

Extimacy: Authority, Anxiety and the Desire for Revolution

February 20 – 21, 2020

American University of Beirut, ACC Auditorium 1 - 2

Over a century ago, Freud surmised that the transformations of modernity, the age of neurosis par excellence, pave the way for the “psychological misery of the masses.” In the mid-twentieth century, Lacan reassessed this characterization by asking: What is the Other, if there really is an Other? How do signifiers structure a social link? How is the relation between subjectivity and otherness structured around desire, anxiety, and fantasy? It may be that modernity is not just the result of the retreat of the discourse of the master; yet it is only in modernity that the crisis in symbolic identification tout court comes to be analysed as a crisis of phallic representation, or perhaps more accurately, as the exposure of the inherent instability of the master signifier itself. The master has taken on different forms that cannot be reduced to a single formula: it is at once many, not-One, and not-All. All identification revolves around a lack; a constitutive lack structured around the question: What does the Other want of me? But psychoanalysis reveals the inconsistency of the Other.

The Other in modernity is propped up by regimes of enjoyment or libidinal modes of interpretation that are at work in constituting social reality. This shift appears to canalise anxiety: what do we do when the lack lacks, when incompleteness and excess are two sides of the same coin?

With the concept of "extimacy", psychoanalysis proposes that unassimilable otherness is not something outside us but resides deep within us and makes us what we are. Psychoanalysis has always been political because its basic premise is that symptoms are never simply personal but rather expressions of the extimate link between the individual and the social. This conference investigates the concept of extimacy as a site in which the link between psychoanalysis and politics can be explored.

This conference is organized with the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation as part of the “Extimacies: Critical Theory from the Global South” early-career scholars program and Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Critical Theory (PACT).

Conference Program

Day One, Thursday 20 February 2020

10:00 – 10:30 **Introductory Remarks**

Surti Singh and Nadia Bou Ali

10:30 – 12:00 **Lecture**

Alenka Zupančič, *Sexual Violence and Systemic Enjoyment*

12:00 – 12:15 **Coffee**

12:15 – 14:00 **Panel 1**

Carlos Gómez Camarena, *Awakening from Critical Theory*

Samo Tomšič, *“Ex-”: Ontology, Topology, Psychoanalysis*

14:00 – 15:15 **Lunch**

15:15 – 17:00 **Panel 2**

Sami Khatib, *Real Abstraction and the Unconscious of the Commodity Form*

Andreja Zevnik, *Political Anxieties: Frameworks of Action, Transformation and Emancipation*

17:00 – 17:15 **Coffee**

17:15 – 18:15 **Lecture**

Vladimir Safatle, *Subjective Destitution As a Practice of Social Emancipation*

19:00 **Book Launch at Barzakh, Hamra**

Samo Tomšič, *The Labour of Enjoyment* (Berlin: August Verlag, 2019)

20:30 **Conference Dinner at Mezyan**

Day Two, Friday 21 February 2020

10:00 – 11:30 **Lecture**

Mladen Dolar, *Where Does Power Come From?*

11:30 – 11:45 **Coffee**

11:45 – 13:30 **Panel 1**

Amanda Holmes, *Outrage: The Phallus and the Extimacy of Anger*

Alexi Kukuljevic, *Extimacy and Stupidity: On Being a Dumb Thing*

13:30 – 14:30 **Lunch**

14:45 – 16:30 **Panel 2**

Goran Vranešević, *The Object of Speculation*

Anna Jovanovic, *TBA*

16:30 – 16:45 **Coffee**

16:45 – 18:30 **Panel 2**

Silvio Carneiro, *A New Biology? Reading Psychoanalysis and Politics from a Marcusean Perspective*

Alejandro Cerda Rueda, *Totem and/or Taboo: A Study on an Incomplete Freudian Concept*

