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The Dawn of A New Day
A Psychoanalytic Reading of Capitalist Realism

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Abstract

The philosophical tradition of ideological critique is long and multi-faceted. As such, it provides starting points for a discussion of the ideological structures underlying the current state of affairs within economics, culture and philosophy. This thesis explores two different perspectives from within this tradition to offer insights into the problem of ideology and capitalist hegemony. First, I outline the problem of capitalist hegemony through the concept of 'capitalist realism' developed by Mark Fisher. I draw on Fisher's work to accurately conceptualize the current state of affairs within capitalist society as well as the temporal condition underlying this malaise. Thereafter, I discuss the three strategies for challenging the capitalist system articulated by Fisher. These challenging strategies function as starting points for the second chapter, in which they are critically examined through the works of Slavoj Žižek. The Žižekian critiques of Fisher's work expose how Fisher fails to address the ways in which ideology constitutes our reality as such. In the third chapter, I introduce a variety of Žižekian concepts to speculate on an original framework for challenging capitalist realism in response to the problems I have exposed in Fisher's thought. I conclude that the structure of ideology demands any subject seeking to change the system to give up some part of his symbolic identity. Through the Žižekian concept of the act, I argue that without such a form of self-destruction, the hegemony of capitalism is unlikely to be truly challenged.

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Introduction

A spectre is haunting society – the spectre of revolution. A sentiment seems to pervade within the contemporary social order that the capitalist system is reaching a point of limitation. A multitude of crises in the domains of ecology, politics, bureaucracy, finance and health has exacerbated forces of rage and discontent. As a result of these tensions, institutions of power are becoming increasingly undesirable to increasing numbers of people across various sides of the political spectrum. Even though these movements disagree on the solutions to many of society's problems, there seems to be widespread consensus on the notion that we cannot continue living like this. Change is needed, and it is needed now.

Simultaneously, cries for revolution serve as cluttered background noise to the machine of capitalism that proceeds as if there is nothing new under the sun. Emancipatory political movements have great difficulties translating the widespread desire for change into tangible forms of action and new models of socio-political organization. This state of affairs, in which the capitalist system is able to maintain itself despite increasing discontent with the various institutions embodying its power, gives rise to complex questions concerning the relation between capitalism, resistance and ideology, such as: what does capitalist hegemony tell us about the power and nature of ideology? What happens when we engage in a critique of ideology? And can a critique of ideology ever stand 'outside' of ideology?

In this thesis, I will analyse two thinkers who have offered different perspectives on these issues, drawing on their insights for my answer to the research question: how can a critique of ideology address the possibility of thinking about resistance and liberation in relation to the structural conditions of capitalist realism? Drawing on the works of cultural theorist Mark Fisher, I outline the main problem of 'capitalist realism' and discuss the various strategies for challenging the capitalist system he articulates. Thereafter, I offer a reading of the book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) by philosopher Slavoj Žižek to outline a psychoanalytic approach to ideology that provides insights into the ways in which ideology functions within societal and individual consciousness. I use this approach to critically examine the various strategies for challenging capitalist realism articulated by Fisher, emphasizing their strengths and weaknesses through the lense of psychoanalytic theory. Žižek's psychoanalytic perspective on ideology allows me to create a deeper and broader understanding of the problems and solutions developed by Fisher, who applies concepts found in cultural studies, philosophy and psychoanalysis to his analysis of capitalism. Taking 'ideology' as the main concept of analysis, a connection will be drawn between the two thinkers that allows them to be critically read alongside each other.

In the final sections of this thesis, I outline an approach to ideological critique that takes the Žižekian reading of Fisher as its starting point. I offer an original interpretation of psychoanalytic concepts to articulate a framework that responds to the problems I have exposed in Fisher's work, thereby tracing the contours of a possible strategy for challenging capitalist realism through a synthesis of cultural theory and psychoanalysis.

What is ultimately at stake in this thesis is the possibility of *thinking liberation.* This thesis is not a manifesto, nor a manual for political action. It is a philosophical analysis of two profound and provoking perspectives on capitalism and ideology that aims to offer insights into the various problems associated with ideological critique and practices of resistance. As such, I hope this thesis offers a valuable contribution to the tradition of psychoanalysis and ideological critique through an original and creative reading of theory. Aside from its theoretical merits, I also hope this thesis is an interesting piece of work that manages to offer glimpses of hope for a new future.

1. Capitalist Realism

"It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism," [1] Mark Fisher writes in the opening lines of *Capitalist Realism.* Finding its origin in the works of Slavoj Žižek and Fredric Jameson, this quote has infiltrated intellectual and popular discourse as the central diagnosis of ideology in contemporary capitalism. It hints at the absence of any sense of futuricity, intellectual originality, or radical alternative thinking. The statement is both blatantly hyperbolic and invitingly realist, demanding further analysis concerning the reasons for the cultural, philosophical and economical deadlock that seemingly pervades within contemporary capitalism.

In this chapter, I analyse this problem through a reading of Mark Fisher's two major works: *Capitalist Realism* (2009) and *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (2014).[2] First, I outline the framework of 'capitalist realism' central to Fisher's thought. Thereafter, I discuss Fisher's theory on 'the slow cancellation of the future,' which describes the temporal condition underlying the deadlock of capitalism in which we find ourselves today. I conclude the chapter by a discussion of the strategies for future thought outlined by Fisher throughout *Capitalist Realism*. These three strategies will serve as a prelude to the second chapter, in which they are exposed to a critical reading through the philosophy of Slavoj Žižek.

1.1 *Defining Capitalism Realism*

In his influential work *Capitalist Realism,* Fisher outlines a framework for understanding contemporary thought and culture. Through a discussion of music, politics, education and bureaucracy, Fisher develops the concept capitalist realism, which he defines as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible to even *imagine* a coherent alternative to it."[3] This quote shows the central problem of capitalist realism:*,* the absence of radical, original thinking in the philosophical, cultural and political imaginary.[4] It is crucial to note that the problem outlined by Fisher is more complex and nuanced than a conflict between the authoritarian domination of capitalist forces and a powerless minority obeying their demands; capitalist realism resides

[1] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 2.
[2] Aside from these two works, Mark Fisher (1968 – 2017) has written and lectured on capitalism, philosophy and culture in popular publications, a variety of books and his very popular blog 'k-punk,' to which he posted regularly until 2013. For the sake of concision and brevity, I have decided to limit my reading of Fisher to his two major publications.
[3] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism,* 2.
[4] Ibid., 3-7.

beneath the surface of authority and power, lurking in the shadows of elusive, intangible mechanisms. As Fisher states: "Capitalist realism as I understand it cannot be confined to art or the quasi-propagandistic way in which advertising functions. It is more like a pervasive *atmosphere,* conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action."[5] This quote demands that we further explore the structural conditions underlying this 'atmosphere' of capitalist realism, inquiring into the reasons for the 'invisible barrier constraining thought and action' that allows the capitalist system to maintain itself.

1.2 *Culture and the Slow Cancellation of the Future*

In *Ghosts of My Life,* Fisher illustrates one of the structural conditions underlying capitalist realism through a discussion of time. The theorist starts the book with a discussion of the British television show *Sapphire and Steel*, a show centred around various kinds of anachronisms in which time periods constantly flow into each other. Fisher argues that this form of temporality is symptomatic of the experience of time in contemporary culture: "21st-century culture is marked by the same anachronism and inertia which afflicted Sapphire and Steel in their final adventure. But this stasis has been buried, interred behind a superficial frenzy of 'newness,' of perpetual movement. The 'jumbling of time,' the montaging of earlier eras, has ceased to be worthy of comment; it is now so prevalent that it is no longer even noticed."[6] In this quote, Fisher theorizes a new experience of time in which linearity has been replaced by an anachronist slippage of time periods into one another. He argues that this new temporality of the 21st century is defined by a 'continuous present' in which the 'new' has disappeared.[7]

To support this argument, Fisher draws a distinction between cultural time and chronological time. He argues that the passage of time is not experienced through the chronological sequence of minutes, hours or days, but rather *through culture*. That is, through cultural innovation which indicates a past, present and future. In Fisher's framework, the connection between culture and time is one in which cultural innovation serves as one of the *conditions for the possibility of the 'new' as such.* This means that cultural innovation not only creates new cultural products and artefacts, but also allows us to conceptualize the 'new' as a temporal horizon towards which the present can flow in various ways.[8]

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[5] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism,* 16.
[6] Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014), 6.
[7] Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life,* 7.
[8] Ibid., 6-11.

