the everyday conception of the term

refers. Lacan called this gap the Real. The Real is not only lack, it is also excess. The Real exists as excess because of the manner in which castration, the source of lack, is itself repressed. As a consequence of that repression, the subject is caught in a condition of seeking to regain the absent, but impossible fullness, which existed for them before entering language, 'before the letter'. Lacan called this state *Jouissance*. Like the Real, *Jouissance* is also a paradoxical substance. It results from an attempt to return to a state that is without lack. Because of the impossibility of that condition, a second-order modality of enjoyment becomes available for the subject, *jouissance*.

This alternative experience of *jouissance* emerges as a substitute for the impossibility of achieving pure *Jouissance*. As a consequence, *jouissance* becomes a troubling kind of pleasure; it represents both the possibility and impossibility of returning to the Real. This paradoxical state is maintained by the presentation to the subject of various objects that can operate as substitutes for the primal lack, known by Lacan as *objet a* or the empty signifier. In an alternative mode, rather than being presented as objects that can suture lack, a range of objects emerge that come to be postulated as being responsible for thwarting the subject's quest to achieve a condition that is without lack, as such they are posited as causing the negativity that is inherent in the social. These objects are antagonisms and symptoms, which, despite their presentation within the social as elements that are to be eliminated, are actually sites of enjoyment. We enjoy blaming the Other for our failures to achieve the fullness we sense we have lost.

Lacan established his system of thought, following Sigmund Freud, primarily for application in the clinical field. However, through the work of Slavoj Žižek in particular, but also Ernesto Laclau and Yannis Stavrakakis, Lacanian theory has become a vastly productive tool for analysis of socio-political formations. Its primary incursion into political theory is to recast the fundamental dualism of politics – the relation between individuals and social formations, between the subject and the object – as a false problem (Osborne, 1996, pp.32-33). Psychoanalytic political theory does not, therefore, begin with the question of how the social is able to incorporate individuality, treating the social as a patient who might, for example, be suffering from collective neurosis. Rather the two –

the individual and the social, the subject and object – are inseparable; the subject operates only through taking on the discourses of the social. As such, the lack that is inherent to the subject is also a constitutive feature of the social, which Lacan termed 'the big Other'. Conversely, Lacan twisted this phrase to create the maxim 'the Big Other doesn't exist'. By this Lacan meant that the social/symbolic order is never complete, it is always characterised by a lack and is therefore inconsistent. In terms of political analysis, the lack in the social is the primary site of interest for Lacanian study. The operation of fantasy and *jouissance* is such that the lack in the Other cannot be revealed. It is only through subjects' attempts to suture this lack that the social maintains its stability.

Objections to the politics of the negative ontology

A number of theorists, even those working within the Lacanian field, doubt the relevance or desirability of a translation of Lacanian ontology into a grounded political practice. Their doubt centres around the possibility of any benefits that can be developed from psychoanalysis's emphasis on the social's negative ontological base, that is, lack. Many commentators, such as Sean Homer, Elizabeth Bellamy, Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, consider Lacanian theory – particularly that embodied by Žižek, the most influential contemporary Lacanian theorist – to be essentially conservative, pessimistic and ineffective. Essentially, they argue that because the Lacanian negative ontological stance reveals the impossibility of fullness and thereby subverts the possibility of the ideal society, Lacanians have given up on the prospect of improving social life. Indeed, Tormey and Robinson contend (in relation to Žižek's adherence to a negative ontological position) "(T)his sums up what is wrong with Žižek's position: for all his radical posturing, he restores the same kind of oppressive logic which operates in the present system" (Robinson & Tormey, 2003, p.15). Similarly, in observing that "Lacanians urge that one reconcile oneself to the inevitability of lack", Robinson argues that "Lacanian politics is therefore about coming to terms with violence, exclusion and antagonism, not about resolving or removing these" (Robinson, 2004, p.260).

Furthermore, Homer contends that although psychoanalysis has a critical role within the

polito-ideological field, through revealing the contingency of symbolic constructions, this role itself is not a productive factor influence on progressive politics. Instead, Homer argues that the seductive force that is at work within the ideological positions which battle to suture the lack in the social, constitutes the realm of politics proper. Thus, any political movement that does not postulate an ideological position is doomed to impotence. Therefore, if Lacanian theory is to be influential in its interaction with politics, psychoanalysis has to develop an ideological position. Because the development of such an ideology is, however, beyond the realms of psychoanalytic theory, Homer reasons that psychoanalysis has no direct role in politics, only in a "critical dialogue with political and social theory" (Homer, 1996, p.109).

The Role of Psychoanalysis in the Political

These criticisms of the role of psychoanalysis in politics are in many ways reasonable. Because of its orientation around a negative ontological orientation, psychoanalysis has no role in the direct production of a positive imaginary, that is, in politics per se. On the other hand, this limitation is precisely the factor which makes psychoanalysis inescapably *political*. Because, as Lacan reveals, all reality is a social construction and social constructions are essentially contingent, any partial fixation of meaning that occurs is political in nature. Through its critical analysis of the social, which variously reveals the stabilising influences, the limit points, and the symptoms of the social, Lacanian theory is inherently political and is thus capable of direct interventions into politics. These interventions do not seek, however, to present positive ideological positions, such as liberalism, socialism, feminism, and so on. Rather, they identify the elements whose exclusion is required in order for an ideological formation to be secured, to expose the reliance of those formations upon foundations that they must disavow.

This thesis supports the use of psychoanalysis as a discipline of the political. The goal of this thesis is to help establish the role of psychoanalysis in relation to the political and to develop this approach into a methodological position to be applied in the name of radical structural change. Žižek's development of psychoanalysis as a theoretical and political tool, upon which this thesis builds, follows a rehabilitated notion of universality and a

Hegelian/Lacanian take on dialectical materialism. Additionally, Žižek, in a Marxist manner, positions the economy at the centre of political analysis. Through the integration of these elements, Žižek produces what he labels a 'short-circuit' analysis. A short-circuit examination occurs when the analyst attempts to reveal the limit points of an ideological discourse, that is, to disclose those elements upon whose exclusion an ideology relies, that are not readily evident within the existing terms of that ideology. It is only through the dialectical notion of totality that such an analysis is possible; to see two sides of the same object.

Dialectical Materialism and Universality

Of the Lacanian psychoanalysts, it is Žižek who has developed the notion of dialectical materialism furthest. He does so through his concept of the 'parallax view' (Žižek, 2006a). The parallax view combines the issues of universality, dialectics and the materialism of *jouissance*. Žižek argues that there are several different modalities of the parallax, but the two most appropriate to this thesis are the 'political parallax' and the parallax of 'ontological difference'. A parallax – that is, an optical illusion – occurs between two perspectives of an object that appear in the same frame but which have no common ground between them. An example of this might be liberal and socialist politicians together musing on the relation between social and individual rights. In a political parallax, these discourses are not structurally hierarchical; rather they are structured around a fundamental antagonism which prevents a translation between the terms. While political parallaxes will be investigated throughout the thesis, the parallax of ontological difference is the central parallax that informs the methodology being developed here.

The 'ontological parallax' best reflects Žižek's thinking on universality. The notion of parallax, in dialectical fashion, splits the idea of totality into an abstract and a concrete form (producing an *abstract* universal and a *concrete* universal). The abstract universal provides hegemonic imaginary horizons that people use to guide their actions – e.g. individual freedom or human rights. This universal imaginary stands in for the lack that

constitutes the social domain. The abstract universal is normally based around an empty signifier, or an *objet a*, which in Lacanian terms provides a suture for that primal lack and, because of the sense of fullness that it gives, provides the subject with *jouissance*. As an example, liberal democratic discourses may be structured around the empty signifier 'freedom', which can be taken to mean any number of things. The content of these meanings is not important. What is important is the structural form that allows 'freedom' to stand in for the presence of absence and structure the ideological field of liberal democracy. In turn, the abstract universal extends this horizon as an ideological formation, taking on further signifiers in what Laclau terms a 'logic of equivalence' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The condensation of particular elements around a central imaginary horizon through a logic of equivalence offers the prospect of a return to fullness and *Jouissance*.

In contrast to the condensing effect of the abstract horizon, the universal exception acts as a dislocating factor again this horizon. The exception, known as the concrete universal, lies on the 'flip-side' of the ontological parallax, being 'the other' to the abstract universal. In this sense, of it being the 'flip-side' of the coin, there is no connection between the abstract and concrete universals, no symbolic point of translation between them. Vitally, however, they nevertheless remain linked as a totality. Although the concrete universal exists as the singular exception to the universal horizon, at the same time this exception comes to exceed that horizon; it is necessary for the continued functioning of the abstract universal. Because abstract horizons rely for their stability on the exclusion of particular elements (they being 'the exception' to those abstract horizons), strong tension exists between them. However, as no means exist for translating between the two, this tension comes out through the effect that the Real has upon the abstract universal.

The irresolvable nature of the difference between the two modalities of universality gets enclosed within, and thus occluded by, a particular element, the symptom. The symptom is an embodiment of the concrete universal (the element that must be excluded in order for the abstract universal to appear coherent), sitting within the abstract universal and within the broad imaginary horizons that establish the identities of social groups,

societies, global formations and so on. Its potentially disruptive effects must therefore be domesticated so as to ensure the continuing stability of the universalising discourses. Conversely, a symptom that is left unchecked can dislocate those horizons. An example is illustrative. One version of the abstract universal horizon of global capital is the sustainable advancement of humanity – 'progress'. In contrast to this imaginary, the concrete universal is the increasing degradation of the global environment. The unsustainable exploitation of natural resources is an exception to the abstract universal, yet necessary for the continued existence of capitalism. The symptom (of the failure of the universal imaginary) is felt through the reporting and effect of climate change itself.

A variety of mechanisms exist within ideological formations that can domesticate the effect of the symptom, just as each universal horizon is vulnerable at many points to the symptoms (the 'unbearable examples') that they must repress in order to sustain their appearance as legitimate statements about social life. These two separate, but vitally related aspects, constitute the torsion around which pivots the methodological position created in this thesis. The challenge in constructing that methodology is to identify and examine both the techniques that are used for maintaining an ideological position (that occurs through the domestication of symptoms) as well as the potential for achieving radical structural shifts.

Constructing a Methodological Position

Here I closely identify with Žižek's approach to discourse analysis and philosophy in general as outlined in *The Parallax View* (2006a). Žižek describes his approach as being a 'short-circuit'. By a short circuit approach he means a critical reading of a political power apparatus such that the hidden underside of its discursive expression is revealed, through which the apparatus functions. Hence "(T)he reader should not simply have learned something new; the point is rather to make them aware of another – disturbing – side of something they knew all the time" (Žižek, 2006, p.ix). Žižek believes, and it is the position adopted in this thesis, that Lacanian psychoanalysis is the privileged instrument of the short-circuit approach, although it is necessary to note that a short-circuit relies heavily on Hegelian dialectical logic.

The 'short-circuit' approach aims to 'practice' concrete universality by confronting a universal with its 'unbearable example' (p.13). This is the core orientation at the heart of this thesis; the identification of the internal fault points within a political formation. These internal limit points – symptoms – can be revealed as being vital for the constitution of universal horizons and, thus, their most concrete aspect (giving rise to their naming as 'concrete universal'). In order to achieve this task, one cannot simply interpret the discursive field. Rather, as Stavrakakis suggests (Stavrakakis, 1997, p.129), the role of critical discourse is to deconstruct the fantasmatic background that sutures the social and to find the symptomatic elements that signal the internal point of failure – the limit point – of the abstract imaginary. Similarly, Žižek suggests that "(T)he aim of the critique of ideology is the analysis of an ideological edifice, is to extract this symptomatic kernel which the official, public, ideological text simultaneously disavows and needs for its undisturbed functioning" (Žižek, 1996, p.3).

As a consequence of the fantasmatic background of a universal edifice, ideological critique comes to involve two important moves. The first is to reveal the contingency of each and every construction, to demonstrate that reality is neither natural nor positive. This purely interpretative approach is, however, insufficient for analysis. Instead, the manner in which an ideology grips its subjects needs to be considered. The substance that achieves this outcome, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, is *jouissance*. As will be developed throughout this thesis, the power of *jouissance* is such that the subject can be aware of the contingency of their situation and the symptoms inherent to this construction, yet continue to act as if they are unaware of this circumstance. Thus Žižek states, '(I)t is not enough to convince the patient of the unconscious truth of his symptom; the unconscious itself must be induced to accept this truth' (Žižek, 2006a, p.351).

The abstracted 'short-circuit' method through which Žižek has intrepretated Lacan has much potential for analysing the political domain. This potential has, however, been obscured somewhat by the abstract, baroque nature of Žižek's theorising. While this has proven excellent for the discipline of political philosophy, Žižek's work remains at times a little too divorced from the concrete, grounded world in which the political occurs, that is, politics. This has enabled a certain misinterpretation of Žižek's political position to proliferate, centred around a critique that suggests that Žižek has no stable political

position (Homer, 2001, p.12; Laclau, 2000a, p.289). My aim in constructing a methodological approach from Žižek's psychoanalytic political philosophy is to develop a portable method for concrete political interventions without losing the theoretical insights that are central to psychoanalytic theory. Herein lies the problem in achieving this task. Any reification of methodological form and content defies the politics of any political methodology – it needs to also be contingent. Therefore, while it is submitted that the methodology suggested by this thesis provides a settled form for analysis, it cannot suggest any concrete content. Rather this must, by definition, change with every application.

Global Capital

The methodology developed through this thesis seeks to understand how apparently contingent social formations such as 'global capitalism' come to enjoy fixed and stable form, and to identify the possibilities that might exist for breaking open these fixed discourses through that disavowed element of them which is not contingent, that is, the concrete universal. To illustrate the potential for such an approach, the method will be applied to the realm of global capital, in particular to two discourses that exist as its disavowed symptoms: poverty and environmentalism. The choice of global capital, as a point of analysis, is political in itself: this thesis takes capital, or more specifically the symptoms of capital, to be a major challenge to the future of humanity. These issues provide a, if not *the*, major motivational factor behind this endeavour. Nonetheless, this is not a position that needs necessarily be adopted by the reader. Rather, I invite the reader to consider how radical change can be achieved, using the analysis of global capital as an example.

Conversely, at the same time it is important to reiterate that the choice of capitalism as a point of analysis is not arbitrary. Žižek has increasingly sought to posit capital as a modality of the Real. Capital is not the Real in terms of an ahistorical, structural lack, but rather the 'symbolic Real', the background for all symbolisation and the point to which all symbolisations must return. In this sense, capital has hegemonised the very grounds of

hegemony (Žižek, 1999, p.4; 2000a, p.223; 2000b, p.319). Capitalism is not seen as simply one struggle amongst many, as is the trend in post-modern politics, but rather the struggle of our times. This emphasis is what gives Žižek's work – and by extension this thesis – a Marxist orientation (Žižek & Daly, 2004, pp.146-148).

At this point it is important to establish what it is that is meant in reference to capitalism throughout this thesis. Capitalism is both a particular form of economic structural organisation as well as a universalising discourse. Capitalism has become an extraordinarily powerful organising force. It is, however, a very unstable one. The main strength of capitalism is that it is a dynamic dialectical process. Where most systems are destroyed because of their inability to deal with their own irrationality, the strength of capital is that it is able to reincorporate its own exception (Žižek, 2006b, p.174). Indeed, the 'logic of the exception' is the process which drives capitalism: what appear to be structural shifts away from capital are brought back into the system as new opportunities for profit. Capitalism requires an ever-increasing rate of profit in order to survive. Profit takes the place of the Lacanian *objet a*: what appears to be an obstacle is actually the very condition of possibility. Because profit is never fully satisfying, it is lacking, it gives rise to an excess. Capitalism thereby requires an 'over-accumulation' of profit (Arrighi, 2005a, p.36; 2005b, pp.84-86). For this reason, leftist attempts to 'tame' capital in a manner which would simply reduce its rate of profit or the incentive to produce profit – such as a 'Green' economy, or market socialism – are doomed to fail (Žižek, 2005b).

Žižek also rejects the common perception that there is a limit to the extent to which capitalism can develop. Rather, any external limits that are encountered are simply turned into opportunities for profit (Žižek & Daly, 2004, p.152). The internet is a salient contemporary example of this: it once constituted an obstacle to the continued hegemony of private property but is now a hugely profitable market place. Rather, Žižek suggests that the weakness of global capital lies within itself; he repeats the Marxist maxim that the only obstacle to capital is capital itself (Žižek, 2001b, p.18). As such, this thesis argues that the strongest possibility for the dislocation of capital lies in the forces unleashed by capitalism itself. Žižek identifies those forces as the concrete universal of

the abstract universal, that is, of global capitalism. It is by exposing the concrete universal, by confronting capital with its disavowed foundations, that radical structural change is possible.

Practicing concrete universality, however, is not a matter of simply presenting the evidence of the concrete universal, of the irrationality of what is considered rational and of waiting for change to occur. Rather, the core insight of psychoanalytic dialectical materialism is that interpretation is only part of the process. A traversal of the fantasmatic core which produces *jouissance* is also required. This can be achieved through using as a lever the anxiety that is caused by the incommensurability that is internal to each and every universal position, of each position's non-coincidence with itself, an anxiety caused by the proximity of the Real. The most efficient manner to generate this anxiety is for the concrete universal itself to place pressure upon the universal horizon. We see this effect in environmental discourse, where the concrete universal (actual climate change) is exerting pressure upon the idea that the high levels of production and consumption associated with capitalism are normal. The concrete universal itself (such as actual climate change) is, of course, not accessible within an academic thesis. Instead the political potential of a text such as this thesis is at best to hold open the place of the symptom in the anticipation of active concrete universals that can produce the dislocations sought.

Thesis Structure

This thesis seeks to develop a line of argument based around the value of Lacanian psychoanalysis for political intervention. The following chapter introduces and outlines the fundamental concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis that are relevant to the thesis and the manner in which these concepts will be used. Most notable are discussions around the different modalities of the Real and of *jouissance*, as well as the operations of ideology, fantasy and desire. Additionally, Žižek's concept of universality is introduced further. Furthermore, in order to establish the context in which the thesis operates, the theorists

that are salient to the thesis are outlined, most prominently Žižek but also Laclau, Lacan, Marx and Hegel.

Chapter three builds on the perspectives established in the initial foray into psychoanalysis by reviewing the work of Laclau and Žižek. This chapter is formed around the debate between the interpretive and (psycho)analytic positions, as has been staged in the differences between Laclau's and Žižek's theoretical orientations. Laclau is a major contributor to the argument developed in the thesis. He works within the Lacanian perspective, although, as I shall develop in chapter three, Laclau's work does not prove as productive as Žižek's because of the former's limited conception of the Real. Conversely, Laclau's 'Discourse Theory' does provide an interesting alternative to Žižek, particularly as it appears to offer a more grounded methodological perspective. Nonetheless, the concluding position of this chapter is that it is the psychoanalytic position (taking on the concepts of *jouissance* and fantasy through an extended notion of the Real) that best explains the grip that ideology exerts upon subjects.

Chapter four introduces the central theoretical insights of the thesis, following on from the discussion of the importance of *jouissance* for socio-political analysis. The focus of this chapter is the materiality of universality – the influence of *jouissance* on the universal. In particular, it introduces Žižek's notion of dialectical materialism, the parallax view, especially in its relation to abstract and concrete universality. As such, the chapter also features discussions on the nature of dialectics and the fundamental role of the symptom.

Chapter five extends discussion on the role of the symptom in a manner that develops the core of the thesis: the construction of a methodological approach to supplement Žižek's psychoanalytic political philosophy. The chapter details the basic defence mechanisms that come to be used, within the context of an abstract universal, against the symptoms upon which the abstract universal relies but must disavow. Additionally, consideration is given to the possible discursive strategies that can be used to dislocate the universal imaginary via the symptom and the concrete universal.

This methodology is then applied to two separate areas of discourse that form the next

two chapters. These areas of discourse, Green ideology and global poverty, represent two of the most salient symptoms of global capital. As such, the application of the methodological position seeks to further develop understanding of the manner in which the symptom is domesticated within a universal horizon. Additionally, the possibilities for generating a radical structural shift via the symptom are considered, particularly in regard to global capital. The thesis concludes with a review of the possibilities that arise from the discursive analyses and returns to the ultimate question of the thesis, the political prospects of Lacanian theory.

Chapter 2: Fundamental Concepts and Theorists

Orienting Lacanian Psychoanalysis in Relation to the Political

This chapter introduces and reviews the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis in relation to the argumentation developed in this thesis. These concepts do not reflect the full range of psychoanalytic terms, nor their 'true' meaning. Although it is important to clarify the manner in which a concept will be used, the uneven history and internally ruptured nature of psychoanalysis is such that definite definitions are elusive. Instead, the terms will be defined in the manner they will be used for the task of political analysis. The most popularised basis for such analysis is Slavoj Žižek's appropriation of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which evaluates the possibilities for radical socio-political change, specifically in relation to the economy. Particularly salient for this approach are the concepts of the Real, *jouissance*, desire, fantasy, *objet a* and universality, especially the category of the universal he calls 'the universal exception'. Before entering into a discussion of these concepts, however, it is useful to examine the predominant influences on Žižek's work, Lacan, Hegel, Laclau and Marx, in order to establish the context in which he operates.

Žižek's main influence has been Jacques Lacan; above all, theoretically Žižek is a Lacanian, although Žižek's use of Lacan is orientated for political rather than clinical analysis. Lacan himself was not political; he was very sceptical about the prospect of revolutionary change, particularly radical change of the sort examined in this thesis. Lacan considered there to be two different meanings of the term 'revolution'. The first mode of revolution is the overthrow of a government or social order, redirecting evolution, so to speak. It was the second, conservative meaning of revolution, however,

on which Lacan placed more emphasis. Here, revolution is taken to mean a rotation around a single central axis (Ciaccia, 2005). This differentiation is seminal for understanding the psychoanalytic conception of social and political change. The latter definition of revolution suggests that while there may be an appearance of movement and some plurality of positions, these are simply responses to the same fundamental and impossible Real. Thus to break out of the conservative conception of revolution and into true political revolution and radical social change, one has to enter into the realm of this fundamental blockage, the Real. This thesis supports Žižek's view that the concept of the Real, articulated through Žižek's concept of universality, gives substantial leverage to a psychoanalytic political approach. Furthermore, this approach allows for the possibility of revolutionary political change.

The Real thus emerges as a core psychoanalytic concept for all analyses of political change or stability. The Real, however, cannot be conceptualised outside of the other registers of Lacanian psychoanalysis; the symbolic – the place of the Other that is structured through the production of signifiers – and the imaginary, that is, the illusionary register of wholeness that emerges for the subject via their identification with the arena of images. Thus the Real is not an entity in itself, but rather a fundamental lack, an effect without a cause that can be observed only through the presence gaps within, of absence, in the symbolic and the imaginary orders. As the limit to signification, the effects of the Real provide the core analytical emphasis for psychoanalysis, through the negative ontology established by the limitations of language (through the effect of the Real upon the symbolic and the imaginary), through the positivisations of this limit in fantasy (which enables the social realm to appear consistent), and through *jouissance* (for Lacan, the only real substance that exists within social life).

The most important consideration in terms of socio-political change, however, is the relationship between the Real and Žižek's rehabilitated conception of universality. Railing against the increasing focus on particularism within postmodern thought, Žižek has sought to rehabilitate the concept of universality. This rehabilitation has occurred through a re-reading of the work of Jacques Lacan, Karl Marx and Georg Hegel, as well

as a dialogue with post-Marxist discourse theorist, Ernesto Laclau. The universal, in its abstract form, is both impossible, in that it can never be fully constituted, and necessary, due to the need to avoid the naked experience of anxiety that is provoked by encounters with the Real. It is this dynamic contradiction, which produces an exception to the universal within the universal – that is, the element which is both part of the universal, yet subverts its horizon – which drives the dialectic process and out of which any possibility for political change will emerge.

The dynamic relationship between the universal and its exception informs the key theoretical hypothesis of this thesis; socio-political change that is capable of generating more than a refashioning of (a simple rotation around) existing alternatives occurs through the dynamic dialectic interactions of the universal (a construction of both the symbolic and the imaginary) and the effect of the Real, embodied by excluded elements of that universal. How the relationship that exists between the universal, the particular, and the universal exception might best be interpreted has been a key point of debate between Žižek and Laclau. Žižek's interchange with Laclau has been vitally important in his reformulation of a theory of the universal. As a consequence, discussion of the influences upon Žižek will begin with Laclau.

Žižek and Laclau

Laclau and Žižek have very similar theoretical orientations, combining the insights of psychoanalysis, Marxism and post-structuralism, although both disavow the continued influence of the latter (Žižek & Daly, 2004, p.46). Laclau and Žižek have been central in generating a form of political analysis that draws upon Lacanian psychoanalysis. That said, as we shall soon observe, these approaches have notable differences, mainly around how the Real is to be conceptualised. Laclau and Žižek each agree on the fundamental importance of the radically negative character of social life, exemplified in the core maxim of Laclau's seminal text *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*: 'society does not exist' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). This formulation, which correlates with the Lacanian ideas that

'the big Other doesn't exist' and that 'there is no sexual relation', has led both Laclau and Žižek to reject the prospect of positive utopian politics.

Despite this initial similarity in political positions and their shared theoretical allegiances, Laclau and Žižek now inhabit quite different positions on both counts. As such, a detailed analysis of the divergences between Laclau and Žižek is more than warranted to examine the political possibilities available from psychoanalytic theory. Of particular interest is the use – or in Laclau's case, the non-use – of the Lacanian categories of *jouissance* and fantasy. The absence of these particular expressions of impossibility in Laclau's work, along with his relatively formalist interpretation of the Real, reveals a deeper issue in his largely structurally based analysis; that of the need to go beyond the act of interpreting social structures, practices and institutions in order to achieve radical change. The role that *jouissance* plays within political analysis for taking such analysis beyond mere interpretation shall be the central focus of the following chapter.

Laclau and Žižek share a common belief that language contains limit-points that are inherent to itself, establishing the social realm upon a negative ontology. Paradoxically though, this negative ontology is the very basis for the construction of universality. In its unmediated form, the negativity that is inherent to the social domain (through the effect of the Real) is unbearable for the subject. By means of the prospect of *jouissance*, however – the troubling pleasure to which we shall soon return – the subject is driven towards the intrinsic wholeness of universality. As a result, the universal becomes an impossible yet necessary object, exemplified in Lacan's concept of *objet a* and Laclau's notion of the empty signifier (both of which are paradoxically produced at the limit point of the discursive, yet offer the impossible prospect of the suturing of these limits). The impossibility of universality, combined with the *jouissance* involved in its construct, produces a necessary exclusion of some elements. These elements, both in the form of what is known as symptoms or as the concrete universal, are central to the psychoanalytic conception of universality.