18:30 - **Closing Remarks**

20:30 **Dinner at Beit el Hamra**

Participants

Silvio Carneiro

A new Biology? Reading Psychoanalysis and Politics from a Marcusean Perspective

Re-reading Freud today means to think more about new dimensions of the symbolic and the connections between psychoanalysis and politics. One of the most influential readings of Freud certainly could be Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955). In this book, the author inquires into Freudian revolutionary tendencies, considering the social and subjective changes as well as cultural and economic transformations after the World War II. What does discontent mean in an advanced industrial society? Would be this new social structure based on old repressive structures? Could such new horizon manifest an emancipatory sign? In this sense, *Eros and Civilization* opens debate on a utopian revolution beyond repressive structures, a new perspective based on the ontological struggle between Eros and Thanatos. I will reconsider Marcuse's reading of biological questions in connection to symbolic interpretation in psychoanalysis and ask: what kind of biology does it represent? Donna Haraway adverts us to think about the limits of Marcuse's biology based on a "pure" Nature. However, Marcuse criticizes the "pure" and "mythological" Nature as signed by Totalitarian narratives. I will explore some perspectives of Marcuse's biological foundations for socialism, considering the limits of such perspective. Maybe, Marcuse perspective on biology could follows a more radical tendency if we think Nature as an extimate concept. Here, Nature is not a "pure" Other different from us but an "Other in relation to us". That is, a nature that resists to be dominated by authoritarian reason, a nature as a possibility for a new history of mankind.

Prof. Dr. Silvio Carneiro is a scholar in the fields of Critical Theory, Contemporary Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Education, and Philosophy of Psychoanalysis. He is a professor at the Federal University of ABC (UFABC), in Brazil. His work as a member of the board of directors of the International Herbert Marcuse Society has, as its focus, Critical Theory, Education, Psychoanalysis, and Politics. He is the coordinator of the Brazilian segment of international project Extimacies: Critical Theory from the Global South, in the context of which he inquires into the dialectics of violence, with a particular emphasis on the dual role of violence as a significant component in both revolutionary emancipation and totalitarian Terror.

Alejandro Cerda Rueda

Totem and/or Taboo: A Study on an Incomplete Freudian Concept

There is still something more to be learned from the Polynesia. As Freud attested to this in his seminal work titled *Totem and taboo*, published in 1913, we will analyze this text not only as a politically enriched opus but also as a four-fold metapsychological writing that places clinical quandaries at its epicenter. Rather than presenting various attempts at resolving old sociological questions, such as mass formation or community engagement, what Freud offers in this book is a crucial step in the constitution of the subject.

Thus, Freud comes to proclaim that in every psychosexual development, as well as in all of our psychical life, a concept emerges whose main role is to account for certain fixations or structuring processes not only for the psychical apparatus but also for the insertion of the subject in culture and time. This process is what Freud defined as “the kern-komplex of neurosis”, the bond with the parents governed by incestuous appetites. The nuclear complex, later named the Oedipus complex, first came to Freud during his *Yahrzeit* process while mourning the loss of his deceased father. If such concept is antiquated and outdated, then why is that people still hang on it to during their lives? Is it still relevant to talk in such terms clinically speaking? In such sense, the key feature is not the complex itself, but precisely how it is always entangled with a never irresolute ambivalence.

Alejandro Cerda Rueda is a Mexican psychoanalyst practising in Mexico City. He is co-partner in the Andrew Mellon Foundation’s project *Extimacies: Critical Theory from the Global South* (2019-2021). He obtained his doctorate’s degree from the European Graduate School (Switzerland) and is Postgraduate professor at the Universidad Iberoamericana (UIA) as well as guest professor at the Freudian Society of Mexico City (SFCM). Since its foundation in 2009, he has served as senior editor of *Paradiso editores*. His selected publications: *Sex and Nothing: Bridges From Psychoanalysis to Philosophy* (Routledge, 2016). *The Penumbra of the Subject. Contributions to a Freudian Metapsychology* (Prometeo, 2019). He is working on a new monograph: *The Attraction of Incest and the Exogamic Solution*.

Mladen Dolar

Where Does Power Come From?

Mladen Dolar is Professor and Senior Researcher at the Department of Philosophy, University of Ljubljana. His principal areas of research are psychoanalysis, modern French philosophy, German idealism and art theory. He is also Professor at the European Graduate School in Switzerland. He has lectured extensively at universities in the United States and across Europe and he is the author of over hundred and fifty papers in scholarly journals and collective volumes. Apart from twelve books in Slovene, his book publications include most notably *A Voice and Nothing More* (MIT 2006, translated into six languages) and *Opera’s Second Death* (with Slavoj Žižek, Routledge 2001, also translated into several languages). His new book *The Riskiest Momentis* forthcoming with Duke University Press.