Fisher argues that this mechanism of perpetual cultural novelty has disappeared in contemporary capitalism. He writes: "It was through the mutations of popular music that many of those of us who grew up in the 1960s, 70s and 80s learned to measure the passage of cultural time. But faced with 21st-century music, it is the very sense of future shock which has disappeared (…) *While 20th-century experimental culture was seized by a recombinatorial delirium, which made it feel as if newness was infinitely available, the 21st century is oppressed by a crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion* (emphasis added)."[9] In this quote, Fisher outlines how his concept of 'the slow cancellation of the future' is one of the structural conditions underlying capitalist realism. Because we lack the cultural resources to think the 'new' as such, we cannot think *beyond* capitalism; the horizon of the 'new' has evaporated, leaving us in the continuous present of capitalist realism. The slow cancellation of the future does not designate a fatalistic 'end of the world,' but rather illustrates that we lack the *tools* to think about the future. As Fisher states: "cultural time has folded back on itself, and the impression of linear development has given way to a strange simultaneity."[10]

Underlying this new experience of time is a pervasive form of *nostalgia* according to Fisher. He follows philosopher Fredric Jameson in arguing that recycling, rebooting and pastiche have become the fundamental aesthetic principles of contemporary culture.[11] These principles have created a culture that is obsessively oriented towards its past as opposed to its future, replacing cultural experimentation and innovation with nostalgia and retro. Fisher argues that this aesthetic pervades contemporary music culture, art and cinema, therewith causing a slow cancellation of the future through cultural stagnation.

1.3 *Hauntology and the Slow Cancellation of the Future*

The second dimension of the slow cancellation of the future deals with *political* temporality, understanding the political 'new' in terms of the political past. To illustrate this dimension, Fisher introduces the concept of 'hauntology' through the philosophy of Jacques Derrida.[12] Fisher writes: "we can provisionally distinguish two directions in hauntology. The first refers to that which is (in actuality is) *no longer,* but which *remains* effective as a virtuality (the traumatic 'compulsion to repeat,' a fatal pattern). The second sense of hauntology refers to that which (in actuality) has *not yet* happened, but which is *already* effective in the virtual (an

[9] Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life,* 7-8.
[10] Ibid., 9.
[11] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1997): 22.
[12] For this analysis, Fisher draws on Derrida scholar Martin Hägglund.

attractor, an anticipation shaping current behavior)."[13] In this quote, Fisher lays out hauntology as the central concept connecting the experience of time to political thought. First, he uses hauntology to refer to *that which is no longer.* This aspect designates the ideologies that posed a challenge to capitalist hegemony during the 20th century but failed to achieve the utopian success they prophesized. What concerns Fisher in his analysis of the slow cancellation of the future are not the reasons for the failure of these alternative ideologies, but the *impact of* their failure on the political imaginary. Fisher argues that we are 'haunted' by futures that have failed to happen, stressing that our thinking about the political future is shaped and structured through the events of ideological history.[14] On the level of ideology, the failures of Communism and Fascism did not just designate the failure of particular economic systems, but rather the *failure of the alternative as such.* Fisher writes: "What's at stake in 21st century hauntology is not the disappearance of a particular object. What has vanished is a tendency, a virtual trajectory."[15] This quote relates the slow cancellation of the future to the Derridean notion that nothing enjoys a purely positive existence. The content of thought and language is always characterized by an implicit *negation*; the positive is always 'haunted' by a negated, concealed element.[16]

Fisher uses this concept to describe how our political thought about the 'new' does not exist in a vacuum outside of history. He writes: "These spectres – the spectres of lost futures – reproach the formal nostalgia of the capitalist realist world."[17] The usage of the term 'spectres' in this quote illustrates the hauntological element of the slow cancellation of the future. The spectral is that which causes us *to see the world in a certain way.* The developments of the 20th century have shaped our ideological spectres to such a degree that the 'new' is absent as such; any attempt to think the 'new' is haunted by the fatal patterns of the futures that have failed to happen.

Aside from the element of hauntology which designates the ideological alternatives that are no longer present, Fisher discusses the hauntological aspect of the 'not yet.' He again draws on the works of Derrida, who writes: "Capitalist societies can always heave a sigh of relief and say to themselves: communism is finished, but it did not take place, it was only a ghost. They do no more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back."[18] This quote shows that the futures that have failed to happen are not dead,

[13] Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life,* 19.
[14] Ibid., 17.
[15] Ibid., 22.
[16] Ibid., 19 - 20.
[17] Ibid., 27.
[18] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1994), 99.

they are *undead.* In their absence, they remain a threat, a horrible possibility, a dystopian virtual agency.[19] Therewith, the no longer and the not yet of hauntology become connected. The ghosts of our past are never present *as such,* but remain intangible and invisible. *It is precisely through this ghostly absence that they structure reality, slowly cancelling the future through the disappearance of the 'new.'*

1.4 *Strategies for Future Thought*

It is tempting to frame Fisher as a pessimistic cultural theorist who focusses on the negative and the impossible as opposed to the positive and the possible. To a certain degree, this is a natural result of his analysis: Fisher argues that challenges to capitalism have disappeared by untangling the inner workings of capitalist realism, cultural time and hauntology. What might be called pessimism is, for Fisher, no more than intellectual realism. However, *Capitalist Realism* does not only offer an argument emphasizing capitalist hegemony. Scattered throughout the book are brief but powerful sketches of possible strategies for future thought that Fisher thinks can challenge the capitalist realist framework.

In the first instance, this future-oriented dimension seems to contradict Fisher's argument that we lack the capacity to think the 'new.' His articulation of various strategies for future thought runs counter to the assertion that we lack the tools to think about futuricity in the epoch of capitalist realism. However, what must be kept in mind in untangling this tension is that Fisher's theories on capitalist realism and the slow cancellation of the future describe a certain *atmosphere,* a tendency, a pervasive sentiment. Fisher argues that the structural conditions underlying capitalist realism have caused the idea of the future to slowly disappear from societal consciousness. However, he does not argue that it is *completely impossible* to speculate on a future alternative to capitalism; rather, he shows how such speculatory, future-oriented thought has become absent from large parts of contemporary societal consciousness. Therewith, Fisher's position on capitalist realism is compatible with his future-oriented strategies for challenging the capitalist system, which the remainder of this chapter will discuss.

1.4.1 *Invoking the Ecological Real of Capitalist Realism*

[19] This is also a reference to the opening line of the Communist Manifesto, in which Marx writes: "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism."

The first strategy for future thought outlined by Fisher consists of "invoking the Real(s) underlying the reality that capitalism presents to us."[20] Fisher defines the Real as "that which any reality must suppress; indeed, reality constitutes itself through just this repression. The Real is an unpresentable X, a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent reality."[21] Using this psychoanalytic concept, Fisher argues that *ecological catastrophe constitutes such a Real within capitalist society*; ecology is always present in the background of capitalism, repressed, never allowed to be fully integrated into symbolic reality. With the strategy of invoking the Real of ecological catastrophe, Fisher aims to expose how capitalist realism represses the fact that capitalism is directly responsible for the destruction of the earth. He reasons that the exposure of this repressed Real will allow the subjects of capitalist realism to realize the disastrous nature of the system in which they continuously participate, thereby challenging capitalist realism by forcing us to explore new ways of constructing an economic system that does not result in ecological catastrophe.[22]

1.4.2 *Reclaiming the 'new'*

The second strategy for future thought outlined by Fisher involves reclaiming the 'new.' Fisher argues that we are experiencing a slow cancellation of the future in which the 'new' as such has disappeared. This leads him to develop a strategy for challenging capitalist realism that is concerned with reclaiming the 'new.' He writes: "there has still not yet been enough thought about what tactics will work against capital in conditions of post-Fordism, and what *new language* can be innovated to deal with those conditions. It is important to contest capitalism's appropriation of 'the new,' but to reclaim the 'new' can't be a matter of adapting to the conditions in which we find ourselves."[23] In this quote, Fisher shows that what we experience as the 'new' in capitalist realism is really a combination of already existing associations which have been eternalized.[24] The constant flow of change is really the *illusion of change*; in reality, the system maintains itself in precisely the same way. Therefore, Fisher argues that a possible challenge to capitalist realism must consist of reclaiming the 'new' not as 'adaptation,' because this is precisely the way in which capitalism is able to maintain itself, but as the as-of-yet unimagined. Illustrating this, he states: "an effective anti-capitalism must

[20] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism,* 18.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 18-19.
[23] Ibid., 28.
[24] Mark Fisher, "The Slow Cancellation of the Future," *Everything Comes Down to Aesthetics and Political Economy* (February 18, 2021).

be a rival to Capital, not a reaction to it; there can be no return to pre-capitalist territorialities. Anti-capitalism must oppose Capital's globalism with its own, authentic universality."[25] In this quote, Fisher shows that a strategy for challenging capitalist realism must focus on rediscovering the possibility of thinking the 'new' that goes beyond the borders of the current system, exploring that which is completely different as opposed to that which is only *disguised* as the 'new.'[26]

1.4.3 *The Construction of a Collective Political Subject*

The third strategy for future thought outlined by Fisher concerns the construction of a collective political subject. In his expansion on the strategy of invoking the Real of ecological catastrophe, Fisher argues that subjects under capitalist realism are exposed to processes of 'responsibilization.' That is, each individual is *made responsible* for doing his fair share, for operating within his capacities to do the best he can to tackle global issues like climate change, resource depletion and environmental exploitation. Fisher states: "the subject supposed to recycle (…) presupposed the structure not supposed to recycle: in making recycling the responsibility of 'everyone,' structure contracts out its responsibility to consumers, by itself receding into invisibility."[27] In this quote, Fisher shows how the problem of the ecological Real of capitalist society is that *everyone* ('every – one') is made responsible for cleaning up its messes (through practices such as recycling and ethical consumption) and, for that reason, *no-one really* is: "The cause of eco-catastrophe is an impersonal structure which, even though it is capable of producing all manner of effects, is precisely not a subject capable of exercising responsibility. The required subject – a collective subject – does not yet exist, yet the crisis, like all the other global crises we're now facing, *demands that it be constructed* (emphasis added)."[28] In this quote, Fisher argues that we must move from an emphasis on *individual* responsibility towards *collective* responsibility because a structure incapable of being held responsible for its outcomes and effects can have catastrophic results.[29] Therefore, Fisher demands the construction of a collective political subject connected to a resurrected notion of the 'general will:' "the goal of a genuinely new left should not be to take over the state but to subordinate it to a general will. This involves, naturally, resuscitating the very concept of a

[25] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism,* 79.
[26] This refers to the aesthetic principles of nostalgia and pastiche within contemporary culture discussed in section 1.2, as well as the lack of the new within the realm of political thought.
[27] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 66.
[28] Ibid.
[29] In his argument, Fisher draws on the article "The Subject Supposed to Recycle" by Campbell Jones.

general will, reviving – and modernizing – the idea of a public space that is not reducible to an aggregation of individuals and their interests."[30] This quote shows the essence of Fisher's strategy, but also leads to various questions: how must the relation between a collective subject and responsibility be conceptualized? What role does democracy play in the construction of a collective subject? And how does the role of ideology relate to these concepts?