Žižek, Hegel and Lacan

Žižek has redeveloped universality through his reading of Lacan and Hegel. Although it is widely accepted that Lacan is the main influence on Žižek's thought, Žižek has also re-read Hegel through the process of *après-coup*, that is, the paradoxical formula by which advancements are gained by retrospectively interpreting the past in the terms of the future in order to 'release its significance for the present' (Kay, 2003, p.18). This has allowed Žižek the opportunity to re-establish what he regards as the common bond between Hegel and Lacan, their belief in the radical negativity which reigns at the heart of the social (p.17). Working with this negative ontology through the process of *après-coup*, Žižek has re-read Hegel via Lacan to make the former a philosopher of the Real (p.17). Likewise, Žižek has given a political edge to Lacan's mostly apolitical thought. This political edge is achieved through the Hegelian dialectic, which Žižek has renewed in the name of dialectical materialism, which he describes as the struggle of opposites in the form of an irresolvable tension that characterises the universal (Žižek, 2006a, p.7).

The psychoanalytic definition of universality is of a different kind from that traditionally constructed in both modern and post-modern philosophy, in that it is based on a radically different articulation of the relationship between elements that Hegel suggested constitute the domain of universality – they being the universal, the particular and the universal exception (Kay, 2003, p.39). Modern and post-modern philosophy share a view that both social cultural plurality and particularity exist in relation to concrete institutions, such as the State and Discourse, respectively. Within psychoanalysis, alternatively, the opposed poles of plurality and particularity are related responses to an elemental, universal lack; the impossible Real that produces an exception which is constitutive of the universal itself (Daly, 1999a, p.75; Žižek, 1989, p.4).

For Žižek, this means that a universal can never be fully constituted in itself. This is seen in the role that the singular, which Žižek calls the exception, plays in the constitution of a universal horizon. Any form of identity has to form abstractly from the particular elements that make up the basic building blocks of a discursive structure. Discourses

must exclude other particular elements to achieve this abstraction (Žižek, 1999, p.180). This exclusion thus becomes a condition of possibility of the universal, and vitally, evidence of the failure of the universal; the excluded particular of a given social formation bears witness to the very impossibility of the conception of universality by which that formation is ordered. This particular element, the singular exception, operates as an unsymbolisable remainder or trace that is generated in the process of producing a universal imaginary through the effect of the Real.

The excluded particular creates a short-circuit in the relationship between the universal and the particular. The excluded element becomes a universal exception, bypassing the particular through its singularity. The exception is singular, rather than particular, because it negates the universal horizon – an embodiment of the opposite of the universal – but at the same time exceeds that horizon because the universal imaginary requires the presence of this singularity: at the same time as it negates the universal, the constitutive role of the singular means that it exceeds the abstracted universal horizon. As this thesis will develop in more detail in subsequent chapters, it is this disavowed element of the universal – the exception – which offers a potential exit-point from the stabilising, functionalist-like cycles of change that routinely get presented as Change within popular discourses.

Žižek and Marx

Despite Žižek's initial affinity with Laclau and Mouffe's variant of post-Marxism, the influence of classical Marxism on Žižek's work should not be underestimated. It is clear that Žižek has sought to become an orthodox Marxist as well as an orthodox Lacanian. There are those, such as Sean Homer (Homer, 2001), who believe that orthodox Lacanian and Marxist thought are "theoretically incommensurable intellectual systems" (p.7) and as such, obstacles to the kind of radical political economy envisaged by Žižek. Homer's position, however, lacks an appreciation of the *après-coup* manner in which Žižek uses a theorist. By approaching a theorist in a retroactive manner, Žižek is able to reinterpret them in terms of his own thought and contemporary circumstances, rather than according to the letter of what the theorist had written. Thus, for Žižek, to be an orthodox Marxist is

not to simply repeat Marx, but rather to re-read him *après-coup* and unleash the significance of his thought for contemporary analysis. Žižek uses Hegel in much the same manner; he is not trying to follow either Hegel or Marx to the letter but, rather, to rehabilitate Hegelian and Marxist thought for contemporary times. In this sense Žižek is post-Marxist; his adherence to Lacanian semiotics prevents him from taking on the more humanist of Marx's concepts, such as 'species being' or 'false consciousness'. More importantly, however, it allows Žižek to return the economy and class antagonism to the core of political analysis.

To summarise these points: Žižek brings together his conceptions of Marx, Lacan, Hegel, and his own thoughts on universality and the Real, into a critique of global capitalism. Global capitalism has increasingly become his main political target. Žižek has become frustrated with the emphasis on postmodern particularism, as is expressed politically in the 'new social movements'. For Žižek these movements represent an implicit acceptance of the horizons of global capital and are an example of a 'rotational revolution'. In this same vein, this thesis contends that a truly radical movement needs to invoke the Real and its relationship with the universal, especially the universal exception. The Real is perhaps *the* concept of Lacanian psychoanalysis and any related political analysis, because it breaks down previous barriers of purely interpretative methods, entering into the realm of pleasure/*jouissance* to enable understanding of how a universal ideology grips the subject.

Modalities of the Real and of *Jouissance*

According to psychoanalyst Bruce Fink, the Real can be divided into two basic categories, the Real that exists 'before the letter' (R_1) and the Real that persists 'after the letter' (R_2). R_1 is the name we give to the (mythical) time before language, a time that is created only by signification itself. There is no absence in R_1. It is only R_2 that cuts up the Real of R_1 through the act of creating what is labeled 'reality' via the symbolic. These cuts in the Real 'before the letter' occur because of the distance between reality and the Real that is created by the symbolic, a symbolic which cannot fully grasp what is beyond its limits. In

reality, R_1 exists only as an absence. This absence is, however, given a name and thus an existence; without this operation of naming it within the symbolic, R_1 would only be felt as an absence. Through the process of naming, however, R_1 is given an existence (albeit 'only' a symbolic one) within human experience (Fink, 1995, pp.24-5).

R_1, however, is not purely a temporal conception in the sense of 'coming before language'. R_1 is not only what is before symbolisation, but also what has not yet been symbolised. Thus, the Real can be symbolised from one perspective but not from another (p.26). What may be openly accepted in one discourse, for example the radical unsustainability of capitalist production within eco-Marxist thought, may be impossible to symbolise within another, such as free-market capitalist ideology. While the unsustainability of capitalism production is Real from the latter perspective, it is symbolic within the former. Therefore the Real can be symbolically manipulated, but not within the terms amongst which the Real remains unsymbolisable. Rather, the effect of the Real can be forced upon the realm in which it remains the impossible. Therefore, while the Real is impossible, importantly for our argument on political change, it is also the impossible that happens. For those who doubt the political potential of Lacanian thought, the Real (in the form of R_1) acts only as a limit to symbolisation, as an external limit which allows only for conservative politics (J. Butler, 2000, p.141). In contrast, Žižek argues that the Real cannot be reduced an *a priori* symbolic norm (Žižek, 2000b, p.309). In his view, the Real is not a pre-social element that opposes the symbolic, nor an effect of the social itself, but rather it is both the precondition for the establishment of reality and the exclusions that occur to/within reality itself (p.311).

Žižek himself has battled against the Real as an *a priori*. In the foreword to the 2nd edition of *For They Know Not What They Do*, Žižek states that in his previous book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, he was guilty of a transcendental reading of the Lacanian Real in which the Real appears as an actually-existing condition of absence. To avoid this kind of reading, he introduces three separate modalities of the Real which map onto the triad of Lacanian registers (Real, imaginary, symbolic); the real Real, the imaginary Real and the symbolic Real. The real Real is the primordial lack or horrifying Thing. The imaginary

Real is the manner in which an object comes to appear to be sublime, as in *objet a*. It is the symbolic Real, though, which is of most interest in relation to this thesis.

The symbolic Real is the Real as a consistent background to the symbolic, it is that which has hegemonised hegemony itself (Žižek, 2002, p.xii). Žižek uses this definition of the Real in his definition of global capital as that which sets the fundamental limits of all symbolisation. Therefore the symbolic Real has much in common with Fink's R_2 because the symbolic Real, in combination with other forms of the Real, introduces inconsistencies into the symbolic order. As an illustration, with capital as the symbolic Real, any discourse in apparent contradistinction with capital, such as ecologism, can only express itself up to a certain limit, that limit being established by capital. Beyond this point the discourse becomes marked with inconsistencies; we see this in the economic interventions of ecological thought, which while critiquing the fundamental premises of capitalism, such as the drive for profit, cannot bring itself to designate capital as the problem itself.

As a consequence, the Real cannot simply be considered external to symbolisation either in the form of R_1 or R_2. The Real is not just what is excluded from the symbolic, but rather has what Lacan termed an 'extimate' relationship with the symbolic order in that the Real is simultaneously within and outside the symbolic. This is the case for R_1 because it establishes the outer limits of symbolisation, but also for R_2. R_2 operates as the factor that distorts symbolisation from within; it is the disavowed 'X' that warps our knowledge in a manner in which we cannot be aware at the time of 'knowing'. In this sense, the Real is an effect without a known cause. To rephrase the point, although the Real is disavowed, it is also the elemental pre-condition and support of reality in the sense that it constitutes its very limits and thus the conditions of possibility for the symbolic (Kay, 2003, p.168).

Whilst the Real operates with the symbolic realm as a lack, it is not only a negative condition. The Real also exists as a condition of excess. The excessive element of the Real comes through the positivisations that occur of the Real through subjects' uses of

fantasy. These positivisations underpin the functioning of the social; fantasy, desire and, most importantly, *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is a paradoxical state of suffering/enjoyment that lies 'beyond the pleasure principle' (Evans, 1996, p.92). This troubling pleasure is the substance recognised by psychoanalytic thought as the material substrata of social life and, as such, it is the only substance known to psychoanalysis (Braunstein, 2003, p.19). *Jouissance* is not simply enjoyment or pleasure, although it can operate in these modes, but it also goes beyond pleasure into a kind of troubling, excessive pleasure that includes elements of transgression and suffering. *Jouissance* operates in numerous modalities, each altering the manner in which it is expressed. Indeed, Braunstein cites twenty different modalities for the operation of *jouissance*, from the initial satisfaction of necessities in the pre-symbolic child ('pure *Jouissance*') to the *jouissance* of the symptom, to the failure of the symbolic order to provide the subject with access to pure *Jouissance*.

Fink (1995, p.60), in a similar manner to both Braunstein and his own distinction between modalities of the Real, distinguishes between two orders of *jouissance*, J_1 and J_2. J_1 refers to *Jouissance* 'before the letter'. This *Jouissance* is the Real link of unity between the mother and the child, in this sense it is 'pure', unmediated *Jouissance*. J_2 is *jouissance* 'after the letter', that which occurs once the subject enters language. Here *Jouissance* gives way to *jouissance* because of the mediating affect of language upon the subject of the signifier. The subject loses access to *Jouissance*, but is able to procure a second-order form of *jouissance* that compensates for that loss. This procurement occurs through the staging of fantasy (Fink, 1995, p.60). Compensatory *jouissance* revolves around the necessarily impossible attempts to regain the original unity of *Jouissance* (such as through universality) which are supported by fantasy. These attempts cannot succeed because the subject cannot return to a time before language, a time of J_1, but this very impossibility is repressed in fantasy.

Conversely, Žižek contends that J_1 itself is a fantasmatic creation. This form of *jouissance* does not really exist, it is only a fantasmatic construction produced because of the lack of *jouissance* within the symbolic order. Fantasy initiates the idea for the subject

that there was once a time or space before lack. However, like the Real before-the-letter, J_1 only exists because it is given a name in language. Žižek contends that this conception (of a lost, primal *jouissance*) ignores a paradox that is caused by the Real, that there is no enjoyment for the subject before their enmeshment in surplus-enjoyment. The fundamental illusion is that behind *jouissance* there is, or once was, an original *Jouissance* (Žižek, 1993, pp.35-36). Therefore, Žižek suggests that social analysis should avoid any fixation on J_1, as if surplus-enjoyment, J_2 is somewhat secondary, as though there is first a primary *Jouissance*, then after the insertion of the signifier into the young infant there exists a remainder of *jouissance*. Conversely, the fantasmatic nature of both forms of *jouissance* means that neither should be dismissed conceptually; the operation of *jouissance* can only be understood through the relationship between the two orders. Rather, J_2 can only operate through the prospect of J_1. This prospect informs the production of J_2, both in sense that the fantasmatic postulate of J_1 gives rise to the drive for *jouissance*, but also produces the very impossibility of returning to *Jouissance*. The paradoxical nature of second-order *jouissance* is embodied in the form of an excessive surplus or remainder which imbues the symbolic. Interpreted in this manner, surplus enjoyment is also a creature of the super-ego (Kay, 2003, p.163).

The Super-Ego

Lacan's definition of the super-ego differs from Freud's original conception. Freud maintained that the super-ego helped to keep the id in check and maintain a balanced ego. In contrast, Lacan considered the super-ego to be not only the subject's 'moral' or normative conscience but, more productively, an unconscious site of enjoyment/perversion. Thus, where Freud conceived of the unconscious as being a site that resists law, Lacan regards the unconscious, through the super-ego, to be the very place of compliance; one does not battle to follow the law, instead we enjoy submitting to norms through the surplus enjoyment that is supplied by the super-ego. Thus, for Lacan, the super-ego becomes an obscene supplement to the symbolic law, enabling the subject to conform.

The super-ego operates because in the process of becoming a social being, the subject makes a (forced) choice away from pure *Jouissance* and towards language. Although pure *Jouissance* is not attainable after subjectification, this impossibility is forgotten. The subject represses the initial negation, the impossibility of achieving fullness. It 'forgets' that it never had the thing in the first place. The super-ego plays an important role in maintaining the image that fullness is possible. It presses 'guilt' upon the subject when s/he experiences things going wrong for it and accounts for those events in terms of its failure to do what is required of it (that is, does not follow the symbolic law). However, every time the subject gives in to the demands of the super-ego and the social order (naturally) is not sutured, more guilt is produced. The more we submit, the more we need to submit. The surplus-enjoyment of the super-ego is very similar to the Marxist notion of surplus-value; the more you have the more you need.

It is through fantasy that the subject learns to control *jouissance* and the demands of the super-ego, thereby structuring its desire (Kay, 2003, p.163).Lacan located desire within a field which also incorporated need and demand. Upon entry into the social, the subject loses access to the level of biological need (e.g. hunger) because every need has to be articulated through the Other of the symbolic order. That which can be articulated (need) can be satisfied, but the unsymbolisable remnant – desire – cannot. Because of its articulation through the Other, need becomes a demand to the Other (Evans, 1996, p.37). Desire is that which is in demand more than need, the impossible quest for the mythical lost *Jouissance* (Stavrakakis, 2000a, p.87). Desire operates as a metonymic chain, objects being presented as a series of substitutions for the constitutive lack, these objects being presented as an embodiment of a lost *Jouissance* (Žižek, 1999, p.228; Kay, 2003, p.160). Lacan also locates desire in relation to drive. Desire aims at an object whose possession is sought, ultimately the enigmatic *objet a*. When this object is obtained, desire does not subside, but is rather transferred to another object in a metonymic fashion. In contrast, drive does not aim at the object, but rather generates enjoyment from circulating around the object and precisely not achieving the goal (Evans, 1996, p.46).

The object around which drive circulates is *objet a*. *Objet a* is a particularly seminal concept for Lacanian psychoanalysis. O*bjet a* can be considered the site of fundamental lack, the void at which the subject remains perpetually riven. As such Lacan places it at the centre of the Borromean knot, as the point where all three registers (of Real, imaginary, and symbolic) meet. While *objet a* is primarily an imaginary concept –- it is constructed in fantasy as the object that will represents a return to *Jouissance* – it has connotations of the Real and is symbolically constituted through the signifier (Evans, 1996, p.124). As well as its triadic structure, o*bjet a* is also both the object-cause and the logic of desire. *Objet a* is able to function as this paradoxical object-cause because it is the remnant of the Real, of R_1, that remains in the subject after the subject enters the symbolic order and is thereby an element of the Other, being the lack that persists on account of the inability of language to connect with material reality. Fantasy uses *objet a* in order to maintain the consistency of reality. For this consistency to operate, some object must be postivised such that it can stand in for the inherent lack that would otherwise threaten consciousness (Žižek, 1997, p.81; 2001a, p.149). This object is then retroactively posited as the cause of desire.

Žižek further elevates the concept of *objet a* in *The Parallax View* (Žižek, 2006a), such that it becomes 'The object of psychoanalysis ... the core of the psychoanalytic experience' (p.19). Žižek identifies *objet a* as being the cause of the Parallax gap (the incommensurable gap between two objects of a totality), *objet a* being the unknowable 'X' that forever eludes the symbolic and that produces a multitude of symbolic responses through which the subject seeks to give it form. *Objet a* eludes the grasp of the symbolic, avoiding description, because it is produced by the subject in the formation of its own gaze. It is an indelible, material 'stain' within that gaze that signifies the constituting effect of the subject's own inclusion in the reality they have constructed. In light of its ineffable form, *objet a* is a, if not the, central concern of fantasy. Fantasy constructs desire around the *objet a*; fantasy does not seek to satisfy desire, but rather constructs it, teaching the subject how to desire (Žižek, 1997, p.7). Fantasy, in the Lacanian sense, is not opposed to reality, but rather structures reality and protects the subject from the effect

of the Real (Kay, 2003, p.163; Evans, 1996, p.60, Žižek, 1997, p.1).

Fantasy, Ideology and Universality

Fantasy has an intimate relationship with ideology. Ideology presents the social to the knowing subject as being a consistent entity. Fantasy also achieves this task by portraying the dislocations which threaten that consistency as antagonisms that are external to social life, and thus amenable to corrective action. For example, ideology and fantasy operate within capitalism by presenting market failures (evidence of the inconsistency of the capitalist discourse) as the fault of external factors, such as government intervention. In this manner capitalist ideology maintains its consistency. The consistency produced by ideology allows for the prospect of universality – that discourses like capital are 'natural' and 'objective'. The issue of the universal brings together the concepts of *jouissance, objet a,* fantasy, ideology, desire, and the Real. These elements interact to produce the abstract universal, that is, the imaginary vista of a shared aspirational horizon through which political communities organise themselves. As such, the abstract universal is constructed in ideological fantasy. Moreover, it is supported, or rather motivated, by *jouissance*, particularly the *jouissance* which the subject obtains through the participating in the symbolic order, J_2.

The subject obtains *jouissance* from abstract universal imaginaries because they appear to promise social fullness by suturing the lack in the Other, by eradicating its inconsistencies. The suture occurs through the idea that the fully inclusive, consensual Society is not impossible; such as the dream of Third Way politics, that a middle approach is available that gives the benefits of economic growth whilst protecting social justice. Abstract universal imaginaries are at the heart of politics, although, as shall be developed in Chapter 3, they cannot produce radical change but, rather, only minor alterations to prevailing social arrangements. These minor changes pivot around a fundamental limit point within the discursive structures that support those arrangements (that is, the Real). Illustrating local, political expressions of these universalising imaginaries, the New Zealand National Party, in their 'Vision for New Zealand' state,

'The National Party seeks a safe, prosperous and successful New Zealand that creates opportunities for all New Zealanders to reach their personal goals and dreams' (National Party, 2006). Similarly the vision statement of the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand states 'In our Vision, Aotearoa New Zealand is a place where people respect each other and the natural world we share. It is healthy, peaceful and richly diverse' (Green Party, 2006) Both these visions exemplify wonderfully the substance and tone of the abstract universal.

The abstract universal, however, can never be fully universal because it is always an abstraction of a particular object, typically, a political community. This particularistic object is unable to construct itself as universal because of the lack inherent in its constitution. The lack is occluded by fantasy, however, and the abstract universal is able to organise subjects' experiences of *jouissance*. Despite this, the abstract universal remains split between two elements – one negative, the other a positivisation – that act as an embodiment of the effect of the Real: the nodal point and the universal exception. The nodal point is a positivisation of the Real, occurring as it does at a point where the abstract universal fails. As such, the nodal point is the component around which particular elements are organised and condensed in order to suture the universal. As an example, the signifier 'New Zealander' provides a nodal point for the structuring of New Zealand identity. At a point where national identity might break down because of a conflict between particular elements, such as Maori and Pakeha, 'New Zealander' is able to condense these particular elements and suture the lack inherent in a political community like New Zealand. This nodal point corresponds to the *objet a*, and also resonates with Ernesto Laclau's concept of the empty signifier, which will be returned to in greater detail in chapter three.

Of more political significance than the condensing effect of the nodal point, for Žižek, is the existence of an exception to that universal, that which Laclau terms the constitutive outside. This exception is conceptualised in two forms, the concrete universal and the symptom. The concrete universal is a key site for any political formation seeking to evoke a radical dislocation. Here, dislocation refers to failures within the discursive

structures by which political communities organise that are caused by encounters with events and conditions that couldn't be envisaged within the terms of those structures (the Real, R_2). Dislocation produces both a sense of lack and the desire to fill that lack (Stavrakakis, 1999, p.68). In this sense, dislocation has both a destructive and constructive influence on the social (Laclau, 1990, p.39).

Concrete Universality and the Symptom

The concrete universal must be excluded in order for the abstract universal to appear coherent. The ability of the concrete universal to subvert that exclusion and become a source of political change turns upon its ability to operate as an affect of the Real. That is, the concrete universal exists outside of the terms of the dominant universal horizon. From the perspective of this imaginary, the concrete universal is the impossible, it is Real. As an illustration, one element of the abstract universal imaginary of western capital could be considered that the 'deserved' wealth of those members at the upper echelons of society occurs because democratic capitalist societies are inherently meritocratic. However, what must be excluded from this formulation is the poverty of the Third World, the existence of which is required in order for this wealth to be maintained. Without this exclusion, the abstract universal would not be able to be cohesively formed. The excluded element, the concrete universal, constitutes the Truth of the abstract universal in that its exclusion is a necessary one.

In order for the concrete universal to exert political pressure upon the abstract universal, it must be represented within that same universal, undermining its coherence. The form which it takes in doing so is as the symptom. The symptom 'reveals the truth' of the abstract universal within the very terms by which the abstract universal is constituted. The symptom does so by embodying the presence of the Real imposed by the concrete universal, by constituting it as a force that cannot be fully domesticated by the abstract universal.

In order for the system to survive the existence within itself of the symptom, to functionally operate, the symptom must be domesticated. This domestication predominately occurs by the inclusion of the symptom within the ideological fantasy of the abstract universal. Ideological fantasy, the symbolic component of the imaginary, has the role of presenting the symbolic to subjects as full and coherent. By doing so, ideological fantasy offers the prospect of *Jouissance*. The dislocating effect of the symptom is pacified in ideological fantasy by being interpreted as an external element that has to be fixed e.g. a market failure caused by a rise in the minimum wage, rather than a constitutive failure that goes to the core of capitalism. Alternatively, the symptom might be portrayed as an external antagonism that is preventing the full expression of society e.g. solo mothers exploiting the benefit system, causing taxes to rise.

Hence the strong relationship between the symptom and *objet a*; the symptom often stands in as that which needs to be eliminated to allow the full expression of society. The removal of the symptom becomes an object of desire. Additionally, these methods of portraying the disruptive -effect of the symptom produce *jouissance* in that they keep a distance between the abstract universal horizon and the very impossibility of its construction. Thus, while ideological fantasy conceals the radical negativity of the social, preventing the subject from the experiences of anxiety, trauma and dislocation which come from naked exposure to the Real, the symptom also gives rise to the inherent negativity that exists as an excess to the universal.

The relationship between the symptom, ideological fantasy, *objet a* and concrete universality will be elaborated upon further in chapters 4 and 5, particularly the *jouissance* that is generated by the symptom. Indeed, the symptom, the concrete universal, and the various measures used to domesticate these subversive forces, constitute the basis of the methodological position and political approach at the heart of this thesis. The key to this methodological position, both in the sense of domesticating the symptom and exploiting it as a disruptive factor, is the affective force of *jouissance* inherent in both modalities of the universal. That is, one cannot simply examine the social only as the symbolic realm, but rather enter into analysis of both the lack and excesses produced by

the Real. The following chapter deals with the limits of the interpretive approach, as is characterised by the work of Ernesto Laclau. That discussion leads into a further elaboration of the roles that universality and *jouissance* play in the construction of social transformation, and of their reconstitution of the notion of dialectical materialism.

Chapter 3: Beyond Interpretation

Žižek's conception of universality is based on his version of dialectical materialist logic. The first element of this logic is normally well understood, but the materialism is often set aside. It is this materialism, however – the materialism of *jouissance* – that gives Žižek's perspective on universality its analytic power. Žižek emphasises the need for a true Lacanian analysis to go beyond purely structural accounts of social life and enter into the realm of *jouissance*. Without the concept of *jouissance* and other positivisations of the Real, most notably fantasy, the Lacanian conceptual apparatus losses much of its explanatory power.

There are few better examples of the importance of the materialist position than the gap between Žižek's work and that of fellow Lacanian political theorist Ernesto Laclau. Laclau and Žižek have been engaged in a long-running dialogue. This dialogue started from positions that were initially very similar, working within the general sphere of post-Marxist radical democracy. Although each took on the other's work uncritically, there were, and continue to be, considerable political and theoretical similarities between Laclau and Žižek. These similarities are especially strong around the issue of universality, particularly noticeable in Laclau's use of terms like discourse, hegemony and the empty signifier, all of which strongly resonate with the Lacanian notion of *objet a*. An affinity also exists between Laclau and Žižek's interpretations of the negative effect that the Real has upon the social, worked out in their concepts of dislocation and antagonism.

Žižek, however, has increasingly moved away from the post-Marxist, radical democratic emphasis that continues to characterise Laclau's project. Žižek has made this move because he believes that such an approach, which does not move beyond the bounds of interpretation, is unable to displace global capitalism. Instead, Žižek has placed more emphasis on the issue of the economy and, more importantly for this debate, Žižek has

shown how any political movement which deals solely at the level of language, and thus interpretation, is a limited one. Instead, the political traction that is needed for social transformation requires that one engages with the roles that fantasy and *jouissance* play in the constitution of political positions. This chapter will review the limits of the Laclauian approach and consider the value of fantasy and *jouissance* for political analysis. This chapter will than move on the relationship between universality and *jouissance*, embodied by the concrete universal and the symptom.

Laclau's interpretation of Lacan

Laclau's particular use of Lacanian categories has incited considerable debate (see J. Butler, Laclau, & Žižek, 2000; Daly, 1999a, 1999b; Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2003; Laclau, 2003; Stavrakakis, 1997; Stavrakakis, 1999). Glynos and Stavrakakis both acknowledge the theoretical affinities between Laclau's work and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Indeed both these authors suggest, and Laclau himself concurs, that Lacan's influence on Laclau's work has increased (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2003, p.111). This is readily apparent in Laclau's use of Lacan's negative ontology, as it pertains to the social/symbolic, and his sense that images of universality are constructed through discourse, hegemony, and the empty signifier. It is to these similarities between Laclau and Lacan that we shall now turn, before turning to the important differences between Laclau's and Žižek's readings of Lacan.

