ARTICLE

Unbehagen: a gallantry with excess

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ABSTRACT   This paper has its foundation in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory as a way of understanding, from a scientific perspective, the human impact of material technology under the conditions of capitalism. Two related propositions concerning material technology are interrogated in terms of the Lacanian struggle for subjective articulation. Firstly, if following Frederick Kittler, information and communication technologies retain their autonomy beyond the subject, having emerged as a product of their storage, containment and repetitive usage, and if we as subjects embody technological developments as they occur, it could be argued that such technologies possess imaginary agency in that their ability for self-preservation and reproduction constitutes a commanding of unending enjoyment. Insofar as this command is enshrined within capitalism it tends to ignore subjective division and to bypass subjective struggle with the impossibility of language. Rather than affording the subject a new language, material technology merely hints at a contingent language yet to come. Further, in obfuscating the necessity for disinterest–the intellectual position–material technology operates as a discourse which fails to capture the subject, or more precisely, *lalangue*. Through its inevitable disappearance (and re-emergence transformed as another technology) material technology localises and thereby obscures conflict within the subject. This leads to the second proposition: as part of the capitalist imperative the quest for *jouissance* is already being played out alongside obscured subjective struggle, spectacularly so in the case of material technology. However, investment in this imperative has an unforeseen cost: in being confronted with excess of *jouissance* we are overwhelmed and uncertain. Material technologies command that we integrate excess into our daily lives as a unique discursive network, yet this network is at best opaque. Here, *joussiance* takes the form of a distinctive compulsion emanating from material technology's intersection with capitalism. This in turn reconfigures the struggle in which the subject of language is grappling with the connection (if any) between knowledge and technological devices. In order to throw light on this struggle we could take up the position of disinterest regarding material technology under capitalism.

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Is there an object of science (to speak of)?

First, let us take a step back to consider technology from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory which situates science in the realm of the Lacanian Real: that which we cannot fully know because it is not completely knowable, but which inserts itself, sometimes confusingly, into our day to day lives. Science and its method can be considered our Other which Lacan explains in *Seminar II* (1978/1954-1955, p 236):

> [w]e must distinguish two *others*, at least two–an other with a capital *O*, and another with a small *o*, which is the ego. In the function of speech, we are concerned with the *Other* [emphasis original].

Lacan goes on to raise an apparently ludicrous question: *why don't planets speak?* His response is equally joking but at the same time obliging: *I don't have a mouth* (1978/1954-1955, p 236). Of course, the inanimate object does not speak, so we are compelled to speak for it whether it be through mathematical symbols, calculations or theoretical propositions. As Lacan quickly reminds us, that which does not have a mouth is not our radical alterity, rather "there is absolutely nothing about [inanimate objects] pertaining to an alterity with respect to themselves, they are purely and simply what they are" (p 238). At the same time and despite not having a mouth, Lacan contends that we demand planets speak a precise language distinguishable only to us. This is an essential reference point regarding the objects of technology. We trust in our conviction that the scientific method is impartial and independent and that science should therefore not have investment in the social bond. Science must remain autonomous and operate independently within its own logic: this is science *par excellence*.

Lacan's approach to science and its method was much influenced by Alexandre Koyré idiosyncratic proposal that from the spectacle of a planet revolving in its orbit we might apprehend the appearance (and disappearance) of the entire cosmos. This structure Koyré presents as logical, axiomatic and intuitive notwithstanding the precariousness of the object which includes scientific method itself. Lacan harnessed this mathematically based conception using his own idiosyncratic algorithms as a way to ponder Freud's structuring of the subject as one of both loss and possession.

Although, given its robustness, the scientific method insists that it be afforded scrutiny and subject to critical evaluation, nevertheless, how scientific knowledge becomes accepted is determined not only by peer review but also by its being subject to influence from economic or political conditions and demands. Here the position of disinterested scientist is no longer a given[1] - there may be rewards or gifts associated with claims to knowledge and which attempt to subvert disinterestedness. Because the social bond makes demands, disinterestedness has a price to pay rather than being merely a voluntary position insisted upon by criticality. Herein lies the potential for disinterestedness to orient speech (and therefore, arguably language) towards symbiosis with particular knowledge investments.

Certainly, for Lacan such ambiguity in which the social bond plays a part manifests in language. He further insists that in our relationship with science we are asserting a larger claim: we are demanding that material objects be inscribed into language in order for us to be absolutely certain that we exist in a unified symbolic field, and in this way we are a part of science *par excellence*. This is a logic we can count on. Lacan's question about planets is making a crucial point about the inanimate object which cannot speak. Here Lacan is suggesting that the object does not even have an existence which is autonomous and separate from the speaking subject because speaking subjects are necessarily inscribed into the social world. Thus, Lacan's question about planets not speaking is a disinterested question *par*

excellence because it reveals that inanimate objects are not split or divided and unlike people do not need to convey language to themselves. Such objects afford us language whilst constraining it. It is our questions about objects which demand that we impose upon science a language, because we as subjects rely on language (whether we speak or not) to represent our existence as interdependent with other subjects and objects. In *Écrits* Lacan claims that "I" is a way of imagining a response to and a relationship with the world beyond the subject: *Le sujet de l'énonciation* and *le sujet de l'énoncé*. He elaborates: "the presence of the unconscious, being situated in the locus of the Other, can be found in every discourse, in its enunciation" (*Écrits*, 1966a, b, p 834). Here, the subject of the statement is closely correlated with what is being enunciated. "I" is divided, represented by both the enunciation and the enunciated. Lacan calls the subject of enunciation "the subject not insofar as it produces discourse but insofar as it is produced (*fait*), cornered even (*fait comme un rat*), by discourse" (2009, p 36). The difference between "I" of enunciation and "I" of the enunciated is the key to understanding the difference between speech and language, as well as to determining who is speaking the 'truth' of the signifier:

> The division between the statement and the enunciation means that, in effect, from the I *am lying* which is at the level of the chain of the statement – the *am lying* is a signifier, forming part, in the Other, of the treasury of vocabulary in which the I, determined retroactively, becomes a signification, engendered at the level of the statement, of what it produces at the level of the enunciation–what results is an I *am deceiving you*. The I *am deceiving you* arises from the point at which the analyst awaits the subject, and sends back to him, according to the formula, his own message in its true signification, that is to say, in an inverted form. He says to him–*in this* I am deceiving you, *what you are sending as message is what* I *express to you, and in doing so you are telling me the truth* (S XI, 139–140).

That language is complicit with thinking is foundational to Lacan's assertion of psychoanalysis as science.[2] Lacan states that "the subject upon which we operate in psychoanalysis can only be the subject of science" (cited in Milner, 2000, p 264). Lacan is making two important propositions here: firstly that a subject of science exists, and secondly that science operates in conjunction with subjectivisation. For science to be a praxis requires mediation by the subject, usually via a method. Lacan implies that science is an external form for the subject, one which the subject must contend with as a result of being divided. We cannot deny science any more than we can deny the unconscious forces which constitute subjectivity. Science is not singular, it is always an open question usually concerning the ontological and conceptual objects and their relationships. What Lacanian psychoanalysis undertakes is not object oriented in quite the same way: it assumes an unwavering hypothesis from which analysis can be undertaken via the *objet a*, that is, the object cause of desire. This is the object which stands in for desire and which in turn presupposes that we have an unconscious from which these forces impact the subject consciously. Therefore, science *per se* cannot be undertaken outside the subject because it in part constitutes a subjectivity which pursues the Master. For Lacan, science, like psychoanalysis, is a praxis "to be distinguished from the question of knowing whether psychoanalysis is a science (i.e., whether its field is scientific)" (Milner, 2000, p 265). Science constructs but cannot be reduced to its constructions because it is a field which interrogates itself. Science exists beyond those objects which manifest in its thought. This is because science is a method from which scientific facts or truths emerge; these may either include

or exclude variables deemed most useful for scientific enquiry. Thus science is controlled by the disinterested scientist even if its outcomes are not.