The last three sections of this chapter have offered an overview of the strategies for future thought outlined by Fisher in *Capitalist Realism.* However, these strategies remain largely underdeveloped in the book and demand further analysis. Since it is the primary aim of this thesis to think about emancipatory thought and liberation in relation to capitalist realism and ideology, Fisher's strategies provide useful starting points for such a project. In the following chapter, I will expose all three strategies to a critical Žižekian reading. Through this reading, I attempt to expose their strengths and weaknesses, posing a new set of questions that will serve as the starting point for an original framework for future thought at the very end of this thesis.

2. Fisher in the Clinic

[30] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism,* 77.

In this chapter, I will further explore capitalist realism by positioning Mark Fisher's thought as the object of analysis, challenging his views through a series of Žižekian 'hysterical questions.' Seeing as the analysis of capitalist realism has mostly remained descriptive thus far, adding a critical element through Žižek's thought is crucial to allow new problems and questions to emerge.

The chapter is divided in four sections. In the first section, I offer a short introduction of Slavoj Žižek's thought through the work of Marc de Kesel, outlining Žižek's approach to philosophy as 'hysterical.'[31] In the following three sections, I critique Fisher's strategies for future thought by close-reading a selection of key passages and concepts in Žižek's works *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and *Like A Thief in Broad Daylight* (2019). The insights of this critical reading will serve as the foundation for the remainder of the thesis, in which I outline the contours of a framework for future thought that has arisen out of Fisher 'in the clinic' of Žižekian psychoanalysis.

2.1 *Slavoj Žižek as a Hysterical Thinker*

Even though Slavoj Žižek draws on a multitude of thinkers, writers and artists to develop his ideas, the key influences throughout his philosophy are Karl Marx, Jacques Lacan and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.[32] In the introduction to *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* Žižek states that one of the goals of the book is to merge Hegelian and Lacanian thought in order to 'reactualize' them. That is, Žižek aims to show how Lacan and Hegel, two seemingly 'discredited and outdated' theorists, offer valuable insights for cultural analysis and a critique of ideology.[33]

For Žižek, the most valuable aspect of combining Hegel with Lacan lies in the emphasis on *lack* in their work. Žižek calls Hegel 'the sublime hysteric' because he sees Hegelian philosophy as the most systematic unleashing of an all-encompassing form of negativity.[34] Žižek connects this element of Hegelian idealism to psychoanalysis, in which the hysteric subject is obsessed with such a supreme negativity, continuously circling around the insurmountable lack inherent to desire, thought, culture and discourse.[35] This approach to

[31] Over the past decades, Slavoj Žižek has written a vast body of work and the current thesis is by no means able to cover the entirety of his thought. Therefore, I have chosen to offer an in-depth discussion of one of his seminal works, supplemented with relevant passages from a few other key texts. In this way, important concepts can be discussed in more depth and detail.
[32] Marc De Kesel, *Žižek* (Leuven: LannooCampus, 2012), 9.
[33] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), xxx.
[34] De Kesel, *Žižek* (Leuven: LannooCampus, 2012), 8-13.
[35] De Kesel, *Žižek* (Leuven: LannooCampus, 2012), 9.

hysteria originated in the works of Sigmund Freud, who argued that the hysteric subject exists in a perpetual state of negation.[36] However, this negation is not an emptiness; it is a *distinct kind of negation* which is given a meaning. The hysteric is engaged in a continuous form of questioning, exposing the gaps, limitations and lacks in the symbolic or ideological field. As such, the hysteric position is a position of determinate negation, finding a thrill in the consistent failure to be integrated into a symbolic identity.[37] Expanding upon this notion in *Sublime Object,* Žižek asks: "what is the hysterical question if not an articulation of the incapacity of the subject to fulfil the symbolic identification, to assume fully and without restraint the symbolic mandate?"[38] This question does not only dwell in the background of *Sublime Object,* but serves as an important starting point for Žižek in his other works as well. This is emphasized by Marc de Kesel's reading of Žižek, in which he argues: "Žižek's thought possess an element of the 'hysteric.' It challenges the questions of our time with an intrepid openness and never shies away from any tricky points – from any 'lack' threatening our culture (…) Just like his 'hero' Hegel, Žižek seems to be a 'highly sublime hysteric.'"[39] This quote shows that for Žižek, hysteric questions are *tied to thinking as such* through the important concept of lack.

It is against this background that Žižek will be read in this thesis: a hysterical thinker who investigates and embraces the concept of lack through merging Hegelian idealism and Lacanian psychoanalysis for a critique of ideology. The interpretation of Žižek as a hysterical thinker is not intended as a form of critique; rather, the concept of hysteria emphasizes how the underlying structure of his thought about ideology is continually concerned with a form of lack.

2.2 *Symptomatic Critique and Cynical Reason*

This section is the first of three critical discussions of Fisher's strategies for future thought, in which I will examine the strategy of 'invoking the Real (s) underlying the reality that capitalism presents to us' through a Žižekian reading. First, I will explain Žižek's analysis of the Marxist symptom and use this explanation to show how Fisher's strategy is *symptomatic.* Then, I will explain Žižek's theory of ideology as cynical reason and argue why Fisher's strategy is valuable in terms of *form* (invoking the Real) but not in terms of *content.* That is, Žižek's theory of ideology begs for a critical strategy that goes *beyond* a symptomatic reading

[36] Seminal texts in the history of this concept include *Studies on Hysteria* (Freud, Breuer, 1895) and *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (Freud, 1905).
[37] Slavoj Žižek, *Cogito and the Unconscious* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 75.
[38] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 126.
[39] De Kesel, *Žižek,* 145.

of ideology towards the unconscious ideological fantasy structuring the most fundamental aspects of reality.

The critical Žižekian reading will start with a discussion of the 'symptom' because this concept is one of the starting points for Žižek's theory on ideology in *Sublime Object.* Žižek starts the book by showing how Marx's analysis of capitalism allowed him to 'invent the symptom,' a concept in Freudian psychoanalysis pertaining to dreams, the unconscious and hysterical phenomena. *Prima facie,* this connection seems peculiar; how could an analysis of capitalism invent a psychoanalytic concept such as the symptom?[40]

Žižek argues that Marx invented the symptom by paying attention to *commodity form* in his analysis of capitalism. In his theory of commodity fetishism, Marx was able to go beyond the content of the commodity (exchange value and price) towards its form, reaching the *movement at work* in the commodity. This also applies to Freud's analysis of dreams, who emphasized that it was the *dream-work* (the movement of displacement and condensation in the dream) as opposed to the *latent content* (the deep, hidden message in the unconscious giving rise to the dream) that was the true secret of the dream.[41] Thus, the question for Marx and Freud did not concern the deeply hidden kernel of the commodity or the dream, but *the process in which the commodity and the dream became constructed.*[42]

This attention to the form of the commodity allowed Marx to see that the entire structure of commodity exchange within capitalist society is based on a certain kind of *non-knowledge.* That is, the form of commodities allows individuals to partake in the exchange process because it *hides* a certain element which, if they come to realize it, subverts the entire process. To illustrate this point, Žižek draws on the work of Marxist theorist Alfred Sohn-Rethel, who writes: "During the act of exchange, individuals proceed as 'practical solipsists,' they misrecognize the socio-synthetic function of exchange: that is the level of the 'real abstraction' as the form of socialization of private production through the medium of the market (…) such a misrecognition is the *sine qua non* of the effectuation of an act of exchange – if the participants were to take note of the dimension of 'real abstraction,' the 'effective' act of exchange itself would no longer be possible."[43] The central thought in this quote is that a certain element of non-knowledge is *essential* for commodity exchange; it is a system which is only possible if

[40] In *Sublime Object,* Žižek mentions that Jacques Lacan already credited Marx with the invention of the symptom. However, Žižek works this connection out in greater detail and links it to a theory of ideology, which is why I discuss the Žižekian theory on the Marxist symptom instead of the Lacanian one.
[41] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 3.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 14.

the individuals operating within it are unaware of its essential logic.[44] Through his attention to commodity form, Marx was able to discover this mechanism in a way that no theorist had done before.