Discourse and hegemony are the concepts most strongly shared by Laclau and Žižek. Discourse is Laclau's primary concept; indeed his approach is labeled 'Discourse theory' (Torfing, 1999). Discourse is the linguistic totality around which social reality is constructed. Its fundamental premise is shared with Lacanian semiotics and developed from the shift that occurred in modern philosophy away from transcendentalism and towards language. The primary proposition of this shift was that the condition of possibility of any thought or action depends on the construction – through language – of a structured and meaningful field. This structured field is discourse (Laclau, 1993, p.431). Vitally, Laclau adds that the structured totality of discourse is never completely closed.

This fundamental impossibility means that politics revolves around the battle to fix meanings in a discourse that can never be totally fixed. This battle for meanings, which in Discourse theory operates only in an interpretive sense, cannot bring wide ranging change, only small changes around a central axis. Only an intervention through the dislocatory power of the Real can force such a radical change. Nonetheless, the political significance of battles to fix meanings should not be underestimated, though it needs to be remembered that such battles get played out within the existing terms of a discourse and thus the outcomes circumscribed by such discourse.

Laclau labels any partial fixation of a discourse 'hegemonic'. A hegemonic discourse fixes meanings around nodal points. Laclau labels these nodal points 'empty signifiers', a concept that we shall return to in further detail below. Hegemony is a key link between Laclau and Žižek because of its similarity with Žižek's conception of universality. Laclau contends that hegemony occurs through particular elements being presented as having universal address (Laclau, 2000b, p.207). Thus a straight translation is possible between Laclau's notion of hegemony and Žižek's concept of the abstract universal. However, as we shall soon develop, Laclau's limited embrace of the Real and of dialectical materialism means that he is unable to view universality as a totality in the same manner as Žižek. Rather his conception of universality, as hegemony, is limited to the abstract universal. Laclau does develop a notion of the constitutive outside, similar to Žižek's idea of the universal exception, but this concept does not have the same intimate link to the abstract universal as Žižek's 'exception'. We shall return to this point latter in this chapter.

Laclau's most productive contribution to psychoanalytic political theory is his work around the empty signifier, which finds its correlate in Lacan's *objet a*. The empty signifier allows Laclau to discuss the relationship between the discursive and non-discursive domains. Empty signifiers are produced where the limit-point of a discourse appears, at the point where the discourse comes into contact with other discourses and divergences appear that need to be sutured. As such, the empty signifier signifies the emergence of an absence. Various political communities compete to 'hegemonise' the

empty signifier with content that is particular to their own life-styles and interests. As the place holder of the presence of absence, the empty signifier takes the structural role of the universal. Indeed, the empty signifier becomes a nodal point, if not the nodal point, of the abstract universal imaginary.

Divergences between Laclau and Lacan/ Žižek

Despite the similarity between Laclau and Žižek's work, there are also some notable absences in Laclau's embrace of Lacan, particularly the concepts of fantasy and *jouissance*. These absences cannot be easily ignored, particularly because of their centrality to Lacan's thought. Indeed, Glynos and Stavrakakis argue:

> The problem is that, without taking into account enjoyment, the whole Lacanian framework loses most of its explanatory force. For example, what can possibly account for the constitutively of desire if *jouissance* is not accepted as the absent cause of human desire? Furthermore, such enjoyment helps us answer, in a more concrete way, what is at stake in socio-political identification and identity formation, suggesting that support of social fantasies is partially rooted in the *jouissance* of the body. What is at stake in these fields, according to Lacanian theory, is not only symbolic coherence and discursive closure, but also enjoyment, the *jouissance* animating human desire. (2003, p, 120)

Laclau does embrace the concept of the Real, but only in a limited and negative manner, one that does not, for him, necessitate the use of fantasy and *jouissance*. Rather Laclau uses the Real, often implicitly, as a limit to the discursive, an internal limit which prevents his work from falling in pure idealism (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2003, p.113). Laclau did not always posit the Real as in internal limit to the social. The fundamental thesis of his seminal text *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* was the post-Marxism caveat 'society does not exist', but this was considered to be caused by external antagonisms faced by the universal imaginaries of political communities, rather than the internal limit-point of those imagined horizons, that is, the Real. It has only been through dialogue with Žižek that Laclau has come to differentiate between internal limits to a discourse (for him, dislocation, for Žižek, the Real) and limits that are external to such (antagonism).

Thus, for Glynos and Stavrakakis, Laclau and Lacan have very similar positions in relation to the manner in which the Real disrupts symbolisation; dislocation, as the negative effect of the Real, is a good indication of this embrace (p.116). By contrast, Laclau does not acknowledge the positive, psychical effects that the Real has on symbolisation and the construction of political positions, that is, fantasy and *jouissance*. These effects represent attempts to positivise the lack that the Real causes within the symbolic order. For Žižek, the subject experiences these through *objet a*, in the drive of desire and the desire to fulfill drive, with objects that will give a sense of cohesion and coherence (for example, political ideologies). Such attempts to obtain fullness are, of course, always fantasmatic. At the same time as fantasy signals that limits exist to a universalising imaginary, it attempts to fill the void that those limit-points create within the subject.

Consequently, a vital distinction exists between the empty signifier in Laclau's work and *objet a* in Žižek's: both signal the presence of an interminable absence within the symbolic order and the subject. A politically significant difference exists between them, however, insofar as *objet a* contains elements of all three Lacanian registers (of the imaginary, symbolic and Real). Alternatively, Laclau's notion of the empty signifier acknowledges the Real and then, staying with Lacan's terminology, conflates the symbolic and imaginary. The effect of this is to understate (at best) the role of affect in the construction of discursive positions (that is, the impact of the imaginary's quest for wholeness). Glynos and Stavrakakis suggest that Laclau's conflation of the imaginary and symbolic levels occurs because of Laclau's avoidance of the notion of *jouissance*. They contend that Laclau ignores *jouissance* because his work is framed in purely formal and structural terms rather than a substantial focus which includes the body, which is the site of *jouissance* (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2003, p.119).

Thus while for Laclau the empty signifier fulfills the same function as *objet a*, it is a purely discursive concept filling a Real lack. For Laclau, the influence of the Real upon the empty signifier does not have the same kind of materiality, through *jouissance*, as

with *objet a*. Nor is the empty signifier an object of fantasy like *objet a* in Žižek's work. Because of these exclusions, the empty signifier does not have the explanatory value of *objet a* in terms of the manner in which a discourse or ideology gains a grip on the subject. Nonetheless despite these limitations the empty signifier does have some discursive explanatory value. This value lies in its structural location, representing the gaps that persist within discourse, held open by a class of signifier that is necessarily empty. Conversely, as has already been noted, Laclau does not attribute to the empty signifier the same imaginary and Real role as with Lacan's *objet a*. Nevertheless, because of its structure value, the term 'empty signifier' will continue to be used throughout this text, with the proviso that it takes on all the meaning of *objet a*, but is projected for a more specific use, that of representing a constitutive gap within a discursive structure.

In a similar vein, Žižek dismisses deconstructive and post-structuralist theory because it overlooks the jouissantic excess which operates in discourse (Daly, 1999b, p.80). In doing so, Žižek contends that the post-structuralist approach places too much emphasis on the semiotic contingency of the discursive realm rather than the interminable impress of the Real upon the human condition, regularly experienced through trauma and enjoyment (p.76).Trauma and enjoyment are part of the non-discursive 'beyond' to the social that Laclau rejects. Without the concept of *jouissance*, however, it is difficult to consider what would be animating the play of the social and the symbolic order in the Laclauian conception of discourse (Daly, 1999a, p.227). This is the fundamental question for all theories of ideology, universality or indeed any play of the social; what accounts for the grip with which an ideology holds a subject? (Glynos, 2001, p.199). Glynos and Stavrakakis, in their discussion paper on Laclau's embrace of Lacan, contend:

> The importance psychoanalysis attaches to the notion of the Real qua fantasmatically structured *jouissance* suggests that symptomal analyses of the discursive or interpretative kind, though perhaps a necessary prerequisite, are often not sufficient to effect a displacement in the social subject's psychic economy. (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2003, p.122)

From this perspective, the concept of *jouissance* is needed in order to produce an adequate account of discourse. In reply, Laclau acknowledges the role of *jouissance* but

argues that all of the concepts that Glynos and Stavrakakis state are missing from his work are present in his use of the term discourse, although Laclau acknowledges that his use of many Lacanian terms is often only implied (Laclau, 1993, p.278). Glynos and Stavrakakis, he continues, unadvisedly produce a duality of discourse and *jouissance*, whereas it is more productive to construct the two as a dualism, approached through a notion that discourse comprises a 'relational complex' (p.283). Such an approach is, I believe, mistaken. While Laclau argues that *jouissance* and fantasy are tacitly included within his concepts of hegemony and discourse, his work loses an explanatory thrust that is available within Žižek's explicit appropriation of these Lacanian concepts because Laclau does not specifically focus on the postivised elements of the Real, specifically fantasy and *jouissance*. These concepts are not additions to the symbolic, but rather they condition the symbolic; they are the very material pre-condition upon which the symbolic is constructed. Therefore, they cannot be simply implicitly assumed within the realms of the symbolic or discourse, but instead should be considered explanatory factors in their own right. Despite his assertions to the contrary, by only implicitly acknowledging the materialism of the Real, Laclau's work lacks the explanatory force evident in Žižek.

My reply to Laclau's position suggests that Žižek's form of psychopolitical analysis provides greater potential for inducing socio-political change than one that approaches discourse as a psychically neutral entity that can be handled in a methodologistic manner. That said, Žižek's political analysis does lack the textual subtly that Laclau provides when discussing the plurality of discourses which circulate around the lack that constitutes the social. It is in this role that I consider Laclau's work most useful. Two concepts in particular that Laclau has developed – which have been introduced above – are productive for political analysis; antagonism and dislocation. Productively, they enable analysis to differentiate between socio-political tensions that emerge as a consequence of the ahistorical, structural void (marked by the notions of the Real, *objet a*, and *jouissance*) and those divisions that occur as a consequence of contingent, cultural differences, this being an issue with which Žižek continues to wrestle (Žižek, 2000b, pp.308-316).

Advantages of Laclau's approach: Antagonism(s)

Antagonism refers, for Laclau, to the effects of culturally contingent differences that produce limit-points to/within the objectivity of particularistic discursive positions (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p.122). As such, antagonisms introduce a principle of negativity into discourse. It is at the point of antagonism that hegemonic battles for meaning are waged (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p.9). Thus antagonisms are vital for politics as they are the point at which meanings can be changed by interests and forces outside of the prevailing discourse. Although Laclau and Žižek notionally agree with the concept of antagonism, Laclau's political position does not extend beyond the idea that culturally-contingent antagonisms alter social meanings. Instead, his initial approach to this issue appeared to assume the existence of an elemental void (the Real), whose dislocating effects are of no significance relative to the antagonisms that develop between actually existing socio-political positions.

A conflation of antagonism and dislocation is not an uncommon error. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe assumed that antagonism and dislocation were one in the same, considering antagonism to be responsible for the impossibility of society (Torfing, 1999, p.128). This position rides a fine line with the post-structuralist definition. Here it is the presence of the 'Other' which prevents the full identity of the subject or system; the existence of the capitalist, for example, is antagonistic for the worker, the obstacle to the formation of a proletariat that is 'for itself' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p.125). This, however, assumes that the impossibility of society is always external, rather than internal to society, that the locus of impossibility is proto-transcendental to society. As Žižek points out, what is negated in the concept of social antagonism is the negation that has always already occurred to discourse by a force – the Real – that is both prior yet wholly internal to it, that exists in a condition with the social, as Lacan put it, of extimacy (Žižek, 2005a) .

As a consequence of Žižek's argument, Laclau has since move beyond the post-structuralist position, adopting Žižek's critique of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Žižek, 2005a, pp.271-285). Here Žižek suggests that it is important to distinguish between a form of antagonism that functions as an a priori limit-point to the social, the very impossibility around which the social is based, and a form of antagonism that operates as conflict between subject positions (p.276). This 'double' of antagonism means that while the latter antagonism may very well be an actual antagonism for the subject, at the same time it is just a foil for the true, constitutive antagonism. The ideological illusion in operation here is that if the antagonism between subjects is removed, then lack would also be thought to disappear. That elemental lack does not disappear, however, and, instead, appears with naked force when the subject's defences against it are removed. Thus Žižek suggests '(I)t is precisely in the moment when we achieve victory over the enemy in the antagonistic struggle that we experience antagonism in its most radical dimension' (p. 274). Žižek's point is that it is the Real which is responsible for the impossibility of society, rather than historically contingent antagonisms. In response, Laclau developed the concept of 'dislocation'.

Dislocation, as an 'unrepresentable' moment, draws upon the notion of the Real to a greater degree than the concept of antagonism, the latter referring more to subjects' attempts to assuage the initial dislocation that is caused by the Real (Stavrakakis, 1997, p.126). Thus dislocation stages, through repeated failures (for example, of socio-political policy to resolve disputes between diverging social interests) the elemental lack around which the social is based. Dislocation, by being in itself unrepresentable, is exactly what shows the limits of every discursive form, of each one's inability to represent once and for all the essence of the social, to symbolise the Real of the social in a definite way (p.124). Thus, a dislocation occurs when events happen that cannot be domesticated or integrated into the existing structure of the discourse (Torfing, 1999, p.301). In light of its thorough-going disruption to prevailing discourse, dislocation offers the prospect of radical social change, pointing to the political significance of situations such as when a discourse is confronted with an example that it cannot bear. To return to a previous

discussion, this 'unbearable' example is, in Žižek's terms, the constitutive exception to the universal, that is, its symptom, the concrete universal.

The difference between antagonism and dislocation turns upon their diverging conceptualisatons of the Real. Dislocation presupposes that the Real is internal to discourse, disrupting a discursive formation from within. The notion of antagonism, alternatively, sees the effect of the Real lying in the limits that become imposed because of conflicts that occur between incommensurable discursive positions. Antagonism operates only within the existing limits of the discourses that are used to map the social and thus poses no Real threat to the structure of the social (Homer, 2001, pp.9-10). It brings about change only in the sense of a revolution of revolving sameness, a multiplicity of responses to the same fundamental lack. Antagonism thus has the effect of forestalling the radical kinds of social transformation that are forestaged by dislocation. Antagonisms negate alternative points of view in addition to occluding the lack upon which the development of multiple options depends. The ability of social conflicts to generate a range of possible positions, say over a given policy issue, covers up that initial lack. In Lacanian terms, antagonism vehicularises *objet a*, giving it solid form through the production of fantasies about the many and various resolutions to conflict situations that might emerge. The subject thus receives *jouissance* from the very presence of an antagonism because it offers to them the prospect of social fullness; if only the antagonism were to disappear, then true society would be possible.

The use of Laclau in further argumentation

The above differentiation between antagonism and dislocation enables us to draw out a subtlety within the concept of antagonism that was not previously evident: we can differentiate between three different types of antagonism. The first is the condition of 'pure antagonism', as represented by Laclau's' idea of dislocation. Secondly, there exists 'external antagonism', Žižek's response to Laclau's notion of antagonism. External antagonisms are the fantasmatic postulations of an element that is responsible for the failure of society. Finally, we can almost return to Laclau's original position of

antagonism – as that which is responsible for the impossibility of society – as developed in his early notion of a 'social antagonism'. Social antagonisms are the deadlocks that occur within the social fabric. Social antagonisms are not necessarily fantasised external antagonisms, although they are often presented in this manner. However, the main affect of social antagonisms is to lock into conflict competing perspectives between which no common ground can be found, e.g. the clash between workers and capitalists can be considered a social antagonism because there is no common ground or point of translation between the positions, despite various fantasmatic efforts to suture this gap, such as the trade union movement. This particular antagonism can be posited as an external antagonism and might indeed be so in some cases e.g. where the capitalist is preventing the worker from achieving his full identity. Nonetheless, this masks the fundamental clash of incommensurable forces. The idea of a true social antagonism is extended further in the following chapter, particularly in relation to Žižek's notion of political parallax.

The triad of positions around antagonism suggest that there is an intimate link between *jouissance, objet a*, fantasy, antagonism, and symptom. The symptom – say, for example, climate change – emerges within a political community as the object-cause of desire (*objet a*), as the sublime object that both embodies the affect of the Real, yet also stands in for the lack of Real, providing *jouissance* through the impossible prospect of a suture. In the case of the symptom, it becomes an *objet a* because fantasy constructs the symptom as that which is standing in the way of *Jouissance*. Thus the symptom becomes an external antagonism; the symptom is presented as a 'straw' enemy, the 'Other' that is preventing the full expression of society and the abstract universal imaginary. Fantasy can then extend to the idea that the society's ills are the result of the Other's presence. The symptom thus becomes a contingent object that can be removed; its cause is presented as an external antagonism.

In ideological fantasy, the removable of the antagonism is projected as bringing about the eradication of the symptom. This is, however, a necessarily false fantasy – the removal of the antagonism will merely expose the universal imaginaries, that bind together the

political community, to the dislocatory effect of the Real: the eradication of the supposed cause of division will remove the unconscious supplement upon which the universal imaginary depends for its form, exposing the community's self-perception to its own inconsistency. As a consequence, a socially important discourse requires the presence of antagonism and its symptom so that stability can be maintained. Moreover, they become the points of enjoyment, of *jouissance,* that bind subjects to the discourse.

As an illustration, the hegemonic global capitalist imaginary is that of 'development', which has the built-in assumption that all nations have the capacity to be 'developed'. As will be further argued in this thesis, particularly in chapter seven, which focuses on the discourse of poverty, this is not the case. Rather, 'developing' countries are the concrete universal of capitalism: they are required to stay in poverty for the maintenance of the global capitalist system; they maintain the over-supply of labour which produces the low wages and low costs of agricultural produce that global capital relies on for the support of an ever-increasing desire for consumption within the so-called developed world. For this capitalist imaginary to remain, its fundamental impossibility must be displaced to an external cause. Thus the symptoms of its failures, such as poverty, are posited as the result of an antagonism, such as corruption in Third World governments. These symptoms and antagonisms become a point of enjoyment for the capitalist subject; it dilutes their sense of responsibility for these ills and thus maintains the hegemonic capitalist horizons. To this end, the imaginary of fully globalised development for everyone can be sustained. Without this antagonism, the system would be faced with the full dislocatory effect of the Real, in the form of the concrete universal, that is, the persistence of structurally-induced poverty.

In conclusion, Žižek argues that the discursive structures of 'the universal' exist through supports that are material in effect – fantasy, desire, and more particularly, *jouissance*. In so doing, he notes the value of Laclau's notions of antagonism and dislocation, particularly when coupled with the ideas of discourse, hegemony and the empty signifier. Indeed, Žižek has described social antagonism as 'perhaps the most radical breakthrough in modern social theory' (Žižek, 2005a, p.271), because, in developing the concept of

antagonism, Laclau has been able to incorporate the Lacanian Real as a tool for social and ideological analysis (Žižek, 1989, p.162). That said, it is evident that his appropriation of the Lacanian Real limits its effects to that of a primal lack that comprises the necessary precondition for the play of textual multiplicity. In doing so, Laclau is able to demonstrate why social constructions are necessarily contingent. That said, he cannot then explain why symbolic formations sustain themselves in spite of this contingency. Žižek, in contrast, emphasizes the productive effects that the Real continues to have upon the constitution of political positions, 'long after' its a priori dislocation of those positions, particularly through the machinations of fantasy, desire, and *jouissance*. More importantly, in acknowledging the materiality of universality through an enlarged conception of the Real, Žižek not only exposes the political makeup of social constructions, but also the political nature of the non-contingent and material exception upon which these social constructions are based. When developed against a background of Hegelian dialectics, these notions give rise to a rebirthed notion of universality. It is to the materiality of this universality that we shall now turn.

Chapter 4: Dialectical Materialism and Universality

Universality, in both its abstract and concrete forms, is the fundamental notion for understanding political formations via Žižek's psychoanalysis. Universality, a structural concept, is animated through Žižek's rehabilitated concept of dialectical materialism. Here, materialism has been given a psychoanalytic spin, referring now to the obdurate negativity of *objet a* in the constitution of political positionality and of the *jouissance* that sustains such positioning. Rather than being understood only in an interpretative manner, dialectical materialism emphasises the role of the Real and *jouissance* in the dialectical process that constructs the universal totality. This chapter will lay out the basic parameters for dialectical thought in relation to universality, in particular Žižek's conception of dialectical materialism, based around his notion of the 'parallax view'. It is theorised that the concept of dialectical materiality provides a productive explanation of the political fixity encountered within the social world, both in relation to the contingent fixation of the universal imaginary as well as the hard materiality (the concrete universal) of the universal exception upon which hegemonic horizons are generated. Therefore the link between dialectical materialism and universality becomes a productive one for generating understandings of socio-political change. The perspective laid out in this chapter indicates the core theoretical orientation of this thesis. As such, it provides the foundation for the methodological position described in the following chapter and, ultimately, the psychoanalytic political approach endorsed by the thesis.

In his latest work, *The Parallax View*, Žižek has redeveloped a psychoanalytic concept of dialectical materialism through the notion of a 'parallax view'. The parallax view designates a gap – the parallax gap – between two discourses, a gap that can only be perceived through a shift in positions. Žižek considers there to be several different

modalities of the parallax, the most salient for this thesis being the 'parallax of ontological difference' and the 'political parallax' (Žižek, 2006a, p.11). Political parallaxes occur when there is no common ground between positions that have been structured around a social antagonism. For example, a political parallax operates between the political 'Left' perspectives of ecologism and global development, structured around the antagonism inherent to global capitalism. This chapter, however, will primarily focus on the parallax of ontological difference, particularly as such difference relates to the issue of universality.

The key notion here is that the parallax gap is not a gap between two discourses that are external to each other but, rather, a gap which persists within the totality of the universal. This difference which is purely internal differs from the condition of 'external difference' that has animated traditional dialectical thought. The internal nature of the difference, as we shall see, is vital for the materialist focus of Žižek's dialectical thought. However, before the parallax view and its implications for universality and social change are developed further, my argument requires that I briefly review the fundamentals of traditional dialectical thought.

An introduction to Dialectics

The basic principle of a dialectical investigation is that the key to analysis lies with discovery of the exception to the series of objects that has caught the analyst's gaze (Žižek, 2000a, p.241). The identification of 'the exception' forms the major difference between the practice of formal logic, which was the primary form of philosophical logic from the Greeks to Hegel, and dialectic logic. In formalism, an identity is considered to be equal to itself; A is equal to A. This is the Law of Identity. Additionally, the formalist Law of Contradiction reasons that if A=A, A cannot be equal to non-A. Rather, contradiction is purely external; A v B. However, the formalist position assumes that identities are full in themselves, that A is solely and fully A. The dialectic response to identity is that A is both A and non-A; the exclusions that are necessary for the formation of a coherent identity mean that every conception of identity includes an element of non-

identity (Kay, 2003, p.26). By taking A as solely A, we miss this necessary exception to A: non-A (Novack, 1971, p.71).

The emphasis on non-A is elemental for the dialectical materialist perspective on universality and socio-political change in particular. More specifically, the exception to the series, which always appears within the series itself, is essential for understanding the manner in which discourses come to shift. These shifts are best understood through Hegel's approach to dialectics. According to Hegelian dialectics, that which is real is rational. Although this appears overly rationalist for psychoanalytic thought, by taking the basic idea and interpreting it through a Lacanian lens, the value of dialectics for psychoanalysis is evident. The core insight of this position for psychoanalytic dialectics, which Žižek terms dialectical materialism, is that when an identity becomes unreal (irrational), what is excluded from the identity will overthrow the identity (Novack, 1971, p.87). To re-write this in Žižek's terms, the weight of the abstract universal's symptom becomes unbearable when it cannot be domesticated within the symbolic and fantasmatic resources available, causing that universal imaginary to become dislocated from within.

It was Hegelian dialectical thought which lead Marx to contend that capitalism had become so irrational that the working class had historical reason and right on its side (Novack,1971, p.88). What Marx did not consider, however, was capitalism's ability to revolutionise its own symptoms by bringing them back into the universal horizon. Conversely, capitalism's ability to internalise its limits has not stopped symptoms from occurring. Symptoms, as with a universal identity, are a relentless threat to capitalism. The constant presence of such symptoms in capitalism has lead Adorno (cited in Žižek, 2006a, p.51) to describe capitalism as a system that lives on credit that will never be paid off, in the sense that global capital is constantly able to revolutionize its own negative conditions.

Capital domesticates its symptoms in two ways. The most common and efficient manner, as has been noted, is to internalise symptoms. The internalisation of symptoms regularly occurs by acknowledging the symptom, but domesticating its effect through fantasy

constructions. This method is an example of a rotational-style revolution. Although there may appear to be regular change, this change moves around a fixed central axis. This axis is the Real. This is the case with capitalism and its symptoms. However, some symptoms are unable to be domesticated through the act of simply being acknowledged. These symptoms lie at the core of a discursive structure; they are the Real around which the discourse rotates. As such, these kinds of symptoms, like the unsustainability of capitalism or global poverty, have to be disavowed from the universal horizon, such as global capitalism, in order for it to continue operating. It is only by getting at the heart of the system, so to speak, to the core, disavowed elements, that thorough-going radical change can occur.

Threats to capital such as these, however, are strongly disavowed, such is the anxiety that comes with acknowledging them and the *jouissance* available from within the capitalist edifice. Instead, capital operates by bringing the symptoms which can be acknowledged back into the system, albeit in a different form. A contemporary illustration of this dialectical process within capitalism, wherein threats to the system are constantly integrated back into the system, is the digital revolution. Digital technology poses a major threat to two of the main pillars of capitalism; private property and the scarcity of resources. Contemporary capitalist discourse, however, has long battled against these symptoms but instead now seeks to include them within its horizons. Although some forms of capitalist discourse try to repress these symptoms – in the case of Napster, for example (a digital file sharing internet site) being taken to court –others embrace the change and seek to profit from it. Thus several mainstream music or digital technology companies, such as Sony and Apple, now operate web-sites that distribute music either free (and profit from advertising) or for a minimal cost. What was once a threat to the very heart of capitalism – the pursuit of private profit – is now an opportunity to generate profit.

From reflection to concrete universality

According to Hegel, there are three stages to the dialectic: reflection, external reflection and determinate reflection (Kay, 2003, p.19). Within the condition of reflection, an identity is posited in itself, because it is assumed to be fully identical with itself. In terms of the individual, reflection can be conceived of as the human substance before it entered the symbolic realm. Upon entry into the symbolic order, however, substance is negated by the symbolic Other and becomes 'subject', thereby losing access to *Jouissance*. The condition of reflection, like *Jouissance*, is always only a fantasy, a retroactive construction of what has been lost through external reflection; the fantasy being that there was something present to lose (*Jouissance*).