In light of this, why do we still consider material technology under capitalism to be still somehow beyond our understanding? Is it because material technology presents as overly esoteric? Does such a framing of technology render subjects anxious because they are unable to recognise or know they are products of science, which is itself a confrontation with the limits of knowledge? Material technology is often cast as *objet a* (the object cause of desire), as the subject's desire within the discourse of knowledge. In this way, material technology is the surplus of science, an abundance of objects which obfuscate real questions of knowledge, the most fundamental of which is our desire for a Master. Here the domain of the Imaginary is crucial: for science an idea is not precise unless it is scrupulous in its methodology - refined, tested and verified. For the subject the best proof that an idea is scientific is its recognisable, neutral and utilitarian form. Despite the acculturation of technology as a unique subjective form, contemporary material technology is also pragmatic in its repeated use not requiring specialist knowledge (although its assemblage certainly does). Little scientific knowledge is required to use material technology, even the sophisticated devices we daily use. This apathy towards and lack regarding knowledge is the most political manifestation of science today: we want things to work for us, but we don't need to know how they work, that is for scientists to figure out for us. Such objective knowledge is reified as real science not needed to be understood by the masses and known only to a few. This problematically places technical knowledge within the perceived esoteric domain of science thereby giving material technology a certain masterful appeal, a *know-how* we can count on despite us not knowing how. Here we might ask, if we understand how it works, how the smart phone for example, stops functioning on the level of the drive. Taking into account the caveat that for Lacan the object is never a consistent field but rather an interruption of the Symbolic then this interruption is implicit in our everyday interactions with technology experienced only when its devices are useful. This provides consistency to our material discursivity, a consistency which in turn acts as an interlocutor in understanding such a dimension of social life.

Let us address this problem by asking the question, *does technology speak?* This question directly implicates the subject as one who tries to capture the Other as a precise function and form of speech thereby inviting the further question of whether technology can be affirmed as a modality of science, one in which we have the language and know-how wherewith understand technology were it to speak. These questions imply that there is an-other who speaks to us, but instead of this other being another subject, it is a material *Thing* to which we attribute our desire to think science.

Science presents as something potentially knowable, inevitable and a pathway to truth so far as its apparent inseparability from quantification permits. Following scrutiny and interrogation of phenomena and method, science uses analysis and calculation to test hypotheses from which thoughts and meanings, understandings and conclusions result. However, as Rado Riha (2012, p 79) states in his discussion of Husserl, the relation between science and meaning is anything but secure:

> The presupposition of the Husserlian doctrine of science is thus the equation between *thought and meaning*: there is thought where there is meaning. Following Husserl's path, a conclusion imposes itself, namely: science does not think. Science does not think to the precise extent that it annihilates meaning [emphasis original].

The manifestation of science as method and technique is affirmed through the materiality of objects, some of which we all use. The meaning of these objects lies in their function and in this way, certainly in today's technological zeitgeist, material technology manifests as a realisation of science *speaking* to us via its method and technique which have determined the character, designation and constitution of such objects. Furthermore, both the object and its function are readily graspable despite us not really knowing or caring how these came about. This imperfect knowledge goes hand in hand with technology presenting itself as a science which speaks. However, there is a certain ambiguity in science's symbolic appropriation valuing particular forms of exchange, even when this exchange is limited to recognition and status. As Pierre Bourdieu (2004) suggests, scientific capital is based on the negotiation of exchange, power and recognition thereby directly implicating the mechanisms of capitalism into the practice of scientific enquiry.

Given this situation how might we understand the role of science and its manifestation as material technology within the framework of capitalism? Riha considers that "science is not useful to capitalism other than submitting itself under the imperative of profitability" (2012, p 90). Material technology is in part a result of science, yet because of its utility it functions in the realm of the drive, not that of desire for knowledge. This is somewhat perplexing given that material technology appears to be an inevitable part of progress. A problem with material technology is that it potentially fails, malfunctions or provides only relative responses. It seems that material technology is a discourse which conflicts with the exacting condition of science. When we are faced with failed material technology, we assume that science too has failed us, yet it is the technology which we have cast as our *objet a* which has not lived up to our expectations, for example when our computer or smartphone doesn't work properly. Our immediate response is to think that science itself has failed and can no longer function as the object for our drive. In a way this failure of technology has stopped us from thinking.

However, the failure we ascribe to science in the guise of a technological object is paradoxical because it has not displaced our faith that science can ultimately be counted on. Here, material technology integrates capitalism into a cultural discipline influencing a coding of the self. We are missing something crucial when confusing science with technology in that science, unlike technology, in order to function is not obligated to have an ideological form. Technology must have such a form or it would not be the device intended–it would be something else and thus be dependent on something else. Here we have both misplaced technology as an interiority of science and framed it within the capitalist conditions of its production. In the quest for our enjoyment of material technology, our *jouissance*, we have elevated this technology to the position of what Lacan calls the big Other.[3]

The big Other[4] for Lacan is best described as that which inscribes the subject into the Symbolic Order.[5] Slavoj Žižek[6] articulates this well when he states (1997, unpaginated):

> The big Other is somewhat the same as God according to Lacan (God is not dead today He was dead from the very beginning, except He didn't know it…): it never existed in the first place, i.e., the 'big Other's' inexistence is ultimately equivalent to Its being the symbolic order, the order of symbolic fictions which operate at a level different from direct material causality. (In this sense, the only subject for whom the big Other does exist is the psychotic, the one who attributes to words direct material efficiency.) In short, the 'inexistence of the big Other' is strictly correlative to the notion of belief, of symbolic trust, of credence, of taking what other's say 'at their word's value.'

A similar logic can explain our relationship with material technology as that which enables a networking of the 'self'. First, it is important to consider what is meant by material technology under capitalism. Although this covers a very broad range of abundant objects, including the computer, the phone, the MRI, interactive games, the light bulb, the recording machine, the robot and so on, it is important to distinguish between these as consumer objects and technology employed for the purposes of knowledge and for the benefit of humanity and without expectation of profit, for example, research technology[7] concerning climate change. Today we feel compelled to be subjects of a specific material technology in which naïve liberalism merges with science, a position of excess from where the functioning of material technology unquestioningly establishes our day-to-day lives. Žižek (2017, unpaginated) discusses technological domination as it problematically structures the subject when he says, "[o]ur life, human life, our identity is reduced to a series of formulas. So, we are effectively entering some kind of post human universe where everything, our inner most identity can be reduced to a formula." The excess of material technology serves to limit the subject.

Yet like the subject, technology is itself ambivalent in handling this excess (which it represents and which the subject does not know what do to with). For the subject, it appears that material technology is also an inescapable mediator between itself and the conditions of capitalism in which the subject is situated. Technology demands we declare ourselves, yet itself has nothing to declare. It demands that we desire yet it is devoid of desire. It demands that we speak yet it is inarticulate. In the opacity of these demands, material technology possesses an anthropomorphic quality; it 'tricks' us by operating as a gallantry of *lalangue* notwithstanding that it is, for the most part, silent while we are doing the speaking.

To illustrate this gallantry with excess, consider for example the smartphone, which according to Adam Greenfield (2017, p 19) "ranks among the most rapidly adopted technologies in human history". Although it is promoted as such this is not a simple device: it displaces other material objects which we previously relied upon, the book, the landline, street directories, traditional methods of exchange and so on; using it is convenient, reliable and even enjoyable. Here the smartphone has not only interrupted some of the social forces, as well as the objects we previously used, it has through its position of dominance reconfigured the subject's interpellation within these social systems, conventions and forces. Our day to day lives are shaped by the smartphone's use and design; it can literally voice what we want to hear yet we don't have to return the call, we can be speechless and at the same time immersed in enjoyment in the power of language or more precisely, *lalangue*, which thereby sustains *jouissance* of the signifier.[8] The smartphone has become, in the west at least, a part of our human condition and of how we interact with the world. Whatever criticisms we might level against the smartphone and its production,[9] these are obfuscated by its usually reliable functionality. The irony is that although the smartphone has ushered in a communications utopia, it has not changed the often mediocre, even boring day-to-day communications and activities in our lives. Indeed, it enables us to enjoy the banal. We have become dependent on a technology which promises limitless access to knowledge through simply being able to use such technology. This, of course, is not the equivalent of thinking and our act of using the smart phone is technical rather than a demonstration of scientific *know-how*. And it is here that we need to return to a formal definition and function of science, the foundation of material technology. In addition to being subject to the scientific paradigm science is conditioned by its underlying of "self-consistency and

correspondence with reality" (Callaghan, 2007, p 15). The sciences (Pluth, 2012, p 97)

> formalise and quantify the workings of nature; they discern patterns and laws in the behaviour of their objects of study. They designate objects (and I am using this word loosely enough so that I would include with it non-objectal things such as waves and forces), the properties of these objects, and the relationships among these objects […] the sciences can even be thought to give us a theoretical knowledge of the real.