How does this mechanism function? Marx asserted that ultimately, the form of the commodity conceals the fact that the commodity is an expression of labour time into exchange value; through 'fetishtic inversion,' it represses the fact that commodity exchange relies on the exploitation of workers. On the one hand, the commodity *condenses* all the labour relations required for its production into a single element (its exchange value). On the other hand, the commodity *displaces* the multiplicity inherent to production onto the commodity itself, leaving behind no trace of the entire production process. This mechanism, which is inherent to the form of the commodity, allows commodities to appear as objects *separate* from social-subjective relations, as entities possessing an aura of value all on their own. However, in reality, commodities are the result of exploitative, oppressive human relations. This process of 'reification,' in which social relations between people are transformed into objective relations between things, is the key thought underlying Marx's theory of commodity fetishism.[45]

This brings Žižek's analysis to Marx's invention of the symptom. He states: "Marx 'invented the symptom' (Lacan) by means of detecting a certain fissure, an asymmetry, a certain 'pathological' imbalance (…) the 'symptom' is, strictly speaking, a particular element which subverts its own universal foundation, a species subverting its own genus."[46] In these lines, Žižek follows Marx in arguing that the oppressive nature of capitalist society (the exploitation and domination of workers) can maintain itself precisely through symptoms which initially seem to be anomalous to the system, but in reality subvert themselves and close the circle of capitalism. The Marxist symptom is an imbalance of a certain universality, but at the same time that which grounds this universality. It is that which 'breaks' an ideological universal and simultaneously helps to constitute it by remaining outside of the consciousness of subjects within capitalism.[47]

An example to illustrate this point. The capitalist system presents itself as 'free' in the sense that the individual worker is free to sell his labour on the market, free to choose where he wants to work and free in the ways in which he wants to organize his life. However, this freedom is symptomatic because it effectively consists of the freedom of the worker to sell himself into

[44] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 15.
[45] Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing Inc, 1996), 165.
[46] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 15.
[47] Ibid., 16.

the slavery of the capitalist system. His abstract freedom is thus a total form of unfreedom, something of which the worker is unaware (the essential element of non-knowledge). To draw on the quote cited earlier, freedom within capitalism is therefore a 'species subverting itself,' turning into its very opposite: unfreedom and exploitation. The crucial Marxist insight is that this subversion is the exact thing that allows the system to maintain itself: the universal *needs* its symptom as its crucial negation, as that which allows it to close its circle.[48]

Žižek argues that this theoretical framework led Marx to view the task of ideological critique as exposing capitalism's various symptoms. Žižek writes: "we can say that the elementary Marxian procedure of 'criticism of ideology' is already 'symptomatic:' it consists in detecting a point of breakdown *heterogenous* to a given ideological field and at the same time *necessary* for that field to achieve its closure, its accomplished form."[49] This quote shows that Marx sought to demonstrate how certain phenomena which at first instance appear as contingent, non-sensical, unintended and heterogenous by-products of capitalist society are in reality *necessary and constitutive* elements for the system to maintain itself. Such necessary elements, such 'symptoms,' are the points at which the 'truth' of the system, its exploitative, oppressive and antagonistic nature, can be revealed.[50]

Let us apply this theory to Fisher's thought. I argue that Fisher's strategy of invoking the Real of ecological catastrophe is *symptomatic.*[51] In a way homologous to Marx, Fisher lays out a critique of capitalism by finding 'a point of breakdown heterogenous to the ideological field.' That is, he argues that capitalism causes the destruction of nature and the exploitation and depletion of its resources. Fisher writes: "The relationship between capitalism and eco-disaster is neither coincidental nor accidental: capital's 'need of a constantly expanding market,' its 'growth fetish,' mean that capitalism is by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability."[52] In this quote, Fisher 'detects' ecological catastrophe as one of the symptoms of capitalism by showing how it is not a contingent consequence of capitalism's 'growth fetish,' but rather *inextricably* tied to it. In the Žižekian reading, this constitutes the symptomatic point at which Marx sought to detect the truth of the capitalist system as such.

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[48] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 16-17.
[49] Ibid. 16.
[50] Ibid., 144.
[51] I take Fisher's 'strategy' to be the conceptual equivalent to a 'critique of ideology' in the Marxist/Žižekian way. Fisher outlines the problems of capitalist realism and ideology and aims to challenge them through various 'strategies' of thought; as such, these strategies fall into the Marxist/Žižekian category of ideological critique, which also mainly focusses on the problems of ideology and capitalism.
[52] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 18-19.

The symptomatic nature of Fisher's strategy can also be shown through the conceptualization of the symptom as a 'species subverting its own genus,' albeit in a different form. Fisher shows that in contemporary consumer culture, the growing awareness of the catastrophic ecological consequences of capitalism is *turned into its very opposite.* That is, *into commodities.* He writes: "Climate change and the threat of resource-depletion are not being repressed so much as incorporated into advertising and marketing."[53] This seems to undermine Fisher's entire strategy as such: if capitalism is able to incorporate the symptom of ecology into its logic of commodification, how could invoking the Real of ecological catastrophe be a useful strategy for challenging capitalist realism? Would this not feed capitalism's growth fetish by leading to more abrasive forms of commodity exchange?

Fisher responds to this problem by arguing that the commodification of ecological catastrophe ultimately still *hides* capitalist realism from the reality of ecological catastrophe: "Environmental catastrophe features in late capitalist culture only as a kind of simulacra, its real implications for capitalism *too traumatic to be assimilated into the system* (emphasis added)."[54] This quote shows that for Fisher, commodification does not take away the repression of ecological catastrophe as a 'heterogenous point' to the ideological field of capitalism, it *actively helps to constitute it.* Ecological commodification helps to shield the subjects of capitalist realism from facing the true horrors caused by the capitalist system, which neatly fits the Marxist theory on commodity fetishism discussed earlier in this section.[55] As such, *the non-knowledge essential to the structure of commodity fetishism is represented in the commodification of ecological catastrophe in contemporary capitalism.* This leads to the conclusion that Fisher's strategy of invoking the Real of ecological catastrophe is fundamentally symptomatic since it seeks to *expose* this non-knowledge in a way homologous to Marx.

Having established this, it must be determined if such a symptomatic reading is useful; since the non-knowledge of the symptom is that which actively constitutes it, and ecological catastrophe remains a distinct form of non-knowledge through commodification, could this mean that Fisher's symptomatic critique is valuable in challenging capitalist realism?

To answer this question, I will firstly outline Žižek's theory on ideology. In *Sublime Object*, Žižek offers a 'classic' Marxist definition of ideology: "The most elementary definition

[53] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism,* 18.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Perpetuating the non-knowledge of the underlying problems of the system (exploitation of workers, ecological ruin) through the condensation and displacement inherent to the forms of commodities.

of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx's Capital: *'Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es'* – '*they do not know it, but they are doing it.'* The very concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive *naiveté*: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it."[56] This quote creates the possibility for Fisher's symptomatic reading of capitalism to be immensely valuable: if the problem lies on the side of *knowing* (that is, the non-knowledge of capitalism's symptoms, its heterogenous point of breakdown) and not on the side of *doing,* this means that raising awareness of the symptom is the most effective and powerful form of ideological critique by exposing the oppressive and destructive truth underlying the capitalist system. However, it is not self-evident that such a form of symptomatic ideological critique holds up today. Therewith, it must firstly be clarified whether the classic notion of ideology found in Marx still applies to contemporary capitalism in order to accurately determine the utility of Fisher's symptomatic strategy.

Žižek argues that the classic notion of ideology found in Marx does not apply to today's ideological predicament through a discussion of *cynicism.* Žižek shows that society has not become post-ideological in an epoch where the major challenges to capitalism have disintegrated and, to use Fisher's terminology, become 'ghosts.' Rather, society has become *cynical*. According to Žižek, cynical ideology does not offer a distorted representation of an underlying, 'real' reality as was the case for Marx; rather: *it includes this distortion in its essence*: "The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask. (…) Cynical reason is no longer naïve, but is a paradox of an *enlightened false consciousness*: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it."[57] To further solidify this problematization, Žižek expands upon the distinction between ideology on the side of *knowing* and ideology on the side of *doing.* He quotes philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who changes Marx's slogan on ideology as a 'false consciousness' (they do not know it, but they are doing it) into "they know very well what they are doing, and still, they are doing it."[58] From this inverted statement, Žižek extrapolates an entirely new picture of ideology in which the he situates ideological illusion on the side of *doing* as opposed to the side of *knowing.* That is, the mechanisms of capitalism and ideology are no

[56] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 24.
[57] Ibid., 26.
[58] Ibid., 24.

longer unknown to subjects in the age of cynical ideology, but they still choose to participate in the system despite this fact.