Reflection is an important stage because it allows one to think of the process of external reflection as a negation of reflection, rather than as a starting point for analysis. External reflection is considered to occur when an identity is negated by an object outside of itself. External reflection introduces lack into the symbolic system. This lack, R_2, occurs because of the lack of J_1, which the subject is believed to hold before the external negation by the symbolic order. This belief is sustained by fantasy.

That same fantasy prevents the subject from entering the third stage of the dialectical movement, determinate reflection; the negation of the negation. This negation is known as determinate reflection. Determinate reflection does not produce a change in content, but rather a reconception of the negation that occurs through external reflection (Kay, 2003, p.37). Rather than being perceived as a negative limit, this negation is reconstituted as a positive condition (Žižek, 2002, p.36).

The philosophical concept of Truth illustrates what is at stake in the dialectical process. In modernism, it was held that, through reason, humankind could have unmediated access to the Truth. Truth itself was never found in modernism, this simply reflects the fantasy of reflection that is at work. The modernist perspective was negated by forms of late-

modernist or post-modernist thought, which reasoned that Truth was impossible for the subject because its access to reality is always mediated by language. The relativistic dismissal of Truth which such positions imply has, in turn, been negated by perspectives such as Lacanian psychoanalysis. Thus, the 'failure' that occurred to the idea of Truth, upon discovery of the mediation of reality by discourse, becomes a positive condition of Truth; Truth is possible, but only in this mediated form – there is no Truth outside of the historical contingency of thought.

Žižek's Dialectical Materialism

The negation of the universal by the particular is fundamental for Žižek's dialectical materialism (Žižek, 2002, p.43). This negation informs the ontological impossibility of a universal identity that is without lack. However, because of the prospect for *jouissance*, in both the forms of J_1 and J_2, the negation in external reflection produces the *après-coup* construction of the abstract universal which negates this lack. Likewise the negation of reflection creates the conditions of possibility for a radical shift in positions relative to concrete universality. To understand the possibilities for such a shift, our argument must do more to understand the negation of the negation, that is, the process of determinate reflection.

External reflection is the stage within which reflection is itself negated, overcome. However, psychoanalytic thought shows that reflection is always-already negated. This state of negation-that-has-already-happened lies in the subject's 'castration' (separation from *Jouissance*), which is associated with its entrance into the symbolic realm. Thus we need to distinguish between two separate, but much related meanings of the negation of the negation. This division relates to the distinction that Žižek makes between negativity (the Real) within the symbolic order (R_2) and the negativity upon which the symbolic order is based (R_1). For Žižek, it is the materiality of R_1 that is primary (this makes his position a materialist one) rather than the idealism of a position founded on the primacy of R_2 (R. Butler, 2005, p.95). The distinction between the materialist position on the Real and the idealist perspective also separates Laclau and Žižek. Where Laclau considers the

Real to be the limit to every symbolic formation and thus as a lack within the symbolic order, Žižek argues that the Real is also an excess to the social, saturating it with *jouissance*. The first negation of the negation is thus structurally based, relating to the condition of determinate reflection. In determinate reflection, the negation that occurs to the universal by the particular in the process of external reflection is, itself, negated: that is, negation is viewed as a positive condition of the universal.

The second type of 'negation of the negation' relates back to castration. Castration is the initial negation, but this negation is itself negated through its repression in fantasy (Kay, 2003, p.33). The two negations of negations are vitally related. In dialectical materialism, we see that, in reflection, whatever it is that we perceive is the product of a prior condition of negation: 'the thing' has already been negated by the operation upon it by the symbolic order. The subject's entry into the symbolic is never completed, however, and their disjointedness with that order provides the means through which the process of negation moves beyond the state of external negation to that of determinate negation: the subject's inhabitation of the symbolic order is always dislocated by an excess of *jouissance* and by the Real. That said, the subject is also driven to get back to the original, but mythical, state of *Jouissance*. As we have previously noted, J_1 is only an imaginary concept, it is the creation of J_2 This drive to return to J_1 constitutes the negation of the negation in its fullest, psychoanalytic meaning, the repression of the fact that we never had 'it' in the first place. As a consequence of this turn, psychoanalysis suggests that a third stage – a further negation – can be added to 'the negation of the negation'.

The 'negation of the negation of the negation', is concrete universality. This third term is necessary to designate the possibility of going beyond the fantasmatic supplement that prevents the subject from perceiving the concrete universal upon which the abstract universal is founded. This synthesis of the two concepts of 'the negation of negation' allows analysis to go past the purely interpretive arena. To summarise this synthesis, we see that any identity is negated in itself, but the very fact of this primordial lack is negated in fantasy. Fantasy instead presents lack as having been caused by an external obstacle, such as occurs through processes of external reflection. The construction of

such fantasies support the production of an abstract universal imaginary from which subjects gain access to *jouissance*.

We see this external concept of antagonism in operation in Laclau's early work (see the previous chapter) but also in everyday political ideology, where the identity of one faction is thought to be prevented by that of another. What this perspective fails to acknowledge is that it is not the Other which is preventing the full expression of identity but, rather, that this failure is internal to the identity. This is why Žižek is so condescending towards identity politics; they are a false politics which ignore more pressing concerns, notably the contemporary manifestation of the Real at the heart of the symbolic order; global capital and its affect on humanity. In the process of negating 'the negation of the negation', the fantasy which portrays the secondary negation (the symptom) as being an external, alien cause of social discord is deconstructed: the cause of discord does not simply lie with a foreign force. This deconstruction the possibility to emerge of a political reconfiguration, as the unconscious supplement which has held together the abstract universal looses its grip upon subjects.

Determinate Reflection and Concrete Universality

Determinate reflection is the most influential phase for inducing change within a universal. In determinate reflection, it is revealed that the second negation, rather than being an impediment to the universal (e.g. we have not quite achieved a notion of universal human rights, but we are getting there as we attempt to incorporate notions of collective –- economic, cultural and social –rights within liberal human rights frameworks), is rather the condition of the universal's ability to generate social consensus. In that process, the subject comes to recognise the element of non-identity that structures the appearance of reality, the 'exclusion' within universality of that which does not correspond with itself, and identifies with that split. The act of identifying with both the universal and its exception generally provokes strong anxiety (although various defence methods, discussed in chapter five) emerge to allow this paradoxical identification to proceed. Because of the anxiety that is experienced through the process of determinate

reflection, the universal loses its grip upon the subject. That subject is then able to reconsider their own (contingent, political) configuration.

In the process of external reflection, the negation of reflection that occurs (that is, of the symptom) is domesticated by being constructed in fantasy. This allows the abstract universal to function in a normal manner. In the move to determinate reflection, however, a radical shift in emphasis occurs from the abstract universal to the concrete universal. This shift in emphasis sees the symptom emerging as a necessary, constitutive element of the totality that is universality, the symptom becoming both the 'concrete singular exception' of the abstract universal and 'a universality' in itself which exceeds the conceptual grid of the existing framework (Kay, 2003, p.42). As a consequence, this impediment to the realisation of universal fullness, the symptom/concrete universal, holds the Truth of the universal in its totality (Žižek, 1999, pp.180-181). A principle of analysis that follows from this is to refrain from comparing the universal with what it seeks to represent (e.g. by asking Are these really universal human rights?), but rather with that which the abstract universal excludes in order to constitute itself; the concrete universal (Žižek, 2002, p.160).

Posited in this manner, concrete universality is the 'constitutive outside' of the universal dialectic. It holds the inherent Truth of the abstract universal imaginary; what has to be excluded in order for the universal to be constituted. Both Laclau and Žižek use the notion of the constitutive outside, and it is worth considering these alternative conceptions in order to better illustrate the internal, as opposed to external, nature of the concrete universal, which, through the dialectical movement, opens up further possibilities for political change.

Laclau considers;

> We must assert that a discourse, or a discursive formation, establishes its limits by means of excluding a radical otherness that has no common measure with the differential system from which it is excluded and that therefore poses a constant threat to the system. (Laclau, 1995, p.151)

Laclau's conception of the constitutive outside, however, varies significantly from Žižek's. For Laclau, the only thing that the excluded elements have in common is that they are excluded from the universal; thus they are external. In contrast, Žižek's notion of concrete universality refers to a condition where the excluded elements stand in the place of, and constitute a state of, 'minimal difference' between the universal and itself; the excluded elements are paradoxically within the species yet subversive of it. Thus, while Laclau would agree that the relation between the universal and its constitutive outside is not the formalist relation of A→ B, he postulates it as A→anti-A (Torfing, 1999, p.125). In contrast, Žižek claims that concrete universality is not anti-A, but rather non-A. The dialectical interactions of A and non-A within universality form the basis of Žižek's parallax view.

The Parallax View

An ontological parallax (as opposed to a political parallax, as introduced at the beginning of this chapter) brings together the concepts of universality and the dialectic within a psychoanalytic conception of materialism. The key notion here is that universality is split internally between the abstract universal and the concrete universal, that split forming around a 'parallax gap'. The parallax gap is the gap that persists between two closely associated perspectives, between which no common ground is possible, the gap only being viewable through the shift between positions. This gap, to add another gloss to it, is the parallax Real (Žižek, 2006a, p.4). The two sides that make up the moment of universality, the abstract universal and the concrete universal, constitute the basis of the ontological parallax, these two forms of universality being made up of incommensurable discourses that are held together by a condition of 'minimal difference' that persists between them. Žižek states that this incommensurability, rather than providing an obstacle to the dialectical movement (because of the lack of a common language), actually fuels the subversive political core of dialectics because it allows for not only small change but, rather, large structural shifts (p.4).

The division that occurs to the universal around the parallax Real – between its abstract and concrete expressions – is not symmetrical. Relatively symmetrical divisions can be found around social antagonisms, as identified within political parallaxes. Alternatively, in the ontological parallax the universal is divided into its abstract and concrete forms, the abstract universal being the hegemonic imaginary through which the apparently coherence of social life gets constructed. The abstract universal is built upon the effects of the imaginary and upon ideological fantasy to negate the negation that is inherent to the symbolic order. It offers the prospect of fullness and of *Jouissance*. The universal horizon pacifies the disruptive effects of the Real by targeting the various manifestations of the Real that occur in discourse, particularly the symptom.

The Role of the Symptom

The symptom is a modality in which we experience the Real insofar as it is the point at which abstract universals – like national identity, human rights, and so on – fail. This point of failure reveals the existence of an irresolvable (parallax) gap within a universal discourse and, thus, ultimately, the presence of a concrete universal that is disrupting the coherence of that universalising horizon. It is not so much the symptom itself that is Real, but rather *the gap that the symptom opens up between itself and the abstract universal.* This gap reveals the existence of an element which subverts the universal horizon and, as such, *is a form in which the Real is staged*, creating the potential for dislocation. Yet, where the symptom comes to be symbolised and constructed in the fantasy-language of the abstract universal that is framing subjects' perceptions of the situation, it loses this Real element and with it the threat of dislocation. This domestication occurs because the symptom, once symbolised through the various mechanisms of fantasy (see Chapter 5), becomes part of the abstract universal itself and, as such, a potential source of enjoyment (*jouissance*). Where this occurs, the gap that exists between the symptom and the abstract universal appears to dissipate. The symptom does not, however, disappear. Fantasy constructions never fully succeed. Rather the symptom continues to exist as an excessive element (as an irrepressible remnant of the Real) within the universalising discourse. The

presence of the symptom, and the repressed Real that is inherent to it, continually threaten to return so as to dislocate the cogency of the universalising discourse.

If the symptom persists as a 'stain' on the universal imaginary, then concrete universality can be said to be the original source of this stain (Žižek, 1999, p.113; 2006a, p.31). In this sense, the concrete universal is the Real element around which the universal rotates and it is the symptom that represents the concrete universal within the abstract universal. The symptom plays this role by operating within the universal as the one element that does not fit, but upon whose presence the universal depends for its coherence. Here Žižek gives the example of 'freedom' as it appears within the universal aspirational horizon of capital. Within the logic of capital there exists one definition of freedom that subverts the reasonableness of all the others; the freedom to sell one's labour on the market. The various social freedoms that citizens of a liberal state enjoy depend upon the loss of economic freedom. To this end, the freedom to sell one's labour constitutes all the other elemental 'freedoms' normally associated with democracy. Without this conception of freedom, the others would not be able to exist (Žižek, 1989, pp.21-23).

Thus it is around the symptom that the stability/instability of a discourse depends. To the extent that the symptom is able to be successfully integrated into the fantasy of the abstract universal then that universal horizon is able to maintain its regular functions. If however, the symptom refuses to be pacified by the terms of the dominant universal and domesticated into a norm or rule of a particular political community it offers the prospect, through determinate reflection, of a shift occurring whereby concrete universality becomes visible. However, the unconscious supplement which maintains the status of the abstract universal is a particularly powerful force, because of the prospect of *Jouissance* that it offers. Conversely, because J_1 is impossible, the fantasmatic element of the abstract universal offers subjects J_2, to enjoy, accessed through the symptom in much the same manner as they might enjoy hating the presence of an external antagonism, of an alien intruder (as discussed in chapter three). Thus, rather than impeding the fullness of the social/abstract universality, the symptom is a necessary condition for its existence: it is

highly disruptive, yes, but nevertheless necessary because through it the abstract occludes its inability to obtain fullness.

Because of the necessary, yet disruptive effect, of the symptom in and upon the abstract universal, a multitude of different perspectives are generated in order to domesticate the dislocating effect of the Real that is inherent to the symptom. These symbolic perspectives depend upon the manner in which a discourse establishes itself in relation to the symptom. The most basic defensive techniques that ensure that the symptom (and thus the discursive position) can function while being disavowed are those of repression, a domesticating acknowledgement (through mechanisms of antagonism, of ideology and of super-ego demand), and of fetishism. We will consider each of these modes of responding to the symptom in the following chapter. In doing so, a methodology will be generated for understanding the manner in which the symptom operates within the domain of abstract universality. This methodology will be constructed with a view to considering the possibilities for radical structural change, change that moves outside of the fantasmatic relationship that, under 'normal' social conditions, persists between the symptom and the abstract universal, and which thereby exposes the concrete universal. As such, the methodology informs the core political orientation of the thesis, that of practicing concrete universality by revealing the constitutive materialist Truth embodied by the concrete universal.

Chapter 5: Symptomatic Readings

The symptom is element that links the two areas of interest to psychopolitical analysis: the abstract universal imaginary and the concrete universal. The abstract universal stablises, via *jouissance*, what are otherwise contingent and inconsistent discourses. In contradistinction, the concrete universal is that which must be excluded in order for the various elements that make up a universal imaginary to be condensed into a whole. As such, the concrete universal represents the material Truth of the universal totality; in terms of the hegemonic horizon, the concrete universal is the unbearable example which the universal cannot face about itself. It is, to rephrase the point, the Real. Within the abstract universal, the symptom embodies the universal exception and, thus, the Real. As such, the domestication of this potentially dislocating element is vital for the smooth functioning of the abstract universal. Such domestication involves a range of different strategies. These strategies can appear to be evidence of social change, but instead they are a 'revolution' around a fundamental impossibility, that impossibility being the concrete universal. Yet, despite the disturbing presence of the symptom, its existence is still necessary for the universal horizon to function. The symptom sustains a distance between, on the one hand, the universal imaginary and, on the other, the contradiction that exists between the fantasies that make the social domain appear coherent and full and the dislocation of those fantasies by the Real. The symptom thus creates an irresolvable gap between within the universal, a gap that itself reveals the presence of the Real. Thus whilst symptoms are enjoyed, their staging of the Real also causes anxiety and dislocation.

For political positions that seek to achieve radical structural shifts, different strategies can be utilised in relation to the symptom and, in particular, the concrete universal. Two strategies are particularly effective. The first involves the identification of the gaps within universal horizons, like national identity, globalisation, and so on, that get opened up by

the symptom. The second engages the concrete universal in the terms that are given by various hegemonic universal imaginaries, but within a conception of the universal that goes beyond those imaginaries, that instead embraces the notion of totality.

This chapter develops a methodology for investigating the different discursive strategies that variously get used in the management of symptoms. The most conservative of these are sets of strategies that include the symptom within the terms of existing abstract universals. Beyond this though, the methodology identifies sets of strategy that use the ideas of the symptom to point-point the form which the concrete universal is taking within a discursive structure and, thus, in Žižek's terms, to practice concrete universality. This approach to methodology does not aim to develop a reified procedure for examining political formations but, rather, suggests a formatic method that can be performed.

By formatic, I mean an analysis that does not simply stay at the level of interpretation. The core aim of this methodology is to produce an approach which *both* identifies the symptomatic point within a discourse and the underlying fantasmatic strategy used to domesticate these symptoms. It also goes further than this in examining the potential strategies that could potentially be used to deconstruct the abstract universal.

In constructing this methodology, the chapter concentrates on two separate areas. The first focuses on the manner in which symptoms are contained by the abstract universal such that they do not produce a shift to the concrete universal. This can happen in one of two ways. The first involves a repression of the symptom. The second, more effective strategy, involves an acknowledgement, but domestication of the Real within the symptom. Understanding the manner in which a universal horizon protects itself from the symptom is vital for comprehending the manner in which the symptom can be used as a political tool for contesting the hegemonic status of a universal horizon such as global capitalism. The latter part of the chapter focuses on this latter task, reviewing the manner in which symptoms can be utilised to reveal the presence of the concrete universal and to produce radical social change. Again, this can be approached in two ways: by acknowledging the presence of the concrete universal using the terms given by the

abstract universal; and by registering the social effects of discourses that emerge from within the concrete universal itself. It is to these tasks that we shall now turn.

Repression of the Symptom

The first discursive strategy to be discussed relates to the repression of the symptom. All discourses within the abstract universal operate with a degree of repression, in that each represses the fact that social fullness is impossible (Stavrakakis, 1999, p.39). As such, a certain repression of the symptom is the condition of possibility for the construction of the abstract universal. When we talk of discursive strategies as a response to the symptom, all of these strategies operate as modalities of repression. However, in this methodology we shall distinguish between this form of repression and a more direct form of repression where the very existence of the symptom is repressed. This type of repression is known as secondary repression, where a signifier is excluded from the symbolic, as opposed to primary repression which relates to castration and the original constitution of the unconscious (Evans, 1996, p.165). Additionally, within Lacanian psychoanalytic thought there is a vital distinction between repression and a term often used in conjunction with repression, disavowal. Repression and disavowal are different defence mechanisms for dealing with trauma, such as the trauma of the Real that gets experienced in encounters with symptoms. Lacan uses disavowal in terms of the structure of perversion, where the subject simultaneously disavows and acknowledges the symptom. This is a process of fetishism, to which we shall soon return (Evans, 1996, pp.43-44).

In contrast to the condition of disavowal, repression is the process where a signifier or discourse is expelled from the conscious into the unconscious. This expulsion is never complete, in that the symptomatic signifier does not disappear, but rather continues to operate within the unconscious realm. Because it functions within the unconscious, the repressed symptom continues to effect the subject by taking symbolic form and, as such, perpetual efforts are made to contain the symptom given its traumatic effects. Repression often occurs when the threat of dislocation is high because the symptom cannot be included within the universal imaginary through which the subject, or social formation, is

organising itself. This has most often occurred in totalitarian societies, where society is considered to be complete. In contrast to free-market societies, where the abstract universal imaginary may emphasise wealth and freedom, the most prominent aspect of the abstract universal of totalitarian societies is unity and solidarity. Therefore elements of non-unity in totalitarian societies are treated in a different manner from societies in which unity is not such a strong ideal. Because of the strong libidinal investment in this unity, the stability of society is entirely dependent on the repression or extermination of the symptom. Thus repression and antagonism often operate together because of the need to exterminate the fantasied external cause of the symptom. Indeed, these antagonism are themselves generated by the abstract universal through the positing, and then repression, of an element deemed alien in order to maintain the abstract universal. This often occurs in a violent manner such as, for example, the Tiananmen square massacre of 1989. The treatment of Jews by Nazi Germany is another seminal example of this strategy for managing the social symptom.

This is not to suggest that non-totalitarian societies do not use repression as a discursive strategy against the symptom. Many discourses within capitalism actively repress symptoms of global capital, such as climate change and absolute poverty. Conversely numerous capitalist discourses acknowledge these symptoms, not as a concrete universal that exceeds the abstract universal, but rather acknowledges their presence by constructing them in fantasy. Recent examples of such fantasy structures are the block-buster movies on climate change. These discursive strategies are used when the symptom can no longer be repressed because of the pressure the symptom is placing on the symbolic order through the unconscious. Paradoxically though, an acknowledgment of the symptom is also functional for an abstract universal in order for distance to be maintained from the impossibility of 'society'. It is to these strategies that we now turn.

Acknowledgement of the Symptom in fantasy

The symptom is unavoidable; it is a constitutive element of the social. Nonetheless, the gap opened up by the symptom can be avoided and, with it, the Real effect of the

symptom. The gap that is opened by the symptom is sutured by the reconstruction of the symptom in some fantasy form. By constructing the symptom in fantasy the symptom itself does not disappear, rather its effect is tamed. Instead of it being a source of anxiety, of trauma, and of dislocation, the symptom as it appears within fantasy becomes a source of *jouissance* for the subject. The symptom is a site of enjoyment because it allows the subject to express the negativity, the lack, which is inherent to the social. In this sense the symptom corresponds with the role played by *objet a*, the cause of an impossible desire for fullness. The symptom, as an element of the Real, opens up a gap within the social – much like *objet a* does as the cause of desire.

The process of attempting to fill that gap generates *jouissance*. If the gap were to be completed filled, the symptom totally sutured by 'the Truth about the situation', then the subject would be faced with the full, naked, negativity of the social. Thus the symptom is maintained, albeit at a distance, within fantasy.

Several different devices exist within fantasy to accomplish the paradoxical task of acknowledging, yet domesticating, the symptom, so as to avoid the potential dislocation that comes with the active presence of the concrete universal. Each gives rise to a peculiar form of discourse. These include ideological fantasy, external antagonism, super-ego demand, disavowal, and fetishism. We shall discuss each in turn.

Ideological Fantasy

Ideology and fantasy are the main drivers through which the symptom is, firstly, acknowledged and, then, domesticated. Together they build the subject's sense of social and psychic coherence, belonging to the Lacanian register of the imaginary. Fantasy, a modality of the imaginary, provides an unconscious supplement of *jouissance* which acts as the base for the operation of ideology. This operation is known as ideological fantasy, the discursive strategy by which *jouissance* (J_2) is obtained through the fantasmatic postulating about the possibility of J_1. This possibility relies on ideological fantasy externalising the symptomatic elements which threaten the abstract universal, but also the maintenance of these symptoms.

The reconstruction of the concept of ideology has been a vital move in psychoanalytic thought. Ideology is one of the most debated concepts in the history of social science (c.f. Thompson, 1990) and, as such, the full genealogy of the concept does not need to be covered here. Ideology is a critical concept for the rehabilitation of universality within Žižekian psychoanalysis. Ideology had been predominately presented in modernist thought as distinct from 'reality' in the sense that it was an illusionary appearance as opposed to essence, at which modernism was driving. For this reason, with the advent of post-structuralist thought and the related post-modern journey into relativism, ideology as a concept was rejected (Stavrakakis, 1997, pp.118-122). Through an operation of determinate reflection, in which the very negation of ideology has become the positive condition for its rehabilitation, Lacanian theory has transcended these definitions of ideology and has rekindled the term. Ideology stills operates as misrecognition, but of a different nature as the domain of ideology is transferred from the epistemological (the truth value of a representation of the social) to the ontological (Glynos, 2001, p.192). Rather than it signaling the existence of a distinction between reality and ideology, ideology is now seen through psychoanalytic eyes as the guarantor of consistency in the social realm; there is no reality without ideology. Because all discourses are ultimately dislocated and lacking, ideology plays the role of covering this lack, and hence occluding the politically contingent nature of any such ideological construction (p.191). Thus, through ideology the subject misrecognises the ontologically negative basis of the social as being a positive, coherent foundation (Stavrakakis, 1997, p.123).

The key role of ideology in the construction of normality, it can thus be surmised, is to include and pacify the symptom through its staging of the symptom within fantasy formations to which the subject holds. It is the symptom that disrupts the consistency of the social and, thus, the presence of the symptom must be negated (Stavrakakis, 1997, p.128). Paradoxically, in order to achieve this, the symptom must be included in the ideological fantasies through which subjects experience their abstract universals, as points of enjoyment. As Glyn Daly states (T)he central paradox of ideology is that it can only attempt closure through simultaneously producing the "threat" to that closure'

(1999a, p.220). The fantasmatic construction of the symptom is of vital political importance. A political approach that seeks to reveal the concrete universal must not focus on the fantasmatic postulations that get generated about and around the symptom but, rather, upon the existence of the symptom from which the concrete universal stems.

As an example, the current debate around climate change recognises it as being the symptom (of something) and attempts to domesticate its effect so as to maintain the primary universal horizon of the social, that is, global capitalism and the production of wealth. Although it is often argued that change must occur to prevent environmental collapse, change is only considered *within* the parameters allowed by capitalist imaginary. This is an ideological construction; it includes the symptom, but gives it external cause, such as the failure of markets or governments to take pollution into account. It is contended that once these contingent factors are remedied, the capitalist imaginary will be restored to its fantasised state of fullness. What this brand of fantasmatic construction denies is the concrete universal; that the logic of capital (the ever-increasing demand for profit) is fundamentally unsustainable. A properly Lacanian psychoanalytic political approach would be to identify the concrete universal and expose it as the unbearable example within the universal horizon, that is, that the generation of wealth has natural limits. This is opposed to regular critical analysis which operates within the hegemonic fantasy, dealing only with the symptom as it is presented in fantasy or by perhaps trying to generate an alternative fantasmatic position which equally ignores the concrete universal e.g. various Green Party attempts to 'Green' capitalism.

An important ideological operation that can be seen in the domesticating of the symptom occurs through the production of 'straw' enemies, through the construction of external antagonisms. Again, this is another paradoxical operation of ideological fantasy; it operates by acknowledging and representing its impossibility in the form of an external obstacle (Daly, 1999a, p.224). Just as with the symptom, in which the subject experiences *jouissance* when ideologies fail, the subject experiences antagonism as a site of enjoyment. In order to avoid the anxiety that comes from the radical negativity of social life, antagonism, like the symptom, produces compensatory *jouissance*. Daly suggests

that the production of an 'Other' that blocks the full constitution of identity and universality is the foremost fantasy because it gives cause for the fundamental lack in the subject (1999a, p.234). Hence it is always difficult to displace symptoms or reveal the contingency of antagonisms.