By contrast, material technology such as the smart phone ensures that its science is instead understood as an experience where meaning is embedded in wide-spread technological consumption. However, such an interpretation of the nature of science is limited to technology precisely because mass consumption renders technology distinct chiefly by its widespread use. Usefulness has always been a driver of science but it is not a sole driver. The usefulness of technology does not embrace scientific thinking but is instead merely to response to *joussiance*.[10] Technology's distinctive logic enables the subject to at will appear or disappear, to speak or not speak, thus desire of the subject of technology can never fully reveal itself because it is obfuscated by this very technology.

Further to these characterisations of science and of technology's interpellation within it, the question arises, is technology an object of science? Arguably it is not. For Lacan, the *objet a* is that which stands in for the cause of desire, meaning that because we do not know what we desire, we replace it with an object to represent our struggle with desire. Any material object is merely an appropriation of desire because as Lacan states in *Écrits*, the *objet a* ought to remain untranslatable; it is a 'thing' which is the remainder, the excess of the Symbolic Order. (Lacan, 1966b, p 104):

> The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but insofar as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, first, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack.

Here *jouissance* and desire are in tension regarding how to handle excess. To be clear, desire is not aimed at a particular object but rather to the act of desiring. This is important in the context of deliberating new technologies because of the clear implication that such technologies are not offering us something to want, rather they are making desire possible. As Alenka Zupančič (2011) attests, the object of desire is external to the duty to desire. This entails that the object is both knowable and unknowable and is acquired in the form of a pre-supposed demand. Technology as the *objet a* is a logical signifier, a continuation of the linguistic exchange we rely upon to convey the materiality we speak about and which to some extent affords us a language enabling us to grapple with our symptom (that which emanates from our subjective division). Although not itself representational, technology has the function of representation via its reconstruction of the subject with an object. Through such reconstruction there is a suspended, teleological character in the relation between subject and object, as well as between desire and *joussiance*. Material technology and its utilisation afford a fidelity to language (not to be confused with *lalangue*) but without necessarily exposing the limitations of language. This abstraction reveals an ethical conundrum: in deference to the contemporary technological age one is suffused with not only the promise of progress, but also (arguably) with the limitations within the structure of technology of apprehending the subject. Nevertheless,

we preserve a strange fidelity to technology in (mis)understanding it as (to use Badiou's term) *evental*.

Let us return again to Lacan's question: *why can't planets speak?* Just as we are certain that planets do not speak because the laws of science preclude it, so also we can be certain that technology does not speak because it interpellates the subject within the capitalist mode of production which itself restricts or limits language. What precisely is the relationship between capitalism and technology? Here a Marxist analysis is helpful. Two consequences of improved technology under capitalism are that even after deduction of the cost of technology, a proportion of its benefits is seldom passed on to workers as their fair share but instead entirely appropriated by the capitalist. Secondly, because technology usually decreases the number of workers required, competition amongst them leads to their increased poverty and dependence. What drives this malign dynamic are those social forces which not only determine value but which also lead to an increasing wealth gap between the worker and the capitalist. As Marx says (1844), "[t]he worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an even cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates."

In the context of Marx's analysis, what is unique about technology under capitalism today? Todd McGowan (2016, p 39) explicates this well in *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets*:

> Though capitalist subjects experience continuing dissatisfaction when they attain each new and disappointing object, they find satisfaction through the repetition triggered by the perpetual search for the next commodity. This dynamic is crucial to capitalism's staying power. If it just offered dissatisfaction with the promise of future satisfaction, subjects would not tolerate the capitalist system for as long as they have. But capitalism does provide authentic satisfaction–the satisfaction of loss–in the guise of dissatisfaction.

The constantly unsatisfying circulation of objects and the repetitive nature of their production is a far cry from the creativity of scientific enquiry. Nor can such objects constitute *objet a* firstly because objects produced under capitalism cannot so readily sustain themselves as the object cause of desire, as McGowan points out when discussing Marx's *Grundrisse* (2016, p 108):

> Desires do not pre-exist the product that arrives on the market to sate them. The product and the desiring consumer form a dialectic relation with each other: the commodity speaks to the possibility of a desire in the consumer, and if it speaks successfully, the desire will form.

This casts light on Marx's problematic assumption that we can in the first place *know* and *recognise* desire and further that we can then reflect this desire onto tangible, satisfying objects. Thus, if Marx's theory of production and consumption were to include the *objet a* then the *objet a* would become no more than that something produced by the workings of the market. It could be argued that material technology's capacity to generate desire is more potent than merely responding to existing desire.

Secondly the object of technology cannot constitute *objet a* because the character of the *objet a* is that it is not a present object, nor an object yet to come but one that is not even in existence. Lacan orients the *objet a* not as an empirical object but rather some-*thing* beyond such an object, indeed as those unconscious forces which allow for conscious interactions between the subject and the object, as something indeterminate that touches upon the Real.

In this way material technology triggers attainment of something that is not necessarily or altogether wanted; here material technology is operating in the territory of *joussiance* rather than of desire. Desire is not at stake. Instead, the status of a truth propagated by material technology is upset. Žižek explores the problem of truth as one interpellated within an ideological excess which points towards obfuscation (2002, p 168):

> The perspective of the critique of ideology compels us to invert Wittgenstein's "What one cannot speak about, thereof should be silent" into "What one should not speak about, thereof one cannot remain silent". If you want to speak about a social system, you cannot remain silent about its repressed excess. The point is not to tell the whole Truth but, precisely, to append to the (official) Whole the uneasy supplement which denounces its falsity.

Certainly, the status of truth is one which the subject grapples with. We seek to detect the manifestation of truth in our day-to-day lives, a manifestation which orients our choices, anchors our physical realities and situates our ego, and we undertake this via science and its various branches. Pluth (2012, p 97) too alerts us to an important supplement, that although "truths are indeed available to us in natural human languages" nevertheless,

> [n]o matter how accurate one's linguistic descriptions of the workings of nature may be (if it is even possible for them to be accurate, which I am not inclined to think), there is still a separation between these linguistic descriptions and what is going on in the real, which is accounted for more adequately in abstract, formal languages.

Despite our smartphone allowing us to share communication, despite the MRI machine capturing images of internal bodily parts and despite the computer collecting and storing data that is put in; despite our interactions with these material technologies, there is no meta-language to speak of or to grasp. These technologies cannot be the object cause of our desire insofar as there is no language which is conducive to their being verified as objects of knowledge. As Lacan says in *Écrits* (1966a, b, p 727), we are still very much caught up in constituting our subjective division. This division is characterised by the pursuit of truth via accessibility to material technology facilitating the drive towards enjoyment. For Lacan, we are subjects of *science*, not of the object which we cast as our contestable *objet a*[11] (p 729):

> To say that the subject upon [which] we operate in psychoanalysis can only be the subject of science may seem paradoxical… one is always responsible for one's position as a subject […]. There is no such thing as a science of man, and this should be understood, because science's man does not exist, only its subject does.

Here Lacan is returning to the logic of structural linguistics posited as a specific science in which the subject is oriented. He is focusing on how the subject of science is actually excluded from the very object it seeks to possess, that being science itself rather than science representing something else (in this case material technology). Herein lies a distinct separation between the subject and knowledge, or more precisely for Lacan, the separation between what he calls 'conjectural' science (human sciences) and 'exact' science (the remaining field of the scientific). He maintains (1966a, b, p 733) that

> [t]he opposition between exact sciences and conjectural sciences is no longer sustainable once conjecture is subject to exact calculation (using probability) and exactness is merely grounded in a formalism separating axioms and compounding laws from symbols.