Žižek shows how this is possible through the concept of disavowal. He argues that subjects are aware of the illusory nature of ideology and the oppressive nature of the system, yet they act *as if* they are not. They do not believe in the universal value of commodities, yet they act *as if* they do. Žižek positions cynical reason as the mechanism to reconcile this form of cognitive dissonance ('insisting upon the mask'). This allows the capitalist system to maintain itself despite a change in the consciousness of the subjects involved in it.[59]

This has great implications for the critique of ideology, since ideology can no longer be confronted with the blind spots it needs to repress in order to maintain itself. That is, ideology can no longer be exposed to a symptomatic reading in the age of cynical ideology. This is the case because the symptomatic ideological reading implies a certain two-level structure: the level of false, distorted reality, which it aims to expose through critique, and the level of true reality *hidden* by this distorted level. However, Žižek shows that this structure does not hold up, because ideology is not an illusion hiding a true reality, but rather *that which creates and structures reality through illusion.* As Žižek writes: "If our concept of ideology remains the classic one in which the illusion is located in knowledge, then today's society must appear post-ideological: the prevailing ideology is that of cynicism; people no longer believe in ideological truth; they do not take ideological propositions seriously. The fundamental level of ideology, however, is not that of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself."[60]

Through this quote, we have reached the final point of critique of Fisher's strategy. Ultimately, Fisher's symptomatic reading of capitalism's destructive ecological consequences implicitly holds onto the idea of ideological illusion residing on the level of traumatic, repressed knowledge. It situates ideology on the level of *knowing.* Fisher asserts that if knowledge of the traumatic Real of ecological disaster were invoked, the ideological act of *doing* would be thereby challenged. However, Žižek's analysis of cynical reason shows that people know very well that what they are doing is causing ecological catastrophe, but still, they are doing it. Moreover, contemporary capitalism has managed to push this Žižekian reversal one step further by *integrating the knowledge of the symptom into the commodity itself.* This further complicates the analysis: acting within ideology becomes related to the *knowledge that this act is problematic*: only if the subject knows that his behavior is problematic, if he becomes aware of

[59] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 24-26.
[60] Ibid., 24.

the symptom, can he buy (ecological, renewable) products which appeal to him as a way to 'restore balance.' *As such, the entire act of consuming has become symptomatic: consumerism in capitalist realism is able to organize itself precisely through incorporating the knowledge of its destructive consequences into its products*. This allows for the reformulation of Marx's theory on ideology to be pushed even one step further: instead of 'they do not know it, but still they are doing it,' it can be said that 'subjects within capitalist realism are doing it, because they know it.'

The question that remains, then, is what ideological critique must consist of, since a symptomatic reading has been shown to be incapable of truly challenging capitalist realism. I argue that ideological critique must be *phantasmatic* as opposed to *symptomatic.* That is, it must aim to expose the unconscious fantasy that gives rise to illusion, as opposed to the various symbolizations that have arisen out of this illusion. As Žižek writes: "Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real impossible kernel (…) The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel."[61] This quote shows that the fundamental level of ideology is the 'fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself;' ideology is not that which hides a deeper essence, it *is that which conceals an emptiness*: the emptiness of the Real. Expanding upon this notion, Žižek writes: "Fantasy conceals the fact that the Other, the symbolic order, is structured around some traumatic impossibility, around something which cannot be symbolized – i.e. the real of *jouissance*: through fantasy, *jouissance* is domesticated, 'gentrified.'"[62] This quote connects Žižek's theory on ideology to the concept of fantasy, through which we are shielded from the Real, traumatic void. Fantasy is that which allows us to be shielded from this Real through capturing 'the Real of our desire' and confining a certain structure onto it which creates what we experience as reality. Žižek's theory on ideology shows that behind this fantasy is *nothing,* and it is precisely this nothing that the structure of the fantasy actively conceals.[63]

How does this relate to a critique of ideology? I argue that it is the deep kernel hidden by fantasy that ideological critique must seek to expose, it is this 'Real' that it must 'invoke.' As Žižek states: "The only way to break the power of our ideological dream is to confront the

[61] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 45.
[62] Ibid., 141.
[63] Ibid., 139.

Real of our desire which announces itself in this dream."[64] The analysis has shown that a symptomatic strategy for challenging capitalist realism is *included in the very logic of ideology,* substituting one form of ideology for another. As such, I argue that a critique of ideology must be located at the phantasmatic level of reality to truly challenge capitalist realism.

2.3 *The Point de Capiton and Stagnation*

In this section, I will offer a critical reading of Fisher's strategy involving the 'new.' For this reading, I will combine an analysis of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* with Žižek's more recent work *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight*. In this book*,* Žižek connects his theory on ideology to developments within contemporary capitalism. The insights of this work therefore allow me to offer a critical reading of Fisher's strategy of reclaiming 'new' that takes the current state of affairs within capitalism into account.

Fisher argues that a possible strategy for challenging capitalist realism is to reclaim the 'new.' Through his framework of capitalist realism and hauntology, Fisher argues that the 'new' is continually present within capitalism, but only in the form of commodities, hypes and trends. The radically 'new,' that which is completely different, is absent as such.[65]

In *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight,* Žižek argues that radical forms of the 'new' are not absent at all; rather, they are emerging all around us. Contemporary ideology is not an 'invisible barrier constraining thought and action' as Fisher states in *Capitalist Realism*, it is that which *does not allow us to see the emergence of the 'new' as such.* Žižek states: "we see that the change is already happening in broad daylight: capitalism is openly disintegrating and changing into something else. We do not perceive this ongoing transformation because of our deep immersion in ideology."[66] This quote seems to suggest that Fisher is mistaken in his theory on the slow cancellation of the future; according to Žižek, the future is not cancelled, but announcing itself in various ways.

Let us further explore this critique of Fisher by drawing on Žižek's theory of ideology. In *Sublime Object,* Žižek explores how signifiers, whose definitive meaning is never 'fixed' and always 'open,' are able to close the circle of an ideological space. In other words, he analyses how ideologies can *appear to be coherent*, even though the signifiers that constitute them are never stable, but rather subject to a constant 'metonymic sliding of meaning.'[67]

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[64] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 48.
[65] This refers to section 1.4.2.
[66] Slavoj Žižek, *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight: Power in the Era of Post-Humanity* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 8.
[67] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 95.

In his response to this problem, Žižek draws on the Lacanian concept of *'point de capiton'* (quilting point). Žižek connects this psychoanalytic concept to ideology, stating: "every element of a given ideological field is part of a series of equivalences: its metaphorical surplus, through which it is connected with all other elements, determines retroactively its very identity (…) But this enchantment is possible only on condition that a certain signifier – the Lacanian 'One' – 'quilts' the whole field and, by embodying it, effectuates its identity."[68] In this quote, Žižek shows the way in which an ideological field comes to be constructed as such. The sliding of meaning inherent to signifiers is halted by a central point of reference which confers upon these signifiers a certain 'fixed' identity. This point of reference, the *point de capiton*, is thus the prime, master signifier determining the other signifiers' meaning in a distinct way.[69]

Žižek uses the example of Communism and its core principle of 'class struggle' to illustrate how this mechanism functions. The *point de capiton* of class struggle structures the ideological field in such a way as to oppose 'real' democracy to oppressive 'bourgeois' formal democracy, connects the struggle of feminism to class divisions, and posits the destruction of the earth as an inevitable result of capitalist production.[70] Taken outside of the ideological field of Communism, signifiers such as feminism or democracy do not *necessarily* have to mean this, but the *point de capiton* of class struggle manages to *inscribe* this meaning into them, fixing them, 'quilting' them together. Žižek uses this analysis to show that what is ultimately at stake in ideological struggle is which *points de capiton* will 'totalize' and therewith confer upon the other, free-floating signifiers their meaning. He argues that all elements of an ideological field in this way become a connected 'series of equivalences.'[71]

This concept must be analysed further, since there is a crucial *temporal* element to ideological quilting that has remained unexplored. Žižek complicates the mechanism of quilting by asserting that the *point de capiton* confers a certain consistency upon an ideological field *retroactively.* To illustrate this retroactive motion, Žižek uses the example of anti-Semitism. In the ideological field prior to anti-Semitism, the signifier of 'Jew' can connote a certain cluster of 'supposed' properties (greedy, cheap, etc), but this is not yet a totalized *point de capiton* of anti-Semitism. In order for the signifiers in this ideological field to be completely quilted together, their relation must be *inverted.* That is, the ideological statement must go from 'Jews

[68] Ibid., 96.
[69] Ibid., 95.
[70] Ibid., 95.
[71] Ibid., 96.

are people who are like that' (greedy, cheap) to 'Jews are like that (greedy, cheap), *because they are Jews.*'[72] This second statement is by no means tautological; rather, the *point de capiton* has only now managed to fully quilt the ideological field together. It has done so by connecting itself to an unattainable, unrepresentable void, that which is 'in the Jew more than the Jew.' It is only when this 'real thing,' this unattainable void at the level of fantasy, is included in the ideological operation, that the signifiers are truly quilted together. For Žižek, this means that the crucial point of the ideological analysis is to detect how the contingency of naming, the act of designating the unrepresentable, 'real' kernel in any object, leads to a certain quilting which retroactively gives that object and the ideological field in which it is situated their identity.[73]

This analysis gives rise to a crucial hysterical question: How come a form of the 'new' is already emerging according to Žižek, whereas Fisher keeps emphasizing its very disappearance? I argue that this question can best be answered through locating the *point de capiton* in Fisher's theoretical framework. As Žižek writes: "The first task of the analysis is therefore to isolate, in a given ideological field, the particular struggle which at the same time determines the horizon of its totality – to put it in Hegelian terms, the species which is its own universal kind."[74] Where in Fisher's theory do we find a point which 'determines the horizon of its totality?' How is his theory quilted together?