Ideological fantasy enables the Real, which inheres within the symptom, to be encountered in a much more manageable fashion than happens through the strategy of repression, as reviewed above (Daly, 1999a, p.224). It does not simply repress the symptom, but rather domesticates it as either a temporal failure to be resolved, or the fault of an external impediment. Symptoms still exist, but society is no longer so reliant on the extermination these symptoms. Because of this, the social or the subject is rarely exposed to the Real in its naked, raw form, but rather as a domesticated encounter that maintains the belief that 'society' in all its consensual plentitude is possible. This effect can be seen at work in the universal horizon of a market-led capitalist system. The market is presented as an abstract universal; it is a natural, objective device that brings maximum wealth and well-being to all. When the market fails to achieve the impossible vision of its abstract universal, such failures are fantasied as being simple impediments to the market; failures which can be overcome through various compensatory measures, particularly in relation to the removal of antagonisms. The negation of the universal horizon by the symptom, which represents the exception of the universal, is therefore not considered a condition of the market, but rather something external to be fixed; a solution-in-coming.

This kind of analysis fits with a formalist understanding of identity, that A (the market) cannot be non-A (the constitutive failure of the market). Rather, any failure of the market is conceived to be caused by B, an external factor. However, as I have argued in relation to dialectical thought, the market can be both the market as an efficient wealth-producing device and its constitutive failure, such as the radical injustice of market mechanisms, as evident in global poverty. In the terms of Žižek's parallax view, market failure is the symptom/negation of the abstract universal – the market-economy system – with the concrete universal being the determinate reflection of this negation in its constitutive role: that markets can only operate through their own failure. This constant failure, and thus

the constant need for minor alterations in the name of universality, provides *jouissance* to the subjects involved, in the same manner as ideology achieves.

Super-ego demand

As well as fantasy and ideology, the other major factor in the domestication of the symptom is the super-ego. The super-ego is an imperative, an imperative to fill the gaps in the symbolic order (Evans, 2004, p.200-1). The super-ego is vitally related to castration, it is a constant reminder within the symbolic order of the 'name-of-the-father'. The name-of-the-father is a Lacanian term that refers to the force of castration. It insists that the subject follow the symbolic law rather than live within the mythical, primal condition of *Jouissance* (Žižek, 1999, p.268-9). The more the subject follows the law, the guiltier they feel for having given up on the *Jouissance* available to them before castration, so the more they seek compensatory surplus enjoyment by following the law (Kay, 2003, pp.170-171). The ultimate imperative of the super-ego is to enjoy; not only must the subject follow the symbolic law, but they must also enjoy it.

Thus the super-ego is not a subversive force within a discursive structure. Despite this inherent conformity, the super-ego is often the major discursive strategy used by those seeking to make political changes within an abstract universal. The most salient example of the use of the super-ego imperative as a discursive strategy for change is in charity appeals, such as World Vision. Indeed, the super-ego is actually a strong discursive strategy for the maintenance of the abstract universal. It appeals to the subject to maintain the symbolic order, in which they have invested, to fix the faults – the symptoms – within this order. Therefore the super-ego appeal can have a short-term progressive affect, appealing for the subject to recycle more, or to sponsor a Third World child, but ultimately these effects are only made in the name of maintaining the order which is producing these faults. More than this, the super-ego domesticates the disruptive effect of the symptom because these efforts to repair the symbolic fabric indefinitely postpone a confrontation with the Real.

The link between the super-ego and the symptom is best considered through the influence that ideological fantasy has in maintaining the consistency of the social. As with ideology and antagonism, the operation of the super-ego is such that the demand of the symptom is be enjoyed; the super-ego suggests the prospect of suture, but also keeps a distance from this (impossible) fullness. As an illustration, rather than critiquing the capitalist edifice as a totality that can end global poverty, we make a gesture towards such a goal. This act will never accomplish the fantasised end goal, but it does enough to delay the demand of the symptom. This is not, however a wholly productive strategy either for the efficient maintenance of the universal or its dislocation via the symptom/concrete universal. Super-ego *jouissance* cannot be avoided simply by attending to its demands; the more that the subject submits to its demands, the more that those insatiable demands are taken on. Herein lays the crucial link between the operation of ideological fantasy and the super-ego. Rather than taking on the demands of the super-ego so as to repair the social (say, to join the 'Eradicate Poverty' social movement so as to correct the capitalism's inability to end poverty), the subject can turn to ideology and in particular, ideological fantasy, because ideological fantasy is able to externalise and *appear* to treat the cause of the symptom. The more the super-ego demands, the greater the need for ideological fantasy; the demands of the super-ego can be avoided by transferring them into the realm of ideology.

Although the super-ego demand is more 'beneficial' for a cause in the short-term (at least, here, attention is paid to symptoms such as poverty, ecological damage, etc), ultimately both the super-ego and ideology fail to invoke radical structural change. Rather, they produce what appears to be change, but is ultimately a rotation around a central axis, the Real. The super-ego prevents the subject from acting against the symptom and instead provides them with surplus-enjoyment, driven by the imperative to repair the symbolic fabric. What is required in order for thorough-going social change to occur is for the fantasmatic system which constructs the symptom as a temporal impediment to fullness, to be broken and the symptom revealed as the very condition of that system.

Fetishism and Disavowal

The major factor preventing this movement is the *jouissance* that is inherent to fantasy. *Jouissance* creates a bond between the subject and the universal imaginary such that any disconfirming evidence is impotent in its effects, even if the symptom is openly acknowledged. Accordingly, Žižek contends that the analyst or critic also has to go past the point of interpreting discursive formations because of the cynicism through which belief functions (Johnston, 2004; Žižek, 2002, p.241-2). Cynical belief operates through disavowal, where the presence of something is acknowledged yet paradoxically at the same time ignored. The subject may acknowledge the presence of the symptom which negates the abstract universal, but continue to strongly believe and invest in the abstract universal. This paradoxical form of belief is allowed to operate because of the presence of a fetishised object in which the subject invests. The object of the fetish mediates between the Real of the symptom and the abstract universal. Thus the concept of 'cynical distance' or disavowal is another modality through which ideologies operate and through which the Real obtains palpable form within the symptom.

Here, Žižek makes a distinction between repression and fetishism as two different modalities of defence against the effect of the Real. In repression, the subject refuses to acknowledge the symptom to the degree that they are unaware of its distorting influence. In contrast, in fetishism, the subject is aware of the symptom and experiences it as a site of enjoyment. Thus the subject can appear to be a pragmatic realist who fully accepts reality. This acceptance, however, is only founded on the existence of a fetish. When this fetish is removed, the subject has no defence against the lack in the Other (Johnston, 2004). Such has the potential to devastate the psychical state of the subject because it is through the fetish that they relate to reality.

Fetishtic belief is the last modality of defence through which discourses that acknowledge the presence of the symptom are able to pacify the dislocating effects of the symptom. Fetishism occurs where a discourse not only acknowledges the symptom, but also, in a purely interpretive manner, accepts this symptom as being wholly necessary. Thus the

subject may see the faults in a universal such as global capitalism, can recognise its symptoms like poverty and rapid climate change, but still believe that society is possible because those symptoms are represented in fantasmatic ways, such as films, news reports, documentaries, etc. As a further example, a subject in the capitalist system may suggest that they know that markets must fail, but nonetheless they have a large libidinal investment in capitalism and thus act as if markets are not constituted by their failure. Daly (1999b,p.86) gives an interesting example here in relation to the welfare state. The modern welfare state apparatus acknowledges that poverty is not the fault of its victims; they are the product of capitalist development. Nonetheless the welfare state requires its clients to act as if their circumstances are their own responsibility. This belief also operates in Jeffery Sachs' work on poverty (see Sachs, 2005), which will be more fully developed in chapter seven. Essentially, while Sachs constantly refers to the global economy, on his major topic, that of poverty, he suggests that poverty within Third World countries is purely the effect of their domestic policies and practices.

Žižek believes that this is the unfortunate stalemate presented by global capital. As we see in reports from the United Nations and the Bretton Woods organisations, the state of the world – particularly climate change and environmentalism, and its effects – is largely well known and documented. This evidence, which should dislocate the imaginary coherence of capitalism because it stands in stark opposition to these elements, is instead displaced by commodity fetishism. Commodity fetishism, a Marxist concept redeveloped by Žižek, occurs where the capitalist subject places a large libidinal investment in an object of consumption. This object becomes the object of desire, of the *objet a* that allows rips in the symbolic order to be temporarily healed. This suturing that is provided through the fetishism of commodities, mediates the dislocatory effects of capitalism's symptoms. Such is the grip of this economy of pleasure that there has been a closure in the political imaginary, one which has led Žižek to suggest that only a huge global event could possibility displace the organising effects of capital (Johnston, 2004).

Adrian Johnston contends that perhaps the biggest issue with fetishism is that those who fetishise do not feel they have a problem; they gather too much enjoyment from the

symptom. Johnston cites the example of George W. Bush who refuses to take on any environmental policy that may endanger the American libidinal object 'the American Way of Life'.

The efficiency in which the symptom is domesticated and included in the realm of the abstract universal means that any political method that seeks to promote radical change cannot do so from within the boundaries set by the universal horizon. In order to avoid this politically conservative outcome, political formations that seek to evoke a structural shift must try to perform the concrete universal, to stage the material Truth of the hegemonic discursive formation such that the hegemonic formation can not survive in its present state. There are two salient approaches relevant to this task. These focus on identifying two forms of discourse: discourses which identify the constituting role that symptoms are playing in the existence of universal horizon; and discourses of concrete universality. It is to these strategies that we now turn.

Discourses of the symptom

Discourses of the symptom, of which this thesis is an example, connect symptoms with the concrete universal. However, these discourses cannot be articulated from outside of the terms that are set by the hegemonic horizon. This issue stems from the incommensurability of the parallax view. While those who view the symptom awry can sense the presence of the parallax Real, and hence the concrete universal, a translation of terms between the two is impossible. This impossibility, however, does not limit the dialectical process. While the parallax view may appear to have commonalities with formalist logic because of the lack of symbolic translatability between levels of the parallax, the dialectical movement continues through the effect that the Real exerts upon the subject via their encounters with the symptom(s) of the abstract universal(s) by which they organise their lives. The dislocating effect that the Real has upon the subject enables them to shift their gaze from the abstract universal to the concrete universal.

The conditions of possibility for such a shift rely on the dislocating pressure that the Real exerts upon the abstract universal, rather than through special knowledge that the subject might claim to have, that is, rather than through any effect of the symbolic. As has been described previously, the pressure of the symptom is regularly subverted through the symbolic and the imaginary, either through the acknowledgement of symptoms in fantasy, or their repression. However, when these devices are not wholly successful, the symptom can become unruly and have the potential to incite the subject to shift their attention from the universal imaginary, because of the unruly effects of the Real as it inhabits the concrete universal. Discourses of the symptom can simulate the concrete universal by revealing the gap that is opened up within a given universal horizon by its symptom(s). Conversely, the very act of symbolising the symptom domesticates and particularises its potential effects; without the force of the Real the symptom is not a dislocatory force in itself and neither are discourses of the symptom. Instead, the biggest role that this kind of discourse has is to open up a space within the abstract universal, to force an internal dislocation. Thus Žižek suggests that; '(T)oday ... it is more important than ever to HOLD THIS UTOPIAN PLACE OF THE GLOBAL ALTERNATIVE OPEN, even if it remains empty, living on borrowed time, awaiting the content to fill it in' (Žižek, 2000b, p.325. Original emphasis).

Examples of discourses of the symptom include Green Radicalism and Marxist political economy. The example of Marxism is instructive here. Marxism, at a time when the 'working-class' of capital still existed as a strong force in developed/capitalist societies, could have been considered to belong to the category of discourse that I will soon develop below, that is, discourses of concrete universality. Contemporary Marxist thought, however, tends not to identify strongly with today's working class in the Third World or in 'developing countries'. Marxist theory still operates within the terms dominated by the western experience of capitalism. It may usefully identify the role that the symptom plays in constituting the universal (say, Third World poverty and western capitalist life-styles), but it still lies outside of the terms of the concrete universal; it does not inhabit this space.

It is also of limited use to simply present an alternative imaginary that is external to the current universal. This kind of discursive strategy fits into the formalist mode of thought. The excluded element – in Laclau's and Torfing's terminology, the 'anti-A' to the dominant A, or the formalist external 'B' discourse – is most likely to simply entrench differences regarding the identity of opposing universals rather than pose a serious challenge to the existing order. This is because discourses which are simply external to the abstract universal are not bearers of the Real, of the underlying absence that can dislocate the abstract universal. Rather they war they wage with one another happens fully within the symbolic order. Whilst, as Laclau contends, this 'war of position' over the content of an empty signifier – around which an abstract universal is structured – can bring change *within* this form of universality, empty signifiers do not interact with the underlying foundations of the order, that is, with the concrete universal. We see such an operation in the global conflict between Islam and the West. Rather than seriously threaten the hegemonic power of the Western world, Islamic militants are posited as external antagonisms which can be removed through conflict and force.

Having detailed the manner in which such 'unbearable examples', in the form of symptoms, are so efficiently re-constructed and domesticated, one might doubt whether such a task can be achieved. As I have noted, while symptoms like poverty and global climate change are sometimes disavowed or repressed completely, they are generally acknowledged. Yet in the process of being acknowledged, symptoms are domesticated by the devices of fantasy and ideology. An alternative approach relies on shifting position within the parallax; from a focus upon the abstract to a focus upon the concrete universal. These discourses are external to the abstract universal in that they cannot be understood within its terms. As such, discourses of the concrete universal are Real from within the perspective of the abstract universal. It is to the analysis of these discourses that we shall now turn.

Discourses of the concrete universal

When observed through the lens of the ontological parallax, the concrete universal exists as the flip side of the abstract universal. That is, the content of the discourse(s) within the concrete universal cannot be perceived from within the abstract universal. Instead, it can only be seen from its effects upon what Žižek calls the parallax Real (Žižek, 2006a), that is, in what gets staged between two incommensurable perspectives. This effect comes through within the abstract universal's symptom, which remains unsymbolisable until it is domesticated through fantasy (as I have laid out in the preceding sections). Therefore, so long as the effects that come from within the concrete universal remain in an unsymbolised state they have the potential to disrupt the abstract universal. This effect does not come through a symbolic/imaginary translation or interaction, but rather through the pressure that the concrete universal places on the abstract universal. .

An example may help here. If we were to suggest that the abstract universal of capitalism is the production of wealth, the concrete universal is the exploited foundation of this wealth, the Third World poor. This element of capitalism, that the conditions of possibility for the abstract universal lie in the concrete universal, is experienced by the subject as an unwanted symptom. The symptom here is the construction of poverty within the wealthy capitalist world. The reconstruction of the symptom in capitalist terms, through fantasy, has it coming out indissociable from the need for charity, of a humanitarian situation devoid of political consequences, which domesticates the unruly effects of the Real. Indeed, the very act of symbolising the symptom within capitalist discourse tames the effect of the symptom.

Using this example, discourses that are 'of the concrete universal' are discourses that would be occurring within the Third World about the poverty of the Third World, discourses which may not be intelligible within the terms of western perceptions of global capitalism. Their existence might be acknowledged, but could not fully taken on board without that western universal imaginary collapsing. Such an act would dislocate the abstract universal because of the unbearable contradiction between the two universals, between the western and the Third World views. Only through a radical structural shift in

positions can two discourses within a parallax, and the incommensurability of the gap between them, be perceived.

The key to this form of discursive strategy is not to present the concrete universal as simply being external to the abstract universal, such that Third World discourses, for example, (usefully) provide an alternative, indigenous, non-western source of understanding about global poverty. Instead, the goal is to present the concrete universal as an *internal* element to the moment of universality (of global capitalism). If a discourse of concrete universality is positioned outside of the abstract universal from which global poverty is being interpreted, it subverts the dislocating (Real) element that is inherent to it, undermining the dislocating force (the parallax gap) that would otherwise emerge when that concrete universal is positioned as the incommensurable other to the abstract universal. Again, political motivation comes from the force exerted by that incommensurability, not from the ostensible coherence or logic of discourses that form in and around concrete universal. When positioned as an external other to the abstract universal, the symptom gets reconstructed in the image of that universal, as an external antagonism against which the abstract universal is thrown in conflict.

In order to avoid this outcome, the excluded element must present itself as the internal, constitutive exception of the abstract universal. The recent pro-immigrant protests in America are instructive of such an appeal to concrete universality. The main banner held by the immigrant protesters was 'We are America'. Here the protesters' appeal has taken the form of concrete universality. The immigration (alien) workers have been under attack in the United States as an impediment to the fullness of the social, being accused of criminal activity, of taking jobs away from real Americans, etc. Alternatively, what the workers are trying to suggest is that they are a necessary condition of U.S society, and should be treated as such. The workers perform a major role in taking the underclass jobs that maintain the American economy; without them the economy would fall. Therefore the immigrants are an elemental condition rather than an impediment to the system. Hence the appeal 'We are America'.

The key here is not to simply put pressure on the abstract universal (in this case, Americanness) to include the marginalised group within its terms, using a particularised approach common to identity-based politics. This might result, in such a case, in the lodging of human rights claims with the law courts, seeking special application of legal protections to the otherwise illegally-positioned immigrants. Neither would it proceed through the proposing of an alternative universal that could surpass the failure of the former universal to represent the marginalised interests, perhaps leading to a new universal condition such as 'North Americanness' . These approaches will result in the domestication of the marginalised's claims, and to open conflict, respectively. Instead, the discourse, like that of the American immigrant protestors, has to occupy the position of the concrete universal, sustaining its position as the constitutive exception.

The method for identifying discourses in and around the symptom that has been outlined in this chapter will now be applied to two symptomatic discourses of global capital: poverty and Green ideology. The initial aim of this analysis is to examine the manner in which these discourses are constructed so as to manage the symptoms of global capitalism with which each is respectively concerned. These discursive structures will be investigated in terms of the various possible responses outlined above for managing symptoms. Special attention will be given to those forms of the discourses that have the potential to move outside of realm of ideological fantasy and into the status of concrete universality, and which thus have the potential to produce a radical structural shift in and around global capitalism. This task bears upon the viability of psychoanalysis for engaging with politics and, more particularly, the viability of 'a practice of concrete universality'.

Chapter 6: Green Ideology

The following two chapters develops further the dialectical materialist methodological position created in chapter five. It does so by examining two areas of capitalist discourse. These discursive formations, Green ideology and global poverty, represent two of the most pressing issues currently facing humanity. By applying the methodology created in this thesis, a method which acts as a political approach in itself, it is hoped that further insight can be gathered into the viability of this political method, in particular the attempt to 'practice concrete universality'. The initial focus of the discursive analysis is an examination of the defence mechanisms used towards symptoms that exist within the universal horizon of global capitalism. Secondly, both chapters examine the possibilities that exist for dislocating these defence mechanisms and for moving beyond the abstract universal imaginary and its unconscious supplement. They do so by exposing the particular exclusion upon which the abstract universal of global capitalism is based, that is, its concrete universal.

In this chapter we shall first set the theoretical context for this examination of to Green ideology, both in terms of the development of that ideology and of the two forms of parallax that are operating within it. Following this, we will move to identify the particular defence mechanisms that are orientated towards variously occluding and managing the symptoms within the discourses that make up Green ideology. Finally, the potential for disrupting capitalism via its symptoms is considered. It is found that although the environment is an element that constantly threatens to dislocate capitalism, it is difficult to harness this power in a pro-active manner; that is, without waiting for an ecological collapse. Green ideology exemplifies the efficiency of discursive defence mechanisms in domesticating the dislocating effect of a discourse's symptom. Conversely, the importance of the concrete universal – as the impossible element which always returns – is highlighted; hence the political potency of practicing the concrete universal.

Development of Green Ideology

Since the latter half of the 20th century, various terms have been used to refer to Green ideology. Environmentalism and ecologism are two such terms that are often used interchangeably within Green discourse; however, for the purposes of this thesis, a subtle distinction is identified as existing between them. Environmentalism is thought to relate more to reformist, particular Green discourses, whereas ecologism takes a stronger, often ecocentric stand (Heywood, 1998, p.264; Smith, 1998, p.66). When this chapter refers to the total field of thought that relates to the environment, the term 'Green' will be used, whereas 'environmentalism' and 'ecologism' will be reserved for the particular discourses.

A further differentiation, more specific to this thesis, is required between the terms 'nature' and 'the natural'. This distinction owes much to the work of Yannis Stavrakakis, particularly to the contrast he draws between politics and the political (Stavrakakis, 1999, p.71). Nature is a social construct of reality, developed through the symbolic order and its fantasmatic supports. Nature cannot exhaust the natural. The natural, to put it crudely, is that which exists prior to the symbolization of nature, that which gets symbolized under the term 'nature', and that which symbolization fails to name. As such, the distinction between nature and the natural resembles the relationship between reality and the Real. The basic parallax that structures Green ideology – a parallax of ontological difference – e is this incommensurability that exists between nature and the natural. Viewed this way, nature is the abstract universal. It refers to the hegemonic conception of the 'natural'. In contrast, the natural is the actually-existing, hard, material/biological core to nature. It is the trees, seas and genes; the total material entity that exist before and outside of language. In terms suggested by the notion of ontological difference, the natural is the concrete universal. The concrete universal of the natural exceeds that which gets named in and by the universal horizon of 'nature'. In so doing it not only encompasses that which the concept of 'nature' will in time to come successfully name but also the intrinsic failure of 'nature' to ever fully succeed in that task. To rephrase the point in the terms of the ontological parallax, 'the natural' also encompasses the concrete singular

exception of the universal horizon, in that it is only when the abstract universal of 'nature' fails, as revealed by the dislocating effects within that universal of its symptom, that 'the natural' is revealed.

As in any parallax, an incommensurable split operates here. What is specific about this parallax for Green ideology is the relationship that exists between the abstract and concrete universal. Rather than the concrete universal operating only as the disavowed foundation of the abstract universal (of the minimal difference of 'nature' within itself), the concrete universal is also what the abstract universal seeks to represent (that is, the inability of 'nature' to fully encompass 'the natural'). The twist, however, is that in seeking to represent the concrete universal, the abstract represses the essential impossibility of this representation; that nature is not the natural - this repression is similar to the fundamental fantasy which represses the act of castration. Therefore, a minimal difference still operates between nature and the natural. This minimal difference is a modality of the Real because of the incommensurable gap introduced within the moment of universality. Further to this, not only does the Real operate as the parallax Real via the incommensurable gap that persists between the abstract and concrete modalities of the universal, but also through the concrete universal as a force in itself, that is, the natural.

As well as the parallax of ontological difference, a second parallax is in operation within Green ideology, the political parallax. Political parallaxes occur, similar to the parallax of ontological difference, when there is no common ground between two perspectives. However, rather than this incommensurability occurring as a point of difference that is fully internal to a single position or identity, the parallax occurs between two competing positions. These positions are separated by a fundamental social antagonism which introduces a parallax gap, the parallax Real. In Green ideology the parallax Real occurs because of an antagonism within social life that is caused by global capital. This social antagonism separates perspectives which are dominated by the hegemony of global capital from those which are structured only according to environmental concerns. Once again, a symptom of the parallax occurs where the gap (social antagonism) reveals itself.

In the case of the political parallax, symptoms can occur on both sides of the parallax, that is, with both capitalist and environmentalist discourse.

This political parallax has occurred because the logic of capital commands global social organisation: it is the symbolic Real (see Žižek, 2002, p.xii), hegemonising the ground upon which the discourses of nature are constructed. This does not mean that capital is the Real in the sense that it is an impossibility or absence, rather it is that which always returns to its place; it forms the background to which all other discourses relate ; capital has hegemonised hegemony (Žižek, 2000a, p.223; 2000b, p.319). The symbolic Real has much in common with Fink's conception of R_2, the Real after the letter (as I have developed in chapter two). Capital, as the symbolic Real, thereby introduces a limit within the symbolic order as it currently functions. Any discourse that clashes with a discourse of capital creates a social antagonism, a split within the discourse. Social antagonisms reveal themselves through symptoms which reveal the incommensurability of the discourses that have been split by those same antagonisms.

As we shall latter develop, this occurs most prominently in discourses from the Green Party of New Zealand. This chapter reviews several different Green discourses which form part of the local Green ideology, considering the operation of both parallaxes (of ontological difference and the political parallax), as well as the modalities of the Real and their symptoms within that ideology. .

It is theorised that each discourse that makes up Green ideology is dealing with a source of dislocation, seen in the Green critique of industrialism and also in the critique of capital's universally hegemonic power. Notwithstanding the range of dislocations that Green ideology might focus upon, again it is capital that provides a fundamental limit to each of the discourses that become the target of Green critique. Moreover, capital presents a Real limit to Green critique, producing a deadlock around which the plurality of Green discourses rotates. The irresolvable nature of that deadlock creates an additional (Real) effect, in that it incites Green ideology to displace its inability to resolve that

deadlock onto a range of external elements, creating an antagonistic relationship between itself and them.

The first prominent dislocations in the western construction of the natural began in the later 20th century. A concern with the environment began to develop into a discourse of its own in the 1960s, along with a host of other changes in social politics at the time, including anti-racism, feminism and the peace movement. Indeed, Dryzek suggests that a concept of the 'environment' did not exist until the 1960s (Dryzek, 2005, p.5). Environmentalism/ecologism did not, however, become a strong force until the 1970s, when a radical environmental movement developed, part of which was a damming critique of capitalism (Hansen, 1991, p.444). Around this time Green political parties were also established, such as the *Values Party* in New Zealand, which first formed in 1972 (Dryzek, 2005, p.203).

In New Zealand the environmental movement only captured the attention of the masses when it began to threaten the national identity, or 'Thing' in a Lacanian sense. The first uprisings in the 1970s were based around protests against the Manapouri dam and then the testing of nuclear devices in the Pacific. The environmental movement was institutionalised by the State with the anti-nuclear ban of 1985, following various other moves in the 1970s, particularly by Kirk's Third Labour Government. The environmental movement gained considerable of traction from a nationalistic *jouissance* because New Zealanders believed that their 'Thing' was being threatened, either by development, as in the Manapouri dam, or foreigners in the French nuclear tests.

As a consequence of these circumstances, environmentalism has become a part of the New Zealand identity and an increasingly central element in New Zealand politics. The ecologically conservative National Party, for example, has even formed a group called the 'Blue Greens' and United Future call themselves the 'common sense Greens'(United Future, 2005). The ACT party is also getting in on the 'Green' message. This spread of environmental politics is mirrored in western nations around the world, with the current notable exception of the United States.