Given this position, what might be the object of science, which for Lacan is also the object of psychoanalysis? About this he is clear: there is no object, but rather, the *function* of the *objet a*, which Lacan proposes as the 'science of psychoanalysis'. The function of *das Ding*, Freud's Thing, which inscribes the subject into language, lends a voice which speaks and which the subject echoes.[12] Thus the status of truth must include language and the subject must face something which is an effect of the function of *objet a*, namely deferment to our neurosis rather than to the object of technology which represents confrontation with our uncannily automated selves.

The struggle for articulation

Two important questions arise in the deliberation of desire and its inscription into technology. First, how can we conceive a subject of desire, and second, what is the function of fantasy in relation to technology? Lacanian psychoanalysis suggests that because subjects are structured by lack and desire, they attempt to fill this uncomfortable convergence with an object. This object is both attainable and impossible because although it is recognisable there are restrictions on and limitations to its form and functionality. Because of these restrictions and limitations, images of fantasy are imposed upon the object thus making it difficult for the subject to fully understand not only the object, but also the subject's relation to it. Furthermore because of resultant confusion, subjects can never fully articulate precisely what will enable them to traverse their object of fantasy and thereby fully submit to desire. This confusion arises partly from subjects' inability to articulate desire but also from their inability to be convinced that the object itself is the object *par excellence*. Thus, we remain forever subjects of perpetual desire and lack, in search of the illusory object through which we aspire to fully signify our desire.

In *Interface Fantasy* (2009) André Nusselder examines Lacan's concept of fantasy as being intrinsically tied to desire. Here he states that fantasy is "the central concept of psychoanalysis" (p 3) and foregrounds fantasy as the location of the subject of desire. Here we consider Lacan's formula for fantasy (Fig. 1).

What this means is that the divided or barred subject ($) is a subject of desire in so far as the object cause of desire is where fantasy engages with the Imaginary (< >) as a surrogate for this object (*objet a*). For Žižek fantasy teaches us how to desire; it mediates and structures this process through empirical objects. Nusselder claims that in addition, fantasy has an interfacing role of mediating the subject with an object. The object can be anything as can the nature of its mediation with the subject, a multiplicity exhibited in the intentional bi-directionality of the character < >. This character stands for the mirror where although two sides are always in view, what is on either side is different: the barred subject of desire ($) and the image of the object cause of desire rendered by fantasy (*a*) on the other. The subject strives for unity and synergy between the self and the object cause of desire. This implies that the subject will always feel alienated from the object cause of desire (*a*) because the object is alien to the subject and cannot be comprehended because it cannot speak. An additional problem arises in the attempt to articulate desire: to be a subject is to be a subject of desire,

however because desire cannot be named, the category of < > gives a structure and form to desire which although supported by language, fits poorly and therefore fails to convince the subject of desire. It is this missing of the mark which reduces the subject to struggling with fantasy as an impossible actuality that must be lived with–if only because living fully within fantasy is either ludicrous or psychotic. This mechanism of desire, although contingent, manifests as a question which seeks to clarify the confusion subjects have with their desire: *Che vuoi?* or more precisely, *what does the Other want from me?* Here, the category of < > is crucial in that it also functions to reflect the desire of the Other. The important question, *Che vuoi?*, can be inverted and reconfigured when we implicate technology with capitalism because desire, like capital, is a distinctly social form. As Joan Copjec maintains (1996), it is the repression of our desires as social subjects that determines how desires are understood and negotiated.

In addition to Lacan's matheme of fantasy, it is also important to consider his Capitalist Discourse, his fifth and arguably unfinished discourse, which is formulated as shown in Fig. 2.

The interpretation of Lacan's formula is as follows: the superego (S1) operates as the master signifier and commands the barred subject ($) to enjoy *objet* (*a*) in the form of consumer goods, services and commodities (S2). Lacan's theory of discourse is intended to reveal those unconscious forces which inscribe the subject into the social bond. Vanheule (2016, unpaginated) conceptualises Lacan's capitalist discourse succinctly when he states that

> [i]n the late 1960s and 1970s, Lacan occasionally discussed the impact of capitalist culture on subject formation. In line with his general idea that the human subject comes into existence through the play of signifiers, which originate from the symbolic order, in this period of his work he also assumed that the symbolic order of capitalism moulds the subject in a particular way. Capitalist culture affects the way we deal with distress and suffering; it shapes the way we relate to others; it determines the way the unconscious functions; and it influences the kind of request for help that an individual might extend to a psychoanalyst. Indeed, early in the nineteen seventies indicated that the capitalist discourse had started to replace the traditional discourse of the master. The classic figure of the other, which largely rests on the structure of the discourse of the master, had faded away (Žižek, 1999), affecting the subject to the extent that a reconsideration of how we work clinically is needed (Miller, 1993).

For Lacan there is a precise command here: *to enjoy!* For Slavoj Žižek (1992), this command becomes more nuanced in that it is the command is to enjoy one's symptom, that which emanates from the convergence of lack and desire. The superego imperative to enjoy promises that our symptom will be more exotic, complex, sexy and so on. Here is the promise of *better* enjoyment. However, with each consumption of enjoyment there is inevitable disappointment and thus in our effort to hold on to desire, we continually repeat the provocative image provided by the *objet a*. With every permutation of this repetition, the image is slightly different, more nuanced and morphing into that which we can

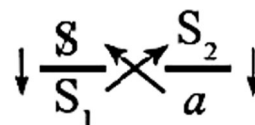**Fig. 1** Lacan's matheme for the structure of fantasy

Fig. 2 Lacan's structure of the capitalist discourse

only partially recognise. Hence, we continuously consume because we are forever compelled to overcome our constitutive lack as a mode of *jouissance*, that of bodily pleasure. The ethic of production and consumption is for Lacan steeped in and structured by the libidinal economy. It is crucial to understand how the limits of this economy function via the modality of prohibition. Prohibition has the function of igniting and maintaining our guilt so that we don't exceed the limit of our *joussiance*, our enjoyment. Here, principles of 'good' and 'reasonable' provide symbolic functions and contexts which are aspired to because these are rewarded as desirable characteristics within the social bond. Taking our theme of technology as an example, one might own the latest and best mobile phone for its more practical characteristics: convenience, work, access to loved ones, information and so on. The additional applications for narcissistic enjoyment accessorise the subject's usage and valuation of the device. This is not exactly an extension of the self, but more a reflection of our *a priori* categories: with every new application, upgrade, colour scheme and so on, we become a hologram in the device. The device, it seems, is both a frame for our pleasure and one to which we are duty-bound.

We don't think about these elements because they are in themselves rather boring, but we nevertheless enjoy them.[13] We see ourselves reflected not in the device but in our use of it and this is a key element of how, within the field of technology we wittingly interpellate and reproduce lack as a form of *joussiance*. We seek fusion with the device in order to replicate ourselves as mechanisms of desire. However, desire and fantasy are always simultaneous, incomplete and in the process of formation. Robert Pfaller (2014, p 3) wittily explicates this mechanism:

> [c]omputer users know perfectly well that their machines are not equipped to respond to encouragement, yet they nonetheless talk persistently with their electronic darlings (which are, incidentally sometimes given pet names) as if they could respond; and when a machine experiences a major mechanical breakdown, many users resort to crude acts of violence, inflicting damage, hitting the machine, or even going so far as throwing it out of the window, as if the punished PC were actually capable of redeeming itself in response to the painful experience.

It is important to remember that there is no subjectivity as a form separate from the biological body: subjectivity is conditional on the body we inhabit. That is, people and technology are recognised as related and relatable but also as distinctive and recognisably distinct. Regardless of this and taking on board Pfaller's important claim that technology plays a pivotal role in staging and regulating fantasy and pleasure, it seems as if the distinction between subjectivity and technology might not have a function of demarcation despite this appearing to be the case. Material technology demonstrates the effect of this opacity in demarcation. When using our smart phone we have to grapple with the realisation that we are deceiving ourselves when at the same time we cannot resist attributing to the device being beyond ourselves. Here desire takes on the staging of technology as a natural or essential order beyond subjectivity and herein lies its claim to be science. But this claim is no more than a ruse because we handle technology differently from science. Material technology stages and fills the void of lack and pleasure, it facilitates mediation of otherness via its usage by us and in relation to other subjects. In this way lack and fantasy configure the subject as triggering deploying of impossible or frustrated *joussiance*. The misreading of material technology as science is our failing. We see technology as both supplementing and appeasing our anxiety in being libidinally invested, and at the same time as attempting to address the impossibility of Lacan's enigmatic claim: *there is no sexual relationship*.[14] Thus, all we have as mediator between desire and the fantasy of technology is the *objet a*, the fantasy object, notwithstanding that in the absence of an object we have the tendency to create one and even attribute to it the status of the untraversable *das Ding*.