I argue that Fisher's theory on the slow cancellation of the future quilts the ideological field together by the *point de capiton* of 'stagnation.' It is this nodal point in Fisher's framework which does not allow him to see that the 'new' is, according to Žižek, already appearing. Just like 'class struggle' determines feminism, democracy and ecology in the ideological field of Communism, 'stagnation' determines culture, politics, art and music in the Fisherian field of capitalist realism. It is that which quilts these signifiers together in such a way as to make their internal movement impossible to grasp. This allows us to make better sense of Žižek's thesis in *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight,* in which he writes: "The paradox of our predicament is therefore that, while resistance to global capitalism seemingly fails again and again to halt its advance, it fails to recognize the many trends which clearly signal capitalism's progressive disintegration. It is as if the two tendencies (resistance and self-disintegration) move at different levels and cannot meet, so that we get futile protests at the same time as immanent decay and there is no way of bringing the two together in a coordinated attempt to emancipate the world from

[72] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 106-107.
[73] Ibid., 106.
[74] Ibid., 97.

capitalism."[75] This quote exposes the flaw in Fisher's theory: even though he is theorizing possible strategies of resistance to capitalism, he fails to see 'the many trends which clearly signal capitalism's progressive disintegration.' I argue that this failure can be explained through an analysis of Fisher's theory as an ideological field totalized by the *point de capiton* of stagnation.

This can be illustrated further by a connection between the *point de capiton* of 'stagnation' and the (impossible) symbolization of the Real. Žižek writes: "It is not the real object which guarantees as the point of reference for the unity and identity of a certain ideological experience – on the contrary, it is the reference to a 'pure' signifier [the point de capiton] which gives unity and identity to our experience of historical reality itself. Historical reality is of course always symbolized; the way we experience it is always mediated through different modes of symbolization."[76] When we apply this quote to Fisher's analysis, it becomes clear that he symbolizes historical reality through culture and politics. His concept of capitalist realism and the slow cancellation of the future is based on the assertion that the 'new' as such has disappeared through cultural stagnation.[77] However, the concept of the *point de capiton* allows us to see that Fisher's analysis does *more* than that. In his theory, a movement can be discerned that is similar to the two statements on Jews in relation to anti-Semitism; for Fisher, it is not the case that culture, through a cluster of supposed properties (style, sound, mode of production and consumption) designates stagnation: rather, *it signals stagnation because it is culture.* The *point de capiton* of stagnation functions in his theory as a 'rigid designator:' it aims at that which is in the cultural object *more* than the cultural object. It is this impossible, impenetrable kernel that Fisher's analysis of the slow cancellation of the future is ultimately built upon, which explains his assertion of the disappearance of the 'new' and the strategy for future thought that attempts to reclaim it.

The Žižekian reading of Fisher's strategy of reclaiming the 'new' has shown that this strategy is itself deeply immersed in an ideological field that is quilted together by the *point de capiton* of stagnation. The *point de capiton* has illustrated this point, since it has brought to light that the unattainable X, the void, structures Fisher's ideological field in ways of which he is not (fully) aware. Therewith, this reading has shown that a critique of ideology must locate its own *point de capiton,* its own rigid designator, the quilting at work in its own operation. If an ideological critique does not take this element into account, it risks the creation of an ideological

[75] Žižek, *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight*, 14.
[76] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 108.
[77] Section 1.2.

fantasy-structure by reading in its object of study that which is *more* than its object of study. In the case of Fisher, such a fantasy-structure is the slow cancellation of the future and the disappearance of the 'new,' which claims to be an accurate depiction of reality that stands outside of ideology, whereas it has actually substituted one ideology for another.

2.4 *Radical Democracy and Ideological Fantasy*

In the last section of this chapter, I will examine Fisher's third strategy for challenging capitalist realism, in which he calls for the construction of a collective political subject that can exercise the responsibility needed to tackle issues on a global scale, such as ecological catastrophe.[78]

In order to critically examine this strategy through a Žižekian lense, I will again draw on Žižek's analysis of *point de capiton* in *Sublime Object.* Drawing on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Žižek connects the *point de capiton* to the theory of radical democracy in their work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). In this book, Laclau and Mouffe aim to identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of collective action through radical democracy. The authors argue that the discourse of radical democracy is capable of bringing together the various independent socio-political struggles that are fighting power inequalities in contemporary society (ecology, feminism, civil rights movements). They argue that the task of emancipatory thought consists of bringing together these various power struggles under one antagonistic umbrella.[79]

Žižek detects a certain quilting movement in this strategy. He writes: "the title 'radical democracy' itself indicates how the very possibility of their articulation implies the 'nodal,' determining role of a certain struggle which, precisely as a particular struggle, outlines the horizon of all the other struggles."[80] In this quote, Žižek shows that an emancipatory project such as the one outlined by Laclau and Mouffe consists in totalizing a specific *point de capiton,* in this case the central point of 'radical democracy,' which quilts all other signifiers together in a distinctive way.

If the project outlined by Laclau and Mouffe is compared to Fisher's strategy of constructing a collective political subject, key similarities can be discerned. Similar to Laclau and Mouffe, Fisher intends to transform society from an aggregation of individuals who are all

[78] Section 1.4.3.
[79] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).
[80] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 97.

equally (non) responsible for society's problems towards one in which a form of general will unites all individuals together in a shared struggle for emancipation and liberation.[81] As such, the 'collective action' in Laclau and Mouffe is mirrored in Fisher's collective political subject.

Does this mean that what is needed for Fisher's strategy of constructing a collective political subject to succeed is the totalization of a new *point de capiton* which unites the plurality of struggles under one umbrella? This is what Žižek seems to suggest when he states: "the particular struggle [radical democracy] playing a hegemonic role, far from enforcing a violent suppression of the differences, opens the very space for the relative autonomy of the particular struggles: the feminist struggle, for example, is made possible only through reference to democratic egalitarian political discourse."[82] This quote shows how Žižek thinks a particular struggle for the left can 'open the very space for the relative autonomy of particular struggles' through the motion of quilting. This seems to suggest that societal problems such as ecological catastrophe can be tackled if a strategy for future thought successfully totalizes a new *point de capiton* through ideological critique.

The answer, however, is not so simple. Drawing on my critique of Fisher in the previous sections of this chapter, I argue that the critique of ideology must go beyond the level of the *symptom* towards the level of *fantasy.* It must locate the deep, traumatic kernel *giving rise* to ideology as such; it must confront the Real of our desire.[83] This means that the discussion of radical democracy needs to be located at the level of ideological fantasy in order to accurately determine the utility of Fisher's strategy of the construction of a collective political subject in relation to the *point de capiton.*

In order to do this, the relation between the phantasmic element of ideology and the theory on radical democracy needs to be further explored. Žižek writes: "society is always traversed by an antagonistic split which cannot be integrated into the symbolic order. And the stake of social-ideological fantasy is to construct a vision of society which *does* exist, a society which is not split by an antagonistic division, a society in which the relation between its parts is organic, complementary."[84] This quote shows that when we apply the notion of fantasy to society, we see that the fantasy allows us to hide from the Real of society: that there is no society as such, that it is based on a lack, a fundamental, insurmountable antagonism. In Žižek's theory on ideology, the fantasy-construction is therefore a necessary companion to this societal

[81] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 77.
[82] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 97.
[83] Ibid., 48.
[84] Ibid., 141-142.

antagonism, as that which is needed to *mask* this antagonism. When we apply this to the work of Laclau and Mouffe, we see that their theory *takes the fantasy structure concealing the fundamental antagonism of society as a starting point*. In their theory of radical democracy and the identification of discursive conditions for the emergence of collective action, the theorists conceptualize democracy as an 'empty seat,' as that which is initially a lack, a void. As such, the power of their theory resides in its acknowledgement of the fact that it fundamentally operates at the phantasmatic level. This antagonist starting point of theory acknowledges that what we call 'reality' (in this case, political reality) is a fantasy-construction concealing the Real.

What implications does this have for Fisher's strategy? Following the conclusions drawn in this chapter thus far, I argue that Fisher's strategy of constructing a collective political falls short because of its failure to situate itself at the phantasmatic level. Fisher's strategy again detects a capitalist symptom in the form of ecological catastrophe and subsequently aims to *construct a collective political subject on the basis of this symptom*. However, Žižek's analysis of Laclau and Mouffe exposes that what is really required for the emergence of a collective subject is a connection to the fantasy-structure of ideology. Žižek shows that through the quilting movement of the *point de capiton*, Laclau and Mouffe give this initial point of negativity (democracy as an 'empty seat,' a traumatic element which cannot be symbolized) a *positive* meaning. As such, this fantasy-structure is *that which allows a certain quilting to take place* which connects subsequent social and political struggles such as ecology, democracy and feminism. This is what Fisher overlooks in his strategy: he frames the antagonism giving rise to the collective political subject in terms of a *symptom* (ecological catastrophe) instead of a more fundamental, traumatic *void*.