Carlos Gómez Camarena

Awakening from Critical Theory

In 1974 Jacques Lacan's oeuvre moved from the opposition of failure (of his teaching)-triumph (of religion) to a new one: awakening-sleepiness. This latest binary regards to psychoanalysis and philosophy, specially to what defines the link between them in terms of practices. This is an obvious reference to Kant remark on his philosophy as "awakening from our dogmatic slumber". Differently from Kant's ideal, for Lacan is not a matter of wake up from slumber, but an immanent continuous awakening from sleepiness (since philosophy has "eternal roots"). Our work will continue to explore the tension between critical theory and antiphilosophy, proposing the late one as a "particular awakening" from the philosophical sleepiness. What is a critical theory that formulates itself in terms of a continuous awakening of ideological sleepiness and not as a lucid awakening outside of a dream? What is the topology of (Kantian/Frankfurtian) critical philosophy and that of Lacanian antiphilosophy?

Carlos Gómez Camarena maintains a psychoanalytical practice in Mexico City. He is a full time professor and researcher at Communication Department, Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. Member of the Forums of the Lacanian Field in Mexico. He holds a PhD in psychoanalysis and psychopathology Université Sorbonne Paris Cité (Formerly Paris 7 Diderot). His research interests are Antiphilosophy, Contemporary French Philosophy and the clinical and theoretical uses of mathematics and poetry in Lacanian psychoanalysis. He was part of the translator teamwork of Barbara Cassin's "Dictionary of Untranslatables". He is the co-coordinator in Mexico of the international project Extimacies: Critical Theory from the Global South.

Amanda Holmes

Outrage: The Phallus and the Extimacy of Anger

"I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!" This iconic declaration from the 1976 film *Network* expresses both the impotence and the anger that characterizes the dominant political affects of the present. In the memorable scene, an unhinged news anchor interrupts the ten o'clock news and calls on all viewers to get mad... to get mad about everything from inflation to homicide, from unemployment to pollution, Russia, and oil prices; in an impassioned display of futility and outrage, he advises the viewers to run to their windows and do the only thing they can in the face of these problems: to scream out "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!" This scene is as relevant now as it was forty years ago when we began to theorize the effects of an increasingly mediatized relation to political events and global catastrophes. And today, thanks to the platforms of social media, what is clear is that indeed, everyone is very angry, "mad as hell." How that anger gets articulated and directed differs regionally and ideologically but one thing that seems to be shared is anger. The paper proposed here will explore the concept of anger in relation to the key Lacanian concepts of the phallus and extimacy. It will develop the claim that a certain form of anger, an explicitly political outrage, is best understood as an extimate relation of the subject to the real. Although Lacan was critical of the discourse around "affect," by elaborating his claims about anger, we will see that Lacan offers resources for theorizing anger and outrage within our current conjuncture.

Amanda Holmes is a Doctoral Candidate in the Philosophy Department at Villanova University. Her work is situated at the intersection of ontology and psychoanalysis. She is planning to defend her dissertation, which is titled "Erotology: Desire and Being in Lacan's Return to Freud" in Spring 2020. She is currently based in Vienna, Austria and is teaching courses on philosophy and psychoanalytic theory at the Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts.

Anna Jovanovic

TBA

Sami Khatib

Real Abstraction and the Unconscious of the Commodity Form

In his reading of Marx's Capital, Alfred Sohn-Rethel coined the term "real abstraction" characterizing an abstraction from use-value actually performed by economic agents in the act of commodity exchange. Following Sohn-Rethel, the coin, money sign, is the historical as well as logical origin not only of commodity exchange but also of the Kantian transcendental subject, its pure concepts ("categories") and pure forms of intuition, time and space, structuring the logical and aesthetic forms of cognitive knowledge and experience. Kant's four categories (quantity, quality, relation and modality) underpin all logical judgment and provide the a priori framework for conceptual knowledge which operates through conceptual abstraction. This a priori capacity to abstract, however, is not only intellectual but shares its seemingly ahistorical logic with the historical practice of abstraction operative in economic exchange relations, materialized and contained in the "coin." This paper examines how real abstraction does not only refer to the prevalence of exchange-value over use-value but produces the universalizing form of commodified exchange relations beyond or, rather, before the intentional preferences of economic agents. Commodity exchange, the act of equating social labor by exchanging its products as commodities, performs a real abstraction which remains unconscious; yet this real abstraction is objective and real and, therefore, not subjective or thought-induced.