Wo Es war, soll Ich werden[15]

What might be the effects of material technology were we to refuse it as the twenty-first century *objet a*? For all of its flaws, capitalism itself provides the syntax of a well-made modern language that we can understand because it touches on actualities which affect our life and frame our choices. Its failings manifest obviously enough in gross inequality, wastage, environmental degradation and so on. Capitalism is a well-made language but it is certainly not a unified one insofar as although we demand, through modes of labour and exchange, that objects speak for us, in fact they cannot. The language we use when demanding that objects speak is one which attempts to provide synergy with our enjoyment together with some recognition of our desire. More than this, we act *as if* objects *do* speak despite being fully aware of materiality's failure to speak. However, although objects do not speak they are also not silent in that they have the potential and actual ability to convey truth or lies, to outwit us, to convince us of falsities and to play upon our imagination. Objects are impossible to fully grasp because we cannot fully grasp ourselves and because we cannot fully grasp what it might mean not to speak.

The reification of contemporary technology is a concomitant of the modernist project which spelt the death of God: it captures this crisis of faith by inserting a different Other, one which is crucial in commandeering the masses. We have however failed to anticipate how utterly unimaginative we can be: instead of basking in the so-called freedom modernism afforded us, we seek a new Master, one who is more reliable, visible, tangible and useful. Thus, technology has emerged from the death of God. However, technology's identification as science (as our big Other) is problematic and in this identification, we are complicit. Although we frame science as affording us certainty, reliability, validation, repetition, verification and so on, science's break with theology has not resulted in a more grounded and disinterested big Other, quite the reverse. We have, as Žižek continually reminds us, again fallen back on the dubious pleasure of belief, this believing being the modality of the *jouissance* we crave, a *jouissance* which promises an even better one the more we believe: this is *jouissance* of the Other. Thus, belief in science as the answer to the crisis of the times is both a return to modernism and to a contemporary form of *jouissance*. Lacan however reminds us that our vision of science as belief in science is very much conditioned on theology from which the contemporary world cannot therefore be divorced. We cannot simply dispense with theology in favour of science. From here Lacan makes an even stronger and controversial claim: that the very foundation of modern science is theological insofar as whatever we affirm, deny, doubt or take seriously is articulated as a subjective position, "I". This claim invokes Descarte's *cogito, I think, therefore I am*.[16] However, for Lacan, the word of "I" involves different positions which are in tension with one another: the "I" of enunciation (*I think*) and the "I" of statement (*I am*), the former referring to the "I" of subjectivity and the latter to the "I" of ontology. What this means is that the object itself is a source of distortion and fantasy as there is no *objet a* without "I". Žižek takes this further by insisting that fantasy and ideology are complicit with each other.

In deliberating the tensions and contradictions that confront our relationship with technology Stijn Vanheule (2016, unpaginated) considers, through an intersection of Marx and Lacan, how capitalist production operates via the command of *jouissance*:

Capitalist production implies that one no longer works solely in order to satisfy needs, and stops once they have been met. Production continues beyond satisfying needs, which results in a fetishist relation to surplus value (Tomšič, 2012, 2015). Lacan (1968–1969, p 64–65) concludes that the secret gain of surplus value is both the product and the motor of the capitalist production system. Yet, despite the appropriation of surplus value, Marx stresses that the capitalist does not personally enjoy what he gains. The capitalist is only the support that makes the system run. Therefore, what the capitalist system produces are suppositions and phantasies of gratification, while in fact nobody enjoys (McGowan, 2013). Indeed, this is what Lacan also stresses when addressing Marx's socio-economic analyses: 'There is only one social symptom: each individual actually is a proletarian' (Lacan, 1975, p 187).

Here, capitalism is cast as unconscious *unbehagen* whose function is unease created by enjoyment. In *Capital and Affects, The Politics of the Language Economy* (2011) economist, Christian Marazzi argues that it is the inscription of a neoliberal structure within the economy which formalises a new kind of hidden exploitation. He explains that the site of technology is deceiving because it assumes an apolitical, virtual and level playing field which one either uses or avoids. However, even if one chooses to avoid sites of connected environments, one is necessarily a reluctant participant, because the site of the virtual encompasses access at any time to worldwide communities and networks. It is the new public sphere, the manipulated 'common space' which nevertheless has consequences for the subject. Here Marazzi focuses on the "capitalist valorisation of linguistic processes" (p 11) as underlying the assumption of a common and objective virtual space, a valorisation which suggests that this space is in fact highly manipulated. He further claims that as a result, new forms of exploitation and struggle interpellate the subject, not into a refusal of fiscalization and exchange via technology but the very opposite, a virtual re-shaping of the means by which goods and services are produced (p. 15).

Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle's work on the 'logistical hypothesis' (2015) substantiates the issue of symbolising capitalism trapped within its own tradition, by highlighting the problem of representation, by establishing a cartography tracking the panorama of crisis. As an example they consider art and its appropriation within the ideology of capitalism, arguing that the capitalist imaginary is constituted within the image both as a paradox of desire and an 'absolute' capitalist system, also as a crisis arguably hidden within symptomatic trends and the chains of commodities.[17]

It seems that capitalism is itself appropriating a crisis of faith, reminiscent of what neoliberalism undergoes when confronted by the adverse conditions of the individual. Here neoliberalism finds it difficult to imagine a way out of the capitalist discourse: when technological expansion is adverse to future conditions of the individual, rather than this being interrogated, it is side-stepped through rearticulating class analysis as, for instance the 'precariat' who may or may not be offered contractual labour conditions. Such terms reflect the excess of technological expansion: an environment degraded by over-consumption, one in which there is no cash to speak of, where items are bought online, debt accumulated and repayment automatically deducted. This is the machine of capitalism whose ideological structures and conditions remain in place, shielded by technology being understood as an explanatory transition rather than framed as a structuring condition.

Fredric Jameson provides a further way in which to consider the structural conditions (or more precisely, spatial awareness) of capitalism. He attempts to demystify the perception that capital is a monopoly implicit in the structure of experience. He says (1990, p 348):

> Too rapidly we can say that, while in older societies and perhaps even in the early stages of market capital, the immediate and limited experience of individuals is still able to encompass and coincide with the true economic and social form that governs that experience, in the next moment these two levels drift ever further apart and really begin to constitute themselves into that opposition the classical dialectic describes as *Wesen* and *Erscheinung*, essence and appearance, structure and lived experience

Jameson considers psychoanalysis as having something important to offer when attempting to understand capitalism within a logistical circuit. He argues that the ideology of capitalism presents as a totality both within itself and more pertinently within class structures. Such a retention of class, Jameson argues, is mapped both consciously and unconsciously as a specific political experience. This mapping endorses a distinctively Marxist approach which is also a problem: totality itself becomes a symptom "of the increasing difficulties in thinking of such a set of interrelationships in a complicated society" (1990, p 352). Jameson argues that the 'postmodern play' with technology, although a way of mapping unrepresentable things, must also result in affect.

It is important to remember that a new language emanating from technology does not necessarily portray what enjoyment looks like, rather it merely presents the struggle to articulate enjoyment via technology. Such techno-speak is always abbreviated and never promises to be full speech, despite its origin in the boundless terrain of technology; it is consequently insufficient when language and enjoyment are complicit. The convergence of technology, capitalism and enjoyment within the messy constitution of the subject and its struggle for articulation offers different ways in which we can approach the subject as experiencing both mediatised enjoyment and frustration in the context of capitalism's staging of enjoyment.