The rapid progression of environment discourse has been a response to symptoms (of the ontological parallax, of the incommensurability that exists between nature and the natural) that have emerged amidst discourses that have come to articulate concerns about the contemporary degradation of 'nature'. Survivalism, which is discussed below, exemplifies such a symptom. The fantasmatic resources of those discourses have not been able to pacify those symptoms, however, and instead, a range of other discourses have proliferated whose effects have been to to understand and tame the symptoms. These, too, are discussed below.. The domestication of symptoms is not an arbitrary process, rather, as Stavrakakis states: "the direction of the response (to dislocation) depends on the course of action which seems to be more capable of neutralising the terrorising presence of the impossible Real" (Stavrakakis, 2000b, p.109). There are numerous discursive positions which have battled to domesticate the symptoms thrown up by industrial-based capital. Growing popular awareness of their inabilities to fully succeed meant that Green ideology has become more common place, as the latter attempts to deal with the threat to the capitalist imaginary produced by climate change. As such, Stavrakakis states;

> Increasing numbers of people look for a solution to problems such as unemployment and economic deterioration in Green ideology…. If today people are increasing looking to Green ideology in order to solve these problems this means that previously hegemonic identifications have been dislocated. (p.111)

The Symptom: Survivalism

Symptoms within Green ideology come in several different forms. They can be symptoms of the ontological parallax, such as the persistence of rapid climate change, or in the instance of political parallax, the failure of carbon taxes to modify consumption-related behaviours. The initial symptom to dislocate Green ideology is signaled through the emergence of a discourse of Survivalism (Dryzek, 2005). Survivalism reflects a perception that humanity's conception of nature is radically out of balance with 'the

natural'. The act of putting this idea into words – and into a fully-fledged discourse of 'survivalism' – did not, however, fully domesticate the Real that operates with the condition that the words seek to capture. Although the symptom is symbolised, its effects threaten to outstrip the terms in which the abstract universal of 'nature' are being formulated, or in any other terms that could perhaps be reconstructed within that universal horizon. Therefore that which Survivalism seeks to name still threatens to dislocate social life..

Survivalism, which was first constituted through a report by the *Club of Rome* in 1972, is based on the belief that industrial production and economic growth is pushing the earth towards or, perhaps past, its 'carry capacity'; that is, the ecosystem is reaching the maximum level of supportable resource use before it collapses (Dryzek, 2005, p.27). Survivalism is the discourse which first established Green ideology as a political force, although it never fully instituted itself as a positive movement, rather it simply threaten the universal imaginary of global progress. This was a role that it played particularly successfully, based as it was on the reasonable idea that the resources of the planet are limited. As such, Survivalism became the symptom of industrialism and looked likely to threaten the universal status of industrialism, in both its capitalist and communist forms.

Survivalism rejected the idea that new technologies could expand the levels of natural resource that could be made available for sustaining exponential human growth, suggesting that technological advancement simply slowed, rather than reversed, resource depletion. The danger of exponential growth is signified by the '29th day' metaphor, a common survivalist image. This metaphor makes a comparison between lilies in a pond and the carrying capacity of the Earth. It asks which day a pond would be half full if the number of Lilies doubles each day and the pond is full on the 30th. The answer is of course the 29th day, on which it would appear that there is plenty of room for expansion. This kind of imagery proved an enormous threat to the hegemonic system of production. However, the advent of Green ideology has not meant a full dislocation of capitalism or of the industrial ethos. Instead, a number of different discursive strategies emerged to

domesticate this unruly, threatening symptom. It is to these discursive strategies that we now turn.

Discursive strategies: Repression

The existence of a parallax relation between nature and the natural means that any and all discourses of 'nature' will experience some degree of dislocation. When the discourse in question is a capitalist conception of nature, the dislocation is likely to be even stronger because of the drive which that conception supports towards greater exploitation of natural resources. Where this particular kind of this dislocation is triggered – that of unmediated resource depletion – the symptoms of nature are difficult to repress. The closest discourse akin to Green ideology that exemplifies the discursive strategy of repression is Promethean discourse (Dryzek, 2005). Promethean discourse was the initial response to Survivalism; it repressed the symptomatic discourse of Survivalism. The basic premise of Promethean discourse is that humankind has ultimate control of the environment and it is thus able to push the limit of 'global carrying capacity' indefinitely. This is based on free-market economic arguments which suggest that price is the ultimate measure of scarcity; as resources become scarcer, prices will increase producing conservation efforts and a search for substitutes. In order to develop and have access to this technology, societies need to be wealthy. Therefore the key to environmental health is economic wealth.

Promethean discourse is illustrated in the following excerpt from a speech by the leader of the New Zealand ACT Party, Rodney Hide;

> (R)esources aren't defined physically but by science and technology combined with our ability to organise and to make use of them. That's why the human race continues to flourish and prosper 30 years after the environmental doomsday books so terrifyingly predicted our imminent demise. We didn't run out of resources for a very simple reason: we can expand our knowledge and thereby expand our resource base. We now have more resources than ever before. We will have even more tomorrow

> I did travel to countries that had run out of everything. These were the eastern bloc countries. Their problem wasn't the physical limits of their resource base but their failed economic system. That's the other problem with the doomsday books. They said a lot about ecology, systems and feedback loops, but ignored, first, the economic system within which natural resources are defined and used and, second, the feedback loop that prices provide. The failure was fatal to the models' predictive power. If something gets scarce, its price goes up, spurring conservation, the search for more supplies and discovery of alternatives. (Hide, 2005)

A fine line exists between Hide's position and the acknowledgement of the symptom. As the discrepancy between 'nature' and 'the natural' starts to reveal itself, it gets more difficult to repress symptoms. Here lies the correlation between acknowledgement and repression. Promethean discourse sustains repression as its core instrument in that it refuses to acknowledge the symptom of industrial capitalism ('environmental degradation', or similar), but at the same time acknowledges the symptom sufficiently enough to state that technology will solve the problem; that environmental problems are just temporary blips in the market - if degradation really a issue, prices would go up to fix the problem. Indeed, as has been previously noted, market failures are necessary for the continued functioning of the abstract universal of capital. Promethean discourse requires failures to occur such that that failure can be posited, in fantasy, as being contingent or externally driven elements that the market can resolve. The minimal acknowledgement of the symptom (of environmental degradation arising from the effects of industrial-capital), circumscribed within the confines of fantasy (that the problem lies fully within the reach of industrial-capital), enables the idea of failure to remain wholly manageable.

Conversely, the threat of environment collapse, which the discourse of Survivalism inaugurated, has not simply dissipated with Promethean discourse. It constantly impacts on the social order, such is the impact of the symptom as an excess to the system. Now, although humanity is still threatened by environmental dislocation, which as Žižek shows is one of the modalities in which we regularly meet the Real (Žižek, 1999, p.4), this threat is increasingly particularised and dealt with within a plurality of other discourses around this fundamental blockage; the parallax relationship between economic growth and environmental limits. The symptom continues to impact upon social life and thus the

Promethean discourse ultimately fails: although it fits in well with the ideological fantasy of economic growth, it fails to adequately domesticate its symptom, the continued failure of 'nature' to represent 'the natural'.

Acknowledgement of the symptom

The failure of Promethean discourse has produced a range of new discursive perspectives that acknowledge the presence of the symptom –- of the existence of environmental limits and or rapid climate change – yet nevertheless continue to domesticate its effects. In terms of the political parallax of Green ideology, these discourses operate firmly on the side of global capital. They function through the ideology/fantasy of science and the market, as well as the super-ego demand that finds expression in Green consumerism and 'clean, green living'. As well as these mechanisms, there is a large degree of fetishism: environmental limits are overlooked in favour of the 'environmentally friendly' consumption of commodities. Disavowal/fetishism is a most powerful force and currently perhaps the strongest defence mechanism within Green ideology against the persistent incommensurability of 'nature' and 'the natural', of the inability of 'nature' to contain 'the natural' (that is, the presence of symptoms). .

Ideology

Another strong defense mechanism used against the symptom in Green ideology is the set of discourses around 'problem-solving'. These discourses represent the ultimate ideological position insofar as they claim to sit outside of ideology, taking a purely neutral perspective on the issue of the environment. Problem solving discourses, such as Democratic Pragmatism, Administrative and Economic Rationalism, take the status quo as given and do not debate the issue of environmental limits which variously drives the division between the Survivalist and Promethean discourses. Instead, problem-solving discourses reject any call to 'ideology' and, rather, focus on pure 'scientific' evidence.

New Zealand environmental politics rotate between these three types of problem-solving discourses: radical sustainability, democratic participation, and economic adjustment.

The Green Party enters furtherest into the discourses of radical sustainability, but increasingly is looking to those relating to democratic participation and to the deployment of economic instruments like the Kyoto Protocol.

By taking the capitalist status quo as a given, problem solving discourses are able to supplement the universal appeal of capital whilst somewhat dealing with the symptom of environmental change, either through domesticating it through its particularization. Good examples of the latter are the arguments that that no real change or sacrifice is required, just good management, or through positing the existence of an external antagonism (often Green Radicalism: "we are not captured by the extremist fringe of the environmental movement or it's ideology" (NZ First, 2005a)).

Some parties, such as New Zealand First, take a purely economic line. To this end, one of its fifteen fundamental principles is: "(W)ise governments view the preservation and enhancement of the environment as sound economics. All environmental policies will be proactive with a view to creating employment and sustainable wealth whilst improving one of our few competitive advantages" (NZ First, 2005b). Likewise, David Benson-Pope, the former Labour Government Minister for the Environment states: "While there are challenges ahead to maintain economic growth without damaging the environment or quality of life, I'm determined to face up to these challenges - there is no alternative" (Benson-Pope, 2006).

Fetishism and Disavowal

Perhaps the most powerful form of discourse for protecting a universal horizon against its symptom is that of disavowal. This is especially so when it is combined with fetishism. The Economic Rationalist discourse is a powerful example of this because it is able to particularise the environmental threat by maintaining the stance that a radical change is not required. Although this discourse does not deny the existence of the symptom, it offers an easy solution, obtainable without sacrifice; indeed the *jouissance* of consumption is frequently offered. Within Green ideology, Economic Rationalist discourse takes this position. Economic Rationalism is very similar to the Promethean

discourse; it includes much the same actors and assumptions, but makes more of an effort to account for environmental threats. Economic Rationalism is almost a sequel to Promethean discourse. Instead of simply letting the market take care of the environment, Economic Rationalist discourse seeks to establish markets where they did not exist previously, such as for water or pollution. Carbon trading and the Kyoto agreement are examples of the new establishment of markets. At its most radical, Economic Rationalism enters into a certain restructuring of the capitalist economy, similar to the discourse of Ecological Modernism. The former discourse is most readily associated with the political and economic Right, but increasingly even social democratic political parties and discourses are seeking to 'harness the power of the market'. The Green party utilises these kind of movements, seeking to 'Naturalise' capitalism (Green Party, 2005a, 2005c, 2005d), such is the impotence of the ecological side of the political parallax.

Economic Rationalism also operates as an act of disavowal in that it acknowledges the presence of climate change and environmental limits as symptoms, yet continues to operate as if they did not exist by progressing on with, indeed strengthening, the very measures that created these conditions. Like most disavowals, the mechanism that allows this paradoxical operation is a fetish. In this case the fetish comes from consumption, as we shall also later develop in relation to the super-ego. In the case of fetishism and of acts of disavowal, the subject acknowledges, often only unconsciously, that consumption and the free-market are destroying the environment, yet refuses to give up the *jouissance* they obtain through consumption. *Jouissance* makes this fetish very difficult to break down. Indeed it is the *jouissance* received from consumption and 'our (western) way of life' that creates the social antagonism identified through the lens of the political parallax, between global capital and environmental limits.

Super-ego demand, ideological fantasy and the Empty Signifier

Green discourses which have operated through ideological fantasy, such as the problem-solving discourses, or through fetishism, however, have not been able to fully integrate the symptom within their universal horizon. Instead, as is the inherent condition of the

nature/natural ontological parallax, the symptom continues to operate as an excessive element within the discourse. In apparent recognition of the continuing unruliness of 'the nature', a new breed of discourse has emerged. These discourses take on a super-ego demand, in that the discourse suggests that the subject 'ought' to conserve the environment. 'Sustainability', predominately the discourses of Ecological Modernism and Sustainable Development, as well as Green consumerism, are the stable discourses of this strategy. As well as this, empty signifiers are frequently used such that an illusion emerges that something exists in the gap between the two elements of the political parallax, between the concerns for capitalist growth and environmental protection. In psychoanalytic terms, such signifiers subvert the staging of absence that occurs between those interests, giving (facile) symbolic form to the Kantian transcendental illusion (Žižek, 2006a, p.18).

Discourses that advocate sustainability do not seek to subvert capitalism but, rather, seek to strengthen its hegemony; they attempt to suture the political parallax by drawing upon discourses that privilege capital at the expense of those that would highlight environmental concerns. They implicitly and explicitly accept that capitalism is the 'only game in town' and therefore ecological movements have no option but to seek to make it profitable for capital to be 'Green'. Success in doing so would effectively dissolve the social antagonism that constructs the parallax; there would be no antagonism because ecologicalism fully accepts the legitimate hegemony of capital. This involves some restructuring of capital, but mostly in the name of capital, not the environment. That said, although these discourses seek to 'Green' capitalism, all they end up achieving is a pacification of the ecological symptom and a market advantage, playing to the super-ego demand of the consumer. The Green consumerist movement exemplifies this super-ego demand well in its advocating of 'Green' shopping, the use of re-usable shopping bags, and so on (Hickman, 2006). An interesting alternative to the super-ego approach is provided by the *Conservation Fund* and their *Carbon Zero Calculator*. Here the consumer is able to approximate their carbon footprint and then 'Go Zero' by making a donation towards the planting of native trees to balance out your production of carbon. I

could remove my guilt, pollute all I want and 'Go Zero' for a mere US$35.50! (The Conservation Fund, 2006).

Green consumerism is one of the strongest Green discourses because its erases popular doubts about the feasibility of consumption (over-consumption being suggested as a symptom of capital), suggesting that we can continue consuming at the same rate, as long as we do it in a more efficient and ecologically sensitive manner (Smith, 1998,p.88). Green consumerism also hooks into the very seductive ideological *jouissance* that inheres within the act of consumption itself. However, the duel operation of super-ego and consumption can produce a paradox of increased consumption. With Green consumption, the more one conforms, the guiltier one feels. Added to Green consumption as a modality of the super-ego, we have the paradoxical situation that Green consumption can lead to more consumption; that Green consumption could mean limiting consumption does not fit the co-ordinates of the capitalist matrix, nor the demands of the super-ego. Therefore, although Green consumerism cannot be dismissed outright – undoubtedly it is better for the environment to buy recycled toilet paper than regular – the obscene underside of this action is that it domesticates the environmental symptom. It reduces the environmental problem to an individual one, rather than a constitutive structural fault, and suggests that the problem can be solved through series of small actions. Such is also the message currently being peddled by Al Gore in his documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. Ultimately then, Green Consumerism cannot be viewed in a positive manner.

The Political Parallax; Empty signifiers

In taking on all these demands, the term 'Sustainable Development' becomes an empty signifier in the sense which Laclau intends; it has no meaning itself, merely signalling the possibility of meaning, and becomes socially effective to the extent that it gets filled by other discourses such that a condition of political hegemony is achieved. More than this, the reliance of discourse upon an empty signifier allows for the temporary production of a transcendental illusion. The transcendental illusion suggests that something exists in the place of nothing, within the gap that exists between the two mutually exclusive

perspectives of the political parallax (of capital/the environment). The empty signifier, by giving a name to this parallax gap, suggests that it can be productively filled. The possibility of such a suture produces *jouissance*, stemming from the promise of existential wholeness.

The use of the empty signifier 'Sustainable Development', in particular, has been proving vital for the smooth operation of political formations that function through or align themselves with Green ideology. Sustainable development seeks to avoid the pitfalls of the political parallax between development and environmental degradation. However, the use of Sustainable Development as a suturing tool does not in any way suggest that it is a middle or neutral point between the discourses. Rather, empty signifiers are hegemonised by the dominant side of the parallax – in this case, capital. Thus, while Green parties and movements may insist on the value of being 'Sustainable', the term is being appropriated by capital to mean 'sustainable growth', which may or may nor have an environmental edge. Thus its very emptiness of the term gives 'Sustainable Development' its value; it can be taken on by many discourses without compromise, most notably capital.

Capital, however, induces a limit-point within the discourses of sustainable development. This limit again reflects the parallax gap. The parallax gap is revealed in sets of symptoms that emerge around the notion of sustainability. Emblematic here in the New Zealand context of such symptoms has been the popular resistance to Green taxes , such as the now infamous 'Fart Tax' and the 'Carbon Tax'. The symptoms of the parallax reveal themselves where the subordinate discourse attempts to push beyond the limits set for it by the hegemonic horizon. This has been the case in Green ideology when moves by ecological discourses begin to threaten capital. These moves are rejected through the threat of 'disinvestment' from capital. The disinvestment threat is not direct, but it is real. Governments in liberal-capitalist democracies stand or fall on their abilities to increase and maintain economic growth. Any discursive move and policy that may directly threaten the interests of capital is immediately written off as a threat to economic growth and is rejected. Efforts to move environmental protection along market lines have been rejected because of their costs to capital.

The Green Party Charter states what appears to be an anti-capitalist manifesto: "Unlimited material growth is impossible. Therefore the key to social responsibility is the just distribution of social and natural resources, both locally and globally" (Green Party, 2005b). In stating such, however, the Green Party are forced to re-interpret the idea of sustainability in a manner that resonates with capitalist sensibilites, in the naïve hope that they can manipulate its meaning beyond that prescribed by the hegemony of economic mangerialism. For example, in the initial issue of the Green's business publication *'The Real Bottom Line'*, co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons suggests that sustainable business is about "Future-proofing the New Zealand Economy"(Fitzsimons, 2006c). Similarly, in an article entitled 'More Power to Consumers', Fitzsimons suggests that more information be given to consumers so that they can make better decisions in their choice of energy supplier (Fitzsimons, 2006b). The Green Party are thus politically limited because they know it is electoral 'suicide' to take on a position that may evoke 'disinvestment' threats. Other political parties in New Zealand are also aware of the power of this threat, accusing the Green Party of being 'Watermelons'; green on the outside, red in the middle (Baldock, 2005; Hide, 2005).

External discourses- The flip-side of the political parallax

On the other side of the political parallax that structures Green ideology lies those discourses which are excluded from the dominant terms of the debate; those that do not fit with the limits set by global capital. Green radicalism is by far the most common of these. Of all the Green discourses that have been analysed in this chapter, it is only Green Radicalism that is not totally anthropocentric. Anthropocentric elements do remain within Green Radicalism, but a large element of this discourse focuses on the ecocentric component of Green ideology, a component that is regularly excluded from the Green discourses reviewed above. The predominance of ecocentricism within Green radicalism reveals the incommensurability between it and capital; no common ground exists between them.

Discourses such as Green radicalism appear to threaten capital because they operate outside its hegemonic domain. It is precisely this fact, however, that prevents Green Radicalism from becoming a threat: Green Radicalism remains fully outside, external, and alien to discourses of industrial-capitalism. External to those discourses, Green Radicalism is fully Other. In the parallax of ontological difference, alternatively, the concrete universal is fully internal to the abstract. In contrast, in the political parallax – which Green Radicalism forms in conjunction with the opposing discourses of industrial capitalism – the excluded Other appears more like Laclau's constitutive outside; it has no common link with the dominant paradigm, the only link is through exclusion via a core social antagonism. While this exclusion does give stability to the dominant position by allowing the establishment of limits, at the same time it does not act as a threat in the same manner as the concrete universal. The only threat comes in the possibility of revealing the limits of the hegemonic discourse and thus the contingency of its construction.

Green Radicalism is also a fatally flawed discourse in itself, although in a different manner from other Green discourses. Green Radicalism is very essentialist and totalitarian; it is just another, more radical attempt to deal with the symptoms of the parallax between nature and the natural. Radical Green discourse seeks to find a fundamental and essential unity between its elements, based on a 'natural' bio-centric harmony between humanity and nature. Paradoxically, ecocentricism can only be expressed anthropocentrically, that is, through language. Like any essentialist discourse, when the inherent impossibility of its construction is exposed, this dislocation is dangerously displaced onto an external antagonism. In the case of radical Green thought, capitalism is posited as the antagonism that is responsible for the failure of 'the natural'. While the positioning of capital as an antagonism may at first glance appear subversive, in the case of Green Radicalism, it is another example of a fantasmatic operation. As such, radical Green thought is unlikely to present a major threat to capital; its more likely role is to set the very boundaries of capitalism, of that which capitalism will colonise next.

It is possible, as Smith (1998, p.163) suggests, that Green Radicalism could make more of an impact if it focused on the role of culture. It should contest the meanings of terms and fight for the hegemonic re-occupation of terms that originated from the Green movement, such as sustainability, rather than leaving the task of naming environmental reality to capital and those who are prepared to compromise with capital. This suggestion would make Laclau proud. Laclau would argue that the role of the excluded terms of the parallax, such as Green Radicalism, is to form a unity of sorts and fill the empty signifier which presently covers the parallax gap with meaning (such as 'sustainable development'). What this approach ignores, however, is the limits that are set for the construction of meaning by capital: capital functions as the Real, in the symbolic sense; it operates as a social antagonism; and it also generates *jouissance* that maintains sets of fantasies, like those associated with consumption, which support capital.

As a consequence of these matters, the battle over an empty signifier, even from the position of excluded terms, can only operate up to a certain limit. That limit is set by the symbolic Real. An alternative strategy, that might avoid such limits, is to reveal the social antagonism which gives rise to the exclusion of 'the natural' and to thereby enable play to occur on the parallax Real that exists between 'nature' and 'the natural'. In this sense, Green radicalism would move to be a discourse of the symptom, rather than the impotent element of a political parallax. To do so, Green Radicalism would have to lose its essentialist edge and instead take a position that attempts to stage the concrete universal. We shall now consider the possibilities of such a position.

Discourses of the symptom

As has been previously noted, it is the concrete universal which holds the most hope for generating social change. The issue, however, is accessing the power of the concrete universal through the parallax gap. In the terms of the abstract universal, the concrete universal appears only as an effect through the Real. The basic thesis of the parallax view is that both positions can only be seen if viewed awry, outside of the hegemonic terms of the universal horizon. By identifying the concrete universal – the constitutively excluded element, the unbearable example – the analyst is able to practice concrete universality.

What such a performance achieves is a viewpoint which allows for a reinterpretation of the symptom. In doing so, a strategic political position is able to place pressure on the abstract universal, by deconstructing the unconscious supplement which supports the abstract universal. This deconstruction occurs via the Real, through the gap that is opened up by the symptom as a representative of the concrete universal. Such a strategy does not require a positive imaginary. Instead, only a negative positioning of the symptom is necessary.

Environmentalist and ecological movements are particularly strong at playing on symptoms of the abstract universal. However, the affect of capital appears to be too strong for such strategies to succeed, pulling such symptoms back into the capitalist imaginary of a fully-functioning global marketplace by a variety of defence mechanisms that have been detailed above. It seems that the more that symptoms dislocate the universal horizon of capital, nature, the stronger the reaction from within Green discourses associated with capital. Although these reactions may on the surface appear beneficial, such as recycling, greater energy efficiency etc, they mask a fundamental limit – capital as the Real, both as a social antagonism and the symbolic Real. It is here that we return to the parallax between 'nature' and 'the natural'. Although symptoms are constantly being pulled back into the unconscious supplement which supports the dominant discourse, there is a limit to that process. That limit is the concrete universal, which dislocates the process on account the Real which inheres within itself, here, within 'the natural'. It is to the concrete universal that we shall finally turn.

'Discourses' of the Concrete Universal

The Real, through the concrete universal ('the natural') is constantly impacting on the discursive construction of 'nature'. Here, however, the concrete universal is not a discourse. 'The natural' can be abstracted and measured, as through 'natural science', but this process, as the naming of 'the natural', simply adds to the discursive construction of 'nature'. Conversely a dislocating effect occurs when knowledge is generated through the natural sciences that cannot be easily integrated into our conception of 'the natural' (that

is, 'nature'). That said, the act of trying to produce such knowledge has a domesticating effect of its own. It sustains the fantasy of the scientific paradigm, that humans have control over 'the natural'. Therefore, when evidence emerges through the natural sciences that 'the natural' is failing – for example, that the Arctic sea ice has declined 14% over the past year (Fitzsimons, 2006a) – a process of fetishised disavowal kicks in, with science being elevated to the status of a fetishised object. Yes, we know that the environment is failing, yet we act as if it is not because we have faith in science to provide an alternative solution.

The cultural embeddedness of this conservative process gives rise to the proposition that it is only when humanity is truly forced to experience environmental degradation, without any symbolic resources that can pacify the event, that true socio-political change is possible. Žižek contends that liberal-capitalism cannot go on forever; ecological collapse is one of the possible explosions that can destroy it; all we can do is be prepared when this explosion does occur (Osborne, 1996, p.44). A less dramatic possibility also lies with the prospect of Peak Oil; the idea that global oil production has peaked and is now beginning to decline. Peak Oil is an interesting natural example of concrete universality. Capitalism is dependent on oil for its efficient operation; no other source of energy has been found with anything like its portability and efficiency. The abundance of natural resources for exploitation, Oil foremost amongst them, is a predominant element of the capitalist conception of nature. Whilst Peak Oil is not a concrete universal in itself, Peak Oil does reveal the concrete universal (and thus the parallax Real) within an ontological parallax by invoking the gap between nature and the natural. However, for radical change to occur, global capital would have to go beyond the prospect of Peak Oil (which we are facing now), beyond the Survivalist discourse, and into the event of Peak Oil; that is, to encounter the end of cheap oil. This event would radically destabilise global capital, forcing its limits into reality.

Conversely, to rely on the occurrence of such an event would be a politically passive strategy, although not to the same degree as to await complete ecological collapse. However, it appears that a last remaining alternative available to us is equally passive, to

resist the terms of the debate, to resist the need to act. This latter alternative takes seriously the idea that any resistive an action can only occur within the co-ordinates of global capital and that it is better to question the very ideological background against which all action can occur, that is, capitalism (Žižek, 2006b, p.238). This alternative cautions against mobilising Green ideology, knowing that it is inevitably played out against the background of capital, and instead suggests a strategy that asks why no alternative exists, why it is, in Žižek words, that '(T)oday we can easily imagine the extinction of the human race, but it is impossible to imagine a radical change of the social system - even if life on earth disappears, capitalism will somehow remain intact' (p.149).

Chapter 7: Poverty

Global poverty is one of the major issues facing humanity. As such, along with climate change, it is one of the main areas of concern for the political Left. Like climate change, poverty is a symptom of capitalism; its existence reveals a point of failure within the global capitalist imaginary. Discursively, the major difference between the two symptoms is that whereas Green ideology is increasingly impacting upon global society, global poverty does not have the same ubiquitous influence. This is not to suggest that the existence of poverty is ignored or repressed; the statistical evidence of its existence is overwhelming. Rather, because those in the western world are divorced from the extremes of third world poverty, poverty is able to be constructed, and accessed, in a manner and time of our choosing. This means that instead of having to cope with the constant return of the symptom, discourses of global capital and development are able to effectively disavow the presence of poverty as that upon which the capitalist production of wealth (and 'freedom') is produced.