In this chapter, I have offered three critical readings of Mark Fisher's strategies for future thought. Through these readings, I have shown how Fisher's strategies ultimately constitute a *symptomatic* reading of capitalist ideology that is impotent in the age of cynical ideology. My reading has shown that ideological critique must be located at the level of the ideological fantasy which allows us to hide from the traumatic void of the Real.

3. The Act

Before moving to the final part of the analysis, let me briefly recapitulate the various elements that have been discussed in this thesis so far. In the first chapter, I have outlined the main problem of capitalist realism and positioned the slow cancellation of the future as a structural condition underlying this problem. Thereafter, I have exposed the three strategies for future thought developed by Fisher to a critical Žižekian reading, emphasizing how ideology structures reality at the level of fantasy. In this third and final chapter, I will outline the contours of a new strategy for future thought that is in line with the insights into capitalism and ideology that have arisen out of the analysis.

In the final lines of *Capitalist Realism,* Fisher writes: "The long, dark night of the end of history has to be grasped as an enormous opportunity. The very oppressive pervasiveness of capitalist realism means that even glimmers of alternative political and economic possibilities can have disproportionately great effect. The tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again."[85] This quote shows that what is at stake in cultural and ideological analysis is not just critique, but also the need to speculate, innovate and provoke. Critique is valuable for exposing the flaws in our theories and allowing us to see the intricate workings of a system as complicated as capitalism, but we must also strive to go *beyond* critique. That is, we must attempt to move society forward by creating new paths of thought and action that have hitherto remained unknown.

What implications does all of this have for the current thesis? What value does the critical reading of Fisher in the clinic of Žižekian psychoanalysis have for the future-oriented dimension of thought I have just emphasized? I argue that this reading is valuable because it has *allowed for a new set of questions to emerge*, such as: how must we think about resistance and liberation in relation to fantasy and ideology? What role can the *point de capiton* play in a strategy for future thought? How can these theoretical insights be used to expand the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism? In this chapter, I will use these questions as starting points for an original strategy for future thought.

The answers to these questions are, of course, not straight-forward. They are not 'solutions' to the problem of ideology. One of the main points that has arisen out of the Žižekian critique of Fisher has been that ideology haunts us *precisely* when we think we are able to escape it. As Žižek writes: "the stepping out of (what we experience as) ideology is the very form of our enslavement to it."[86] I have argued that even when Fisher constructs a strategy for

[85] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism,* 80-81.
[86] Slavoj Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2012), 5.

future thought which he thinks can escape ideology, he remains tied to the fundamental level of ideology. That is, he fails to adequately address the ways in which we *need* ideology as a phantasmatic basis of reality, as that which allows us to escape the Real. The analysis has shown that it is precisely this non-knowledge of the fantasy-structure of ideology that strengthens the power of ideology.[87]

This means that we have to be careful when developing the framework underlying strategies for future thought; the moment we think we have 'surpassed' or 'solved' the problem of ideology seems to be the exact moment at which we are fully encapsulated by it. This creates the need for a *speculative* approach to future thought, an approach which has an element of uncertainty and doubt built into it. As such, my framework does not constitute a way to solve the problem of ideology, but rather lays out a *possible path for future thought that starts at the level of ideological fantasy.* With these remarks in mind, I will use the remainder of this thesis to trace the contours of this framework.

3.1 *The Act and the Impossible*

The first step in constructing the framework will be a discussion of the Žižekian 'act.' In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality,* Žižek writes: "Precisely because of this internality of the Real to the Symbolic, it *is* possible to touch the Real through the Symbolic; (…) this is what the Lacanian notion of the psychoanalytic *act* is about – the act as a gesture which, by definition, touches the dimension of some impossible Real."[88] In this quote, we can discern a certain homology between the Žižekian act and Fisher's strategy of invoking the Real of ecological catastrophe. Both theorists aim at reaching the Real underlying symbolic reality; Žižek looks for an abstract kind of act to touch the Real, whereas Fisher aims to do so by connecting ecological catastrophe to capitalism. However, my critique of Fisher's strategy has shown that it is *symptomatic* as opposed to *phantasmatic*. That is, it positions ecological catastrophe as a symptom of capitalism instead of addressing the ideological fantasy-construction underlying reality. Žižek argues that the act is capable of going *beyond* the symptom because it 'touches the dimension of some *impossible* Real.' As such, the act carries a certain element of 'impossibility' in it that is absent from Fisher's symptomatic strategy.[89]

[87] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 45-49.
[88] Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Verso, 2010), 121.
[89] Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!," 121.

Let us further analyse the relation between the act and the impossible. Žižek writes: "An act does not simply occur *within* the given horizon of what appears to be 'possible,' it redefines the very contours of what is possible (an act accomplishes what, within the given symbolic universe, appears to be 'impossible,' yet it changes its conditions so that it creates retroactively the conditions of its own possibility)."[90] This quote further solidifies the divergence between the Žižekian act and Fisher's strategy for future thought. Fisher connects resistance to capitalism to clear, representable *reasons* for action (in the form of symptoms) whereas the Žižekian act, through its element of impossibility, only *retroactively* 'makes itself possible' by changing the ways in which the notions of possibility and impossibility are constructed within the ideological field. Žižek's approach to the act is thus strongly connected to his conception of the Real as that which is the end point of symbolization; Žižek's Real is the position which allows the subject to look at the symbolic *as* symbolic without being 'in' it. The quote shows that the act is that which can break open the symbolic field *from this position of impossibility,* from this endpoint of symbolization, retroactively making itself 'possible' within the new structure of symbolic reality.

This element of impossibility does not mean that an act can be anything absurd, non-sensical or random. Rather, the act is constituted by a *distinct kind* of impossibility. Žižek writes: "an authentic act is not simply external with regard to the hegemonic symbolic field disturbed by it: an act is an act only *with regard to* some symbolic field, as an intervention into it. That is to say: a symbolic field is always and by definition in itself 'decentred,' structured around a central void/impossibility (…) and an act disturbs the symbolic field into which it intervenes not out of nowhere, but precisely *from the standpoint of this inherent impossibility, stumbling block, which is its hidden, disavowed structuring principle*."[91] Through this quote, we can discern how the act is always an impossible leap *in relation to* a symbolic or ideological field; it is that which is deemed impossible *by* this field, that which is its 'hidden, disavowed structuring principle.' In this way, the act is capable of invoking the Real of capitalist realism through a fundamental *negation*, exposing the element of impossibility inherent to any symbolic field or ideological structure.

This connects the act to the concept of ideological fantasy, since the ideological fantasy is precisely that which structures the symbolic field in such a way as to *conceal* its point of impossibility. As such, there seems to be an adversarial relation between the act, which aims to expose this hidden point, and the fantasy, which actively conceals it. How does the act, which

[90] Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!," 121.
[91] Ibid., 125.

retroactively creates the conditions for its own possibility, relate to the idea of reality as a fantasy-construction, as that which hides us from the Real? And how does this relate to the *point de capiton* of ideology? The answers to these two questions will further help to outline the framework for a strategy for future thought.

3.2 *Traversing the Fantasy*

In this section, I will further examine the relation between the act and ideological fantasy. Discussing the notion of the act as a form of political resistance, Žižek writes: "An act does not only shift the limit that divides our identity (…) it transforms the very coordinates of the disavowed phantasmic foundation of our being."[92] This quote allows us to see how the act and fantasy stand in a distinct relation to each other. Even though fantasy constructs our reality at the most fundamental level, the act still allows the subject to 'transform the very coordinates' of that foundation. Expanding on what such a 'transformation' entails, Žižek writes: "this second feature (for a gesture to count as an act, it must 'traverse the fantasy') is not simply a further, additional criterion, to be added to the first ('doing the impossible,' retroactively rewriting its own conditions): if this second criterion is not fulfilled, the first is not really met either – that is to say, we are not actually 'doing the impossible,' traversing the fantasy towards the Real."[93] This quote is very useful for the strategy for future thought, because it allows us to see how the act is comprised of two *distinct* but *connected* elements: 'traversing the fantasy' and 'doing the impossible.'

How do these two elements relate to each other? In *Event,* Žižek writes: "what psychoanalysis aims at is not such a disintegration of fantasy, but something different and much more radical, the *traversing* of fantasy. (…) Traversing the fantasy does not mean simply going outside fantasy, but shattering its foundations, accepting its inconsistency. In our daily existence, we are immersed in 'reality,' structured and supported by the fantasy, but this very immersion makes us blind to the fantasy frames which sustains our access to reality. To 'traverse the fantasy' therefore means, paradoxically, *to fully identify oneself with the fantasy,* to bring the fantasy out."[94] When we read this quote alongside the quote at the beginning of this section, it becomes clear how we must conceptualize of the act as doing the impossible by 'traversing the fantasy.' In the act, the subject is revolting against the ideological field by

[92] Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!," 124.
[93] Ibid., 127.
[94] Slavoj Žižek, *Event* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 49.

striking at himself at the most fundamental level of reality. That is, at the level of his fantasy.[95] Instead of 'going outside fantasy,' he is 'shattering its foundations' and 'accepting its inconsistency.' *In the act, he loses himself*: he takes the leap into the impossible Real that the fantasy is hiding him from. The act is therefore not a pleasurable or positive act; the act is, in a way, a destruction of one's own subjectivity because it undermines the very fantasy-structure upon which that subjectivity rests.