We can now turn our attention to the task we have set, that of tracking enjoyment and the fantasy of desire via the logic of technology interpellated within the capitalist discourse. On the face of it, technology as a libidinal tool appears little more than masturbatory in that it exposes no more than a semblance of lack, in other words of *jouissance*. Although apparently superficial, this interpretation is the most accurate for trying to locate and articulate enjoyment (but not desire). Returning to Lacan's thesis of *non-rapport*, were a sexual relationship possible, the semblance of technology would come to replace the force of *jouissance*. Despite technology's apparent promise of filling the void of desire, it ultimately fails because technology is an apparatus which cannot itself desire or suffer lack. Desire places the subject as both setting up the coordinates of fantasy and of being the primary provocation of it. Hence the desiring subject sets up technology both as the lost object and the one which is possibly recoverable via *jouissance*.

'What will you do with all that I say?'

The discussion thus far has focused on the assemblage of technology as a libidinal enterprise for the subject. The constitution of the subject and the object is distinctive yet it is also alienating. Alienation has the function of negotiating visibility and representation. This is significant because it entails that the subject is demanding that the *objet a* (the Imaginary) be in place of the Symbolic as a way of *knowing* the Real. Consequently, the subject is forced to struggle, via metaphor and metonymy, towards greater accessibility to language, as well as towards how he/she

can access pleasure and engage the drives. Here it is important to consider how desire for articulation is stored and contained. Antonio Negri argues that power, subjectivity and labour are characterised through technology as automatous (1991). This absorption of technology is, as Marx puts it, a realisation of capital, in which the worker is "superfluous" to the labour process (1858/1993, p 605).

We have already argued that technology is an ontological challenge by science yet at the same time we reify technology as that which in part subjectivises us. One of the most appealing ways in which we might approach this is through an examination of the devices themselves. For example, mediatised spaces presented by mobile technologies offering social networking and access to instant information bring to mind Descartes' discussion of the body's appearance as opposed to its mechanics (this being part of his questioning of how the immaterial can influence the material and *vice versa*). Descartes' enquiry anticipates a contemporary problematic concerning both the illusion of and fascination with what might exist (if anything) beyond immediate appearance. Žižek contends that we do not even know anything about immediate appearance and such postmodern scepticism is found in recent commentary regarding the subject's interpellation with technology. Robert Pfaller illustrates this when he critically asserts that instead of producing pleasure, the affective condition of fantasy produces the illusory phenomenon of self-esteem: "people do believe in anything else but themselves" (2014, p 11). The contemporary use of and dependence on technology both upholds and contradicts this postmodern turn when we take into account its potential for failure and in so doing enable a return to Descartes' enquiry, as well as to both Lacan's structuring of the subject as a subject of desire and to the capitalist structures which attempt to regulate subjectivity. We feel certain particular forms of technology are essential for our very existence, yet at the same time we resent the status of such technologies in our lives. Pfaller (2014, p 5) highlights this ambiguous position of the subject who is contending with the fantasy of an object, as "an imagination without an image", this being a kind of self-deception of which we are nevertheless well aware.

Mediatisation is the automation of subjectivity and eventually comes to rival it through both staging and maybe even dismissing desire. A problem arises in that desire and technology are not intrinsically bound, rather they occupy the idiosyncratic space of fantasy. Even in its neo-pragmatic form, technology does not stand in for the subject's desire. We cannot operate like machines and trust the devices which impose upon us a linear version of our complexities. Desire is not a utility to be dispensed with or replaced by *jouissance* when we can no longer trust recognition of our interpellation within technology.

Lacan provocatively states in *Seminar XVII* (1969–1970), "What will you do with all that I say? Will you record it on a little thing and organise soirees by invitation only?" Of course, it is widely acknowledged by Lacanians today that his theorisations will inevitably be entered into the University discourse. However, Lacan is himself initiating another preserving power–one that he could not predict at the time–the power of technology as a mediating force between the subject and the desire for articulation. The "little thing" he so amusingly refers to appropriates discourses of speech within the ecology of media which structure the recording, storing and transmission of sounds and voices. Technology appropriates the exploration and dynamics of orality and influences one's approach to the choice and usage of its products. Here the objects of media are not merely technological, they have the ability to serve an intention, to be arresting and to seize opportunities for articulation. Notwithstanding this urgency to speak, technology simultaneously re-appropriates a desire to resist speech, to simply not speak. German cultural thinker,

Friedrich Kittler considers the freedom of 'unspeaking' to be a form of language in crisis and a provocation towards a formalisation of freedom.[18] This provocation is salutary because it directly implicates and situates the will-to-*jouissance* as a way to bear the ongoing crisis of language.[19]

The subject for 'late' Lacan is an entity of irreducible lack. Lorenzo Chiesa (2007, p 6) articulates this well when describing the Lacanian subject: "the real other as the inherent impasse and precondition of the Symbolic–which must actively be confronted and assumed". This subject is marked through contours of lack and eventually subsumed as subjectivised lack. We are born into language, subjected to and submersed in it, yet we are unable to fully harness it or escape the problem that language offers merely a specular identification with our subjective lack. Insofar as we are linguistically always in production we are thereby alienated from the Other for which we yearn: that is, we are subjected to language and to its laws but can never be Masters of them. The distinction here is between language and speech, speech being the execution of language by the subject. However, the subject is already alienated insofar as language precedes subjectivisation. More so, language is the only mediator between subjects. However, language fails because one can never say all that one truly desires because communication can never fully convey desire, enjoyment and lack. Nevertheless, Lacan suggests that full speech[20] not only has the potential to overcome alienation but is also a counterpoint to it because within the failure of speech, another intention or truth is revealed. Let us here return to science. For Chiesa, the question is not about whether science eclipses metaphysics but rather of how science can be inclusive of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Language certainly holds the key to accounting for the dissatisfactions and disappointments of consumerism. Yet there is a paradox here: although language is a significant propellant of human relations it is also ambivalent and ambiguous. For Lacan, we are always close to the object upon which we gaze and this minimal distance is a necessary condition of the subject's dependence on language. Yet at the same time, the truth for Lacan can only be partially said: "half-saying is the internal law of any kind of enunciation with the truth" (Lacan, 1959–1960, p 126). This is the linchpin holding in place Lacan's designation of science. It refers to the structures within which the subject is entangled, to the struggle experienced by the subject in relation to both the incompleteness of language and our intrinsic separation from it. Language is itself a fantasy concealed in its status as objet *a*.

It is important here to note that for Lacan the object comes into existence via a process of negation, in other words, it is the confirmation of the negation of the object which reveals it to the subject (Lacan, 1961–1962 cited in Chiesa, 2006, p 81–82):

> There is no more, and not at all less, in the idea of an object conceived of as not existing, than the idea of the same object conceived of as existing, because the idea of the object not existing is necessarily the idea of the object existing with, in addition, the representation of an exclusion of this object by the present reality taken as a whole.

Thus, for an object to be named is for it to be counted as one marking a symbolic relation. The object is a possibility arising from nothing, a space from which both nothing and nearly everything provides a path towards its enunciation. Simply put, the object exists precisely because it could be said not to exist.

Technology does not always allow us to fall back on the rhetorical declarations and sensibilities of lack and pleasure. The immediacy technology brings is both confronting and precarious in not allowing language to be even partially articulated or desire to be fully expressed. Regardless of the medium employed, transparency in one's discourse cannot be fully realised within

language. For Kittler the reason for this opacity is obvious – "tricks, whether in technology or love, or in war, are strategies of power" (1997, p 97) and these provide ways of doing things without words. In embracing technology, we assume the condition of the 'human machine' while at the same time continuing to desire, to love and be loved. Yet we as subjects realise that both we and the technology we use are subject to malfunction. Our pursuit of desire under the conditions of technology manifests as textual materialism which transpires through our illusory ability to control technology whilst at the same time being confronted with both the pursuit and the limitations of *joussiance*. Textual materialism is (a kind of) gallantry of subjective division in that being disembodied, it can never fully seduce us because we are all the time aware of its insufficiency. As subjects under capitalism we do not get to choose our *joussiance* because it is our relationship with material technology which both endeavours yet fails to capture *lalangue*. Because our relationship with material technology under capitalism is fraught, it can be expressed only through *jouissance*. We articulate ourselves via technology, although we rarely speak; we struggle with it, although there is little explicit combat. Material technology reminds us that we are bombarded with images of destitution despite our trying to establish a preserving and intentional critical distance from the world. Today technology makes movement, speech and struggle not only possible but bearable for us. We cannot both traverse *jouissance* and desire a future because we cannot see beyond an all-encompassing technology. Thus, our struggle emanates from the capitalist conditions which dominate our daily lives.