Defining Poverty

Poverty has many meanings. The most common divide between those meanings is between the notions relative and absolute poverty. Relative poverty is a statistical definition, normally based on a nominal level that sits below the median average income within a given economy. Because of its political definition, relative poverty is a controversial measure. Indeed, the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development does not measure 'poverty', rather it uses a concept of 'low-incomes' that is based on a three-level scale; 40, 50 and 60% of median family income (*The Social Report*, 2005). However, those who are considered in poverty in New Zealand may have an income that would place them amongst the wealthy in a third world economy.

Absolute poverty, on the other hand, is measured in relation to a total lack of resources to continue living and is still often symbolised in monetary terms. Less than US$1 a day is

a regular measurement point for absolute poverty. Such measurements of poverty, however, are an attempt to name the Real.

These arbitrary measurement points are in themselves political and contribute to the domestication of poverty as a symptom. Rather, than attempt to fix their meaning once and for all, it might be better to let the meaning of poverty reside in a state of tension, never quite definitively conceptualised. In this way poverty would continues to exert is dislocating (Real) effect. For those who experience absolute poverty, definitions are anyway fairly irrelevant, particularly to those who are facing the immediacy of death via poverty. It is this type of poverty that we shall be referring to within this chapter.

Following on from the analysis of Green ideology, this chapter seeks to examine the manner in which discourses within capitalism deal with the symptom of poverty. Because poverty, as a symptom of capitalism, does not impact on the universal imaginary of capital as often as Green ideology, it is difficult to find a coherent body of thought that could be labelled 'poverty ideology'. Rather, poverty exists as a symptom amongst numerous differing discourses, centring on the theme of global development. These discourses include global development itself, human rights, charity, health and trade, amongst others. Recently, though, strong efforts to 'eliminate' poverty have developed. These efforts have reached the western world under the guise of the 'Make Poverty History' and 'ONE' campaigns. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations, as part of their Millennium Declaration, are in the same category as these campaigns; indeed, the MDGs may be their precursor. The prominence of these discourses – which have also forced other responses, critical or otherwise – suggests the possibility that an an ideology of poverty will develop in the future, that is, a system of discourses around the term poverty.

At the moment, however, no such body of thought exists. Instead, in this chapter, we shall examine the discursive responses to the symptom of poverty, both as it is presented in the most recent campaigns against poverty, and as the result of the concrete universal which is akin to the condition of absolute poverty.

The most prominent theoretical text representing the recent campaigns to eliminate poverty is Jeffery Sach's *The End of Poverty* (2005). Sachs both describes poverty through his notion of the global development ladder, and sets forward a prescription for ending poverty 'in our time'. Sach's discourse is particularly interesting because it does not deny the existence of poverty. Rather, he proposes a 'developmental ladder' upon which all nations lie. Sach's main interest is getting those in absolute poverty onto this ladder. As such, in terms of discursive strategy for the symptom, *The End of Poverty* is an ideological acknowledgement of the symptom, contending that poverty is not necessary but, rather, that 'development' is possible for all.

Absolute Poverty as the Concrete Universal

Here, Sachs positions himself within the parallax of ontological difference. He describes in specific terms the existence and experience of extreme poverty; indeed he produces a theory of the 'poverty trap' that keeps people in poverty. However, Sachs cannot link the actual existence of poverty with his notion of the global economy; there is no common ground between the concrete universal – absolute poverty – and the universal horizon to which his work subscribes, of 'global development'. This is an example of the operation of an ontological parallax *par excellence*. This parallax is often in operation within discourses of poverty. The World Bank series on the 'voices' of poverty also describes the experiences of the poor from the perspective of the poor, those voices having been incited through processes of participative research (Narayan, Chambers, Shah, & Petesch, 2000; Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher, & Koch-Schulte, 2000; Narayan & Petesch, 2002). Yet, like *The End of Poverty*, this series does not, or cannot, make a link between the conditions of poverty about which they speak and the global economy. On the other side of the parallax, the World Bank publishes, and makes regular interventions into the global economy. Yet it cannot seem to bring the two perspectives together, accept under the suturing effect of empty signifiers such as 'development'.

The concept of development also animates Sach's discourse. It makes the point that inequality is inherent to all notions of development, whether economic or otherwise.

Classical economists such as Adam Smith and David Riccardo have long considered some degree of inequality as necessary in capitalism. Within the global economy, inequality is patently unjust; the life-chances of the poorest, to enter into capitalist discourse, are incomparable to that of the elite. Inequality was an excepted part of capitalist discourse because capitalism had been assumed to be just; to each according to their efforts and merits. Because of the dislocating effects of global inequality, however, the very issue of inequality is largely disavowed within contemporary capitalist discourse. Thus, Sach's work inserts an important message within that discourse, insofar as it acknowledges inequality as being a necessary factor within capitalism. As a consequence of this, Sach's work is able to argue that 'sweatshops' are positive for local economies, notwithstanding the fact that they remain symptoms of capitalist wealth (Sachs, 2005, p.11). This broadening of the universal horizon so as to favourably include questionable institutions like sweatshops has the effect of domesticating this symptom, even thought the act of doing so highlights poverty in its absolute form. As has been noted in previous chapters, the symptom is developed as an excess to the abstract universal, an excess which reveals the failure of that universal. Therefore the content of the symptom depends upon the discursive context in which it is formed; the symptoms of Sach's development ladder are significantly different to the pure free-market approaches that can be taken to global economics. In the latter, sweatshops can be considered a symptom of capitalism, particularly in contrast to the highly symbolic consumption-orientated capitalism of the west, as has been highlighted by Naomi Klein in *No Logo* (2001).

In contrast to the symptoms of free-market capitalist discourse, the symptoms of Sach's approach to development lie in two separate areas. The first is the symptom that Sachs acknowledges (although not as a symptom), those who are 'caught in a poverty trap' and who cannot make it onto the global development ladder. Second, there are symptoms of the parallax by which Sach's work is inflicted; the incommensurability between global economics and the ground-level analysis of poverty. This chapter examines both the manner in which symptoms have been constructed by Sachs and others amongst the 'make poverty history' discourses, as well as the discursive strategies that contain the symptoms that get produced by the ontological parallax that structures these

constructions of poverty. Certainly there is a strong link between the construction of symptoms and their discursive domestication, which we shall turn to shortly. However, what is not subject to symbolic construction is the concrete universal, from which the symptom stems.

For Jeffery Sachs the symptom is those who are not on the ladder, the $1/6^{th}$ of the world population who live on less than $1 a day (Sachs, 2005, p.18-9). In this thesis it is argued that this symptom is a constitutive element of capital; the concrete universal that provides the pre-condition for the generation of wealth. That is, the occurrence of this absolute poverty is necessary for the continued progress of global capitalism. The basic logic of capitalism is the need to continuously produce profit. Profit, in its rawest form is produced through the gap between production costs and selling price. This gap has been maintained through an over supply of raw materials, both human and natural. The excess of supply has kept the price of these production costs down. When it comes to natural inputs such as primary commodities, this process is increasingly complex, dealing with subsidies and tariffs. With labour though, the situation is less complicated. The excess supply of labour keeps labour prices at a minimum. In Sach's developmental ladder this is acceptable. What Sachs ignores, however, is that for labour prices to be kept at this price, there has to be a reserve army of workers willing to work for that price. When wages are already dangerously low, for those who remain in reserve, unemployment may mean death.

Thus death via poverty is both an exception to the capitalist imaginary and yet a requirement of the system; a concrete universal. The ultimate reserves are those outside of the manufacturing sector, who live a subsistence existence, within, but essentially outside the capitalist economy. Arguments of this sort enter into the Marxist territory of theories of military imperialism and the construction of economic empires (see Arrighi, 2005a, 2005b). While such insights are valuable for political analysis, they are not the ultimate goal of this present argument. Instead, what I seek to establish here is the necessity of a a conceptual link, within capitalism, between the capitalist production of extreme wealth and the equally capitalist production of extreme and absolute poverty.

Ultimately, the link between absolute poverty and capitalist wealth is repressed, or at least disavowed. This missing link is the key to the parallax that operates in the representation of poverty. However, while the concrete universal cannot be accessed through the terms that are suggested by the universal horizon of global capital, its symptoms do appear. This chapter will now move to the analysis of the discursive strategies that come to be used to domesticate the Real, dislocating effect within poverty-related discourses of the symptom of absolute poverty. The analysis will follow the methodology that was laid out in chapter five and that has been applied to Green ideology in the previous chapter. There are several similarities between the manner in which symptoms come to be domesticated within Green ideology and the way in which this happen within the discourses related to poverty, although the symptoms differ significantly in form.

Poverty is easier to ignore than climate change or environmental degradation and as such is more often repressed, or at least disavowed. The most common strategy though is super-ego demand – 'we ought to eliminate poverty'. Here, the super-ego is given full reign, deployed thus by charities such as World Vision, as well as the Make Poverty History campaign. However, there are also opportunities for disrupting capitalism, through the acknowledgement of poverty as a symptom and concrete universal of capital. Unlike Green ideology, the concrete universal of poverty can exist in its own terms as a discourse. Through this discursive existence, the concrete universal can apply dislocating pressure to the universal horizon. Before we return to this possibility, however, we must first review the discursive strategies that commonly get employed to domesticate of the symptom and, thus, to maintain the capitalist universal horizon. We shall start with repression.

Discursive Strategies; Repression

All hegemonic discourses operate with an element of repression, of a repression of the concrete universal upon which they are based. Poverty is no exception. The link between

an abstract universal within capitalism, especially those that emphasize capital's ability to generate wealth, and the concrete universal of absolute poverty, is an impossible one. This impossibility generates the operation of repression. Repression occurs so the subject avoids the horrific exposure to the Real. In this case, as well as the parallax Real, the concrete universal is linked to the real Real, the hard kernel of horror, to the sight of emaciated children about to die from hunger or poverty-related disease. However, as has been noted, true repression of symptoms generally only occurs when they cannot be included within the universal horizon without dislocation occurring to that horizon. This may be the case if citizens of capitalist societies were regularly exposed to the true horror of absolute poverty, of the concrete universal of capitalism. But this is not the case. Rather, poverty can be constructed through fantasy such that the shock of encountering it is pacified. Therefore there are few discourses which actively repress poverty as a symptom; the statistical evidence is overwhelmingly strong.

What is more common is the disavowal of the symptom. Within disavowal, the subject acknowledges the existence of the symptom, but simultaneously ignores it. Indeed, absolute poverty provides the disavowed foundation of capitalism, certainly when one considers the impact of colonial empires and slavery. In terms of repression, it is not the content of the symptom that is repressed in the disavowal of poverty; rather it is the relationship between poverty and wealth that is repressed. Many repress the possibility that capitalism may cause poverty as well as wealth, again we see the limitations of formalist logic. This kind of repression is seen in the work of anarcho-capitalist economist, David Friedman (son of Nobel-prize winning economist Milton Freidman) who writes: "(F)ew people believe that capitalism leads inexorably to the impoverishment of the masses; the evidence against this thesis is too overwhelming" (Friedman, 1978, p.26).

In terms of the discursive strategies used to domesticate absolute poverty, we shall include this particular type of disavowal in the category of repression. Disavowals are only able to operate because the existence of a fetish. The most powerful fetishised object in these discourses is that capitalism is the only feasible economic option. It is theorised

that because capital has brought strong economic growth and a correspondent increase in living standards to the western world, than there is no reason that this cannot be applied to the rest of the world. This is an argument often used by Jeffery Sachs (2005, pp.18-19). Sachs, and others, often cite the example of South-East Asia, where many people have been brought out of extreme poverty through economic growth that has been bought on by the rapid expansion of the manufacturing sector, fueled by the availability of cheap labour. As Don Brash contends in relation to global poverty, "we need to continue with further growth and development. I cannot see any solution to the problems of the many desperately poor people in the Asia Pacific region that does not require a continuation of sustained economic growth" (2006, para.27).

Very similar to the kind of solutions proposed by Friedman and Brash, Ken Shirley, a former MP for the neo-liberal ACT party in New Zealand, states that in order to eliminate poverty capitalism has to go further than it has, to be truer to itself and to remove all trade barriers. Shirley argues that once trade barriers have been removed, and capital is enabled to move freely without government interference, wealth can finally be shared globally. Shirley asserts: "I am appalled at the hypocrisy of some parties who rail against global trade and free trade agreements on the one hand and yet simultaneously argue that a greater commitment is required for overseas development assistance" (Shirley, 2005, para.9).

This kind of discursive method could well be defined as an 'acknowledgement of the symptom', mediated by the positing of an external antagonism, rather than as repression. The most powerful device for the repression of poverty as a symptom is the assertion that capital is the only possible option. In its formalist guise, this argument becomes that because capital has brought wealth to some, it can bring wealth to all. However, despite the growing wealth of the world, for at least $1/6^{th}$ of the global population, poverty is still an extreme, life-threatening reality. For those who champion anti-poverty movements, it appears to be obvious that something ought to be done about this excess. This acknowledgement of the capitalism's symptom, of extreme poverty, occurs through several different devices to which we shall now turn.

Acknowledgement of the Symptom

Acknowledgements of poverty, when they happen without repression or disavowal, are always fantasmatic in form. The sheer scale of poverty means that it cannot be contained in discourse, there is always an excess that needs further taming. The domestication of this excess is the function of several elements of discourse that were introduced in chapter five and discussed in the previous chapter in relation to rapid climate change. The predominant element is ideological fantasy, which maintains the consistency of the social, or at least the prospect of such consistency. The driver of this process is *jouissance*, specifically the unconscious drive around the idea of a return to a time of *Jouissance*.

Ideological Fantasy and Antagonisms

Ideological fantasy operates by reproducing, in popular discourse, encounters with the symptom (here, poverty), but in a manner that the universal horizon of capitalist accumulation can manage. In reproducing the symptom via fantasy, the Real, disruptive dimension of the symptom is removed. This Real element is removed because fantasy presents the symptom in a manner that divorces it from the concrete universal; poverty is not a *constitutive* exception to the generation of individual wealth but, rather, a contingent failure, an alien intruder that can be eradicated. This domestication of the problem occurs frequently in discourses on poverty. The predominant representation of poverty in contemporary western society, outside of the techniques of repression and disavowal detailed above, is the Make Poverty History campaign, sitting alongside the United Nations MDGs. Here poverty is constructed as something that can be fixed, it is within our control. Not that poverty is considered to be caused by capital, in that poverty is required by capital to produce wealth. Rather, it is posited that mistakes have been made in the past because the wrong *version* of capital has been used. Therefore, rather than capitalism in general being at fault , it is the particular application of capitalism that has been wrong (Sachs, 2005, pp.81-82).

This kind of strategy invokes an external antagonism. External antagonisms are the 'straw' enemies that get generated by universal horizons. The main purpose for the production of these antagonisms is that it gives a visible reason for the failure of the abstract universal. Therefore, while the universal orientates itself towards the removal of the antagonism, antagonisms are actually required for the maintenance of the universal; they provide *jouissance* for the subject who inhabits the universal.

Two types of antagonism operate within poverty discourse. The first is posited to have occurred in the past (Žižek, 1997, pp.13-16). It does not matter whether this antagonism has actually occurred or not, what is important is that stories about it enter popular consciousness. The past failure emerges as the cause of contemporary failures. This form of antagonism is a strong feature of Sach's work, where he details the reasons why some nations are in poverty and some are not (Sachs, 2005, pp.74,79.249, 300-314). These causes range from the development of colonial empires, to geographic conditions, to incorrect structural adjustments previously made in the name of global development. This past failure gives a cause for the failures of the present and of the future. Rather than looking for the source of the fault within the current universal horizon, this fault is attributed to previous events. As such, these past events become a source of *jouissance*: we can enjoy the fact that responsibility for present problems lies with those who have gone before.

The second type of external antagonism lies on the 'concrete universal side' of the parallax rather than the 'abstract universal side', as is the case with the first kind of antagonism discussed above. As I have noted, the key distinguishing feature of the parallax as it relates to poverty is that the actual occurrence of poverty (the concrete universal) cannot be linked to the global economy that causes it. This second type of antagonism, which occurs in the present rather than the past, explains poverty in the terms of it being akin to a concrete universal to global capital. As such, they relate to the circumstances of those in poverty themselves. These range from blaming the victims of poverty, suggesting that poverty is the result of corrupt government or lazy/ignorant

workers, or the result of a 'poverty trap' that is internal to particular societies or the effect of those societies' physical geography and/or societal demographics (Sachs, 2005, pp.56-66). The main effect of these antagonisms is that they suggest a possible alternative cause to the concrete universal. Poverty is not caused by the wealth produced in the global economy but, rather, it is an effect of a variety of external antagonisms. As has been noted, the accuracy of these antagonisms is often unimportant. While deeming Third World workers to be 'ignorant' or uneducated seems overwhelmingly unfair, in terms of the maintenance of the fantasmatic supplement supporting the abstract universal, it has the same effect as Sach's poverty trap. Both these modes of antagonism mediate between the subject and the true horror of absolute poverty; they alleviate responsibility for the persistence of poverty from the capitalist subject.

The positing of antagonisms is a core element of ideological fantasy; it removes the Real's dislocating effect from the symptom. Contemporary hegemonic discourses on poverty have rotated around the fantasmatic construction of poverty, which domesticates its dislocating potential. Indeed, the very construction of the United Nations MDGs is a means of domesticating the disruptive effect of the Real as it exists in extreme poverty. The symptom exists both as the Real, in that it represents the failure of the abstract universal to eradicate the effects of the symptom, and also as a symbolic entity. The effect of naming the symptom ('Poverty') largely domesticates the presence of the Real, although an excess still remains. This is the case with the Millennium Development Goals. Through the construction of poverty in this manner (the elimination of poverty is one of the central goals), the symptom enters into the authoritative discourse of the United Nations. As a consequence, the symptom of extreme poverty no longer exerts pressure upon the abstract universal of global capital; it has been domesticated by entering into the fantasmatic core of the United Nations. In terms of the construction of poverty, the act of symbolising poverty removes the unsymbolisable dimensions of poverty from popular view. It is no longer a Real force that threatens the universal horizon, but rather part of the existing symbolic framework. It is for this reason that governments can appear so eager to establish frameworks like the MDGs, but then demonstrate little motivation to carry them out. This effect allows poverty to be

continually disavowed; the idea of fixing the symptom in discourse is sufficient to domesticate its unruly, dislocating effects.

Super-ego

Notwithstanding the potential of symbolization to domesticate the dislocating effects of poverty, this domestication is never complete. Once the symptom enters into the discursive arena, either as a symbolic entity or as an effect of the Real, any symbolisation leaves an excess. This excess can be dealt with through one of three separate strategies. The first has already been outlined, that of the production of external antagonisms: the failure of something like the MDG's can be explained with reference to the failure of western governments to comply with them, or to the mismanagement of funds by nations receiving the assistance. The second has also been noted, the disavowal of the symptom. We shall further expand on these discursive strategies shortly. However, perhaps the most common discursive method for dealing with the excess in the symptom of poverty is super-ego demand. The construction of poverty is a super-ego construction; we 'ought' to do something about poverty (Sachs, 2005; Shirley, 2005). As such, super-ego demand pervades most discourses on poverty and has led to the establishment of strong super-ego discourses, such as those of charities like World Vision.

The super-ego establishes guilt in the subject about the failure of the symbolic fabric. This guilt presses the subject to act upon the content of the failure. However, such an action does not remove the effect of the super-ego. Instead, the more the subject submits, the guiltier they feel. This is the main appeal of charitable organisations that operate around poverty. Organisations like World Vision or Tear Fund use images of malnourished small children and slogans such as "A child is waiting" (*World Vision: A Child is Waiting*, 2006). As has been previously detailed, super-ego demand is not an effective strategy for achieving change. Rather, it leaves the existing fantasmatic core intact, although it may make some small changes along the way. Normally, the subject seeks to find a way out of the super-ego cycle. Often the mediating affect of paying money, like in the sponsorship of a Third-World child, allows the subject to divorce

themselves from the responsibility for poverty, or to inhabit an ideological edifice such as the MDG's, or enter into a state of disavowal.

The *Make Poverty History* campaign appears to have been aware of this effect. Rather than ask for donations, the campaign instead posits a series of demands that could not be solved by individual responses. At the same time, it played upon the dislocating effects on capitalist accumulation of its symptom, that is, of extreme poverty. This strategy had the effect of preventing the subject from finding any easy way out of the super-ego cycle, such as by sponsoring yet another child. Additionally, white wrist bands were sold and worn as a constant reminder of the super-ego demand of poverty. The campaign then suggested an alternative way out of this cycle of super-ego demand for the individual, requiring them to demand that their governments do something about the conditions of poverty. Unfortunately, while this demand did occur, governments have been able to domesticate the dislocating pressure of those demands by simply promising to do something.

This kind of super-ego demand has an additionally harmful effect. Instead of placing poverty in its properly political realm, that of political economy, charitable organisations and campaigns tend to present poverty as a humanitarian problem, a failure of human rights rather than political organisation. This positioning of poverty removes responsibility from both the subject and from the capitalist mode of production (Žižek, 2005). Presented as a humanitarian project, as Sachs presents it, poverty again reveals the parallax that structures its representation: an irresolvable gap exists between the conditions of global capitalist accumulation and extreme poverty. The demand of the super-ego is not linked to the reduction of wealth within the over-developed societies, or to radically altering our economic systems, but rather of providing funding and support for "On-the-ground solutions for ending poverty" (Sachs, 2005,pp. 226-243).

Disavowal

The final discursive strategy for acknowledging the symptom in ways that domesticate it has already been covered within this chapter, that of disavowal. However, we shall

briefly return to it because of its importance in the operation of poverty discourse. What allows the disavowal of poverty to operate so effectively – that is, for it to be acknowledged in such a way that a a general state of ignorance can be sustained towards it – are two separate factors. The first, which has already been discussed, is that poverty, as a symptom, does not regularly impact on the abstract universal imaginary of capital. It is nowhere near as all-pervading as a symptom like climate change.

The second reason was also in operation in Green ideology, commodity fetishism. In commodity fetishism, a commodity stands in for *objet a*, as the fantasised object that holds the promise of fulfilling the lack in the Other. Simply put, the subject receives too much *jouissance* from the fetishised commodity that is involved in consumption for s/he to be dislocated by the specter of poverty. They may know very well that the clothing being purchased was made in a sweatshop in Bangladesh, a fact to which the subject may be personally opposed. However, the *jouissance* involved in the consumption is too strong for the former ideal to become a salient factor. Conversely, there is often an excess involved in consumption, in that the symptom is never completely pacified. This excess has generated new initiatives, such as the growing popularity of 'ethical' or 'fair-trade' consumption. In most cases though, the fetishism of commodities, through a consumption-oriented capitalism, is too strong for the existence of poverty to have a dislocating effect on the western world. However, possible opportunities still exist within discourses of poverty for such dislocation to occur. It is these possibilities upon which we shall now focus.

Discourses of the Symptom

The shift from discourses which 'acknowledge the symptom' to discourses 'of the symptom', is accomplished via a short-circuit discursive reading of poverty. Through the short-circuit analysis, both sides of the parallax view become visible. Rather than constructing the symptom (absolute poverty) as a failure of the universal (capitalist accumulation), in the short-circuit view the symptom becomes constitutive of the universal. It identifies the existence of a gap between capital accumulation and poverty that cannot be resolved, a parallax gap that belongs entirely to the logic of capital. The

irresolvable nature of that gap introduces into the heart of global capitalism, so to speak, an unmanageable source of dislocation.

Discourses 'of the symptom' have to be carefully distinguished from 'external discourses', with which they might easily be confused. External discourses sit outside the tension that gets set up by a parallax relation, they being discourses about the existence of rouge elements, like corrupt Third-World governments, that are responsible for local poverty. As such, these discourses offer little prospect for radical change, but more of a chance of sedimenting the hegemonic universal imaginary. This sedimentation occurs because, as Laclau contends, discourses establish limits by excluding a radical otherness. Laclau terms this exclusion the 'constitutive outside', because the formation of an 'interior' depends upon the notion of an 'outside'. In discourses of poverty, we can also see this operating between forms of Islam and the capitalist West, particularly in context of the United States. Militant Islam groups, such as Al-Qaeda, often attract the poor and powerless, although they are often controlled by a rich elite. Militant Islam gives the powerless an identity via an antagonism; the capitalist West. This strategy, although often damaging to capitalist interests, is very unlikely to cause the downfall of capitalism. As we have seen with the actions of the Bush administration of the United States, militant Islam has only entrenched the fantasmatic core of capitalism, resulting in the mobilization of military power to secure the interests of 'the American (liberal-capitalist) way of life'.

Alternatively, discourses 'of the symptom' challenge the unconscious fantasmatic supports that underpin the universal. In terms of poverty, Marxism is the discourse which presently fills this role. Marxism, as has been noted previously, has moved from a discourse 'of the concrete universal' (to which we shall soon turn) to a discourse 'of the symptom'. Where Marxism was once a discourse of the proletariat, it has increasingly become a dissident voice distant from the now global working class. This is not to suggest that Marxism only recognises the workers of the western world. Rather, as a discourse of the symptom, Marxist discourse is often able to view capitalism awry, taking in both the global capitalism and the poverty it produces. Indeed, many Marxists, such as

Samir Amin, declare that the western workers and unions are the enemies of the global proletariat both because they draw attention away from global poverty and because they have implicitly submitted to the capitalist system.

By being able to conceptualise the parallax gap, discourses 'of the symptom', like Marxism, have a unique, but productive role to play in the articulation of poverty. This role involves attempting to deconstruct the universal horizon of global capitalism by distancing the symptom (poverty) from the fantasmatic bonds that normalize that symptom. To accomplish this task, Marxism does not have to be in the business of generating alternative economic systems. Rather, its role is to play on the symptom, revealing the excess that gets generated in and through the fantasies of fullness that accompany a universal horizon like global capitalism. By doing so, spaces can be opened up within the universal imaginary that can be exploited by a discourse 'of the concrete universal'. This has proved, however, to be a particularly difficult task, such is the fantasmatic closure that is inherent in the notion of global capital. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find an example of this kind of discursive strategy in mainstream media, although these discourses do exist in the academic world (see Arn, 1994; Limqueco & McFarlane, 1983). Often Marxism falls victim to the same structuring effect of the parallax as does capitalist discourse, focusing only on the issue of exploitation of Third World peoples (Ercel, 2006), rather than upon the unbridgeable gap that exists between the poverty in which those peoples live and the pursuit of wealth elsewhere. However, this is the task to which Marxism might best apply itself to help achieve a radical structural global economic shift.