Since the analysis thus far has shown that ideology resides at this phantasmatic level, I argue that a productive form of ideological critique truly capable of challenging capitalist realism is connected to the destruction of some form of subjectivity. As Žižek states in *The Perverts Guide to Cinema*: "This is what liberation means. In order to attack the enemy, you first have to beat the shit out of yourself. To get rid in yourself of that which in yourself attaches you to the Leader, to the conditions of slavery, and so on."[96] This quote symbolizes the act as such; in order to liberate and change the ideological field, the subject has to abandon some element of himself. This element is the fantasy-structure of ideology which creates his reality; as such, the movement of traversing the fantasy is constitutive of the liberatory dimension of the Žižekian act.

3.3 The Act and the Point de Capiton

The final connection that needs to be drawn for the original strategy for future thought is between the act and the *point de capiton.* My analysis has illustrated how the *point de capiton* structures an ideological field through its motion of quilting signifiers together. Accordingly, the specific identity of an ideological field is subject to change if the *point de capiton* quilts its signifiers together in new and unforeseen ways. As such, it is a place where possible liberation is located. This is emphasized by Žižek, who writes: "For Lacan, radical rearticulation of the predominant symbolic Order is altogether possible – this is what his notion of *point de capiton* (the 'quilting point' or the Master-Signifier) is about: when a new *point de capiton* emerges, the socio-symbolic field is not only displaced, its very structuring principle changes."[97] Through this quote, we can start to discern the central connection between the act and the *point de capiton*. A *point de capiton* manages to retroactively quilt an ideological field together by aiming at a deep, phantasmic kernel *within* the object (I have given the example of anti-

[95] Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!," 122-123.
[96] *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema,* directed by Sofie Fiennes, featuring Slavoj Žižek (Sydney: P Guide Ltd., 2006), 2:29:00, https://www.documentarymania.com/player.php?title=The%20Pervert%20Guide%20to%20Cinema
[97] Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 262.

Semitism, which accomplishes a rigid form of quilting by aiming at that which is in the Jew *more* than the Jew, that which cannot be represented as such). Moreover, I have argued that the theory on radical democracy outlined by Laclau and Mouffe is powerful because it situates itself precisely at this phantasmatic level, allowing the *point de capiton* of radical democracy to quilt the ideological field together in ways that allow for collective political action. How does this relate to the Žižekian act?

I argue that the motion of the act, which is capable of changing the ideological field by retroactively creating the conditions for its own possibility, is homologous to the retroactive motion of the *point de capiton*. The act is the initial leap, the movement that traverses the fantasy; the *point de capiton* is that which *articulates* this leap. It is that which, at the phantasmatic level, allows the leap to 'retroactively create the conditions for its possibility' by quilting the floating signifiers together in new ways. The *point de capiton* is the central place from which this quilting is organised.

This argument must be examined further, since the *point de capiton* is not typified by an abundance of meaning, but rather by a form of lack. As such, it complicates the assertion that a *point de capiton* meaningfully articulates a central point of reference for the ideological field. As Žižek writes: "This then is the fundamental paradox of the *point de capiton*: the 'rigid designator,' which totalizes an ideology by bringing to a halt the metonymic sliding of its signified, is not a point of supreme density of Meaning (…) On the contrary, it is the element which represents the agency of the signifier within the field of the signified. In itself it is nothing but a 'pure difference': its role is purely structural, its nature is purely performative."[98] This quote shows us that the act and the *point de capiton* are both characterized by a negativity; they carry no meaning within them, but create the possibility for meaning to be construed in new ways. They are, in a way, hysterical concepts to their very core.

What implications does this have for the framework for future thought? I argue that the act and the *point de capiton* are connected because they create the possibility of 'ideological anamorphosis.'[99] This means a *change of perspective* to the ideological field. Žižek writes: "the criticism of ideology must perform a somewhat homological operation: if we look at the element which holds together the ideological edifice, at this 'phallic,' erected Guarantee of Meaning, *from the right perspective*, we are able to recognize in it the embodiment of a lack,

[98] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 109.

[99] Žižek illustrates the concept of ideological anamorphosis through the painting 'The Ambassadors' by Hans Holbein de Jonge. In the painting, what seems from the front to be a meaningless spot appears to be a skull from a different perspective. Anamorphosis is thus the place, the perspective from which meaning is constructed as such. This place, however, remains empty.

of a chasm of non-sense gaping in the midst of ideological meaning (emphasis added)."[100] This quote shows that the act and the *point de capiton* are indeed homologous in the sense *that they are both characterized by a radical form of negativity which can allow the structure of an ideological field to change*. They are situated at the level of the Real, exposing the symbolic *as* symbolic without being 'in' it, thereby allowing for a challenge to its structuring principles by seeing the system from the 'right perspective.'

The connections I have drawn in this chapter between the act, traversing the fantasy, the *point de capiton* and ideological anamorphosis outline the contours of a strategy for future thought intended to challenge capitalist realism. I have articulated how the act and the *point de capiton* are valuable concepts for a framework that takes the ideological fantasy-construction of reality as its starting point. The analysis has shown that if this fantasy-level is taken into account, some form of subjective annihilation is needed in order to truly challenge the coordinates of the hegemonic capitalist system. This challenge is created through a change to our ideological perspective; the creation of a new set of spectres through the *point de capiton.*

[100] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 109.

Conclusion

The path to revolution is filled with a dazzling splendour of glorious opportunity and hazardous pitfall. The state of affairs within contemporary capitalism represents both of these elements; the desire for a radical path towards liberation is accompanied by the spectres of ideology that stop it dead in its tracks. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that such a dichotomy between liberation and domination is central to the inner workings of ideology. In my arguments, I have shown how we are unable to either live *with* or live *without* ideology; even though we experience ideology as the central obstacle preventing us from achieving freedom, we forget that we also *need* ideology as a fantasy-construction. This means that ideology is not a distorted version of reality or a specific political orientation; ideology is the structure underlying our reality which allows that reality to emerge as such within a symbolic field. Therewith, ideology prohibits us from escaping towards better futures, but simultaneously allows us to escape the gaping void deep within our subjectivity that needs to be concealed. This duality is the fundamental problem of ideology.

In this thesis, I have used a psychoanalytic approach to ideology to expose this duality in Mark Fisher's theory on capitalist realism. Through the three critical Žižekian responses to Fisher's strategies for challenging capitalist realism, I have illustrated how ideology haunts us at the very moment we believe we have transcended it. The weakness of Fisher's challenges to capitalist realism resides in his failure to address this problem; even though he develops a kind of thinking which he thinks can stand outside of ideology, the analysis of the symptom, the *point de capiton* and the ideological fantasy has demonstrated that his thought remains stuck within a web of ideology. From this analysis, I have argued that a challenge to capitalist realism must move to the level of ideological fantasy. This does not only apply to Fisher's thought; rather, it is one of the central philosophical tasks any movement fighting for change and liberation (such as Greenpeace in the field of ecology or Occupy and SYRIZA in the world of finance) must carry out. Such movements must continuously reflect on their relation to ideology in order to escape the assertion that they are capable of completely standing outside of ideology. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that such an assumed position of ideological neutrality is itself an ideological illusion, which consequently limits the ability to reach into the great outdoors beyond capitalist hegemony.

However, the position of ideology as a structure underlying reality does not mean that challenges to the current system are altogether impossible. Rather, this position requires us to completely re-think the nature of resistance and liberation. In this thesis, I have traced the contours of a possible framework for such a project. The concepts that make up this framework

serve as the answer to the research question that has been posed at the beginning of this thesis, which asks about the possibility for a critique of ideology to think about resistance and liberation in light of the structural conditions of capitalist realism. Through the concept of the act, the *point de capiton* and ideological anamorphosis, I have argued that it is possible to challenge the ideology of capitalist realism by *traversing the ideological fantasy*. This concept addresses the problem of ideology as the fantasy-construction underlying reality by arguing that *in order to fight ideology, one has to destroy some element of one's identity*. Instead of ignoring the fantasy, this strategy for challenging capitalist realism *embraces* the fantasy, exposing its inconsistencies and shattering its foundations. Such an exposure constitutes a certain impossible, traumatic act which fractures the reality in which we are immersed. This illustrates how the act is a form of self-annihilation as well as the road to liberation; the act is a strike at the system through a strike at the self.

It must be noted that the concepts and arguments that constitute this framework remain speculative and preliminary; a completely original framework for ideological critique exceeds the scope of this thesis. However, these remarks can be seen as the first drops of ink for a blueprint of future-oriented thinking that combines insights from psychoanalysis and cultural theory to think about new ways to challenge capitalist realism. Future theory might add substance to such a blueprint of resistance by elaborating on different strategies for challenging capitalist realism or exploring new concepts and theories of ideology. There is a long road ahead, but if we continue to explore creative and original approaches to ideology, perhaps we can find a glimpse of hope waiting for us at the other end.

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