Sami Khatib is an assistant professor of Visual Arts at the American University in Cairo (AUC) and member of the Mellon research group "Extimacies: Critical Theory from the Global South." He is also a founding member of the Beirut Institute for Critical Analysis and Research (BICAR). His ongoing research project "Aesthetics of the 'Sensuous-Supra-Sensuous'" examines the aesthetic scope and political relevance of Marx's discovery of the commodity form.

Alexi Kukuljevic

Extimacy and Stupidity: On Being a Dumb Thing

In English one can speak of being "dumbfounded." When one is dumbfounded, one is stupefied. One finds oneself in a situation or confronting a demand for which there is no response. As one of its first appearances in the English language attests to in Thomas Urquhart's translation of Rabelais, to dumbfound is an embarrassment of the head: "I beseech you never dum-found or Embarrass your Head with these idle Conceits." Or as another Thomas puts it, Thomas Otway, in The Souldiers fortune, "He has but one eye, and we are on his blind side; I'll dumb-found him. (Strikes him on the shoulder.)" To be dumbfounded is to encounter something unexpected, unforeseen, and thus cannot be avoided, resolved, or circumnavigated. "I cannot wriggle out of it; I am dumbfounded" as Charles Darwin puts it. In short, one finds oneself dumb, which is to say, unable to speak. What is dumbfounding finds the subject in dumbness, in silence. One is at loss of words. Trapped somewhere between being stunned and astonished: between stupidity and wonder. Lacan introduces the relation to the thing, "the-beyond-of-the-signified," as a matter of dumbness.

“The things in question are things insofar as they are dumb...And dumb things are not exactly the same as things which have no relationship to words.” It is not thinking but stupidity that grounds the subject as extimate. Taking seriously the claim that the subject is founded in relation to dumbness, I would like to argue here that it is this relation that makes the animal we call human a horribly anxious creature.

Vladimir Safatle

Subjective Destitution As a Practice of Social Emancipation

I would like to discuss the Lacanian concept of transference and his connection between subjective destitution and the end of analysis. The major aim is to develop a concept of emancipation beyond the traditional idea of autonomy and self-legislation. We will see how analytical practice can help us in that task.

Vladimir Safatle, Professor at Universidade de São Paulo, invited-professor at the universities of Paris VII, Paris VIII, Toulouse, Louvain, Essex and Stellenbosch. Author of, among others: *La passion du négatif_Lacan et la dialectique* (Georg Olms, 2010) and *Grand Hotel Abyss: desire, recognition and the restoration of the subject* (LUP, 2016). He is the editor of the Portuguese translation of Adorno's complete work.

Samo Tomsic

"Ex-": Ontology, Topology, Psychoanalysis

The prefix "ex-" plays an increasingly important role in Lacan's teaching. It emerges in two concepts, extimity and ex-sistence, or perhaps one should rather call them "concepts", since the work of conceptualisation is in both cases left to the reader. Still, the two neologisms are more than mere plays on words. They sustain a critical dialogue with Heidegger. For it was none other than Heidegger, who first proposed "existence" to be written with a hyphen, thus accentuating its "eccentric" character. However, unlike Heidegger, who sought a way out of philosophy into post-ontological "thinking", Lacan progressively intensified his philosophical ambitions. This intensification reaches its peak in Lacan's later seminars, where he openly speaks of the necessity to reinvent philosophy - in a materialist way. At the center of this Lacanian materialism we certainly find the fundamental Freudian lessons concerning the unconscious. These are brought together with algebraic topology and knot theory, in order to provide a new - so Lacan's bet goes - foundation of philosophy.

Samo Tomsic holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and is currently visiting professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Nürnberg and research fellow at the Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. His research areas comprise structuralism, psychoanalysis, epistemology and continental philosophy. Recent publications include *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan* (Verso, 2015) and *The Labour of Enjoyment* (August Verlag, 2019).