Defamiliarising *Enjoy*-ment

It might be said that technology is a detritus, a waste-residue of capitalism. This left-over provides enjoyment of capitalism, although such enjoyment is infused with subjective anxiety. Here an interesting bi-directionality emerges where technology produces alternative directions between the subject and itself. There is a relationship between the codified language of technology (that which structures the Symbolic) and our transmission of it being dependent on the network of signifiers in which we are integrated. Such a science of syntax entails that we are subjects of technology, a more or less comfortable position except that we are still faced with our libidinal economy. Lacan was certainly familiar with cybernetic theory as it ordered things and subjects (Lacan, 1978/1954–1955, p 306):

…[W]e come upon a precarious fact revealed to us by cybernetics–there is something in the symbolic function of human discourse that cannot be eliminated, and that is the role played by the imaginary.

It is here that we can recognise *jouissance* as subjective pleasure, where the image and the body are synchronised in delivering the most potent sensory impression. Not being an object of science, material technology speaks directly to the libidinal body, giving us the illusion that because it is interpreted through codes and textual signs it is somehow trustworthy. This illusion does have another more poignant function: although material technology is an excess it nevertheless provides a symbolic solution for its suppression. Material technology is a surrogate of science because it separates the speaking body from the object but without entirely isolating the effect of it being an excess. Here it occupies the domain of the Imaginary is at its most potent. The Imaginary constitutes the subject and cannot therefore be eliminated even by technology. Rather, material technology ensures *joussiance* and its *unbehagen*. Science as our Other will always be left inaccessible and its mystery always left at the level of the symptom. Thus, material technology provides for a *jouissance* of excess ensuring that the impasse of science will never be traversed. This is because meaning cannot be extrapolated from

syntax alone and the possibility of an encounter with that part of language beyond syntax provides anxious enjoyment not only with materiality but also with a new and unfamiliar enjoyment. We can never assume that we will probably enjoy our interaction with things. We cannot really objectify things or even ourselves through our use of technology because we are seduced also by its virtualising power. More than this there is little consistency in our use of technological devices because our subjectivity is, as Nusselder (2009) attests structured largely by socio-symbolic discourses. Material technology cannot, despite our misinterpretation of it pin down or secure the subject because this is simply not its goal. Instead, we feel compelled to enjoy our *not*-knowing, even disinterest, through our incorporation and libidinal investment in virtualisation (the Imaginary of technology). This recasting of enjoyment refuses a larger proposition, the taken-for-granted binary of post-modern thinking: that science is the handmaiden of technology because it locates the rational subject as unwittingly interpellated within technology.[21]

Might this recasting enjoyment as acceptance that there is no meta-language (particularly of material technology) be the manner through which we can experience a more contemporary form of subjectivisation? What I mean here is that the embodied experience of using material technology–our interpellation within it–is an appropriation of language, a semblance of *lalangue* in which we are psychically invested. We inhabit the surface of material technology for moments in time and that is all. More than this, we rely on the Imaginary to do so because we want to preserve that which is most important to us and which material technology threatens to take away: to be recognised for our difference, *l'identification*. Material technology does this via a specific character of *jouissance* because it appears in the Symbolic as a device which does not merely exist but which exists for the benefit of everyone under capitalism. This structuring of *jouissance* both animates it and leads to subjective disquiet because what is at stake is how we handle subjective division. It seems we are duty-bound to enjoy material technology and at the same time have a moral obligation to do so because technology is cast as a representation of life. Such *unbehagen* emanates from alienation triggered by the devices which we use but do not fully know. Here Marx's analysis of the subject's relationship with machinery is pertinent: the machine is where objectified labour confronts living labour and where we are no longer an authority on either the device or its production notwithstanding we utilise and fetishise it. This 'de-ontological status', as Antonio Negri puts it, quantifies the self because in attempting to measure the affective it speaks directly to the limits of one's knowledge. Object-ontology has offered the illusion of an automated, depoliticised or post-political discursive space. Although material technology appears abstracted from politics, in fact it is not because it subordinates the subject as being complicit with capitalism. Rather than liberating us either from the burden of labour or the pursuit of surplus-value, material technology has instead alienated us even further from the task of thinking.

Let us return to our original question: *can technology speak?* Here, Rado Riha (2012) provides us with a clue emanating from science: science certainly *thinks*, despite it being in the traditional domain of *non-thought*. However, if are to interrogate technology, then this must include two important characterisations (according to Riha): firstly, that technology is a question of science and secondly, that technology is burdened with the extra task of self-affirmation. Technology is not a self-sufficient ontology of knowledge, rather it is to use Fabio Vighi's words, "sustained by the formal deadlock of reason" (2015, p 3). Such a deadlock is considered by Zupančič (2011) as a problematic choice between autonomy and pathology. That we are strangers to ourselves is played out in the very devices we use in trying to locate our lack. This foundation of false representation both constitutes us as

divided and exposes the very division we rely on. Because the Other we rely on to characterise us is also inconsistent–that is marked by lack–we are free only to feel guilty and experience *unbehagen*. When it comes to technology, we are in the position of *non-choice* regarding our duty to it.

To locate this deadlock, we must ponder the subject's alienation in its relationship with technology. Although language is a tool the subject uses in addressing alienation, the subject's relationship with language is itself alienating. Although this sounds odd, capitalism as manifested in material technology can be 'heard' via the Marxian maxims of labour, exchange, surplus-value and accumulation, despite it its inability to speak. Although enjoyment of material technology is in many ways imaginary, the syntax of capitalism has the potential to make enjoyment possible in that the subject operates as an ontological interruption between science and material technology. Here *jouissance* takes on a more ambiguous hue: although technology itself provides a materiality for enjoyment, the subject's interpellation within it marks a different quest, that of foregrounding pleasure which is nevertheless, unlocatable.

Material technology under capitalism is at best a response to the emergence of new symptoms arising from technology. In providing data in place of knowledge, material technology upsets the subject's fall-back position of transparent rationality. We have technology as our Other which is both distracted and which distracts us. However, what constitutes this fantasy (mediated by the human-technology interface) are the continual messy forces of capitalism. Here Roland Barthes (1981) reminds us about not being so quick to merge the object with its representation, his *ça-a-été* [that-has-been] insists that we raise doubts about what we witness. If we take Barthes seriously, our enjoyment itself is at stake; it can be a form of interruption only if we only enjoy the position of interpreting data. There is no determining *imago* to speak of because subjectivity has more potency than the illusions surrounding our relationship with technology. This continual quest for (and clinging on to) enjoyment can be understood as material technology taking the place of impossible absolute silence, as an inevitable emanation of repressed tension between constraint and autonomy. With this intended inscription of alienation, material technology functions as the law of the Father. As Richard Boothby rightly asserts this our fundamental relation to the Lacanian mirror stage: we are estranged from the very image we project (2001, p 141). This tension is transfixing for the subject because much material technology is literally a mirrored signal wherein self-representation cannot be fully deciphered. Material technology provides the comfort of knowing that something exists outside one's inner monologue but it does not promise knowledge of anything in particular. Despite our desire for it to do so, material technology does not say anything: it is messy and confused, a reminder that we have an unconscious. More than this we must confront material technology as no more than a category of science; it is not science but rather an indisputable error of language, a recognition that we are fallible and like technology, prone to malfunction. From this position of frustration, we can only imagine, as emanating from the singular and imprecise form of technology, a language yet to come. To recognise this language is not to dispense with the object but to confront our unfamiliarity with the fetishized object. We are bombarded with material objects, we feel suffocated by them yet are not sure what to do with all this waste and excess. Our inability to recognise and control desire harnesses our will to jouissance thereby endowing technology with a unique character for social reproduction. Our response to this could be via the science of psychoanalysis because this has the required structure and agility to mobilise the subject towards scientific disinterestedness, to refuse dissolution in material technology and to locate attachment beyond technology. Here we can reject the great post-industrial commandment that material technology be enshrined as our

Other. We can refuse reduction of the subject to an automaton and instead embrace disinterest as a pivot from which to handle both *jouissance* and *unbehagen*. Here we can surrender to Zupančič's (2017) position: it is the object itself which disorients ontology by indexing the gap in subjective being. The object will never be able to fully signify subjectivity because the body is invested in *jouissance* while the drive is invested in the fantasy of impossible structures. The subject who chooses to think about what is at stake concerning subjective division (that is, being locked within the repetition of the symptom) is no longer merely a product of but a challenge to the totalising and symbolic effects of capitalism.