Discourses of the Concrete Universal

Discourses 'of the concrete universal', around the issue of poverty, speak in the terms of those who are experiencing poverty. These discourses are not, however, limited to the concrete universal side of the parallax, that is, to the experience of poverty, such as has been recounted by the *Voices of the Poor* series produced by the World Bank. Rather, as in all concrete universals, these discourses express the singular exception to the universal horizon, absolute poverty, yet exceed the existing hegemonic imaginary by which the

idea of absolute poverty has been popularly conceptualised. By so doing, absolute poverty is not presented as a singular experience, as the experiences of individuals, but rather as a constitutive feature of capitalism. As has been detailed previously, the relationship between the abstract universal and the concrete universal is an impossible one; there are no terms available to establish a link between them. As a consequence, the presence of the concrete universal in the abstract universal has the potential to radically dislocate the hegemonic imaginary through which global caapitalism is constructed (such as around a sense of justice that aids the the production of wealth, through the invisible hand that guides the market). Within the latter, no room exists for exploitation or a constitutive mode of poverty. In contrast, the combination of absolute poverty (the concrete universal) with the capitalist imaginary of continuous wealth-generation (the abstract universal) as incommensurable, co-existing elements of global social life is profoundly unsettling.

The potential therefore exists for a political movement that takes its cue from the concrete universal. Such a movement could involve the people of poverty, those who are disavowed by capital, coming together under a united discourse. We can perhaps see this process in the use of the term 'Majority World' rather than Third World, to refer the idea that those in poverty are not simply an excess of capitalism, but rather constitutive the core population of the world. The key is the form that this unity might take. It will not be effective if the discourse becomes an alternative imaginary to that of the hegemonic horizon of global capital. This strategy – which resonates with Laclau's thinking – risks becoming an external discourse, a constitutive outside to capital rather than the unruly concrete universal that exists within. Alternatively, the discourse could fight a 'war of position' for whatever empty signifier is mobilized to suture the parallax gap, of 'development' or 'progress'.

Such a strategy is, however, likely to simply be pacified by the dominant discourse because it enters, but does not disturb, the unconscious supplement of the abstract universal. Rather, the element which 'discourses of the concrete universal' would suggest to place political pressure on poverty is for poverty to emerge as the constitutive

exception of capitalism, as that which the logic of capital requires but which it cannot acknowledge as being necessary. No such discourses presently appear to exist, however.

The concrete universal mobilized thus would not necessarily produce a better normative or economic horizon than capitalism. Its goal is not prescriptive. Rather, its prize is the dislocation of capital's logic, to expose that which is necessarily disavowed for the continued functioning of global capitalism.

We shall now turn to the concluding chapter of this thesis, which examines the possibilities for practicing concrete universality, particularly in regard to global capital. In addition, the viability of this strategy as a political method (as well as the viability of this symptomatic reading of the political) is discussed in detail.

Conclusion

Disrupting Capitalism

There is no symbolic space outside of global capital; an alternative to capital is impossible. Paradoxically, herein lays the precise possibility for moving beyond capital. From within the current hegemonic boundaries of capitalism, there is simply no prospect of an end to capitalism - those who practice 'Third-Way' politics are correct, there is no alternative. Capitalism has an all-pervasive grip upon the power centres of the world. The *jouissance* produced through the abstract universal imaginaries of capital and the various modalities of ideological fantasy that provide its unconscious supplement are too compelling. Although most of the capitalist world is aware of the potential threats to capital, particularly climate change and global poverty, these symptoms are easily disavowed; such is the effectiveness of capital in domesticating the threat posed by its symptoms. Nonetheless, through dialectical logic, specifically the dialectical materialist methodology suggested in this thesis, the potential strategies for disturbing the impossible grip of capitalism become apparent. The greatest potential lies in the very impossibility of moving beyond capitalism.

This impossibility is best understood through Žižek's notion of the parallax view. It highlights the disruptive potential(s) of the concrete universal and of the Real within the totality that is capitalism. Again, no 'beyond' exits to capitalism, only the possibility of rupture within.

The potential for, and apparent impossibility of, moving beyond global capital is illustrated in the relationship that exists between the two areas of discourse that have been analysed in the previous two chapters, Green ideology and discourses on global poverty (developmentalism). These two areas represent the major areas of discursive investment for the political Left. They are, however, incommensurable forms of engagement with global capitalism; they form a political parallax centred around a social antagonism that is caused by global capital. It appears that the Left can either speak of environmentalism, of reducing pollution and carbon production, or global development– increasing the collective wealth of humanity – but not both positions at the same time. Those who focus

on the goal of reducing poverty argue for increased levels of consumption and greater production. On the other side of the parallax, environmentalists and ecologists demand that limits be placed upon development. Such a limit radically interferes with the goal of eliminating poverty. The gap between these elements is sutured under the empty signifier 'Left', which supports the Kantian transcendental illusion that something exists between the two perspectives. However, as Kant's notion of the illusion makes clear, no such position exists, only the presence of absence. This gap – the parallax Real – occurs because of a fundamental antagonism that exists between the two, caused by global capital in its manifestation as the symbolic Real. Only with the dissipation of capitalism can this parallax be dissolved, not with the suturing of the gap between the two (which is the current strategy for much of the political Left). In contrast, rather than attempting to provide a suturing-point for this impossibility, this thesis argues that the more productive political approach is instead to focus on the impossibility that is inherent to this parallax and also on the parallax of ontological difference that sits between the abstract and concrete universals of global capitalism. This position can be achieved by attempting to think both perspectives – and the gap – at once, through the dialectical concept of totality. In doing so, a psychoanalytic approach is not only able to reveal the contingency of capitalist social constructions of the abstract universal (of the social Good), but more importantly the capitalism's disavowed materialist core , its concrete universal.

The methodology created in this thesis grounds Žižek's abstract philosophical position. As its application to the two areas of discourse demonstrates, possibilities exist for disrupting the existing hegemonic matrix of global capital by evoking capitalism's concrete universal, by 'practicing' the concrete universal as Žižek puts it.

Practicing Concrete Universality

A first possible means for practicing concrete universality comes by focusing on what I term 'discourses of the concrete universal'. These discourses perhaps provide the greatest potential for producing a radical structural shift within/to capital. Discourses of the concrete universal are those discourses which lie outside of the abstract universal horizon that the idea of 'global capitalism' represents. In this sense, they are discourses of the

Real, possessing no means for translating between the twin poles of the ontological parallax. Any movement of the concrete universal into the realm of the hegemonic imaginary will produce some degree of dislocation because of the ultimate incommensurability between the elements involved. The concrete universal, as both the excess which is generated by the abstract universal and the material substance upon which that universal horizon is constituted, cannot be translated into the terms of that horizon without a dislocation occurring to that same horizon, that is, to the idea of global capitalism.

We see this at work in the area of climate change. Although climate change is not simply a discursive construction, it still appears within the broad horizon of global capitalism as a discursive element, as the concrete universal of capitalism; it appears as 'an effect of nature', as 'the natural'. This dislocates the universal capitalist imaginary. This process is currently occurring in relation to climate change. Reports continue to surface regarding the incommensurability between the capitalist economic system and the limits of the environment (PCE, 2005; Stern, 2006). Although symbolic resources currently exist to domesticate this symptom, such as through increased or targeted taxes, a dislocation of some degree is likely to occur if the concrete universal were to continue to assert pressure. Similarly, this might be possible if a unity could be formed between the peoples of the Third World, perhaps under a signifier such as 'Majority World'. This unity could allow a position of concrete universality to emerge, evoking a degree of dislocation, providing that the fantasmatic resources which support the hegemony are unable to domesticate the symptoms. This proviso, however, perhaps underpins the prospects for both social change and stability.

Discourses of the concrete universal also identify the manner in which fantasy and *jouissance* sustain universal horizons over and above the words through which those horizons are symbolised. That is to say, subjects are enabled to identify with particular images of the universal because they enjoy the experience of doing so, such experiences grip them. The loosening of this grip does not occur simply though the production of rational arguments that reveal the irrationality of the universal horizon (such that the global production of wealth relies upon the exploitation of localised groups), but rather

the provocation of experiences of abjection, such as anxiety and trauma. These occur to the subject through their exposure to the Real.

Anxiety and trauma occur when the concrete universal impacts upon the universal horizon, such as when one comes into face-to-face contact with extreme poverty, perhaps by bumping into a homeless person on a city street. This is what offers the prospect for change, as the subject seeks to find an alternative, more bearable discourse that can domesticate the unsettling effects of the Real.

An alternative field of discourse to that of 'the concrete universal' which can be mobilised to interrupt a structural formation, I have termed 'discourses of the symptom'. This very thesis is itself such a discourse. These discourses use the terms that have been set by an abstract universal, such as capitalism or multiculturalism. Notwithstanding their location within abstract universals, discourses of the symptom are able to view in a dialectical manner both the abstract universal which frames them and their constitutive exception.

When viewed from the perspective of this form of discourse, the constitutive exception emerges as 'the symptom' to the abstract universal. More specifically, the symptom refers to the disruptive impact which the concrete universal has upon the universal imaginary by virtue of its own location within that imaginary. To rephrase the point, discourses of the symptom reveal the limit point of the universal, the point of its failure.

Such a point is the Truth of the universal. This is not a meta-physical Truth which remains the same in all possible symbolisations. Rather it is the embodiment of Truth in a particular content. The core to a Žižekian-inspired political analysis is not to expose the contingency of a hegemonic social construction (although this is a useful political strategy) but rather to reveal the Truth as the central element of the universal totality. The Truth of any construction, its concrete universal, is not purely contingent, but rather the hard material core to that construction; this is the point which paradoxically holds together the abstract universal yet remains its constitutive exception.

That is, a Žižekian-styled political approach does not seek to deconstruct a contingent political position so that it can be reformulated in a more progressive manner, but rather to reveal the point against which all political constructions are combating, the concrete universal. Here, we are not talking about an ahistorical lack or Real against which all symbolisations battle, but rather a historical lack, R_2, or the symbolic Real; in our times, that symbolic Real is, global capital.

Thus, in a mutually constituting manner, the form that Truth takes is always particular to its content and the particular content that is involved in this takes on a form that enables it to play a universalising role. Thereby, a symptom can embody the Truth of a particular edifice because it represents a universal form (that being the point of failure of the hegemonic imaginary) and the universal form only takes shape through the particular content in which it occurs (Brockelman, 2003, p.196). Discourses of the symptom reveal this point of Truth not by embodying the concrete universal, but rather, as Žižek states, by confronting a universal horizon with its 'unbearable example' (Žižek, 2006a, p.13), that is, by practicing concrete universality.

Discourses of the concrete universal, reviewed above, provide the more powerful force of the two kinds of discourse in terms of inducing radical political change. That said, discourses of the symptom supply a more viable kind of political strategy given that they operate from a position that is fully within the universal edifice. For those seeking to produce social change, the concrete universal – like the brute fact of climate change – forever remains outside of their control. Thus, as political strategies, neither the increasing degradation of the environment nor the unity of the disavowed 'Majority World' population can be relied upon for dislocating capitalism. Neither is under political influence. This is not to suggest that in another context discourses of the concrete universal should be ignored. Indeed, perhaps the most efficient strategy is a combination of the two.

The act of identifying with the symptom, of practicing concrete universality, opens up a space for the concrete universal itself to operate, for it to emerge as the unbearable example of the abstract universalising horizon. The method which has been created in this thesis is a grounded reflection of this abstracted strategy. By revealing the deadlock

that is inherent to capital, its incommensurability within itself as a totality, one can practice concrete universality through a 'short-circuit analysis'. It is this strategy which reveals the political potential of psychoanalysis. This thesis, as a short-circuit analysis – a discourse of the symptom – has the role of thinking both sides of the parallax at once. By doing so through the dialectical notion of totality, we see that the methodology suggested in this thesis offers an alternative strategy for anti-capitalist engagement. Specifically, rather than having to choose between alternative conceptions of capitalism, its abstract and concrete forms, dialectical logic allows an analyst the ability to think both options at once (for example, that global capital brings both great wealth and extreme poverty, that capitalist societies can become increasingly energy efficient yet be destroying the climate at the same time). This Žižekian style of analysis allows the symptoms of capital to be seen not as contingent failures but, rather, as disavowed elements of capital that constitute its very possibility. This thesis thereby suggests that the most constructive form of anti-capitalist engagement is to reveal the disavowed hard kernel upon which capital is based, but not as an element in itself, but rather as the concrete universal of capitalist totality. It is the ability to think both elements of the parallax at once, to contrast the concrete universal with the hegemonic imaginary, which brings the possibility of dislocation. Contemplation of, and intervention with, the concrete universal alone (of climate change or of poverty) is insufficient.

This conclusion reflects what has increasingly become Žižek's core position. In an elaboration of this position, Žižek has come to interpret capitalism as a modality of the Real. By this he means that there is nothing outside of capital, it is the point to which all socio-political discourses ultimately return. Therefore, for Žižek, to act is to act only against the background of capital. There is no empty place from which to speak. Here Žižek argues that rather than involve oneself in local politics – to develop bold courses of action that do not threaten the universal edifice despite their apparent radicality – it is better not to act at all (Žižek, 2006b, p.212). These apparently radical transgressions ultimately allow capital to run smoothly, they allow for the construction of a constitutive outside to capitalism, against which the profit motive can pit itself and perhaps subsume. Therefore Žižek reverses Marx's famous thesis 11, where Marx contends that while philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it. Instead, Žižek suggests:

> The first task today is precisely not to succumb to the temptation to act, to intervene directly and change things (which then inevitably ends in a cul-de-sac of debilitating impossibility: 'What can one do against global capital?'), but to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates. (Žižek, 2006b, p. 238)

In its place, Žižek contends that critical analysis must rehabilitate the concept of the universal through a notion of totality in which totality is riven from within, that is, through dialectical analysis. This totality takes in both the abstract and concrete universal of capitalism, vitally allowing access to the gap that is inherent in every symbolic performance, that is, the Real. The key is not to focus exclusively on one side, such as suggesting that capitalism is nothing but poverty nor that capitalism is the best method for producing economic wealth. Neither is it particularly productive to try to find a mediating point, such as an empty signifier, to suture the gap inherent in capitalism, as Laclau suggests. Rather, Žižek asserts, the best position to take in attempting to disrupt capitalism is to think both alternatives at the same time. By taking on both perspectives, the disavowed foundations of capital, as well as the inherent gap within capital, are thus revealed.

Summary

The parallax view, as presented by Žižek, underpins the methodology being suggested by this thesis. This thesis draws upon just two of the modalities of the parallax that Žižek presents: the political and the ontological. An ontological parallax occurs between the abstract and concrete universal within a totality. Here the abstract universal is the hegemonic horizon, it provides the fundamental background against which all other discourses operate. In contrast the concrete universal is the singular exception to this universal horizon.

Conversely, the concrete universal is an exception that is necessary for the constitution of the universal imaginary; absolute poverty, as a concrete universal that sits against the

wealth of capitalism, is a salient contemporary example. Therefore, while the concrete universal is an exception to the abstract universal, its singularity bypasses the particular and exceeds the abstract universal horizon. To reiterate this point, the concrete universal, as an exception to the universal imaginary is not simply one element amongst the many that make up that horizon, but rather – despite its status as an exception– it is the very element that constitutes the universal horizon. As such, the concrete universal is necessarily repressed by the hegemonic horizon. This repression returns through the symptom, which reveals the Truth of the abstract universal and the presence of the parallax gap.

The second modality of parallax upon which this thesis draws is the political parallax. Political parallaxes occur between two relatively symmetrical political formations, separated by a social antagonism. This social antagonism creates a condition of incommensurability between the discourses; there is no common language between them. The social antagonism thus reveals the limit point of the discursive formation. This gap is often filled by empty signifiers which offer the prospect of a suture. The impossibility of such a suture, however, is revealed by the emergence of symptoms within the political parallax. Such symptoms occur when the two positions attempt to translate into each other. An example is illustrative here.

As has been noted at the start of this chapter, a strong political parallax is in operation with contemporary capitalism between developmentalism and environmentalism. This occurs in New Zealand politics, particularly within Green discourse. The Green Party is unable to articulate an economic position because its ecological goals are incommensurable with the interests of capital, capital being the social antagonism that gets actualised here. Therefore any attempt at economic policy is fragmented at best, often contradicting its ecological claims; the symptom of this parallax occurs at this point in the discourse (Donald, 2005a, 2005b; Fitzsimons, 2006c).

Empty signifiers such as 'Sustainable Development', which offer the prospect of a suture of a parallax, are associated with the production of *jouissance*. *Jouissance*, as an excess to the Real, is a vital element of Žižek's rehabilitation of universality; it offers a materialist element to dialectical logic. The abstract universal itself provides subjects the

experience of *jouissance*, of enjoyment, as it offers a possibility of staging a return to an absent state of fullness. These universal horizons are centred around an empty signifier, or the objet a, which have a suturing effect by offering an object for libidinal investment as a substitute for lack. At the same time, because of the impossibility of this suture, the universal horizon requires a certain degree of failure. That failure can not bring about total meltdown – a constitutive failure – as might occur when the concrete universal dislocates a horizon, but rather a displacement of the negativity that is inherent to the symbolic order.

There are two primary modalities of this displacement, external antagonisms and the symptom. External antagonisms are 'straw enemies' which are created to stand in for the impossibility of social fullness, of society. Every universal horizon sends out the message that the removal of these antagonisms will restore the lost fullness of society. Of course, this postulated fullness is always only an imaginary creation. Nonetheless, antagonisms are required by the abstract universal and as such they are enjoyed, they are a site of *jouissance*.

The operation of the symptom, in contrast, is split between its role as an antagonism and the links that exist between symptoms and the concrete universal. Ideological fantasies give the message that symptoms, too, are antagonisms that can be eliminated. Nonetheless, there is a difference between the external antagonisms noted above and symptoms. The former is a fantasmatic creation, whereas symptoms are the Real, material limit-points of universal, hegemonic imaginaries. The symptom carries with it an element of the Real, because it reveals the presence of the concrete universal, which embodies the failure of the universal imaginary. Through ideological fantasy, symptoms are generally represented in a more palpable form than the concrete universal, appearing as external antagonisms that can be removed. However, symptomatic antagonisms always suggest the possibility of a dislocation via their association with the Real.

Despite the necessary existence of symptoms, ideological fantasy manages to domesticate the effect of the Real that is inherent in symptoms. This domestication occurs through a number of techniques. Along with repression, ideological fantasy and external antagonism, super-ego demand is also common. We see the super-ego in operation within

charity discourse, or Green/ethical consumerism. Perhaps the most effective device, however, is the operation of disavowal and fetishism. Disavowal occurs when the subject acknowledges the presence of the symptom, yet continues to act as if it does not exist. Disavowal is allowed to continue because of the existence of a fetished object. This object mediates the effect of the Real, via the subject, by acting as a point of jouissant investment for the subject. Thus the subject may know very well about the existence of poverty, poverty which is in stark contrast to the universal imaginary of capitalism in which they have affectively invested. Nevertheless, because of the existence of commodified objects, the subject is able to maintain this paradoxical state because the commodity substitutes for the gap that is opened up by the contradictory nature of these parallel beliefs.

Another common fetish which supports the disavowal of symptoms within capitalism is the idea that there is no alternative to capital. This allows the subject to unquestionably accept capital as a universal horizon: any failure is displaced as unavoidable or apolitical. Disavowal and fetishism are powerful forces because of the enjoyment inherent in them. The power of *jouissance* is such that the condition is not seen as a problem. The operation of disavowal and fetishism, along with that of the parallax view and the devices that are used to domesticate symptoms, reveal the necessity of a materialist analysis.

The issue of materialism, which *jouissance* raises, divides Žižek's work from that of Ernesto Laclau. Laclau operates within much the same theoretical and political territory as Žižek, indeed his approach features a more grounded methodology for political analysis, an element that has been replicated in the methodology created in this thesis. As such, Laclau and Žižek's works align. They both work roughly within the field of Lacanian political analysis, although each has a different take on what form this should take. In particular, Laclau has been influential in his development of the concepts of antagonism and empty signifiers. However, Laclau's work is lacking because of the manner in which he interprets the Real.

In Laclau's work, the Real is nothing more than a limit-point to the discursive. In contrast, Žižek takes the Real to be both a limit and an excess. By acknowledging the Real as a source of excess, the notions of *jouissance* and fantasy develop as vital tools for political

analysis. These factors explain why social constructions that appear conditional and contingent, maintain such fixity. Nonetheless, Laclau is very critical of Žižek's approach to the political. In their three way debate in *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality* (Judith Butler the other contributor), Laclau argues that Žižek is not a political commentator, but rather merely produces "a psychoanalytic discourse which draws its examples from the politico-ideological field" (Laclau, 2000a, p.289, Original emphasis). By this Laclau suggests that Žižek has nothing constructive to offer to politics, rather that Žižek's is a purely deconstructive discourse. Indeed, in the paragraph previous to the one just cited, Laclau states (in relation to Žižek's desire to overthrow capitalism without a ready-made alternative):

> Only if that explanation is made available will we be able to start talking politics and abandon the theological terrain. Before that I cannot even know what Žižek is talking about and the more this exchange progresses, the more suspicious I become that Žižek himself does not know either (p.289).

Is the Realm of Politics beyond Psychoanalysis?

This disagreement revolves around what each of the theorist designates as a political approach. The Žižekian approach has already been laid out at the start of this chapter; it is the position taken in the thesis. To reiterate, it is theorised that psychoanalysis is inherently political because of the negative ontological status of the social. This negative ontology means that social constructions are contingent. Therefore any fixation is a political fixation. Žižek's work is political because it operates by revealing both the contingency of a political formation, involving its symptoms and the unconscious supplement which supports the hegemonic discourse, as well the concrete universal, the hard material Truth of the discursive formation. This form of political analysis, which this thesis attempts to vehecularise in terms of a grounded methodology, is the political approach for a Žižekian perspective. For Laclau though, this is not far enough. Instead Laclau seeks to develop a positive form of politics. Here we rely on the distinction made by Stavrakakis between politics, as the day-to-day operation of the political, and the political itself (Stavrakakis, 1999, p.71). Laclau attempts to form a political model to be institutionalised: radical democracy. Radical democracy seeks to institutionalise the gap

formed by the negative ontology, as revealed in Lacanian theory. This is very much a formal operation: radical democracy cannot prescribe its own content. Rather, Laclau suggests that a free society is one which is aware of the contingency of its own construction (Laclau, 1990, p.211). In this way the contingency of social constructions is to be constantly revealed and battled over; this is the 'radical' in radical democracy.

Stavrakakis goes further in suggesting that radical democracy must go beyond the 'ethics of harmony' that seeks to constitute an ideal society, a utopia (Stavrakakis, 1997, p.127). Instead Stavrakakis argues that psychoanalytic politics needs to develop an 'ethics of the Real' (in the limited Laclauian sense) that revolves around the constant contestation of meaning. The concept of psychoanalytic politics –in the sense of the application of a political approach in government policy and related areas – is a controversial one, indeed it signals one of the boundaries of this piece of work.

Many theorists within the Lacanian field believe that psychoanalysis and politics do not mix well, or at all. The argument revolves around what to do with the gap that is created by the negative ontological constitution of the symbolic. There are three significantly differing perspectives. The first, characterised by Elizabeth Bellamy (1993), Sean Homer (1996), Simon Tormey and Andrew Robinson (Robinson, 2004; Robinson & Tormey, 2003, 2005) seeks to construct a positive imaginary to fill this gap. In doing so, they query the possibility, and the desirability, of creating a psychoanalytic form of politics. It is argued, particularly by Homer, that because ideological fantasy, which sutures the gap, is so enjoyable, any political position that refuses to posit an ideological position is impotent. Because attempts at psychoanalytic politics, such as Laclau's radical democracy, attempt to move away from any form of ideological suture, they are ineffective (Homer, 1996, p.106-8). Homer recognises the limitations of psychoanalysis in this regard and thus states that the task of creating a positive imaginary is beyond the limits of psychoanalysis.

There is some warrant to this approach, particularly as a strategy for thinking about politics within their existing form. There are, however, compelling reasons to surpass it. Firstly, as has been documented throughout this thesis, any political formation that operates through an imaginary position – as Homer suggests a political position must –

needs to find a way of displacing the negativity that is inherent to the symbolic realm; as history shows, the positing of external antagonisms in order to explain the lack of fullness in a society can be disastrous e.g. Hitler's marginalisation of the Jews. Psychoanalytic political analysis has the value of avoiding the kind of positive imaginary positions (or, more importantly the resulting displacement of lack) inherent to this kind of approach.

Secondly, politics of this form cannot move outside of the constraints that exist upon the symbolic realm. It can operate within the terms of the unconscious supplement which supports the symbolic, but it cannot bring any kind of radical shift. Only an intervention with the supplement can produce shifts of a radical magnitude.

This critique also applies to Laclau's approach. In addition to the radical democratic project, Laclau generates a more general political strategy for the Left, involving the creation of a coalition of new social movements under the unity of an empty signifier. The success of that signifier turns upon its ability to fill the gap between the diverging perspectives and projects of those social movements. Indeed, Laclau suggests that this new, combined movement such be under the guise of the radical democracy movement (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p.176). Žižek is particularly critical of this approach because it cannot move outside of the conditions set by global capital.

In order to progress beyond this apparent impasse between the radical democratic project and political psychoanalysis, we should refer back to the distinction Stavrakakis makes between politics and the political. Žižek's approach, with which this thesis associates, operates solely within the more general domain of the political. Thus, it offers a strategy for achieving radical political shifts and a method for critiquing everyday politics, but does not present a way forward for the operation of 'regular' politics. This is perhaps one of the weaknesses of the Žižek's approach. Conceivably, here, Homer is correct; psychoanalytic politics are not relevant. Alternatively, it could be that Homer and Bellamy are looking for the wrong kind of outcome from psychoanalytic analyses. Neither Lacan nor Žižek argue that psychoanalytic ideas can be constituted for a utopian ethical/political order; this is simply outside of the bounds of psychoanalysis. I do not believe that many would (or should) be willing to support the 'Lacanian Party' in the 2008 New Zealand elections. But the impossibility of utopia does not rule out more

'progressive' political constructions.

The difference between utopian politics and simple societal improvement relies on a distinction between that lack which is ahistorical, as in the effect of the Real upon the symbolic order, and the lack which is historically conditioned, that is, capital. In a time when global capital has produced a condition in which humanity is paradoxically living both far beyond and beneath its material needs and the capacity of the planet to support those needs, it is this historical lack that deserves the political interest of psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, an unanswered question remains: What can psychoanalysis offer politics beyond ideological critique and dislocation? Is it that Lacanian theory can only offer a mode of understanding of the social, one that can be applied to political critique, but cannot offer a solution beyond dislocation? Here we again return to the vital distinction between politics and the political. Just as the Real sets the limits for the construction of reality, the political serves as the precondition for the operation of politics. Therefore, we may conclude by stating that, yes, psychoanalysis has no role in politics: its influence goes well beyond it, into the political.

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