Goran Vranesevic

The Object of Speculation

The presentation seeks to delineate the often-misunderstood conceptual operation of speculation that has conceptually been converted from an epitome of pure thought into an economic category of profitability and self-interest. But to define speculation already means to pose a problem. If we consider the use of speculation in antiquity, notably as *speculum*, it designated observation and contemplation of God (*Gottesbetrachtung*), or, as Augustine put it, the mutual clarifying relationship of reflection (*Spiegelndes*) and the mirrored (*gespiegeltes*) appearance of God. This dictates an unattainable task of catching God's gaze and modeling our thoughts accordingly. The activity of conceiving is therefore the formal condition for the construction of the dimension of visibility and is inscribed into any profound contemplation of a relationship. More precisely, object that on the surface has the purpose of expanding knowledge also forms the structural impossibility. In Kant's system this has the form of a synthetic a priori structure of imagination, which constitutes the twofold appearance of subject and object that determine the horizon of visibility. This fundamental discrepancy that forms our thoughts was the foundation upon which Hegel was able to carve a positive determination of speculation in its minimal unifying form constituted as speech acts. Thoughts are namely not expressed in language, as sentences or judgements, since the medium of thinking itself is established through articulation: "we know our thought only when we give them the shape of externality [...], which bears the seal of the highest interiority [...] articulated tone, word" (Hegel). Even though it may seem that there is something inside us, in the abyss of substance that has to come out and adequately express our being, in actuality the latter is manifested in the exteriority of words. In this respect, we will examine the speculative affirmation of contingent objects as the cause and the backbone of interiority. The result is the concept of speculation that doesn't merely express pure thought, but has to be regarded as a structural necessity according to which being is organized.

Goran Vranešević is a research associate at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana where he is currently the research coordinator of *Verbum sat* project, which aims to establish a relation between structural linguistics, forensic investigation and the prevention of secondary victimization of children. He has written and presented on various topics, ranging from aesthetics and cultural theory, to classical commentaries on ontological concepts, while his main research interests include German idealism, psychoanalysis, political philosophy and linguistics. He is also a founding member of *Aufhebung* - International Hegelian Association and the coordinator of the Seminar for political theory at the Peace Institute in Ljubljana.

Andreja Zevnick

Political anxieties – Frameworks of Action, Transformation and Emancipation

Andreja Zevnik is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Manchester. Her research focuses on the questions of political mobilisation and race. Theoretically her work draws on postcolonial and critical theory and psychoanalysis; while empirically her focus is in particular on Black communities in the US and Roma community in Europe. Her publications include: *Lacan, Deleuze and World Politics* (Routledge, 2016) and edited collections such *Politics of Anxiety* (Rowman& Littlefield, 2018, edited with Eklund and Guittet), *Deleuze Lacan: a disjunctive synthesis* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017, edited with Bostjan Nedoh) and *Jacques Lacan between politics and psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2015, edited with Samo Tomšič).

Alenka Zupančič

Sexual Violence and Systemic Enjoyment

The laudable attention brought in the past decades to sexual violence has produced a somehow less laudable side effect: the idea or ideology according to which power is good as far as nobody enjoys it. It can be most brutal in its consequences, but it's ok as far as it is carried out professionally. The only thing recognized as violence is subjective violence, defined as a personal "abuse" of power. The talk will start out from interrogating the relationship between sex and violence, and follow the ways in which "abuse" has become a key word when thinking about power in western academia and in the so-called "liberal" discourse. Sexuality, desire and enjoyment are rarely interrogated in their own right, but are used and overused in the process of whitewashing the systemic relations of power. This is partly facilitated by the way in which one thinks of enjoyment as necessary subjective category, which is further reinforced by the attention brought to the personal style of the populist leaders as shameless enjoyers. But the enjoyment at the root of the contemporary rise of populism is not the enjoyment of populist leaders, it is rather what the talk will try to develop under the name of "systemic enjoyment".

Alenka Zupančič is a Slovene philosopher and psychoanalytic social theorist. She works as Senior Researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, Scientific Research Center of the Slovene Academy of Sciences. She is also Professor at the European Graduate School in Switzerland, and at the Graduate School ZRC SAZU (Ljubljana). She is the author of numerous articles and books on psychoanalysis and philosophy, including *What is Sex?* (MIT Press 2017), *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (MIT Press 2008), *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two* (MIT Press 2003) and *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan* (Verso 2000). Her books have been translated into many languages.