Notes

1 Mario Biagioli (2012; 2015) has written on how the capitalist discourse implicitly and explicitly constructs an important tension in the science community, that of remaining disinterested while all the time conceding to (obligatory) economic and social demands to deliver what is useful within symbolic capital and intellectual property.

2 Lacan never gave up on the capacity for psychoanalysis to *think*: it is a condition for thought. Rado Riha says about science that "it is good for thinking" (2012, p 85). Lacan claims similarly for psychoanalysis.

3 Dotan Lesham (2017, p 82) discusses how the Platonic orientation towards 'self-knowledge' as a human capability to 'know God' confronts one with an indisputable lack manifesting through the limitations of human language. He claims that knowledge is harnessed by language but is then diverged rather than dispensed to all because the political economy directs its gaze away from knowledge. Here, the position of science is similar–the inability to fully *know* science is employed as a method which directs the politics of social reproduction.

4 Also referred to as the Other.

5 Lacan's Symbolic Order is determined by the registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The Imaginary contains the mirror-stage which highlights the ego and reflects discrepancies between individuals' sense of selfhood and that of their image. The Symbolic is the dimension of language through which subjects are inscribed into the Symbolic Order. The Real is that which is difficult to be represented, said or known and is "carved up by language" (Myers, 2003, p 25; Žižek, 1991).

6 Žižek (2014, p 119) offers a succinct account of the Symbolic dimension of the big Other when he states that it is, "the invisible order that structures our experiences of reality, the complex networks of rules and meanings which makes us see what we see the way we see it (and what we don't see the way we don't see it)."

7 This includes not only technology used in consumer goods, but also additional technological expertise which is part of the wider logistical technological field, discussed at length by Toscano and Kinkle (2015). I acknowledge that Lacanian psychoanalysis has limits in dealing with the object of 'logistical technology'. There is a logic of the signifier but no 'logistic' of the signifier. The *objet a* is never consistent as a field of its own, whereas the materiality of logistical technology supports our everyday interactions without us even being aware of it. It is problematic to assume that psychoanalytic theory alone can satisfactorily address logistical technology as effectively as it does personal consumer technology.

8 In *Seminar XXIII: The Sinthome*, Lacan talks of being "rendered speechless" (1975–1976, p 146) through the experience of listening to chamber music. He talks of this as a process of stupefaction conditioned by *lalangue*.

9 Adam Greenfield (2017) discusses how the production of the smartphone is dependent on damaging extraction of natural resources, the exploitation of labour, low wages and so on.

10 I am here reminded of Aaron Schuster's, *The Trouble with Pleasure* (2016) where he claims that whereas jouissance is unsettling, pleasure "keeps you within a fairly buffered limit" (p 118–119). Maybe the smart phone for example, operates as a device which pulls jouissance back into the modality of pleasure, thus rendering it a 'useful' pleasure rather than threatening.

11 Pluth (2012, p 99) makes the claim that the object of science is not *objet a*, but rather "a development, and indeed, a logic". He goes on to elaborate the philosophical project of science - "what philosophy ends up discerning is a basic logical structure for the becoming of beings" (ibid). For Pluth, there is no object of science.

12 In *Écrits* (1966, p 736) Lacan recounts Freud's allegorical figure who is recognisable only in a subjective form through the promise of truth.

13 Alfie Bown's interesting paper, *Algorithmic Control and the Revolution of Desire* (2016) considers psycho-geography as a context within which people use technology. He discusses surveillance as a method from which technology is appropriated as a

form of political intervention, as well as a leisure time activity, maintaining that in using the same device for both purposes, constraints of geography and temporality are up to a point, transcended.

14 It is important to understand what lies behind this claim. In 1972 Lacan published his famous *L'Etourdit* in which he reminds us that there is no sexual relationship because ultimately, we are alone in our relationship with others and that therefore in the function of sex, two people remain separate via pleasure, rather than being united as two subjects. For Alain Badiou (2012) love has the potential to fill the void left by this absence of sexual relationship. What Lacan too is saying is that because *jouissance* alone cannot establish a bond between two subjects, sexual relationship is an impossibility without the mediation of love. Furthermore desire itself relies on mediation between the subject and *objet a*.

15 Originally stated by Freud and translated by Lacan in *Écrits*, (1966a, b, p 734) as "where it was, there must I come to be as a subject."

16 Descarte's *cogito* speaks to an affirmation of self-identity, that the subject who thinks at one moment must be the same as the one who thinks at the next because what relates these moments of thinking is memory guaranteed by God. However, although Lacan appreciates the force of the *cogito* as an explication of the subject, he nevertheless affirms that psychoanalysis and science is against historicisation and the *a priori* assumption of God's existence.

17 Here I am reminded of an important question posed by Gabriel Tupinambá: What are the conditions, economic, social and otherwise, which make psychoanalysis possible, even viable, in precarious times? His focus on temporality allows for the constructing of conceptual tools enabling psychoanalysis to frame its own praxis. His current work (Tupinambá, 2017) focuses on logisitics as the material basis of the signifier circulating within broad sets of practices, which include but are not limited to the field of the technological.

18 Kittler is suggesting that technological conditions are bound up within ontology. This claim and his style of argumentation are aptly summed up in his well-known dictum: *Nur was schaltbar ist, ist überhaupt*: "Only that which is switchable, exists", or more precisely, "only that which can be switched, can be". What Kittler is saying here is that we can understand knowledge only in terms of those cultural artefacts we use to employ its possible manifestation.

19 For both Kittler and Lacan (although differently) this formalisation of speaking situates freedom as a self-styled historical and interpretative problem. Both thinkers theoretically dismantle language and its relation to material objects, thereby abstracting the subject into a formalisation; Lacan via the subject of desire and Kittler through the subject's interpellation with technology.

20 Lacan states that "the function of language in speech is not to inform, but to evoke" (1966a, b, p 299) and he draws on Heidegger in making the distinction between full and empty speech. Full speech, also referred to as true speech, is close to the subject's desire, as "it is in recognition of one person to another" (Evans, 1996, p 194). Empty speech is where "the subject is alienated from his/her desire" (p 124). It is through speech that one can articulate the truth of one's desires, the most unencumbered full speech being during free association.

21 Here I again refer to Pierre Bourdieu's claim (2004) that science and the scientist need to understand the context in which knowledge is constructed and perpetuated. For Bourdieu today's scholar, scientist, philosopher or thinker is not only not free but also (un)consciously self-interested because aggressive conditions of capitalism now structure the academy, knowledge has become 'symbolic capital' and the traditional position of disinterested thinker is not tenable because scholars are driven by rewards, whether they be notoriety, prestige or even a knowledge-claim. Bourdieu's position is critiqued by Jacques Rancière (2004) who maintains that Bourdieu's thesis, founded on inequality, is fundamentally flawed because it is afforded too much agency for a discourse concerning the very foundations of knowledge. Rancière maintains that Bourdieu's staging of inequality as the primary limitation to knowledge is a claim to truth made representable and predictable. This for Rancière is at best paradoxical because Bourdieu is assuming particular processes of social reproduction of inequality and exclusion, and in order to legitimate their potency he engages the very concept of disinterestedness which is (arguably) in place to prevent inequality and exclusion. We might add that although capitalism structurally influences scholars, like anyone else, it does not necessarily annihilate our critical facilities.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this paper as no datasets were analysed or generated.

Acknowledgements

Additional information

Competing interests: The author declares no competing financial interests.

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